

TAO
TE
CHING

The classical book
of
meaning and life

TAO TE CHING, the classical book of meaning and life contained only 5,000 pictograms. Despite its size, no other work of Chinese literature has attracted as much as Lao Tzu's TAO TE CHING.

It has been translated more often than any other book except the Bible and more commentaries have been written on it than any other Chinese classic. Both philosophical and mystical reflection, the TAO TE CHING is about the harmony and flow of life and the necessity for affinity to it.

The practice of a spiritual tradition, one of the few psychological techniques of transformation, the esoteric arts, are greater awareness of the body and its relation to mind and psyche.

Taoism has been a source of inspiration and guidance from earliest times to the present day, and since our forebears had been practicing this culture which have been proven long before the modern days teachings of hi-fi literature, why must we not learn and adopt it for today's knowledge and exercise?

The life of "the Old One" offered so little to research, legends sprang up all the more freely. It follows quite clearly that we cannot learn much about Lao Tzu's work from the fragmentary and uncertain facts of his life especially from non-Chinese writing all historical facts dissolve into insubstantial apparitions. And yet an original and inimitable personality speaks to us of the aphorisms of the TAO TE CHING.

But one must have the right kind of wisdom to be able to grasp and understand such things; there is no point in disputing the facts. The Sage did say about his Tao Te Ching and about his understanding:

"When a man of highest wisdom is told about the TAO, He is eager to follow it.

When a man of middling wisdom is told of the TAO, At times he follows it, at times he loses touch with it.

When a man of no wisdom is told about the TAO, He LAUGHS aloud.

If he did not LAUGH at it, it could not rightly be named the TAO. Chinese literature has paid far more attention to Lao Tzu's work than his personal life. The full text of the 5,000 pictograms of his ancient classic teaching is reproduced here.

The text is divided into two parts, one called "MEANING" (TAO) and the other "LIFE" (TE). These two words were later compounded to form the TAO TE CHING. The first part comprising 37 sections and the other part entails 44 sections.

A lot of references are made to the ancient day-to-day matters, such as father, mother, mountains and the streams and the birds and the bees. Other references were made to environmental matters of his time. It is precisely for these reasons that Lao Tzu remains so utterly alien to western thought, with its different historical pointers, to this day; and on the other hand, this is the reason he had influenced Chinese thought so tremendously for 2,500 years and shall seem to continue to influence.

Lao Tzu established a tradition amongst his disciples and through his literary works so that at least the outlines of the good, old social order might be saved for posterity, and his teachings be preserved as seed-com for future times, so that if more favorable circumstances should ever come about be a means of setting the world to rights once again.

It is a matter of the individual finding perfect harmony with life. This harmony is actually man's natural state which has been lost over the centuries; it can only be rediscovered through intuition, rather than through intellectual pursuits. Thus there is no religious dogma, because life is unknowable. Sin does not feature in Taoism: bad behavior is simply a signal of stupidity, and ignorance, for no one would knowingly violate the natural way. Sometimes in the early history of Taoism, opinion became divided as to the proper approach to discovering the Way. One major branch of Taoism developed the principle of non action by retreating from the world to a life of contemplation. Another branch favored more active pursuits, with a concentration on alchemy and the search for an elixir of life.

TAO TE CHING
(The Way of the Sages and the Moral Power)

1

The Tao that can be expressed is not the constant Tao;
The name that can be named is not the constant Name.
The Nameless is that from which Heaven and Earth derived,
leaving itself unchanged.
If it must be named, (thinking of it as having a name) let it be called the Mother of all things.
He who is without earthly passions and without desire can perceive the profound mystery of that Unmanifested, Unseen, Unfathomable, Existence.
He who has not rid himself of desire can perceive only the fathomable Manifest, with its differentiations.
Nevertheless, the fathomable Manifest and the Unfathomable Unmanifested are in or in the same.
Unfathomable and fathomable are in origin the same, but distinct by their names of all things that are intellectually deep.
The pairing of these two is deepest, the gateway into all Mysteries

2

Because the world recognizes beauty as beauty, ugliness is known to be ugly.
Everyone knows goodness to be goodness, and to know this is to know what is not good.
Similarly, existence implies nonexistence;
The hard and the easy complement each other;
We recognize what is long by comparison with what is short;
High by comparison with low;
The shrill by comparison with sonorous.
Before and after, earlier and later, back and front--
All these complement one another.
Therefore the Sage, the self-controlled man, dwells in action less activity, poised between contraries.

He teaches without employing words.

He beholds all things that have been made he does not turn his back on them:

They have their own life and he makes no claim on them;

He achieves, but does not claim merit; He does not call attention to what he does, not claim success.

Regarding nothing as his own, he loses nothing that is his.

3

If we do not exalt superior persons into positions of authority, we shall not arouse jealous conflicts among the people.

If we do not prize unduly such objects as are hard to procure, we shall do away with thieves.

The hearts of the people will remain calm and unconfused.

The Sage governs: By emptying people's hearts of desire and their minds of envy, and by filling their stomachs with what they need-

By reducing their ambitions and by strengthening their bones and sinews;

By striving to keep them without the knowledge of what is evil and without cravings.

Thus are the crafty ones given no scope for tempting interference.

For it is by Non-action that the Sage governs, and nothing is really left uncontrolled.

4

The Tao is like a hollow vessel that yet cannot be filled to overflowing;

For it is bottomless and unfathomable;

Its infinite depth is the source of all things in the world,

The progenitor of all creatures. Yet how still and changeless it seems!

In it and though it, all sharp edges are blunted, all knots untied; all glaring light softened; all dust smoothed away.

It is a deep and limpid pool that remains so forever. We do not know whence it came, we only know it is:

As an Image without substance the Tao is before and things that can be conceived.

5

Heaven and Earth do not claim to be kindhearted or pitiful.
To them all things and all creatures are as straw dogs brought to the sacrifice and afterwards discarded.
Nor is the Sage kindhearted or pitiful?
To him too the people are as straw dogs.
But the space between Heaven and Earth may be likened to a bellows:
It seems empty, and yet it gives all that is required of it. The more it is worked, the more it yields.
Whereas the force puffed up by words is soon exhausted.
Better to hold fast to that which dwells within the heart.

6

The Spirit of the Valley is undying: It is the Mysterious Mother.
The Doorway of the Mysterious Mother is the root from which grew Heaven and Earth. And this Spirit endures unceasingly: Without effort, Itself inexhaustible.

7

Heaven is eternal: the Earth is ever-renewing. Why?
Surely it is because they do not live for themselves:
That is why they endure.
And so it is with the Sage.
He keeps himself in the background, and yet he is always to be found the forefront.
He is ever unmindful of himself, and yet he is perceived.
It is not because he seeks no personal gain that all his aims are fulfilled?

8

The highest good may be likened to water.
Water benefits all creatures yet does not strive or argue with them.
It rests content in those lowly places which others despise:
Thus it is very near to the Tao.

It is a virtue in a house that it stand firm upon the ground.
It is a virtue in a man that his thoughts should be profound. In friendship, gentleness and good nature are a virtue. In speech, it is a virtue to utter truths.
It is a virtue in government that it maintains good order.
It is a virtue in affairs that they should be well-conducted
It is a virtue in movements and actions that they should be well timed.
And all these virtues are as the virtue of water,
Which does not contend and therefore can do no wrong.

9

Rather than fill a vessel to overflowing, stop in time.
If you temper a sword blade to razor sharpness, it will blunt the sooner. If you overload your house with gold and jade, how shall it be guarded?
Wealth and high office breed vanity and trouble, and ruin follows in their train.
Accomplish your task, earn honor but do not claim it;
Then withdraw into the background.
That is Heaven's Way.

10

Can you control the restless physical-being and the same time hold fast to the Oneness of The Universe?
Can you so regulate your breathing that it becomes soft and effortless like a child's?
Can you sponge away the dust from the surface of the Mysterious Mirror, leaving nothing obscure?
Can you love the people and govern the country while remaining yourself unknown?
Can you penetrate all quarters and understand all creatures, and yet not interfere?
Very well then: quicken them, nourish them;
Give life to them, but make no claim on them;
Govern them, but do not be dependent on them;
Be chief among them, but do not order them about.
This is to use the Mysterious Power.

11

Thirty converging spokes combine to form a wheel;
But it is the point of nothingness at the center that determines the wheel's usefulness.

We fashion clay into a pot;

But it is the nothingness within the walls of clay that gives the vessel its usefulness.

We pierce the walls of a house to make the windows and doors;

And their usefulness consists in their being fitted around nothingness. Thus we profit not only by what is, but by what is not.

12

The five colors, if unharmonized, confuse the eye;

The five tones, if uncoordinated, offend the ear;

The five tastes, if crudely blended, violate the palate.

Unrestrained in hunting and pursuing confounds the mind;

Eagerness in the acquisition of rare goods impedes right action.

That is why the Sage looks within and not without;

He disregards that and nurtures this.

13

"Glory and disgrace are both related to fear;

Fortune and misfortune are both bound up with the body."

What is meant by the saying that glory and disgrace are both related to fear?

The one is high, the other is low.

If you achieve glory, you fear to lose it. If you are in disgrace, you fear the shame of it.

Thus glory and disgrace both involve fear.

What is meant by the saying that fortune and misfortune are bound up with the body?

Fortune and misfortune come to us because we have a body.

If we had no body, how should for time and misfortune befall us?

Therefore he who is willing to give to the world as much care as he gives to his own body is worthy to govern the world.

He who gives to the world as much love as he gives to his own body, may be trusted with the ruling of the world.

14

That object upon which you gaze yet do not see is called the Invisible:

That sound to which you listen yet do not hear is called the Inaudible:

That thing for which your hand gropes yet fails to touch is called the Intangible.

The scrutiny of these three imponderables, cannot be carried further: the mind perceives them as blended in One.

This Unity seen from above does not shine, Nor, seen from below, is it dark.

It goes back through Time in an unbroken chain of countless links

Till it reaches Nonexistence.

It is the Formless Form, the Image of the Unimaginable.

It is the inscrutable.

Advance towards it, and it shows no front:

Follow it, and it shows no back.

Yet by laying hold of this Ancient Truth you can master your present existence. For to understand the mystery of the beginning.

Is to hold the key to the Tao.

15

The Wise Men of old were skilled in the Mysteries;

Their minds were subtle and penetrating, and so profound that they were scarcely to be understood.

Trying to understand them, this is the picture I call up:

They were cautious, like those who cross a river in winter;

They were reserved, like those who are watchful of their fellows:

Their behavior was modest and seemly, like that of one paying a formal visit; They were yielding, like ice responding to the heat of the sun;

They were open to receive, like a valley between hills.

Yet they seem to some of us obscure, like a muddy stream

How shall water become clear save by keeping still?
It is by the still and the motionless that life is quickened.
Those who follow that Tao do not crave replenishment;
Always satisfied but never surfeited, they are ever renewed.

16

Seek to attain to absolute emptiness;
Maintain a state of perfect stillness.
See how all things come into being.
And see how they return!
They come to flower and fullness
And then go back to the roots whence they came.
To go home to the root is to achieve perfect stillness.
Thus, in attaining stillness, do they fulfill their destiny; and thus, in turning back, they
join the Never-changing.
To be aware of the Never-changing is to be enlightened.
Not to know the Never-changing is to stumble blindly into miseries.
He who knows the Never-changing embraces all; Embracing all, shall he not accept
all impartially?
To be impartial is an attribute of kingship.
And kingship is of Heaven.
He who is of Heaven can attain to the Tao.
He who is of the Tao endures forever,
And though his body decays, he never dies.

17

The greatest of kings rule, and his subjects are hardly aware of his existence.
The less great is loved and praised by his subjects.
The still less great is feared by his subjects.
The still less great is despised by his subjects.
For truly, where faith is not given, confidence is not inspired.
How guarded, and how sparing, is the greatest of kings in giving utterance to his
precious words!

When his task is accomplished and all his undertakings crowned with success,
The people, scarcely aware that they are ruled at all, say: All this happens according
to nature.

18

When the Great Tao is abandoned, then patronage, condescension and
righteousness make their appearance.

When knowledge and learning appear, then hypocrites and pretenders make their
appearance also;

It is when closest blood relations are at strife with one another that we have talk of
dutiful children and devoted parents:

It is not until the country is racked with strife and disorder that the patriots spring
up.

But in the Tao is balance;

And when the Tao is abandoned, what conflicts.

19

Give up holiness, cast away cleverness,

And the people will be a hundred fold better off,

Give up duty to your neighbors, cast away morality,

And the people will return to neighborliness and family feeling!

Give up artistic cleverness, cast away profit-making,

And there will be no more thieves and robbers.

But if in following these three precepts the people are not satisfied:

Take care that they are given things to hold on to,

Let them be shown Simplicity;

Let them hold fast to Purity.

Thus will self-seeking diminish,

Thus will desirelessness be attained.

20

Give up accumulating knowledge, and you will free yourself from many cares.

After all, what is the difference between "yes" and "yes, indeed"?
Can it be compared with the difference between Good and Evil?
"What others fear one may not with impunity disregard, people say.
What a dark wilderness divides them from me!
I see men smiling and gay, as if they were taking part in a great festival,
Or mounting a tower to celebrate the coming of Spring.
While I alone am quiet, making no sign,
Like a baby not yet old enough to smile,
Or a tired traveler who has no home to turn to.
The common people live in plenty;
It is only I who seem emptied of everything.
Truly, my heart seems to be the heart of a fool,
So bewildered am I!
The people about me are bright, so bright:
Only I seem to be dull and cast down.
The people about me are so eager and so knowing:
Only I am sad, so sad.
I am restless as the waves of the sea:
I am unmoored, drifting, as one attached to nothing.
All other people have something they are able to do.
Only I am unpractical, like a good-for-nothing.
I alone am unlike other men,
For I hold it of worth to seek nourishment from the all sustaining Mother.

21

The greatest virtue is but a manifestation of the Tao.
The Tao itself is intangible, invisible, ungraspable,
Yet pregnant of images, ideas.
Intangible, invisible, ungraspable, yet pregnant of things.
Dark, unfathomable,
yet holding seed. This seed is truth,
And in this truth is faith.
From immemorial time till now it's nameless name and nature have not changed.
From it proceed all manifested things.

And how do I know that such is the origin of all manifested things?
How else than through the Tao?

22

"If in humility you adapt yourself, you will remain complete."
If bent, you will become straight again;
If emptied, you will become full again,
If whom, you will be renewed.
He who has little may receive;
He who has much may be embarrassed.
Thus it is that the Sage embraces the One Tao and is an example for all the world.
He does not seek to shine: therefore he is illumined.
He does not pride himself on being right: therefore his rightness speaks for itself. He
does not sing his own praises: therefore he succeeds.
He does not boast of what he achieves: therefore his work endures.
He contends with none: therefore no one in the world contends with him.
Thus, the Ancient's saying, "If in humility you adapt yourself you will remain
complete," was no empty precept.
For he alone attains completion who, yielding, returns home to the Tao.

23

To be moderate in talk is according to nature.
A hurricane does not blow all the morning;
A rainstorm does not last all day.
What is it that makes the wind to blow, the rain to pour down?
Heaven-and-Earth!
If such actions as these-of Heaven-and-Earth do not go on forever,
How much less should the actions of men!
Therefore: He who acts with the Tao is identified with the Tao;
He who acts in Virtue is identified with Virtue;
He who fails through abandoning Virtue is identified with failure.
Conform to the Tao, and the Tao will receive you gladly;

Identify yourself with Virtue, and Virtue will receive you gladly; Identify yourself with failure, and failure will receive you gladly.

And truly, if your faith is not strong enough, you will not meet with faith.

24

"If you stand on tiptoe you will not stand firm. With legs astride, you will not go forward." Make a display of yourself and you will not shine;

If you assert yourself you will not therefore be distinguished.

If you vaunt yourself you will not acquire merit.

If you glorify yourself you will not excel.

Such excesses, viewed from the Tao,

Are like excess in eating or unmannerly behavior,

Which everywhere arouse distaste,

The Sage gives them short shrift.

25

Before Heaven and Earth came into existence

There was that which though formless was complete silent! Unfathomable

It stands alone, unchanging

All-pervading, inexhaustible!

One may think of it as the Mother of the universe. What its real name is I do not know:

If I name it, I call it the Tao.

If I Classify it, I Call it Supreme.

Supreme means ever in the flow;

Ever in the flow means going far far away;

going far far away means returning to the source.

Therefore we may say:

The Tao is supreme;

The Earth is supreme.

A ruler of men may also be supreme.

There are four things that are supreme, and a ruler of men is one of them.

Man follows the standards of the Tao.

The Tao is its own standard.

26

At the root of lightness must be weightiness;
The master of activity is stillness.
Therefore a nobleman, though he traveled all day long,
Would not allow himself to be separated from the wagon bearing his luggage.
And however splendid were the sights surrounding him,
He would rest content in quite solitude.
How much less should a king, with his myriad chariots,
Allow himself to be lightly swayed?
Through light behavior he would lose his roots:
Through restlessness he would lose control.

27

The perfect traveler leaves no tracks behind him;
The perfect speaker leaves no cause for error;
The perfect reckoner has no need of counters;
The perfect watchman has no need of bolts or bars,
Yet none can open the door;
The perfect binder has no need of cords or twine,
Yet none can unfasten after him.
Thus it is with the Sage:
He is always the perfect savior of men; By him is no man rejected.
He is always the perfect savior of creatures;
By him is no creature rejected.
His method is called the Twofold Enlightenment,
He makes the perfect man the instructor of the imperfect;
The imperfect man is the material, is not with standing all his learning, deluded.
In this resides the fundamental secret.

He who while recognizing his manhood yet holds also to his womanhood,
 Becomes a channel for all the world.
 Being a channel for all the world,
 Everlasting virtue will never leave him:
 He goes back to the state of childhood.
 He who knows the light that shines within him,
 Yet veils himself in darkness,
 Becomes a standard for the world.
 Being a standard for the world everlasting virtue cleaves to him:
 He returns to the Never-changing.
 He who, knowing honor, yet dwells in humility
 Becomes a valley for all the world,
 Everlasting virtue will abide in him: he returns to Wholeness.
 This Wholeness when broken may produce many useful instruments;
 But used by the Sage, it becomes the minister of ministers, and truly,
 The Greatest Ruler Interferes the least.

Those who attempt to seize all under Heaven by force do not, in my experience,
 succeed. The world is a sacred vessel and cannot be so handled.
 Those who handle it, spoil it;
 Those who grasp it, lose it.
 For consider:
 There are creatures who go ahead and others who follow after;
 There are those who blow hot, and others who blow cold;
 Some who feel strong when others feel weak;
 Some who mount the wagon, while others fall off
 Therefore the Sage avoids the excessive, the extravagant the grandiose.

He who relied on the Tao to aid a ruler of men would not seek to conquer with weapons.

The Sage holds back from such instruments of recoiling violence.

For where armies have camped there spring up thistles and thorns:

And in the wake of marching armies follow years of hardship.

Having achieved his aim, the good commander stops;

He does not venture to follow up his advantages with greater force.

He achieves his aim, but does not plume himself

He achieves his aim, but is not boastful.

He achieves his aim, but is not proud of what he has done.

He achieves his aim, by means which could not be avoided.

He achieves his aim without violence.

For it is when creatures reach the climax of their strength that they start to grow old;

Thus violence runs counter to the Tao,

And what runs counter to the Tao is soon spent.

Weapons, however handsome, are none the less implements of evil portent, distrusted by all.

The Sage keeps them at a distance.

The men of breeding, at home and at peace, esteems the left-hand the place of honor.

But in war-time, when arms are used, things are reversed, and the right-hand becomes the place of honor.

Weapons are of ill-omen, avoided by the wise man, who resorts to them only if he must.

To him, quiet and peace are his chief delight.

He takes no delight in conquest.

To delight in conquest is to delight in slaughter.

He who delights in slaughter cannot hope to work his will in the world.

32

The Never-changing Tao has no name.
It may appear, so simple is it, of small account,
Yet the whole world would not venture to subdue it.
If kings and princes were possessed of it,
Homage would be gladly paid to them by all the people in the world.
Heaven-and-Earth would sweeten them with the gentle dew.
The people, unconstrained by commands, would live in harmony
That which functions, however, is named.
When naming starts, see that you know where to stop.
If you know where to stop, danger cannot touch you.
As the brooks and the streams flow into and become the rivers and the seas,
So everything in the world flows into and is made one with the Tao.

33

To know others is to be clever;
To know oneself is to be enlightened.
He who conquers others has strength,
But he who conquers himself has strength and courage indeed.
To know when one has enough is to be rich.
He who pursues a course with energy may attain his goal;
But to remain in one's proper place is to endure;
And he who dies yet does not cease to be;
Achieves the blessing of true longevity.

34

The great Tao flows in all directions:
To left, to right, at the same time.
To it all things owe their existence for it rejects none.
Through it all things are brought to perfection, but it lays no claim to them.
It clothes and nourishes them, but does not claim mastery over them.

Because it at no time makes demands on them, we may class it with the humble;
Because all things return home to it - and still not play the master - we may name it
Supreme.

Thus it is with the Sage:
He never prides himself on greatness;
Therefore he achieves greatness.

35

Hold fast to the Great Idea, the Formless Form that is the Tao, and all men will
come to you.

In you they will see no danger and meet no harm.

In you they will find stillness, safety, and peace.

Pleasant music and the smell of savory dishes cause strangers passing by to linger.

But how pure, how lacking in savory, are the utterances of the Tao!

Look for the Tao, and you see nothing!

Listen for the Tao, and there is nothing to be heard!

But use it, and you will find that it is inexhaustible.

36

If anything is capable of being contracted, no doubt it was previously expanded;

If a thing is capable of being weakened, no doubt it was previously strengthened.

Exaltation precedes abasement.

He who would take must first give

This is the Secret Law,

Whereby the soft and the weak overcome the hard and the strong.

Leave the fish in the depths of the water, out of harm's way;

And leave the nations his sharpest weapons where they cannot be seen.

37

The Tao is eternally inactive;

Yet nothing is left undone.

If rulers and ministers grasped this truly,

All creatures would develop of themselves.
And if, as they developed, desires stirred within them.
I would curb them by the Simplicity without a name.
This Simplicity-without-a-name leads to detachment from desire;
Detachment from desire leads to stillness.
And in this way the world, by Itself, would reach Peace.

38

The highest power is not aware of itself as power,
Hence its power.
The inferior power clings to the appearance of power:
Hence it lack of power.
The highest power works by non-action and has no ulterior aims.
The inferior power acts and claims recognition.
The highest loving-kindness acts without motive.
The highest justice acts with motive.
The highest ritual of convention and respectability acts, and if there is no response,
force is used to compel respect.
Therefore: When the Tao is lost, power appears;
When power is lost, loving kindness appears;
When loving-kindness is lost, justice appears;
When justice is lost, ritual appears.
Ritual is but the shadow of faith and loyalty, and beginning of confusion.
Prediction of what is to come is doubtlessly an offshoot of the Tao, but the
beginning of ignorant folly.
Therefore, he who is truly great holds to the substance and not to the shadow;
He holds to the main stem and not to the offshoot.
Thus he disregards that and nurtures this.

39

These things have from the beginning attained Unity: Heaven, through Unity, is
clear;
Earth, through Unity, is firm;

Spirits, through Unity, are active;
The Valley, through Unity, is brimming;
All creatures through Unity, multiply;
Kings and princes, through Unity, govern the world.
Yes: in all these things works Unity.
If Heaven through Unity were not clear, it would be rent;
If Earth through Unity were not firm, it would topple over;
If Spirits through Unity were not active, they would shrivel away;
If the Valley through Unity were not brimming, it would dry up;
If all creatures through Unity did not multiply, they would die out;
If kings and princes through Unity did not govern the world, they would be
overthrown.
For nobility has its roots in humility,
And the high is built on a foundation that is low.
Thus, kings and princes speak of themselves as 'orphans,' "the lonely ones, "the
unworthy",
In this way they acknowledge that their might is rooted in the lowly? Surely this is
so?
For without the component parts of a wagon there is no wagon.
The Sages of old sought to be neither the isolated single gem, nor yet the common
stone among common stones.

40

The movement of the Tao is a returning.
The chief method of the Tao is non-striving
All manifestations have their source in Being;
Being has its source in Non-being.

41

When a man of highest wisdom is told about the Tao, He is eager to follow it.
When a man of middling wisdom is told about the Tao,
At times he follows it, at times he loses touch with it.
When a man of no wisdom is told about the Tao,

He laughs aloud;
If he did not laugh at it, it could not rightly be named the Tao.
For as a maker of proverbs has truly said:
"Enlightenment in the Tao seems like darkness;
Progress in the Tao seems like regress";
Evenness in the Tao seems like roughness;
The highest virtue seems like the emptiness of a valley.
The purest white seems murky; The most exalted virtue seems inadequate:
The strongest virtue seems unstable;
The most steadfast nature seems variable.
For the greatest space of all has no angles;
The greatest vessels that are brought to perfection;
The greatest note is soft.
The greatest image, has no shape.
The Tao, in its secrecy, is nameless;
Yet it is the Tao which is behind everything
And brings all things to completion.

42

From the Tao was born the One,
From the One was born the Two;
From the Two was born the Three;
And from the Three all things proceeded,
All creatures have the shadow at their backs and embrace the light;
And the everlasting breath of life unites them.
What men hate is to be orphaned, lonely, unworthy;
But do not kings and princes often so describe the selves?
"For things by being diminished may be increased,
And by being increased, diminished."
What others teach, I will teach too.
"Those who are foolhardy and violent do not come to natural end."
On this maxim I too will base my teaching too.

43

The most yielding thing in the world:
Masters the hardest thing in the world.
Its nothingness can penetrate even the impenetrable.
That is how I know the value of non-action.
But teaching without the use of words,
Arid action that is non-action
How few in the world achieve this!

44

Your fame, or yourself - which is the nearer to you?
Your sell, or your possessions - which is the more precious to you?
Acquiring, or losing-which is the worse to you?
He who sets his heart on things will spend wastefully;
He who hoards greatest treasures risk greatest loss.
Therefore, to be content with enough is to risk no humiliation.
He who knows when to be still escapes harm. He will endure.

45

The greatest perfection seems inadequate,
But it is unailing in its usefulness;
What is brimful seems empty.
But it is inexhaustible in its usefulness.
The completely straight seems crooked, the greatest skill seems awkward.
The greatest eloquence seems like stammering.
Activity overcomes cold, but stillness overcomes heat.
Only by purity and stillness will the world be governed.

46

When the Tao is reigning on the earth,
Racehorses are harnessed to dung-carts;

When the Tao is not reigning on the earth,
War-horses are bred even in the fields outside the city walls.
There is no greater fault than yielding to uncurbed desire;
There is no greater unhappiness than discontent with what one has,
No greater calamity than greed and craving.
For "the content that comes from being content is an enduring content."

47

Without going out of his own door
A man may know the world;
Without looking out of his own window
A man may know the Tao of Heaven.
For the farther away one goes the less one knows.
Thus it is with the Sage:
He does not go forth, and yet he attains the goal;
Although he does not look around him he is able to give things their names;
Without fuss he brings all to completion by Non-action.

48

He who goes in search of knowledge adds to himself day after day;
Shedding more and more, until he attains Non-action.
By non-action there is nothing that cannot be done.
The Kingdom can only be achieved by not interfering;
Those who busy themselves interfering are not capable of achieving the Kingdom.

49

The Sage's self is not a self for itself;
He makes the people's self his self
I am good to the good;
To the bad I am also good.
For how shall Virtue express itself if not in good
I am candid to the candid;

To those who are not frank I am also candid.
How shall Virtue express itself it not in candor?
The Sage always absorbing, lives in stillness in the world,
But his heart is open to receive the conflicting impressions of the world.
And the people of the world gaze at him round-eyed and agape,
And he treats them as children.

50

To go out from life is to enter death.
The Knights of Life are thirteen,
The Knights of Death are thirteen;
And most men in living create thirteen vulnerable spots within themselves.
How is that?
Because they are so avid of life.
I have heard that he who has control of his life may walk throughout the land and
meet neither tiger nor rhinoceros;
He may pass through a battlefield indifferent to weapons and armor.
For the rhinoceros would find in him no place to drive its horn;
The tiger would find no place to thrust its claws;
The weapon no place to insert its blade.
How is that?
Because such as he have no vulnerable spots.

51

The Tao gave birth to them;
Virtue nourished them,
Gave to each its form,
Brought each to perfection,
And gave to each its power.
Therefore among all created things there is not one which does not honor the Tao
And revered Virtue.
And if the Tao is thus honored and Virtue thus revered,
It is not because an edict went forth.

It has always been so.
Thus: The Tao gave birth to them, nourished them,
Made them grow, protected them, perfected them.
To rear them and possess them.
To quicken them and lay no claim to them,
To govern them and not be dependent on them
Such is the Mysterious Power.

52

The source of all manifested things in the universe
May be called the Mother.
He who knows his kinship with the Mother
Will know his kinship with the children too.
He knows the children but clings the closer to the Mother.
And though his body may decay,
He himself will never perish.
"Close your mouth; keep shut all the doors,
And your vigor shag last to the end."
Open your mouth, busy yourself with numberless affairs,
And there is no help for you.
To see the smallest is to have clear vision;
To hold fast to the gentlest is to be strong.
Use your light to fight you to the light within,
And no harm can ever befall you.
This is called: holding to the Never-changing.

53

Let me have the good sense to keep to the Great Highway of Tao:
Only if I go straying into side-turnings shall I have anything to fear.
The Highway is fine and smooth and easy,
But men prefer the bypaths.
There the royal palaces are spick and span
But see how the weeds have sprung up in the fields!

See how empty the granaries are!
Where garments are much bedecked and embroidered,
Where sharp swords hang from every belt,
Where there is gluttony in food and drink,
Where riches are over-abundant there you will find that crime is rife.
Not so on the Great Highway of Tao!

54

That which is firmly implanted by the Tao will not be uprooted.
That which is firmly grasped by the Tao will not be unloosened.
As, through the Tao, Ancestral Sacrifices continue from children to grandchildren for countless generations.
So, if you cultivate the Tao in your self, your virtue will be true power;
If you cultivate the Tao in your family, your family through its power will enjoy abundance;
If you cultivate the Tao in your village, your village through its power will grow in strength;
If you cultivate the Tao in your country, your country through its power will flourish;
If you cultivate the Tao in the community as power will be seen everywhere in the world.
For by looking into one's self one may become aware of others;
Through one's own village one may become aware of other villages;
Through one's own country one may become aware of other countries;
Through contemplating the community one may become aware of the Great Society of Mankind
How do I know the Great Society of Mankind may be so governed by this?

55

The man who is endowed in full measure with the spiritual power of harmlessness may be compared to a child.
Venomous insects do not sting him,
Nor savage beasts assail him;
Birds of prey leave him unharmed.

His bones are soft and his sinews are weak,
But his grip is firm and sure.
Though innocent of sexual union, yet he is fully formed,
And thus is his vitality unimpaired.
Though he shouts all day long, his voice does not grow harsh
His functioning is perfectly harmonious.
To know such harmony as this is to be aware of the Never changing;
To be aware of the Never-changing is to know illumination.
But to lust after greater fullness of life is to invite calamities.
For it desire plays the tyrant over the life-breath, hardening sets in.
When vigor reaches its climax, shall not decay ensue?
Such forcing is against the Tao.
And that which is against the Tao quickly passes away.

56

He who knows the Tao does not talk about it;
He who talks about the Tao does not know it.
He whose lips are closed,
Who has shut the doors of the senses,
Who tones down that which dazzles
And knows himself lowly as the dust -
It is not he who has attained to perfect equanimity?
Such a one cannot be encroached upon;
Nor can he be repelled;
He cannot be benefited,
Nor can he be banned;
He cannot be exalted,
Nor can he be cast down.
Is not this perfect equanimity the most valuable of all things under the sun?

57

The government of a country is best achieved by carrying out the rules.
The winning of wars is best achieved by the employment of artful strategy."

But the winning over of the community is best achieved by non-interference.
How do I know that this is so?

By this.

The more the people are forbidden to do this and that, the poorer they will be.

The more sharp weapons the people possess,

The more will darkness and bewilderment spread through the land.

The more craft and cunning men have,

The more useless and pernicious contraptions will they invent.

The more laws and edicts are imposed,

The more thieves and bandits there will be.

Hence these savings of a Sage:

If I work through Non-action, the people will transform themselves.

If I love the Stillness, the people will grow righteous of themselves.

If I do not fuss or interfere, the people will grow wealthy of themselves;

If I am free from desire, the people will return to unspoiled simplicity.

58

When the government seems hesitant and lacking in vitality,

The people are free and happy.

When the government is active and interfering,

The people are discontented and critical.

"Misery" ; It is said, "rests on happiness, and happiness underlies misery";

But who sees that there is a supreme state where nothing is imposed?

For if right action becomes mere expediency

And belief in goodness becomes mere superstition,

The people will pass their days in a fog of bewilderment,

Therefore the Sage:

Though square himself, does not seek to shape others;

Though he has his own angles, he ask not others to match them;

Though he is himself straight, he does not seek to stretch others;

He shines, but he does not make a display of himself

59

In the ruling of men and the serving of Heaven nothing equals moderation.
For moderation leads to foresight in conserving;
Foresight in conserving leads to the storing of treasures of power.
The strength of one who has stored such treasures of power cannot be overcome.
As nothing can overcome it, its potency is boundless,
Because its potency is boundless,
Its possessor can attain sovereignty, over the whole kingdom.
And if, having attained sovereignty, he returns to the Mothers.
He will endure long.
For by striking deep roots he will be building on firm foundations
And through contemplation he will repose in the Eternal Tao.

60

Rule a great kingdom as you would cook a small fish gently!
If the Tao ruled in the world, evil spirits would not work their malignant powers.
Not that the evil spirits would lose their powers;
Not But their powers could do no harm to men.
They would do no harm,
Nor would the Sage harm himself by calling on his spirits to do the people harm.
Therefore, since neither of them harmed the other,
Their powers would unite in a common cause.

61

A great kingdom is like the low-running stream to which all rivers flow down: the center towards which all converge.
It plays the female part.
The female overcomes the male by quiescence: she puts herself beneath the male.
Similarly, a great kingdom that puts itself beneath a small kingdom gains the adherence of the smaller;
A small kingdom, because in the natural order of things it is below a great kingdom, gains the adherence of the greater.

The one gains by becoming lowly and putting itself beneath, the other gains by being naturally lowly.

Thus: if the great kingdom desires only to add to the population which it already nourishes,

And the small kingdom desires only to unite and serve, then both of them assume the positions they desire.

But it is the greater of the two that should seek the lowly position.

62

The Tao is the sanctuary of all creatures in the world.

It is the good man's treasure, the bad man's refuge.

With high-sounding words honors are easily acquired;

With spectacular deeds credit is easily acquired.

But the bad must not be rejected either.

Therefore: when an emperor is enthroned,

And the three Ministers are appointed,

He who comes bearing gifts of jade,

Followed by a retinue of four horses,

Should be less highly prized than he who,

Without moving, brings the gift of the Tao.

Why was the Tao so highly prized by the ancients?

Was it not because this could be said of it:

He who seeks it shall receive it,

Sinners seeking it shall be freed from sin.

That is why they thought it the most precious of all things.

63

He who acts by non-action,

Who does, but does not undertake,

Who finds savor in the tasteless

Will see the great in the little, the many in the few.

"He will repay injuries with kindness;

He will deal with hard things while they are still easy,

And tackle great things while they are still small"
All difficulties on earth are easy in their beginnings;
All great things start by being small.

Therefore the Sage:

Because he: does not turn his attention to the great,
Achieves greatness. Ready promises inspire little confidence;
He who takes things too lightly encounters many difficulties.

Therefore the Sage:

Because he recognizes what is difficult,
Never has any difficulties.

64

That which is motionless can be easily held,

That which has not been forecast can be easily planned;

That which is still tender can be easily broken-,

That which is minute can be easily scattered.

Take things in hand before they come into existence;

Put things in order before they are in a state of confusion,

The tree which fills your arms embrace grew from a tiny shoot;

The nine- story tower rose from a heap of earth.

The journey of a thousand miles began with the spot of earth covered by one's own feet.

He who acts, spoils. He who grasps, loses.

The Sage does not act: therefore he does not spoil things.

He does not grasp, therefore he does not lose things.

But ordinary people, eagerly going about their business,

Often fail when they are on the verge of succeeding-

Keep watch on the end as well as on the beginning-,

Then you will not fail.

Therefore the Sage:

Desires only the undesiring;

He does not value things that are hard to come by.

He learns how not to learn,

Turning back to those things which others have passed through,

And thus helps all creatures to fulfill their own natures.
But he does not venture to act.

65

In olden times those who were most practiced in the Tao did not use their knowledge to instruct the people; they used it rather to keep them simple. It is when they are overstocked with learning the people are hard to govern. To govern by adding to the people's store of learning is to prey on the country; To govern by decreasing the people's store of learning is to be a blessing to the country.
He who is familiar with these two methods will not want for a touchstone. Always bearing this in mind, he will be able to draw on the Mysterious Power; This Power is infinitely deep and far-reaching, and, unlike all things else, goes back and back,
Until it attains to complete Unity.

66

Oceans and mighty rivers are as kings to all the valleys, because they lower themselves to the level of the valleys:
That is why they are as the kings of the valleys.
Therefore the Sage, if he would be above the people, must in speech seem to put himself below the people,
If he would lead the people, he must place himself behind them.
Thus: although he is above the people, he is not a burden to them;
Although he goes ahead of the people, he does not block their way.
Thus: the whole world willingly follows and esteems him and is not irked by him.
And because he does not contend, no one contends with him.

67

All the world declares that the Tao of which we speak may be supreme, but nevertheless it baffles definition.

If it had been definable it would long since have become as negligible as the conventions,

These are my three treasures, which I prize and protect:

The first is compassion; the second is moderation-, the third is, not to attempt to be the first among men.

If you are compassionate, you can be truly brave;

If you are moderate, you can be truly generous;

If you do not attempt to be the first among men, you can become the chief of ministers.

But nowadays, if you are brave it is at the expense of compassion;

If you are generous, it is at the expense of moderation;

If you lead, it is at the expense of humility,

And this is death.

For he who fights with compassion will conquer;

He who defends with compassion will hold fast;

Heaven will save him and protect him with compassion.

68

The captain who is most accomplished does not make a display of warlike zeal;

The best fighter is not angry;

He who is most capable of conquering does not engage the enemy,

He who is most capable of using men places himself in a position inferior to them.

This may be called the Virtue of Non-striving,

The power of men;

It is to work in consort with heaven itself,

And attain the highest ideal of the ancients.

69

A great strategist has said: "I will not issue a challenge, but being challenged will give a good account of myself Rather than advance an unnecessary inch I will retire a foot".

This might be called:

Marching by standing still;

Baring the arms, but not raising them to fight;
Keeping the hand on the hilt of the unsheathed sword;
Being prepared for battle, but not engaging the enemy.
No calamity could be greater than that which results from underestimating the enemy.

To underestimate the enemy is to risk the loss of one's greatest treasure- life itself.
Thus it is that when enemies meet in baffle, the side that deplores the conflict will most surely be victorious.

70

My words are very easy to grasp and very easy to carry out;
Yet few on earth understand them, and few carry them out.
Nevertheless, my words have an ancestor;
My actions have a master.
And because they, my words' ancestor and my actions' master, are not understood, nor shall I be understood.
Those who understand me are but few
But their fewness does not lessen my worth.
For the Sage goes clothed in coarse and simple garments,
But he wears a jewel hidden in his bosom.

71

To know that one does not know is the better part. Not to recognize true knowledge is an illness.
Only by knowing this illness to be illness does one cease to be ill.
The Sage is free from this illness;
For having recognized his illness as illness,
He is no longer ill.

72

If people are not awestruck by that authority which rightly claims their awe,

Be sure a greater fear, the fear of death, will not let them escape. But do not confine them within narrow walls,
Nor interfere with their lot;
If you refrain from despising them, you will not be despised by them.
Thus it is with the Sage:
He knows himself, yet makes no parade of himself
He loves himself, yet does not overrate himself
Indeed, he disregards That and nurtures This.

73

He whose courage is shown in rashly daring will be killed
He whose courage is shown in not rashly daring will live.
Of these two either may be harmful, either may be beneficial;
And who shall say which of them is hated by Heaven? (Even the Sage sees a difficulty here)
The Tao of Heaven does not contend, yet knows the way to win;
It does not speak, yet knows how to get the right answer,
It does not beckon, yet all things come to it freely.
In stillness and without haste, it carries out his well-laid plans.
The net of Heaven is vast, but though its mesh is wide,
Nothing escapes.

74

If the people do not stand in awe of death,
What is the point of threatening them with death penalty?
But even suppose the people were in constant fear of death,
Who would dare to seize the evil-doers and slaughter them?
Leave killing to the Great Slayer.
He who usurps the place of the Great Slayer,
Is like one who seeks to assist a master joiner with an axe
Rarely fails to injure his own hands.

75

If the people go hungry it is because their betters ruin them with taxes:
That is why they must go hungry.
In the people are hard to govern it is because their betters meddle in their affairs:
That is the only reason why they are hard to govern.
If the people make light of death it is because they are so absorbed in the task of living:
That is why they make light of death.
And indeed they who set too little store by life are at any rate wiser than they who value it too dearly.

76

Men at birth are weak and tender;
Men in death are rigid and hard.
All creatures, trees and plants are soft and tender in their early growth,
And in dying become withered and dry.
Thus we may say that rigidity and hardness are related to death,
While weakness and tenderness are related to life.
Therefore, the soldier who depends on strength will not conquer;
The tree that has grown too hard will be felled.
For the place of the strong and mighty is below,
And the place of the weak and tender is above.

77

How like the drawing of a bow is the Tao of Heaven!
The end which is high is brought low;
The end which is low is raised high;
What is excessive is reduced-,
What is insufficient is increased.
The Tao of Heaven lessens where there is overabundance and increases where there is lack.
But this is not the way of man,

Who takes from him who lacks and gives to him who has too much.
Who is it that can draw on superabundance and fill up deficiencies?
Only he who possesses the Tao.
Therefore: the Sage acts, but seeks no reward;
He brings his work to completion, but makes no claims.
For he has no desire to make a display of his wisdom.

78

In the whole world there is nothing weaker or more yielding than water;
But when it comes to attacking the strong: and the resistant, it has no superior.
For nothing can take its place.
The weak overcomes the strong;
The yielding overcomes the hard.
Everybody knows that this is so, but no one acts as if he knew.
That is why a Sage has said:
He who accepts the unclean reproaches of the people can become the master of
the country;
He who bears the woes of the country can become the king of the world.
These words, though paradoxical, are true.

79

When reconciliation follows a great grievance,
How often there is a residue of grievance!
Therefore, the Sage, while himself fulfilling the harder part of a bargain.
The Tao is no respecter of persons:
Its abundance is always at the service of the good.

80

Picture my little country with its few inhabitants;
Maybe there are contraptions in it for reducing labor to a tenth, a hundredth, but
why should they be used?

I would have my people take death seriously and not go a broad to seek it, though they be ready enough to die twice over to defend their homes.

Maybe there are boats and carriages in my little country but why should the people travel in them?

Maybe there are weapons and armor, but these are kept in the background, unused. I would let my people jog their memories with knotted cords and not depend on writing. I would have them satisfied with their food: their clothing should be pleasant; their homes comfortable; and they would take delight in the performance of the daily round. The neighboring country might be so near that my people would hear the cocks crow and the dogs bark over there- but old age might come and even death itself, and yet my people would have felt no need to cross the border.

81

Truth has no need of fine words;

Fine words may not be true words.

The man of Tao does not try to convince by argument:

He who argues is not a man of Tao.

Wisdom does not consist in knowing everything;

The know ails do not know the Tao.

The Sage does not hoard. The more he spends himself for others, the more he enriches himself.

The rare he gives, the more he gains.

For the Tao of Heaven penetrates all things but harms none.

This, too is the Tao of the Sage, who acts without contending.