

The 12 Rules

1. Stand up straight with your shoulders back
2. Treat yourself like someone you are responsible for helping
3. Make friends with people who want the best for you
4. Compare yourself to who you were yesterday, not to who someone else is today
5. Do not let your children do anything that makes you dislike them
6. Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world
7. Pursue what is meaningful (not what is expedient)
8. Tell the truth – or, at least, don't lie
9. Assume that the person you are listening to might know something you don't
10. Be precise in your speech
11. Do not bother children when they are skateboarding
12. Pet a cat when you encounter one on the street

12 RULES FOR LIFE

AN ANTIDOTE TO CHAOS

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Order is where the people around you act according to well understood social norms, and remain predictable and cooperative. It's the world of social structure, explored territory, and familiarity. The state of Order is typically portrayed, symbolically – imaginatively – as masculine. It's the Wise King and the Tyrant, forever bound together, as society is simultaneously structure and oppression.

Chaos, by contrast, is where – or when – something unexpected happens. Chaos emerges, in trivial form, when you tell a joke at a party with people you think you know and a silent and embarrassing chill falls over the gathering. Chaos is what emerges more catastrophically when you suddenly find yourself without employment, or are betrayed by a lover. As the antithesis of symbolically masculine order, it's presented imaginatively as feminine. It's the new and unpredictable suddenly emerging in the midst of the commonplace familiar. It's Creation and Destruction, the source of new things and the destination of the dead (as nature, as opposed to culture, is simultaneously birth and demise).

Order and chaos are the yang and yin of the famous Taoist symbol: two serpents, head to tail. Order is the white, masculine serpent; Chaos, its black, feminine counterpart. The black dot in the white – and the white in the black – indicate the possibility of transformation: just when things seem secure, the unknown can loom, unexpectedly and large. Conversely, just when everything seems lost, new order can emerge from catastrophe and chaos.

For the Taoists, meaning is to be found on the border between the ever-entwined pair. To walk that border is to stay on the path of life, the divine Way.

And that's much better than happiness.

Jordan B. Peterson