**Water and Stone**
What’s softest in the world
rushes and runs
over what’s hardest in the world.

The immaterial
enters
the impenetrable

So I know the good in not doing.

The wordless teaching,
the profit in not doing –
not many people understand it.

Over and over again Lao Tzu says, “do not doing”, which I understand to mean that one’s actions should, ideally, be unforced and without ulterior motives – natural. In this way, my son Alex is my teacher and example, for doing without doing is his mode of being. Where I am like stone, he is like water. It is about Alex that I write in this journal entry.

The area in which we live is filled with kids and when the weather is nice they play within sight of our windows. As anyone with a child knows, the sight of other children playing exerts an irresistible attraction. However, when those children do not speak your language, initial interactions are a bit scary. It was Alex that first reached out to the neighbor kids, and the first meetings were facilitated by soccer, which has been a consistent interest of Alex’s since we’ve been here, and by Alex’s gift for making friends. Ellie soon followed. The local kids are now frequent visitors, ringing the doorbell (often just as we’ve sat down for dinner) and saying something in broken English, such as, “Can Alex’s come out?” The blank stares that great any English reply to these questions indicate that this is the only English they know.
Life for Alex here in Helsinki is quite different from what it was in Missoula. For one, he no longer lives across the street from his school, and this means daily trips on the city bus. It’s about a 15 minute jaunt, and since I work in the afternoons and Ellie is at a different school, he usually makes the trip home on his own. He loves his new freedom and, in particular, the cell phone we got him to ease our anxiety.

This brings up a difference between the state of mind of the Finnish people and that of Americans. Here, even in the country’s largest city, parents don’t worry nearly as much about their kids’ safety as we do in America – even in the small city of Missoula. On school mornings, the city busses are packed with kids on their way to school. The children are given much more freedom here, and having had brought some of that American fear with us to Finland, we have been challenged to give our kids more freedom as well.

Alex attends a public school in the Maunula district of Helsinki, because it has international classes in which the instruction is in English. It is not an ideal situation – over the years we’ve learned that none is – but we are happy it, and more importantly, Alex is happy there. He has classmates from a number of countries, including Afghanistan, South Africa, Ghana, Iran, Thailand and Turkey, and he has made a number of friends with what I’ve come to recognize as typical ease. At school, as in our neighborhood, soccer is the sport of choice, and Alex plays at recess most every day. He is also on a local team called HPS and has already played in four games.

Of the four of us, it seems to me that Alex could be most accurately described as thriving. He has a lightness of being that suggests that he is comfortable in his surroundings and happy with his life. For Jen and I, this is definitely a gift.

From the Tao Te Ching
To give birth, to nourish,
to bear and not to own;
to lead and not to rule;
to do the work and let [them] go:
for just letting [them] go
is what makes [them] stay.

INFO: Jen will be showing her art in a downtown café in November. The weather has been atypically glorious. Next weekend we visit Tallin, Estonia.