

# THE TAO TEH KING, OR THE TAO AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

By Lao-Tse

Translated by James Legge

## PART 1.

### Chapter 1

1. The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name.
2. (Conceived of as) having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth; (conceived of as) having a name, it is the Mother of all things.
3. Always without desire we must be found, if its deep mystery we would sound; but if desire always within us be, its outer fringe is all that we shall see.
4. Under these two aspects, it is really the same; but as development takes place, it receives the different names. Together we call them the Mystery. Where the Mystery is the deepest is the gate of all that is subtle and wonderful.

### Chapter 2

1. All in the world know the beauty of the beautiful, and in doing this they have (the idea of) what ugliness is; they all know the skill of the skilful, and in doing this they have (the idea of) what the want of skill is.

2. So it is that existence and non-existence give birth the one to (the idea of) the other; that difficulty and ease produce the one (the idea of) the other; that length and shortness fashion out the one the figure of the other; that (the ideas of) height and lowness arise from the contrast of the one with the other; that the musical notes and tones become harmonious through the relation of one with another; and that being before and behind give the idea of one following another.

3. Therefore the sage manages affairs without doing anything, and conveys his instructions without the use of speech.

4. All things spring up, and there is not one that declines to show itself; they grow, and there is no claim made for their ownership; they go through their processes, and there is no expectation (of a reward for the results). The work is accomplished, and there is no resting in it (as an achievement).

The work is done, but how no one can see;  
'Tis this that makes the power not cease to be.

### **Chapter 3**

1. Not to value and employ men of superior ability is the way to keep the people from rivalry among themselves; not to prize articles which are difficult to procure is the way to keep them from becoming thieves; not to show them what is likely to excite their desires is the way to keep their minds from disorder.

2. Therefore the sage, in the exercise of his government, empties their minds, fills their bellies, weakens their wills, and strengthens their bones.

3. He constantly (tries to) keep them without knowledge and without desire, and where there are those who have knowledge, to keep them from presuming to act (on it). When there is this abstinence from action, good order is universal.

### **Chapter 4**

1. The Tao is (like) the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fullness. How deep and unfathomable it is, as if it were the Honored Ancestor of all things!

2. We should blunt our sharp points, and unravel the complications of things; we should temper our brightness, and bring ourselves into agreement with the obscurity of others. How pure and still the Tao is, as if it would ever so continue!

3. I do not know whose son it is. It might appear to have been before God.

## Chapter 5

1. Heaven and earth do not act from (the impulse of) any wish to be benevolent; they deal with all things as the dogs of grass are dealt with. The sages do not act from (any wish to be) benevolent; they deal with the people as the dogs of grass are dealt with.

2. May not the space between heaven and earth be compared to a bellows?

'Tis emptied, yet it loses not its power;  
'Tis moved again, and sends forth air the more.  
Much speech to swift exhaustion lead we see;  
Your inner being guard, and keep it free.

## Chapter 6

The valley spirit dies not, aye the same;  
The female mystery thus do we name.  
Its gate, from which at first they issued forth,  
Is called the root from which grew heaven and earth.  
Long and unbroken does its power remain,  
Used gently, and without the touch of pain.

## Chapter 7

1. Heaven is long-enduring and earth continues long. The reason why heaven and earth are able to endure and continue thus long is because they do not live of, or for, themselves. This is how they are able to continue and endure.

2. Therefore the sage puts his own person last, and yet it is found in the foremost place; he treats his person as if it were foreign to him, and yet that person is preserved. Is it not because he has no personal and private ends, that therefore such ends are realized?

## Chapter 8

1. The highest excellence is like (that of) water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things, and in its occupying, without striving (to the contrary), the low place which all men dislike. Hence (its way) is near to (that of) the Tao.
2. The excellence of a residence is in (the suitability of) the place; that of the mind is in abysmal stillness; that of associations is in their being with the virtuous; that of government is in its securing good order; that of (the conduct of) affairs is in its ability; and that of (the initiation of) any movement is in its timeliness.
3. And when (one with the highest excellence) does not wrangle (about his low position), no one finds fault with him.

## Chapter 9

1. It is better to leave a vessel unfilled, than to attempt to carry it when it is full. If you keep feeling a point that has been sharpened, the point cannot long preserve its sharpness.
2. When gold and jade fill the hall, their possessor cannot keep them safe. When wealth and honors lead to arrogance, this brings its evil on itself. When the work is done, and one's name is becoming distinguished, to withdraw into obscurity is the way of Heaven.

## Chapter 10

1. When the intelligent and animal souls are held together in one embrace, they can be kept from separating. When one gives undivided attention to the (vital) breath, and brings it to the utmost degree of pliancy, he can become as a (tender) babe. When he has cleansed away the most mysterious sights (of his imagination), he can become without a flaw.
2. In loving the people and ruling the state, cannot he proceed without any (purpose of) action? In the opening and shutting of his gates of heaven, cannot he do so as a female bird? While his intelligence reaches in every direction, cannot he (appear to) be without knowledge?

3. (The Tao) produces (all things) and nourishes them; it produces them and does not claim them as its own; it does all, and yet does not boast of it; it presides over all, and yet does not control them. This is what is called 'The mysterious Quality' (of the Tao).

## Chapter 11

The thirty spokes unite in the one nave; but it is on the empty space (for the axle), that the use of the wheel depends. Clay is fashioned into vessels; but it is on their empty hollowness, that their use depends. The door and windows are cut out (from the walls) to form an apartment; but it is on the empty space (within), that its use depends. Therefore, what has a (positive) existence serves for profitable adaptation, and what has not that for (actual) usefulness.

## Chapter 12

1. Color's five hues from th' eyes their sight will take;  
Music's five notes the ears as deaf can make;  
The flavors five deprive the mouth of taste;  
The chariot course, and the wild hunting waste  
Make mad the mind; and objects rare and strange,  
Sought for, men's conduct will to evil change.

2. Therefore the sage seeks to satisfy (the craving of) the belly, and not the (insatiable longing of the) eyes. He puts from him the latter, and prefers to seek the former.

## Chapter 13

1. Favor and disgrace would seem equally to be feared; honor and great calamity, to be regarded as personal conditions (of the same kind).

2. What is meant by speaking thus of favor and disgrace? Disgrace is being in a low position (after the enjoyment of favor). The getting that (favor) leads to the apprehension (of losing it), and the losing it leads to the fear of (still greater calamity) – this is what is meant by saying that favor and disgrace would seem equally to be feared.

And what is meant by saying that honor and great calamity are to be (similarly) regarded as personal conditions? What makes me liable to great calamity is my having the body (which I call myself); if I had not the body, what great calamity could come to me?

3. Therefore he who would administer the kingdom, honoring it as he honors his own person, may be employed to govern it, and he who would administer it with the love which he bears to his own person may be entrusted with it.

## Chapter 14

1. We look at it, and we do not see it, and we name it “the Equable.” We listen to it, and we do not hear it, and we name it “the Inaudible.” We try to grasp it, and do not get hold of it, and we name it “the Subtle.” With these three qualities, it cannot be made the subject of description; and hence we blend them together and obtain The One.

2. Its upper part is not bright, and its lower part is not obscure. Ceaseless in its action, it yet cannot be named, and then it again returns and becomes nothing. This is called the Form of the Formless, and the Semblance of the Invisible; this is called the Fleeting and Indeterminable.

3. We meet it and do not see its Front; we follow it, and do not see its Back. When we can lay hold of the Tao of old to direct the things of the present day, and are able to know it as it was of old in the beginning, this is called (unwinding) the clue of Tao.

## Chapter 15

1. The skilful masters (of the Tao) in old times, with a subtle and exquisite penetration, comprehended its mysteries, and were deep (also) so as to elude men's knowledge. As they were thus beyond men's knowledge, I will make an effort to describe of what sort they appeared to be.

2. Shrinking looked they like those who wade through a stream in winter; irresolute like those who are afraid of all around them; grave like a guest (in awe of his host); evanescent like ice that is melting away; unpretentious like wood that has not been fashioned into anything; vacant like a valley, and dull like muddy water.

3. Who can (make) the muddy water (clear)? Let it be still, and it will gradually become clear. Who can secure the condition of rest? Let movement go on, and the condition of rest will gradually arise.

4. They who preserve this method of the Tao do not wish to be full (of themselves). It is through their not being full of themselves that they can afford to seem worn and not appear new and complete.

## Chapter 16

1. The (state of) vacancy should be brought to the utmost degree, and that of stillness guarded with unwearying vigor. All things alike go through their processes of activity, and (then) we see them return (to their original state). When things (in the vegetable world) have displayed their luxuriant growth, we see each of them return to its root. This returning to their root is what we call the state of stillness; and that stillness may be called a reporting that they have fulfilled their appointed end.

2. The report of that fulfillment is the regular, unchanging rule. To know that unchanging rule is to be intelligent; not to know it leads to wild movements and evil issues. The knowledge of that unchanging rule produces a (grand) capacity and forbearance, and that capacity and forbearance lead to a community (of feeling with all things). From this community of feeling comes a kingliness of character; and he who is king-like goes on to be heaven-like. In that likeness to heaven he possesses the Tao. Possessed of the Tao, he endures long; and to the end of his bodily life, is exempt from all danger of decay.

## Chapter 17

1. In the highest antiquity, (the people) did not know that there were (their rulers). In the next age they loved them and praised them. In the next they feared them; in the next they despised them. Thus it was that when faith (in the Tao) was deficient (in the rulers) a want of faith in them ensued (in the people).

2. How irresolute did those (earliest rulers) appear, showing (by their reticence) the importance which they set upon their words! Their work was done and their undertakings were successful, while the people all said, "We are as we are, of ourselves!"

## Chapter 18

1. When the Great Tao (Way or Method) ceased to be observed, benevolence and righteousness came into vogue. (Then) appeared wisdom and shrewdness, and there ensued great hypocrisy.
2. When harmony no longer prevailed throughout the six kinships, filial sons found their manifestation; when the states and clans fell into disorder, loyal ministers appeared.

## Chapter 19

1. If we could renounce our sageness and discard our wisdom, it would be better for the people a hundredfold. If we could renounce our benevolence and discard our righteousness, the people would again become filial and kindly. If we could renounce our artful contrivances and discard our (scheming for) gain, there would be no thieves nor robbers.
2. Those three methods (of government)  
Thought olden ways in elegance did fail  
And made these names their want of worth to veil;  
But simple views, and courses plain and true  
Would selfish ends and many lusts eschew.

## Chapter 20

1. When we renounce learning we have no troubles.  
The (ready) “yes,” and (flattering) “yea” –  
Small is the difference they display.  
But mark their issues, good and ill –  
What space the gulf between shall fill?

What all men fear is indeed to be feared; but how wide and without end is the range of questions (asking to be discussed)!

2. The multitude of men look satisfied and pleased; as if enjoying a full banquet, as if mounted on a tower in spring. I alone seem listless and still, my desires having as yet given no indication of their presence. I am like an infant that has not yet smiled. I look dejected and forlorn, as if I had no home to go to. The multitude of men all have

enough and to spare. I alone seem to have lost everything. My mind is that of a stupid man; I am in a state of chaos.

Ordinary men look bright and intelligent, while I alone seem to be benighted. They look full of discrimination, while I alone am dull and confused. I seem to be carried about as on the sea, drifting as if I had nowhere to rest. All men have their spheres of action, while I alone seem dull and incapable, like a rude borderer. (Thus) I alone am different from other men, but I value the nursing-mother (the Tao).

## Chapter 21

The grandest forms of active force  
From Tao come, their only source.  
Who can of Tao the nature tell?  
Our sight it flies, our touch as well.  
Eluding sight, eluding touch,  
The forms of things all in it crouch;  
Eluding touch, eluding sight,  
There are their semblances, all right.  
Profound it is, dark and obscure;  
Things' essences all there endure.  
Those essences the truth enfold  
Of what, when seen, shall then be told.  
Now it is so; 'twas so of old.  
Its name – what passes not away;  
So, in their beautiful array,  
Things form and never know decay.

How know I that it is so with all the beauties of existing things? By this (nature of the Tao).

## Chapter 22

1. The partial becomes complete; the crooked, straight; the empty, full; the worn out, new. He whose (desires) are few gets them; he whose (desires) are many goes astray.
2. Therefore the sage holds in his embrace the one thing (of humility), and manifests it to all the world. He is free from self-display, and therefore he shines; from self-assertion, and therefore he is distinguished; from self-boasting, and therefore his

merit is acknowledged; from self-complacency, and therefore he acquires superiority. It is because he is thus free from striving that therefore no one in the world is able to strive with him.

3. That saying of the ancients that 'the partial becomes complete' was not vainly spoken – all real completion is comprehended under it.

## Chapter 23

1. Abstaining from speech marks him who is obeying the spontaneity of his nature. A violent wind does not last for a whole morning; a sudden rain does not last for the whole day. To whom is it that these (two) things are owing? To Heaven and Earth. If Heaven and Earth cannot make such (spasmodic) actings last long, how much less can man!

2. Therefore when one is making the Tao his business, those who are also pursuing it, agree with him in it, and those who are making the manifestation of its course their object agree with him in that; while even those who are failing in both these things agree with him where they fail.

3. Hence, those with whom he agrees as to the Tao have the happiness of attaining to it; those with whom he agrees as to its manifestation have the happiness of attaining to it; and those with whom he agrees in their failure have also the happiness of attaining (to the Tao). (But) when there is not faith sufficient (on his part), a want of faith (in him) ensues (on the part of the others).

## Chapter 24

He who stands on his tiptoes does not stand firm; he who stretches his legs does not walk (easily). (So), he who displays himself does not shine; he who asserts his own views is not distinguished; he who vaunts himself does not find his merit acknowledged; he who is self-conceited has no superiority allowed to him. Such conditions, viewed from the standpoint of the Tao, are like remnants of food, or a tumor on the body, which all dislike. Hence those who pursue (the course) of the Tao do not adopt and allow them.

## Chapter 25

1. There was something undefined and complete, coming into existence before Heaven and Earth. How still it was and formless, standing alone, and undergoing no change, reaching everywhere and in no danger (of being exhausted)! It may be regarded as the Mother of all things.
2. I do not know its name, and I give it the designation of the Tao (the Way or Course). Making an effort (further) to give it a name I call it The Great.
3. Great, it passes on (in constant flow). Passing on, it becomes remote. Having become remote, it returns. Therefore the Tao is great; Heaven is great; Earth is great; and the (sage) king is also great. In the universe there are four that are great, and the (sage) king is one of them.
4. Man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Heaven; Heaven takes its law from the Tao. The law of the Tao is its being what it is.

## Chapter 26

1. Gravity is the root of lightness; stillness, the ruler of movement.
2. Therefore a wise prince, marching the whole day, does not go far from his baggage wagons. Although he may have brilliant prospects to look at, he quietly remains (in his proper place), indifferent to them. How should the lord of a myriad chariots carry himself lightly before the kingdom? If he do act lightly, he has lost his root (of gravity); if he proceed to active movement, he will lose his throne.

## Chapter 27

1. The skillful traveler leaves no traces of his wheels or footsteps; the skilful speaker says nothing that can be found fault with or blamed; the skilful reckoner uses no tallies; the skilful closer needs no bolts or bars, while to open what he has shut will be impossible; the skilful binder uses no strings or knots, while to unloose what he has bound will be impossible. In the same way the sage is always skilful at saving men, and so he does not cast away any man; he is always skilful at saving things, and so he does not cast away anything. This is called 'Hiding the light of his procedure.'

2. Therefore the man of skill is a master (to be looked up to) by him who has not the skill; and he who has not the skill is the helper of (the reputation of) him who has the skill. If the one did not honor his master, and the other did not rejoice in his helper, an (observer), though intelligent, might greatly err about them. This is called “The utmost degree of mystery.”

## Chapter 28

1. Who knows his manhood's strength,  
Yet still his female feebleness maintains;  
As to one channel flow the many drains,  
All come to him, yea, all beneath the sky.  
Thus he the constant excellence retains;  
The simple child again, free from all stains.

Who knows how white attracts,  
Yet always keeps himself within black's shade,  
The pattern of humility displayed,  
Displayed in view of all beneath the sky;  
He in the unchanging excellence arrayed,  
Endless return to man's first state has made.

Who knows how glory shines,  
Yet loves disgrace, nor e'er for it is pale;  
Behold his presence in a spacious vale,  
To which men come from all beneath the sky.  
The unchanging excellence completes its tale;  
The simple infant man in him we hail.

2. The unwrought material, when divided and distributed, forms vessels. The sage, when employed, becomes the Head of all the Officers (of government); and in his greatest regulations he employs no violent measures.

## Chapter 29

1. If any one should wish to get the kingdom for himself, and to effect this by what he does, I see that he will not succeed. The kingdom is a spirit-like thing, and cannot be got by active doing. He who would so win it destroys it; he who would hold it in his grasp loses it.

2. The course and nature of things is such that  
What was in front is now behind;  
What warmed anon we freezing find.  
Strength is of weakness oft the spoil;  
The store in ruins mocks our toil.

Hence the sage puts away excessive effort, extravagance, and easy indulgence.

### Chapter 30

1. He who would assist a lord of men in harmony with the Tao will not assert his mastery in the kingdom by force of arms. Such a course is sure to meet with its proper return.
2. Wherever a host is stationed, briars and thorns spring up. In the sequence of great armies there are sure to be bad years.
3. A skilful (commander) strikes a decisive blow, and stops. He does not dare (by continuing his operations) to assert and complete his mastery. He will strike the blow, but will be on his guard against being vain or boastful or arrogant in consequence of it. He strikes it as a matter of necessity; he strikes it, but not from a wish for mastery.
4. When things have attained their strong maturity they become old. This may be said to be not in accordance with the Tao: and what is not in accordance with it soon comes to an end.

### Chapter 31

1. Now arms, however beautiful, are instruments of evil omen, hateful, it may be said, to all creatures. Therefore they who have the Tao do not like to employ them.
2. The superior man ordinarily considers the left hand the most honorable place, but in time of war the right hand. Those sharp weapons are instruments of evil omen, and not the instruments of the superior man – he uses them only on the compulsion of necessity. Calm and repose are what he prizes; victory (by force of arms) is to him undesirable. To consider this desirable would be to delight in the slaughter of men; and he who delights in the slaughter of men cannot get his will in the kingdom.

3. On occasions of festivity to be on the left hand is the prized position; on occasions of mourning, the right hand. The second in command of the army has his place on the left; the general commanding in chief has his on the right – his place, that is, is assigned to him as in the rites of mourning. He who has killed multitudes of men should weep for them with the bitterest grief; and the victor in battle has his place (rightly) according to those rites.

## **Chapter 32**

1. The Tao, considered as unchanging, has no name.
2. Though in its primordial simplicity it may be small, the whole world dares not deal with (one embodying) it as a minister. If a feudal prince or the king could guard and hold it, all would spontaneously submit themselves to him.
3. Heaven and Earth (under its guidance) unite together and send down the sweet dew, which, without the directions of men, reaches equally everywhere as of its own accord.
4. As soon as it proceeds to action, it has a name. When it once has that name, (men) can know to rest in it. When they know to rest in it, they can be free from all risk of failure and error.
5. The relation of the Tao to all the world is like that of the great rivers and seas to the streams from the valleys.

## **Chapter 33**

1. He who knows other men is discerning; he who knows himself is intelligent. He who overcomes others is strong; he who overcomes himself is mighty. He who is satisfied with his lot is rich; he who goes on acting with energy has a (firm) will.
2. He who does not fail in the requirements of his position, continues long; he who dies and yet does not perish, has longevity.

## **Chapter 34**

1. All-pervading is the Great Tao! It may be found on the left hand and on the right.

2. All things depend on it for their production, which it gives to them, not one refusing obedience to it. When its work is accomplished, it does not claim the name of having done it. It clothes all things as with a garment, and makes no assumption of being their lord –it may be named in the smallest things. All things return (to their root and disappear), and do not know that it is it which presides over their doing so – it may be named in the greatest things.

3. Hence the sage is able (in the same way) to accomplish his great achievements. It is through his not making himself great that he can accomplish them.

### **Chapter 35**

1. To him who holds in his hands the Great Image (of the invisible Tao), the whole world repairs. Men resort to him, and receive no hurt, but (find) rest, peace, and the feeling of ease.

2. Music and dainties will make the passing guest stop (for a time). But though the Tao as it comes from the mouth, seems insipid and has no flavor, though it seems not worth being looked at or listened to, the use of it is inexhaustible.

### **Chapter 36**

1. When one is about to take an inspiration, he is sure to make a (previous) expiration; when he is going to weaken another, he will first strengthen him; when he is going to overthrow another, he will first have raised him up; when he is going to despoil another, he will first have made gifts to him – this is called, “Hiding the light (of his procedure).”

2. The soft overcomes the hard; and the weak the strong.

3. Fishes should not be taken from the deep; instruments for the profit of a state should not be shown to the people.

### **Chapter 37**

1. The Tao in its regular course does nothing (for the sake of doing it), and so there is nothing which it does not do.

2. If princes and kings were able to maintain it, all things would of themselves be transformed by them.

3. If this transformation became to me an object of desire, I would express the desire by the nameless simplicity.

Simplicity without a name

Is free from all external aim.

With no desire, at rest and still,

All things go right as of their will.

## PART II.

### Chapter 38

1. (Those who) possessed in highest degree the attributes (of the Tao) did not (seek) to show them, and therefore they possessed them (in fullest measure). (Those who) possessed in a lower degree those attributes (sought how) not to lose them, and therefore they did not possess them (in fullest measure).

2. (Those who) possessed in the highest degree those attributes did nothing (with a purpose), and had no need to do anything. (Those who) possessed them in a lower degree were (always) doing, and had need to be so doing.

3. (Those who) possessed the highest benevolence were (always seeking) to carry it out, and had no need to be doing so. (Those who) possessed the highest righteousness were (always seeking) to carry it out, and had need to be so doing.

4. (Those who) possessed the highest (sense of) propriety were (always seeking) to show it, and when men did not respond to it, they bared the arm and marched up to them.

5. Thus it was that when the Tao was lost, its attributes appeared; when its attributes were lost, benevolence appeared; when benevolence was lost, righteousness appeared; and when righteousness was lost, the proprieties appeared.

6. Now propriety is the attenuated form of leal-heartedness and good faith, and is also the commencement of disorder; swift apprehension is (only) a flower of the Tao, and is the beginning of stupidity.

7. Thus it is that the Great man abides by what is solid, and eschews what is flimsy; dwells with the fruit and not with the flower. It is thus that he puts away the one and makes choice of the other.

## Chapter 39

1. The things which from of old have got the One (the Tao) are:

Heaven which by it is bright and pure;  
Earth rendered thereby firm and sure;  
Spirits with powers by it supplied;  
Valleys kept full throughout their void  
All creatures which through it do live  
Princes and kings who from it get  
The model which to all they give.

All these are the results of the One (Tao).

2. If heaven were not thus pure, it soon would rend;  
If earth were not thus sure, 'twould break and bend;  
Without these powers, the spirits soon would fail;  
If not so filled, the drought would parch each vale;  
Without that life, creatures would pass away;  
Princes and kings, without that moral sway,  
However grand and high, would all decay.

3. Thus it is that dignity finds its (firm) root in its (previous) meanness, and what is lofty finds its stability in the lowness (from which it rises). Hence princes and kings call themselves "Orphans," "Men of small virtue," and as "Carriages without a nave." Is not this an acknowledgment that in their considering themselves mean they see the foundation of their dignity? So it is that in the enumeration of the different parts of a carriage we do not come on what makes it answer the ends of a carriage. They do not wish to show themselves elegant-looking as jade, but (prefer) to be coarse-looking as an (ordinary) stone.

## Chapter 40

1. The movement of the Tao

By contraries proceeds;  
And weakness marks the course  
Of Tao's mighty deeds.

2. All things under heaven sprang from It as existing (and named); that existence sprang from It as non-existent (and not named).

## Chapter 41

1. Scholars of the highest class, when they hear about the Tao, earnestly carry it into practice. Scholars of the middle class, when they have heard about it, seem now to keep it and now to lose it. Scholars of the lowest class, when they have heard about it, laugh greatly at it. If it were not (thus) laughed at, it would not be fit to be the Tao.

2. Therefore the sentence-makers have thus expressed themselves:

'The Tao, when brightest seen, seems light to lack;  
Who progress in it makes, seems drawing back;  
Its even way is like a rugged track.  
Its highest virtue from the vale doth rise;  
Its greatest beauty seems to offend the eyes;  
And he has most whose lot the least supplies.  
Its firmest virtue seems but poor and low;  
Its solid truth seems change to undergo;  
Its largest square doth yet no corner show  
A vessel great, it is the slowest made;  
Loud is its sound, but never word it said;  
A semblance great, the shadow of a shade.'

3. The Tao is hidden, and has no name; but it is the Tao which is skilful at imparting (to all things what they need) and making them complete.

## Chapter 42

1. The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things. All things leave behind them the Obscurity (out of which they have

come), and go forward to embrace the Brightness (into which they have emerged), while they are harmonized by the Breath of Vacancy.

2. What men dislike is to be orphans, to have little virtue, to be as carriages without naves; and yet these are the designations which kings and princes use for themselves. So it is that some things are increased by being diminished, and others are diminished by being increased.

3. What other men (thus) teach, I also teach. The violent and strong do not die their natural death. I will make this the basis of my teaching.

### **Chapter 43**

1. The softest thing in the world dashes against and overcomes the hardest; that which has no (substantial) existence enters where there is no crevice. I know hereby what advantage belongs to doing nothing (with a purpose).

2. There are few in the world who attain to the teaching without words, and the advantage arising from non-action.

### **Chapter 44**

1. Or fame or life,  
Which do you hold more dear?  
Or life or wealth,  
To which would you adhere?  
Keep life and lose those other things;  
Keep them and lose your life – which brings  
Sorrow and pain more near?

2. Thus we may see,  
Who cleaves to fame  
Rejects what is more great;  
Who loves large stores  
Gives up the richer state.

3. Who is content  
Needs fear no shame.  
Who knows to stop

Incurs no blame.  
From danger free  
Long live shall he.

## **Chapter 45**

1. Who thinks his great achievements poor  
Shall find his vigor long endure.  
Of greatest fullness, deemed a void,  
Exhaustion ne'er shall stem the tide.  
Do thou what's straight still crooked deem;  
Thy greatest art still stupid seem,  
And eloquence a stammering scream.

2. Constant action overcomes cold; being still overcomes heat. Purity and stillness give the correct law to all under heaven.

## **Chapter 46**

1. When the Tao prevails in the world, they send back their swift horses to (draw) the dung-carts. When the Tao is disregarded in the world, the war-horses breed in the border lands.

2. There is no guilt greater than to sanction ambition; no calamity greater than to be discontented with one's lot; no fault greater than the wish to be getting. Therefore the sufficiency of contentment is an enduring and unchanging sufficiency.

## **Chapter 47**

1. Without going outside his door, one understands (all that takes place) under the sky; without looking out from his window, one sees the Tao of Heaven. The farther that one goes out (from himself), the less he knows.

2. Therefore the sages got their knowledge without travelling; gave their (right) names to things without seeing them; and accomplished their ends without any purpose of doing so.

## Chapter 48

1. He who devotes himself to learning (seeks) from day to day to increase (his knowledge); he who devotes himself to the Tao (seeks) from day to day to diminish (his doing).
2. He diminishes it and again diminishes it, till he arrives at doing nothing (on purpose). Having arrived at this point of non-action, there is nothing which he does not do.
3. He who gets as his own all under heaven does so by giving himself no trouble (with that end). If one take trouble (with that end), he is not equal to getting as his own all under heaven.

## Chapter 49

1. The sage has no invariable mind of his own; he makes the mind of the people his mind.
2. To those who are good (to me), I am good; and to those who are not good (to me), I am also good – and thus (all) get to be good. To those who are sincere (with me), I am sincere; and to those who are not sincere (with me), I am also sincere – and thus (all) get to be sincere.
3. The sage has in the world an appearance of indecision, and keeps his mind in a state of indifference to all. The people all keep their eyes and ears directed to him, and he deals with them all as his children.

## Chapter 50

1. Men come forth and live; they enter (again) and die.
2. Of every ten three are ministers of life (to themselves); and three are ministers of death.
3. There are also three in every ten whose aim is to live, but whose movements tend to the land (or place) of death. And for what reason? Because of their excessive endeavors to perpetuate life.

4. But I have heard that he who is skilful in managing the life entrusted to him for a time travels on the land without having to shun rhinoceros or tiger, and enters a host without having to avoid buff coat or sharp weapon. The rhinoceros finds no place in him into which to thrust its horn, nor the tiger a place in which to fix its claws, nor the weapon a place to admit its point. And for what reason? Because there is in him no place of death.

## **Chapter 51**

1. All things are produced by the Tao, and nourished by its outflowing operation. They receive their forms according to the nature of each, and are completed according to the circumstances of their condition. Therefore all things without exception honor the Tao, and exalt its outflowing operation.

2. This honoring of the Tao and exalting of its operation is not the result of any ordination, but always a spontaneous tribute.

3. Thus it is that the Tao produces (all things), nourishes them, brings them to their full growth, nurses them, completes them, matures them, maintains them, and overspreads them.

4. It produces them and makes no claim to the possession of them; it carries them through their processes and does not vaunt its ability in doing so; it brings them to maturity and exercises no control over them – this is called its mysterious operation.

## **Chapter 52**

1. (The Tao) which originated all under the sky is to be considered as the mother of them all.

2. When the mother is found, we know what her children should be. When one knows that he is his mother's child, and proceeds to guard (the qualities of) the mother that belong to him, to the end of his life he will be free from all peril.

3. Let him keep his mouth closed, and shut up the portals (of his nostrils), and all his life he will be exempt from laborious exertion. Let him keep his mouth open, and (spend his breath) in the promotion of his affairs, and all his life there will be no safety for him.

4. The perception of what is small is (the secret of clear-sightedness; the guarding of what is soft and tender is (the secret of) strength.

5. Who uses well his light,  
Reverting to its (source so) bright,  
Will from his body ward all blight,  
And hides the unchanging from men's sight.

### Chapter 53

1. If I were suddenly to become known, and (put into a position to) conduct (a government) according to the Great Tao, what I should be most afraid of would be a boastful display.

2. The great Tao (or way) is very level and easy; but people love the by-ways.

3. Their courtyards and buildings shall be well kept, but their fields shall be ill-cultivated, and their granaries very empty. They shall wear elegant and ornamented robes, carry a sharp sword at their girdle, pamper themselves in eating and drinking, and have a superabundance of property and wealth – such (princes) may be called robbers and boasters. This is contrary to the Tao surely!

### Chapter 54

1. What (Tao's) skilful planter plants  
Can never be uptorn;  
What his skilful arms enfold,  
From him can ne'er be borne.  
Sons shall bring in lengthening line,  
Sacrifices to his shrine.

2. Tao when nursed within one's self,  
His vigor will make true;  
And where the family it rules  
What riches will accrue!  
The neighborhood where it prevails  
In thriving will abound;  
And when 'tis seen throughout the state,  
Good fortune will be found.

Employ it the kingdom o'er,  
And men thrive all around.

3. In this way the effect will be seen in the person, by the observation of different cases; in the family; in the neighborhood; in the state; and in the kingdom.

4. How do I know that this effect is sure to hold thus all under the sky? By this (method of observation).

## Chapter 55

1. He who has in himself abundantly the attributes (of the Tao) is like an infant. Poisonous insects will not sting him; fierce beasts will not seize him; birds of prey will not strike him.

2. (The infant's) bones are weak and its sinews soft, but yet its grasp is firm. It knows not yet the union of male and female, and yet its virile member may be excited – showing the perfection of its physical essence. All day long it will cry without its throat becoming hoarse – showing the harmony (in its constitution).

3. To him by whom this harmony is known,  
(The secret of) the unchanging (Tao) is shown,  
And in the knowledge wisdom finds its throne.  
All life-increasing arts to evil turn;  
Where the mind makes the vital breath to burn,  
(False) is the strength, (and o'er it we should mourn.)

4. When things have become strong, they (then) become old, which may be said to be contrary to the Tao. Whatever is contrary to the Tao soon ends.

## Chapter 56

1. He who knows (the Tao) does not (care to) speak (about it); he who is (ever ready to) speak about it does not know it.

2. He (who knows it) will keep his mouth shut and close the portals (of his nostrils). He will blunt his sharp points and unravel the complications of things; he will temper his brightness, and bring himself into agreement with the obscurity (of others). This is called “the Mysterious Agreement.”

3. (Such an one) cannot be treated familiarly or distantly; he is beyond all consideration of profit or injury; of nobility or meanness – he is the noblest man under heaven.

## Chapter 57

1. A state may be ruled by (measures of) correction; weapons of war may be used with crafty dexterity; (but) the kingdom is made one's own (only) by freedom from action and purpose.

2. How do I know that it is so? By these facts: In the kingdom the multiplication of prohibitive enactments increases the poverty of the people; the more implements to add to their profit that the people have, the greater disorder is there in the state and clan; the more acts of crafty dexterity that men possess, the more do strange contrivances appear; the more display there is of legislation, the more thieves and robbers there are.

3. Therefore a sage has said, 'I will do nothing (of purpose), and the people will be transformed of themselves; I will be fond of keeping still, and the people will of themselves become correct. I will take no trouble about it, and the people will of themselves become rich; I will manifest no ambition, and the people will of themselves attain to the primitive simplicity.'

## Chapter 58

1. The government that seems the most unwise,  
Oft goodness to the people best supplies;  
That which is meddling, touching everything,  
Will work but ill, and disappointment bring.

Misery! – Happiness is to be found by its side! Happiness! – Misery lurks beneath it!  
Who knows what either will come to in the end?

2. Shall we then dispense with correction? The (method of) correction shall by a turn become distortion, and the good in it shall by a turn become evil. The delusion of the people (on this point) has indeed subsisted for a long time.

3. Therefore the sage is (like) a square that cuts no one (with its angles); (like) a corner which injures no one (with its sharpness). He is straightforward, but allows himself no license; he is bright, but does not dazzle.

## **Chapter 59**

1. For regulating the human (in our constitution) and rendering the (proper) service to the heavenly, there is nothing like moderation.

2. It is only by this moderation that there is effected an early return (to man's normal state). That early return is what I call the repeated accumulation of the attributes (of the Tao). With that repeated accumulation of those attributes, there comes the subjugation (of every obstacle to such return). Of this subjugation we know not what shall be the limit; and when one knows not what the limit shall be, he may be the ruler of a state.

3. He who possesses the mother of the state may continue long. His case is like that (of the plant) of which we say that its roots are deep and its flower stalks firm – this is the way to secure that its enduring life shall long be seen.

## **Chapter 60**

1. Governing a great state is like cooking small fish.

2. Let the kingdom be governed according to the Tao, and the manes of the departed will not manifest their spiritual energy. It is not that those manes have not that spiritual energy, but it will not be employed to hurt men. It is not that it could not hurt men, but neither does the ruling sage hurt them.

3. When these two do not injuriously affect each other, their good influences converge in the virtue (of the Tao).

## **Chapter 61**

1. What makes a great state is its being (like) a low-lying, down-flowing (stream) – it becomes the center to which tend (all the small states) under heaven.

2. (To illustrate from) the case of all females – the female always overcomes the male by her stillness. Stillness may be considered (a sort of) abasement.

3. Thus it is that a great state, by condescending to small states, gains them for itself; and that small states, by abasing themselves to a great state, win it over to them. In the one case the abasement leads to gaining adherents, in the other case to procuring favor.

4. The great state only wishes to unite men together and nourish them; a small state only wishes to be received by, and to serve, the other. Each gets what it desires, but the great state must learn to abase itself.

## Chapter 62

1. Tao has of all things the most honored place.

No treasures give good men so rich a grace;

Bad men it guards, and doth their ill efface.

2. (Its) admirable words can purchase honor; (its) admirable deeds can raise their performer above others. \Even men who are not good are not abandoned by it.

3. Therefore when the sovereign occupies his place as the Son of Heaven, and he has appointed his three ducal ministers, though (a prince) were to send in a round symbol-of-rank large enough to fill both the hands, and that as the precursor of the team of horses (in the court-yard), such an offering would not be equal to (a lesson of) this Tao, which one might present on his knees.

4. Why was it that the ancients prized this Tao so much? Was it not because it could be got by seeking for it, and the guilty could escape (from the stain of their guilt) by it? This is the reason why all under heaven consider it the most valuable thing.

## Chapter 63

1. (It is the way of the Tao) to act without (thinking of) acting; to conduct affairs without (feeling the) trouble of them; to taste without discerning any flavor; to consider what is small as great, and a few as many; and to recompense injury with kindness.

2. (The master of it) anticipates things that are difficult while they are easy, and does things that would become great while they are small. All difficult things in the world are sure to arise from a previous state in which they were easy, and all great things from one in which they were small. Therefore the sage, while he never does what is great, is able on that account to accomplish the greatest things.

3. He who lightly promises is sure to keep but little faith; he who is continually thinking things easy is sure to find them difficult. Therefore the sage sees difficulty even in what seems easy, and so never has any difficulties.

## Chapter 64

1. That which is at rest is easily kept hold of; before a thing has given indications of its presence, it is easy to take measures against it; that which is brittle is easily broken; that which is very small is easily dispersed. Action should be taken before a thing has made its appearance; order should be secured before disorder has begun.

2. The tree which fills the arms grew from the tiniest sprout; the tower of nine stories rose from a (small) heap of earth; the journey of a thousand li commenced with a single step.

3. He who acts (with an ulterior purpose) does harm; he who takes hold of a thing (in the same way) loses his hold. The sage does not act (so), and therefore does no harm; he does not lay hold (so), and therefore does not lose his hold. (But) people in their conduct of affairs are constantly ruining them when they are on the eve of success. If they were careful at the end, as (they should be) at the beginning, they would not so ruin them.

4. Therefore the sage desires what (other men) do not desire, and does not prize things difficult to get; he learns what (other men) do not learn, and turns back to what the multitude of men have passed by. Thus he helps the natural development of all things, and does not dare to act (with an ulterior purpose of his own).

## Chapter 65

1. The ancients who showed their skill in practicing the Tao did so, not to enlighten the people, but rather to make them simple and ignorant.

2. The difficulty in governing the people arises from their having much knowledge. He who (tries to) govern a state by his wisdom is a scourge to it; while he who does not (try to) do so is a blessing.

3. He who knows these two things finds in them also his model and rule. Ability to know this model and rule constitutes what we call the mysterious excellence (of a governor). Deep and far-reaching is such mysterious excellence, showing indeed its possessor as opposite to others, but leading them to a great conformity to him.

## **Chapter 66**

1. That whereby the rivers and seas are able to receive the homage and tribute of all the valley streams, is their skill in being lower than they – it is thus that they are the kings of them all. So it is that the sage (ruler), wishing to be above men, puts himself by his words below them, and, wishing to be before them, places his person behind them.

2. In this way though he has his place above them, men do not feel his weight, nor though he has his place before them, do they feel it an injury to them.

3. Therefore all in the world delight to exalt him and do not weary of him. Because he does not strive, no one finds it possible to strive with him.

## **Chapter 67**

1. All the world says that, while my Tao is great, it yet appears to be inferior (to other systems of teaching). Now it is just its greatness that makes it seem to be inferior. If it were like any other (system), for long would its smallness have been known!

2. But I have three precious things which I prize and hold fast. The first is gentleness; the second is economy; and the third is shrinking from taking precedence of others.

3. With that gentleness I can be bold; with that economy I can be liberal; shrinking from taking precedence of others, I can become a vessel of the highest honor. Nowadays they give up gentleness and are all for being bold; economy, and are all for being liberal; the hindmost place, and seek only to be foremost (of all which the end is) death.

4. Gentleness is sure to be victorious even in battle, and firmly to maintain its ground. Heaven will save its possessor, by his (very) gentleness protecting him.

## Chapter 68

He who in (Tao's) wars has skill  
Assumes no martial port;  
He who fights with most good will  
To rage makes no resort.  
He who vanquishes yet still  
Keeps from his foes apart;  
He whose hests men most fulfil  
Yet humbly plies his art.

Thus we say, 'He ne'er contends,  
And therein is his might.'  
Thus we say, 'Men's wills he bends,  
That they with him unite.'  
Thus we say, 'Like Heaven's his ends,  
No sage of old more bright.'

## Chapter 69

1. A master of the art of war has said, "I do not dare to be the host (to commence the war); I prefer to be the guest (to act on the defensive). I do not dare to advance an inch; I prefer to retire a foot." This is called marshalling the ranks where there are no ranks; baring the arms (to fight) where there are no arms to bare; grasping the weapon where there is no weapon to grasp; advancing against the enemy where there is no enemy.

2. There is no calamity greater than lightly engaging in war. To do that is near losing (the gentleness) which is so precious. Thus it is that when opposing weapons are (actually) crossed, he who deplores (the situation) conquers.

## Chapter 70

1. My words are very easy to know, and very easy to practice; but there is no one in the world who is able to know and able to practice them.

2. There is an originating and all-comprehending (principle) in my words, and an authoritative law for the things (which I enforce). It is because they do not know these, that men do not know me.

3. They who know me are few, and I am on that account (the more) to be prized. It is thus that the sage wears (a poor garb of) hair cloth, while he carries his (signet of) jade in his bosom.

### **Chapter 71**

1. To know and yet (think) we do not know is the highest (attainment); not to know (and yet think) we do know is a disease.

2. It is simply by being pained at (the thought of) having this disease that we are preserved from it. The sage has not the disease. He knows the pain that would be inseparable from it, and therefore he does not have it.

### **Chapter 72**

1. When the people do not fear what they ought to fear, that which is their great dread will come on them.

2. Let them not thoughtlessly indulge themselves in their ordinary life; let them not act as if weary of what that life depends on.

3. It is by avoiding such indulgence that such weariness does not arise.

4. Therefore the sage knows (these things) of himself, but does not parade (his knowledge); loves, but does not (appear to set a) value on, himself. And thus he puts the latter alternative away and makes choice of the former.

### **Chapter 73**

1. He whose boldness appears in his daring (to do wrong, in defiance of the laws) is put to death; he whose boldness appears in his not daring (to do so) lives on. Of these two cases the one appears to be advantageous, and the other to be injurious. But

When Heaven's anger smites a man,  
Who the cause shall truly scan?

On this account the sage feels a difficulty (as to what to do in the former case).

2. It is the way of Heaven not to strive, and yet it skillfully overcomes; not to speak, and yet it is skilful in (obtaining a reply; does not call, and yet men come to it of themselves. Its demonstrations are quiet, and yet its plans are skilful and effective. The meshes of the net of Heaven are large; far apart, but letting nothing escape.

#### **Chapter 74**

1. The people do not fear death; to what purpose is it to (try to) frighten them with death? If the people were always in awe of death, and I could always seize those who do wrong, and put them to death, who would dare to do wrong?

2. There is always One who presides over the infliction death. He who would inflict death in the room of him who so presides over it may be described as hewing wood instead of a great carpenter. Seldom is it that he who undertakes the hewing, instead of the great carpenter, does not cut his own hands!

#### **Chapter 75**

1. The people suffer from famine because of the multitude of taxes consumed by their superiors. It is through this that they suffer famine.

2. The people are difficult to govern because of the (excessive) agency of their superiors (in governing them). It is through this that they are difficult to govern.

3. The people make light of dying because of the greatness of their labors in seeking for the means of living. It is this which makes them think light of dying. Thus it is that to leave the subject of living altogether out of view is better than to set a high value on it.

#### **Chapter 76**

1. Man at his birth is supple and weak; at his death, firm and strong. (So it is with) all things. Trees and plants, in their early growth, are soft and brittle; at their death, dry and withered.
2. Thus it is that firmness and strength are the concomitants of death; softness and weakness, the concomitants of life.
3. Hence he who (relies on) the strength of his forces does not conquer; and a tree which is strong will fill the out-stretched arms, (and thereby invites the feller.)
4. Therefore the place of what is firm and strong is below, and that of what is soft and weak is above.

## **Chapter 77**

1. May not the Way (or Tao) of Heaven be compared to the (method of) bending a bow? The (part of the bow) which was high is brought low, and what was low is raised up. (So Heaven) diminishes where there is superabundance, and supplements where there is deficiency.
2. It is the Way of Heaven to diminish superabundance, and to supplement deficiency. It is not so with the way of man. He takes away from those who have not enough to add to his own superabundance.
3. Who can take his own superabundance and therewith serve all under heaven? Only he who is in possession of the Tao!
4. Therefore the (ruling) sage acts without claiming the results as his; he achieves his merit and does not rest (arrogantly) in it – he does not wish to display his superiority.

## **Chapter 78**

1. There is nothing in the world more soft and weak than water, and yet for attacking things that are firm and strong there is nothing that can take precedence of it – for there is nothing (so effectual) for which it can be changed.
2. Every one in the world knows that the soft overcomes the hard, and the weak the strong, but no one is able to carry it out in practice.

3. Therefore a sage has said,  
'He who accepts his state's reproach,  
Is hailed therefore its altars' lord;  
To him who bears men's direful woes  
They all the name of King accord.'

4. Words that are strictly true seem to be paradoxical.

## Chapter 79

1. When a reconciliation is effected (between two parties) after a great animosity, there is sure to be a grudge remaining (in the mind of the one who was wrong). And how can this be beneficial (to the other)?

2. Therefore (to guard against this), the sage keeps the left-hand portion of the record of the engagement, and does not insist on the (speedy) fulfillment of it by the other party. (So), he who has the attributes (of the Tao) regards (only) the conditions of the engagement, while he who has not those attributes regards only the conditions favorable to himself.

3. In the Way of Heaven, there is no partiality of love; it is always on the side of the good man.

## Chapter 80

1. In a little state with a small population, I would so order it, that, though there were individuals with the abilities of ten or a hundred men, there should be no employment of them; I would make the people, while looking on death as a grievous thing, yet not remove elsewhere (to avoid it).

2. Though they had boats and carriages, they should have no occasion to ride in them; though they had buff coats and sharp weapons, they should have no occasion to don or use them.

3. I would make the people return to the use of knotted cords (instead of the written characters).

4. They should think their (coarse) food sweet; their (plain) clothes beautiful; their (poor) dwellings places of rest; and their common (simple) ways sources of enjoyment.

5. There should be a neighboring state within sight, and the voices of the fowls and dogs should be heard all the way from it to us, but I would make the people to old age, even to death, not have any intercourse with it.

## Chapter 81

1. Sincere words are not fine; fine words are not sincere. Those who are skilled (in the Tao) do not dispute (about it); the disputatious are not skilled in it. Those who know (the Tao) are not extensively learned; the extensively learned do not know it.

2. The sage does not accumulate (for himself). The more that he expends for others, the more does he possess of his own; the more that he gives to others, the more does he have himself.

3. With all the sharpness of the Way of Heaven, it injures not; with all the doing in the way of the sage he does not strive.

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# The Tao Te Ching

## A Translation by Stan Rosenthal

### 1. THE EMBODIMENT OF TAO

Even the finest teaching is not the Tao itself.  
Even the finest name is insufficient to define it.  
Without words, the Tao can be experienced,  
and without a name, it can be known.

To conduct one's life according to the Tao,

is to conduct one's life without regrets;  
to realize that potential within oneself  
which is of benefit to all.

Though words or names are not required  
to live one's life this way,  
to describe it, words and names are used,  
that we might better clarify  
the way of which we speak,  
without confusing it with other ways  
in which an individual might choose to live.

Through knowledge, intellectual thought and words,  
the manifestations of the Tao are known,  
but without such intellectual intent  
we might experience the Tao itself.

Both knowledge and experience are real,  
but reality has many forms,  
which seem to cause complexity.

By using the means appropriate,  
we extend ourselves beyond  
the barriers of such complexity,  
and so experience the Tao.

## **2. LETTING GO OF COMPARISONS**

We cannot know the Tao itself,  
nor see its qualities direct,  
but only see by differentiation,  
that which it manifests.

Thus, that which is seen as beautiful  
is beautiful compared with that  
which is seen as lacking beauty;  
an action considered skilled  
is so considered in comparison  
with another, which seems unskilled.

That which a person knows he has  
is known to him by that which he does not have,  
and that which he considers difficult  
seems so because of that which he can do with ease.  
One thing seems long by comparison with that  
which is, comparatively, short.  
One thing is high because another thing is low;  
only when sound ceases is quietness known,  
and that which leads  
is seen to lead only by being followed.  
In comparison, the sage,  
in harmony with the Tao,  
needs no comparisons,  
and when he makes them, knows  
that comparisons are judgements,  
and just as relative to he who makes them,  
and to the situation,  
as they are to that on which  
the judgement has been made.

Through his experience,  
the sage becomes aware that all things change,  
and that he who seems to lead,  
might also, in another situation, follow.  
So he does nothing; he neither leads nor follows.  
That which he does is neither big nor small;  
without intent, it is neither difficult,  
nor done with ease.  
His task completed, he then lets go of it;  
seeking no credit, he cannot be discredited.  
Thus, his teaching lasts for ever,  
and he is held in high esteem.

### **3. WITHOUT SEEKING ACCLAIM**

By retaining his humility,  
the talented person who is also wise,  
reduces rivalry.

The person who possesses many things,

but does not boast of his possessions,  
reduces temptation, and reduces stealing.

Those who are jealous of the skills or things  
possessed by others,  
most easily themselves become possessed by envy.

Satisfied with his possessions,  
the sage eliminates the need to steal;  
at one with the Tao,  
he remains free of envy,  
and has no need of titles.

By being supple, he retains his energy.  
He minimizes his desires,  
and does not train himself in guile,  
nor subtle words of praise.  
By not contriving, he retains  
the harmony of his inner world,  
and so remains at peace within himself.

It is for reasons such as these,  
that an administration  
which is concerned  
with the welfare of those it serves,  
does not encourage status  
and titles to be sought,  
nor encourage rivalry.

Ensuring a sufficiency for all,  
helps in reducing discontent.

Administrators who are wise  
do not seek honours for themselves,  
nor act with guile  
towards the ones they serve.

#### **4. THE UNFATHOMABLE TAO**

It is the nature of the Tao,

that even though used continuously,  
it is replenished naturally,  
never being emptied,  
and never being over-filled,  
as is a goblet  
which spills its contents  
upon the ground.

The Tao therefore cannot be said  
to waste its charge,  
but constantly remains  
a source of nourishment  
for those who are not so full of self  
as to be unable to partake of it.  
When tempered beyond its natural state,  
the finest blade will lose its edge.  
Even the hardest tempered sword,  
against water, is of no avail,  
and will shatter if struck against a rock.  
When untangled by a cutting edge,  
the cord in little pieces lies,  
and is of little use.

Just as the finest swordsmith  
tempers the finest blade  
with his experience,  
so the sage, with wisdom, tempers intellect.  
With patience, tangled cord may be undone,  
and problems which seem insoluble, resolved.

With wise administrators, all can exist in unity,  
each with the other,  
because no man need feel that he exists,  
only as the shadow of his brilliant brother.

Through conduct not contrived for gain,  
awareness of the Tao may be maintained.  
This is how its mysteries may be found.

## 5. WITHOUT INTENTION

Nature acts without intent,  
so cannot be described  
as acting with benevolence,  
nor malevolence to any thing.

In this respect, the Tao is just the same,  
though in reality it should be said  
that nature follows the rule of Tao.

Therefore, even when he seems to act  
in manner kind or benevolent,  
the sage is not acting with such intent,  
for in conscious matters such as these,  
he is amoral and indifferent.

The sage retains tranquility,  
and is not by speech or thought disturbed,  
and even less by action which is contrived.  
His actions are spontaneous,  
as are his deeds towards his fellow men.

By this means he is empty of desire,  
and his energy is not drained from him.

## 6. COMPLETION

Like the sheltered, fertile valley,  
the meditative mind is still,  
yet retains its energy.

Since both energy and stillness,  
of themselves, do not have form,  
it is not through the senses  
that they may be found,  
nor understood by intellect alone,  
although, in nature, both abound.

In the meditative state,

the mind ceases to differentiate  
between existences,  
and that which may or may not be.  
It leaves them well alone,  
for they exist,  
not differentiated, but as one,  
within the meditative mind.

## **7. SHEATHING THE LIGHT**

When living by the Tao,  
awareness of self is not required,  
for in this way of life, the self exists,  
and is also non-existent,  
being conceived of, not as an existentiality,  
nor as non-existent.

The sage does not contrive to find his self,  
for he knows that all which may be found of it,  
is that which it manifests to sense and thought,  
which side by side with self itself, is nought.

It is by sheathing intellect's bright light  
that the sage remains at one with his own self,  
ceasing to be aware of it, by placing it behind.

Detached, he is unified with his external world,  
by being selfless he is fulfilled;  
thus his selfhood is assured.

## **8. THE WAY OF WATER**

Great good is said to be like water,  
sustaining life with no conscious striving,  
flowing naturally, providing nourishment,  
found even in places  
which desiring man rejects.

In this way

it is like the Tao itself.

Like water, the sage abides in a humble place;  
in meditation, without desire;  
in thoughtfulness, he is profound,  
and in his dealings, kind.  
In speech, sincerity guides the man of Tao,  
and as a leader, he is just.  
In management, competence is his aim,  
and he ensures the pacing is correct.

Because he does not act for his own ends,  
nor cause unnecessary conflict,  
he is held to be correct  
in his actions towards his fellow man.

## **9. WITHOUT EXTREMES**

The cup is easier to hold  
when not filled to overflowing.

The blade is more effective  
if not tempered beyond its mettle.

Gold and jade are easier to protect  
if possessed in moderation.

He who seeks titles,  
invites his own downfall.

The sage works quietly,  
seeking neither praise nor fame;  
completing what he does with natural ease,  
and then retiring.  
This is the way and nature of Tao.

## **10. CLEANING THE DARK MIRROR**

Maintaining unity is virtuous,

for the inner world of thought is one  
with the external world  
of action and of things.

The sage avoids their separation,  
by breathing as the sleeping babe,  
and thus maintaining harmony.

He cleans the dark mirror of his mind,  
so that it reflects without intent.  
He conducts himself without contriving,  
loving the people, and not interfering.

He cultivates without possessing,  
thus providing nourishment,  
he remains receptive  
to changing needs,  
and creates without desire.

By leading from behind,  
attending to that  
which must be done,  
he is said to have attained  
the mystic state.

## **11. THE UTILITY OF NON-EXISTENCE**

Though thirty spokes may form the wheel,  
it is the hole within the hub  
which gives the wheel utility.

It is not the clay the potter throws,  
which gives the pot its usefulness,  
but the space within the shape,  
from which the pot is made.

Without a door, the room cannot be entered,  
and without windows it is dark.

Such is the utility of non-existence.

## 12. THE REPRESSION OF DESIRES

Through sight, the colors may be seen,  
but too much color blinds us.  
Apprehending the tones of sound,  
too much sound might make us deaf,  
and too much flavor deadens taste.  
When hunting for sport, and chasing for pleasure,  
the mind easily becomes perplexed.  
He who collects treasures for himself  
more easily becomes anxious.

The wise person fulfills his needs,  
rather than sensory temptations.

## 13. UNMOVED AND UNMOVING

The ordinary man seeks honor, not dishonor,  
cherishing success and abominating failure,  
loving life, whilst fearing death.  
The sage does not recognize these things,  
so lives his life quite simply.

The ordinary man seeks to make himself  
the center of his universe;  
the universe of the sage is at his center.  
He loves the world, and thus remains unmoved  
by things with which others are concerned.  
He acts with humility, is neither moved nor moving,  
and can therefore be trusted in caring for all things.

## 14. EXPERIENCING THE MYSTERY

The Tao is abstract,  
and therefore has no form,  
it is neither bright in rising,  
nor dark in sinking,

cannot be grasped, and makes no sound.

Without form or image, without existence,  
the form of the formless, is beyond defining,  
cannot be described,  
and is beyond our understanding.  
It cannot be called by any name.

Standing before it, it has no beginning;  
even when followed, it has no end.  
In the now, it exists; to the present apply it,  
follow it well, and reach its beginning.

## 15. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE TAO IN MAN

The sage of old was profound and wise;  
like a man at a ford, he took great care,  
alert, perceptive and aware.

Desiring nothing for himself,  
and having no desire  
for change for its own sake,  
his actions were difficult to understand.

Being watchful, he had no fear of danger;  
being responsive, he had no need of fear.

He was courteous like a visiting guest,  
and as yielding as the springtime ice.  
Having no desires, he was untouched by craving.

Receptive and mysterious,  
his knowledge was unfathomable,  
causing others to think him hesitant.

Pure in heart, like uncut jade,  
he cleared the muddy water  
by leaving it alone.

By remaining calm and active,

the need for renewing is reduced.

## 16. RETURNING TO THE ROOT

It is only by means of being  
that non-being may be found.

When society changes  
from its natural state of flux,  
to that which seems like chaos,  
the inner world of the superior man  
remains uncluttered and at peace.  
By remaining still, his self detached,  
he aids society in its return  
to the way of nature and of peace.  
The value of his insight may be clearly seen  
when chaos ceases.

Being one with the Tao is to be at peace,  
and to be in conflict with it,  
leads to chaos and dysfunction.

When the consistency of the Tao is known,  
the mind is receptive to its states of change.

It is by being at one with the Tao,  
that the sage holds no prejudice  
against his fellow man.  
If accepted as a leader of men,  
he is held in high esteem.

Throughout his life,  
both being and non-being,  
the Tao protects him.

## 17. LEADERSHIP BY EXCEPTION

Man cannot comprehend the infinite;  
only knowing that the best exists,

the second best is seen and praised,  
and the next, despised and feared.

The sage does not expect that others  
use his criteria as their own.

The existence of the leader who is wise  
is barely known to those he leads.  
He acts without unnecessary speech,  
so that the people say,  
"It happened of its own accord".

## **18. THE DECAY OF ETHICS**

When the way of the Tao is forgotten,  
kindness and ethics need to be taught;  
men learn to pretend to be wise and good.

All too often in the lives of men,  
filial piety and devotion  
arise only after conflict and strife,  
just as loyal ministers all too often appear,  
when the people are suppressed.

## **19. RETURNING TO NATURALNESS**

It is better merely to live one's life,  
realizing one's potential,  
rather than wishing  
for sanctification.

He who lives in filial piety and love  
has no need of ethical teaching.

When cunning and profit are renounced,  
stealing and fraud will disappear.  
But ethics and kindness, and even wisdom,  
are insufficient in themselves.

Better by far to see the simplicity  
of raw silk's beauty  
and the uncarved block;  
to be one with oneself,  
and with one's brother.  
It is better by far  
to be one with the Tao,  
developing selflessness,  
tempering desire,  
removing the wish,  
but being compassionate.

## 20. BEING DIFFERENT FROM ORDINARY MEN

The sage is often envied  
because others do not know  
that although he is nourished by the Tao,  
like them, he too is mortal.

He who seeks wisdom is well advised  
to give up academic ways,  
and put an end to striving.  
Then he will learn that yes and no  
are distinguished only by distinction.

It is to the advantage of the sage  
that he does not fear what others fear,  
but it is to the advantage of others  
that they can enjoy the feast,  
or go walking, free of hindrance,  
through the terraced park in spring.

The sage drifts like a cloud,  
having no specific place.  
Like a newborn babe before it smiles,  
he does not seek to communicate.  
In the eyes of those  
who have more than they need,  
the sage has nothing, and is a fool,  
prizing only that which of the Tao is born.

The sage may seem to be perplexed,  
being neither bright nor clear,  
and to himself, sometimes he seems  
both dull and weak, confused and shy.  
Like the ocean at night,  
he is serene and quiet,  
but as penetrating as the winter wind.

## **21. FINDING THE ESSENCE OF TAO**

The greatest virtue is to follow the Tao;  
how it achieves! Without contriving.

The essence of Tao is dark and mysterious,  
having, itself, no image or form.  
Yet through its non-being,  
are found image and form.  
The essence of Tao is deep and unfathomable,  
yet it may be known by not trying to know.

## **22. YIELDING TO MAINTAIN INTEGRITY**

Yield, and maintain integrity.  
To bend is to be upright;  
to be empty is to be full.

Those who have little have much to gain,  
but those who have much  
may be confused by possessions.

The wise man embraces the all encompassing;  
he is unaware of himself, and so has brilliance;  
not defending himself, he gains distinction;  
not seeking fame, he receives recognition;  
not making false claims, he does not falter;  
and not being quarrelsome,  
is in conflict with no one.

This is why it was said by the sages of old,

"Yield, and maintain integrity;  
be whole, and all things come to you".

### **23. ACCEPTING THE IRREVOCABLE**

Nature's way is to say but little;  
high winds are made still  
with the turn of the tide,  
and rarely last all morning,  
nor heavy rain, all day.  
Therefore, when talking,  
remember also  
to be silent and still.

He who follows the natural way  
is always one with the Tao.  
He who is virtuous may experience virtue,  
whilst he who loses the natural way  
is easily lost himself.

He who is at one with the Tao  
is at one with nature,  
and virtue always exists for he who has virtue.

To accept the irrevocable  
is to let go of desire.

He who does not have trust in others  
should not himself be trusted.

### **24. EXCESS**

He who stretches  
beyond his natural reach,  
does not stand firmly  
upon the ground;  
just as he

who travels at a speed  
beyond his means,  
cannot maintain his pace.

He who boasts  
is not enlightened,  
and he who is self-righteous  
does not gain respect  
from those who are meritorious;  
thus, he gains nothing,  
and will fall into disrepute.

Since striving,  
boasting and self-righteousness,  
are all unnecessary traits,  
the sage considers them excesses,  
and has no need of them.

## **25. THE CREATIVE PRINCIPLE OF TAO**

The creative principle unifies  
the inner and external worlds.  
It does not depend on time or space,  
is ever still and yet in motion;  
thereby it creates all things,  
and is therefore called  
'the creative and the absolute';  
its ebb and its flow extend to infinity.

We describe the Tao as being great;  
we describe the universe as great;  
nature too, we describe as great,  
and man himself is great.

Man's laws should follow natural laws,  
just as nature gives rise to physical laws,  
whilst following from universal law,  
which follows the Tao.

## 26. CENTRING

The natural way is the way of the sage,  
serving as his dwelling,  
providing his center deep within,  
whether in his home or journeying.

Even when he travels far,  
he is not separate  
from his own true nature.  
Maintaining awareness of natural beauty,  
he still does not forget his purpose.

Although he may dwell in a grand estate,  
simplicity remains his guide,  
for he is full aware, that losing it,  
his roots as well would disappear.  
So he is not restless,  
lest he loses the natural way.

Similarly, the people's leader  
is not flippant in his role, nor restless,  
for these could cause the loss  
of the roots of leadership.

## 27. FOLLOWING THE TAO

The sage follows the natural way,  
doing what is required of him.

Like an experienced tracker,  
he leaves no tracks;  
like a good speaker, his speech is fluent;  
He makes no error, so needs no tally;  
like a good door, which needs no lock,  
he is open when it is required of him,  
and closed at other times;  
like a good binding, he is secure,  
without the need of borders.

Knowing that virtue may grow from example,  
this is the way in which the sage teaches,  
abandoning no one who stops to listen.  
Thus, from experience of the sage,  
all might learn, and so might gain.

There is mutual respect twixt teacher and pupil,  
for, without respect, there would be confusion.

## **28. RETAINING INTEGRITY**

Whilst developing creativity,  
also cultivate receptivity.  
Retain the mind like that of a child,  
which flows like running water.

When considering any thing,  
do not lose its opposite.  
When thinking of the finite,  
do not forget infinity;

Act with honor, but retain humility.  
By acting according to the way of the Tao,  
set others an example.

By retaining the integrity  
of the inner and external worlds,  
true selfhood is maintained,  
and the inner world made fertile.

## **29. TAKING NO ACTION**

The external world is fragile,  
and he who meddles with its natural way,  
risks causing damage to himself.  
He who tries to grasp it,  
thereby loses it.

It is natural for things to change,

sometimes being ahead, sometimes behind.

There are times when even breathing  
may be difficult,  
whereas its natural state is easy.

Sometimes one is strong,  
and sometimes weak,  
sometimes healthy,  
and sometimes sick,  
sometimes is first,  
and at other times behind.

The sage does not try  
to change the world by force,  
for he knows that force results in force.  
He avoids extremes and excesses,  
and does not become complacent.

### **30. A CAVEAT AGAINST VIOLENCE**

When leading by the way of the Tao,  
abominate the use of force,  
for it causes resistance, and loss of strength,  
showing the Tao has not been followed well.  
Achieve results but not through violence,  
for it is against the natural way,  
and damages both others' and one's own true self.

The harvest is destroyed in the wake of a great war,  
and weeds grow in the fields in the wake of the army.

The wise leader achieves results,  
but does not glory in them;  
is not proud of his victories,  
and does not boast of them.  
He knows that boasting is not the natural way,  
and that he who goes against that way,  
will fail in his endeavors.

### **31. MAINTAINING PEACE**

Weapons of war are instruments of fear,  
and are abhorred by those who follow the Tao.  
The leader who follows the natural way  
does not abide them.

The warrior king leans to his right,  
from whence there comes his generals' advice,  
but the peaceful king looks to his left,  
where sits his counselor of peace.  
When he looks to his left, it is a time of peace,  
and when to the right, a time for sorrow.

Weapons of war are instruments of fear,  
and are not favored by the wise,  
who use them only when there is no choice,  
for peace and stillness are dear to their hearts,  
and victory causes them no rejoicing.

To rejoice in victory is to delight in killing;  
to delight in killing is to have no self-being.

The conduct of war is that of a funeral;  
when people are killed, it is a time of mourning.  
This is why even victorious battle  
should be observed without rejoicing.

### **32. IF THE TAO WERE OBSERVED**

The Tao is eternal, but does not have fame;  
like the uncarved block, its worth seems small,  
though its value to man is beyond all measure.  
Were it definable, it could then be used  
to obviate conflict, and the need  
to teach the way of the Tao;  
all men would abide in the peace of the Tao;  
sweet dew would descend to nourish the earth.

When the Tao is divided,  
there is a need for names,  
for, like the block which is carved,  
its parts then are seen.

By stopping in time  
from torment and conflict,  
strife is defeated, and danger averted.  
The people then seek the wisdom of Tao,  
just as all rivers flow to the great sea.

### **33. WITHOUT FORCE: WITHOUT PERISHING**

Knowledge frequently results  
from knowing others,  
but the man who is awakened,  
has seen the uncarved block.

Others might be mastered by force,  
but to master one's self  
requires the Tao.

He who has many material things,  
may be described as rich,  
but he who knows he has enough,  
and is at one with the Tao,  
might have enough of material things,  
and have self-being as well.

Will-power may bring perseverance;  
but to have tranquility is to endure,  
being protected for all his days.

He whose ideas remain in the world,  
is present for all time.

### **34. WITHOUT CONTRIVING**

All things may act, without exclusion,

according to the natural way,  
which fulfills its purpose silently,  
and with no claim.  
Being an aspect of natural order,  
it is not the ruler of any thing,  
but remains the source of their nourishment.  
It cannot be seen; it has no intention,  
but all natural things rely on its presence.  
When all things return to it,  
it does not enslave them,  
so unmanifested, its greatness prevails.

Modeling himself upon the Tao,  
he who is wise, does not contrive,  
but is content with what he achieves.

### **35. THE BENEVOLENT HOST**

The wise man acts at one with the Tao,  
for he knows it is here that peace is found.  
It is for this reason that he is sought.

Whilst guests enjoy good music and food,  
as these are supplied by a benevolent host,  
a description of Tao seems without form,  
for it cannot be heard and cannot be seen.  
But when the music and food are all ended,  
the taste of the Tao still remains.

### **36. OVERCOMING**

It is the way of the Tao,  
that things which expand might also shrink;  
that he who is strong, will at some time be weak,  
that he who is raised will then be cast down,  
and that all men have a need to give,  
and also have a need to receive.

The biggest fish stay deep in the pond,

and a country's best weapons  
should be kept locked away.  
That which is soft and supple,  
may overcome the hard and strong.

### **37. THE EXERCISE OF LEADERSHIP**

The way of nature is not contrived,  
yet nothing which is required  
is left undone.

Observing nature, the wise leader knows this,  
and replaces desire with dispassion,  
thus saving that energy, otherwise spent,  
which has not been wasted away.

The wise leader knows  
his actions must be  
without the use of forced energy.

He knows that more  
is still required,  
for he also knows  
that he must act  
without deliberate intent,  
of having no intention.

To act without contrived intent  
is to act without contriving,  
and is the way of nature,  
and so is the way of the Tao.

### **38. THE CONCERNS OF THE GREAT**

A truly good man is unaware  
of the good deeds he performs.  
Conversely, a foolish man must try  
continuously to be good.

A good man seems to do little or nought,  
yet he leaves nothing undone.  
A foolish man must always strive,  
whilst leaving much undone.

The man who is truly wise and kind  
leaves nothing to be done,  
but he who only acts  
according to his nation's law  
leaves many things undone.

A disciplinarian wanting something done  
rolls up his sleeves,  
enforcing it with violence.

It may be that goodness still remains,  
even when the natural way is lost,  
and that kindness still exists  
when goodness is forgotten.  
It may be that justice still remains  
when the people are no longer kind,  
and when this is lost, that ritual still remains.  
However, ritual may be performed  
only as an act of faith,  
and may be the beginning of confusion,  
for even divination and the such  
are but the flowery trappings of the Tao,  
and are the beginning of great folly.

He who is truly great  
does not upon the surface dwell,  
but on what lies beneath.  
It is said that the fruit is his concern,  
rather than the flower.  
Each must decide what it might be he seeks,  
the flowery trapping,  
which comes to summer fullness first,  
or the fruit which is beneath.

### **39. SUFFICIENCY AND QUIETNESS**

From the principle which is called the Tao,  
the sky, the earth, and creativity are one,  
the sky is clear, the earth is firm,  
and the spirit of the inner world is full.

When the ruler of the land is whole,  
the nation too is strong, alive and well,  
and the people have sufficient  
to meet their earthly needs.

When the daytime sky is dark  
and overcast like night,  
the nation and its people  
will surely suffer much.

The firmness of the dew filled earth  
gives it its life;  
the energy of the inner world  
prevents its becoming drained of strength;  
its fullness prevents it running dry.  
The growth of all things  
prevents their dying.

The work of the leader should ensure  
the prosperity of the populace.  
So it is said,

"humility is the root  
of great nobility;  
the low forms a foundation  
for the great;  
and princes consider themselves  
to be of little worth".  
Each depends on humility therefore;  
it is of no advantage to have too much success,  
so do not sound loudly like jade bells,  
nor clatter like stone chimes.

#### **40. BEING AND NOT BEING**

The motion of nature  
is cyclic and returning.  
Its way is to yield,  
for to yield is to become.  
All things are born of being;  
being is born of non-being.

#### **41. SAMENESS AND DIFFERENCE**

On hearing of the Tao,  
the wise student's practice is with diligence;  
the average student attends to his practice  
when his memory reminds him so to do;  
and the foolish student laughs.  
But we do well to remember  
that with no sudden laughter,  
there would be no natural way.

Thus it is said,

"There are times when even brightness seems dim;  
when progress seems like regression;  
when the easy seems most difficult,  
and virtue seems empty, inadequate and frail;  
times when purity seems sullied;  
when even reality seems unreal,  
and when a square seems to have corners;  
when even great talent is of no avail,  
and the highest note cannot be heard;  
when the formed seems formless,  
and when the way of nature is out of sight".  
Even in such times as these,  
the natural way still nourishes,  
that all things may be fulfilled.

#### **42. THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE TAO**

The Tao existed before its name,

and from its name, the opposites evolved,  
giving rise to three divisions,  
and then to names abundant.

These things embrace receptively,  
achieving inner harmony,  
and by their unity create  
the inner world of man.

No man wishes to be seen  
as worthless in another's eyes,  
but the wise leader describes himself this way,  
for he knows that one may gain by losing,  
and lose by gaining,  
and that a violent man  
will not die a natural death.

#### **43. AT ONE WITH TAO**

Only the soft overcomes the hard,  
by yielding, bringing it to peace.  
Even where there is no space,  
that which has no substance enters in.

Through these things is shown  
the value of the natural way.  
The wise man understands full well,  
that wordless teaching can take place,  
and that actions should occur  
without the wish for self-advancement.

#### **44. SUFFICIENCY**

A contented man knows himself to be  
more precious even than fame,  
and so, obscure, remains.

He who is more attached to wealth  
than to himself,

suffers more heavily from loss.

He who knows when to stop, might lose,  
but in safety stays.

#### **45. CHANGES**

In retrospect, even those accomplishments  
which seemed perfect when accomplished,  
may seem imperfect and ill formed,  
but this does not mean that such accomplishments  
have outlived their usefulness.

That which once seemed full,  
may later empty seem,  
yet still be unexhausted.  
That which once seemed straight  
may seem twisted when seen once more;  
intelligence can seem stupid,  
and eloquence seem awkward;  
movement may overcome the cold,  
and stillness, heat,  
but stillness in movement  
is the way of the Tao.

#### **46. MODERATING DESIRE AND AMBITION**

When the way of nature is observed,  
all things serve their function;  
horses drawing carts, and pulling at the plough.  
But when the natural way is not observed,  
horses are bred for battle and for war.

Desire and wanting cause discontent,  
whilst he who knows sufficiency  
more easily has what he requires.

#### **47. DISCOVERING THE DISTANT**

The Tao may be known and observed  
without the need of travel;  
the way of the heavens might be well seen  
without looking through a window.

The further one travels,  
the less one knows.  
So, without looking, the sage sees all,  
and by working without self-advancing thought,  
he discovers the wholeness of the Tao.

#### **48. FORGETTING KNOWLEDGE**

When pursuing knowledge,  
something new is acquired each day.  
But when pursuing the way of the Tao,  
something is subtracted;  
less striving occurs,  
until there is no striving.

When effort is uncontrived,  
nothing is left undone;  
the way of nature rules  
by allowing things to take their course,  
not by contriving to change.

#### **49. THE VIRTUE OF RECEPTIVITY**

The sage is not mindful for himself,  
but is receptive to others' needs.  
Knowing that virtue requires great faith,  
he has that faith, and is good to all;  
irrespective of others' deeds,  
he treats them according to their needs.

He has humility and is shy,  
thus confusing other men.  
They see him as they might a child,

and sometimes listen to his words.

## 50. THE VALUE SET ON LIFE

In looking at the people, we might see  
that in the space twixt birth and death,  
one third follow life, and one third death,  
and those who merely pass from birth to death,  
are also one third of those we see.

He who lives by the way of the Tao,  
travels without fear of ferocious beasts,  
and will not be pierced in an affray,  
for he offers no resistance.

The universe is the center of his world,  
so in the inner world  
of he who lives within the Tao,  
there is no place  
where death can enter in.

## 51. THE NOURISHMENT OF THE TAO

All physical things arise  
from the principle which is absolute;  
the principle which is the natural way.

All living things are formed by being,  
and shaped by their environment,  
growing if nourished well by virtue;  
the being from non-being.

All natural things respect the Tao,  
giving honor to its virtue,  
although the Tao does not expect,  
nor look for honor or respect.

The virtue of the natural way  
is that all things are born of it;  
it nourishes and comforts them;

develops, shelters and cares for them,  
protecting them from harm.

The Tao creates, not claiming credit,  
and guides without interfering.

## **52. RETURNING TO THE SOURCE**

The virtue of Tao governs its natural way.  
Thus, he who is at one with it,  
is one with everything which lives,  
having freedom from the fear of death.

Boasting, and hurrying hither and thither,  
destroy the enjoyment of a peace filled life.

Life is more fulfilled by far,  
for he who does not have desire,  
for he does not have desire,  
has no need of boasting.

Learn to see the insignificant and small,  
grow in wisdom and develop insight,  
that which is irrevocable,  
do not try to fight,  
and so be saved from harm.

## **53. EVIDENCE**

When temptation arises to leave the Tao,  
banish temptation, stay with the Tao.

When the court has adornments in profusion,  
the fields are full of weeds,  
and the granaries are bare.  
It is not the way of nature to carry a sword,  
nor to over-adorn oneself,  
nor to have more than a sufficiency  
of fine food and drink.

He who has more possessions than he can use,  
deprives someone who could use them well.

#### **54. CULTIVATING INSIGHT**

That which is firmly rooted,  
is not easily torn from the ground;  
just as that which is firmly grasped,  
does not slip easily from the hand.

The virtue of the Tao is real,  
if cultivated in oneself;  
when loved in the family, it abounds;  
when throughout the village, it will grow;  
and in the nation, be abundant.  
When it is real universally,  
virtue is in all people.

All things are microcosms of the Tao;  
the world a microcosmic universe,  
the nation a microcosm of the world,  
the village a microcosmic nation;  
the family a village in microcosmic view,  
and the body a microcosm of one's own family;  
from single cell to galaxy.

#### **55. MYSTERIOUS VIRTUE**

He who has virtue is like a newborn child,  
free from attack by those who dwell  
in the way of nature, the way of the Tao.

The bones of the newborn child are soft,  
his muscles supple, but his grip is firm;  
he is whole, though not knowing he was born  
of the creative and receptive way.  
The way of nature is in the child,  
so even when he shouts all day,

his throat does not grow hoarse or dry.

From constancy, there develops harmony,  
and from harmony, enlightenment.

It is unwise to rush from here to there.  
To hold one's breath causes the body strain;  
exhaustion follows  
when too much energy is used,  
for this is not the natural way.

He who is in opposition to the Tao  
does not live his natural years.

## **56. VIRTUOUS PASSIVITY**

Those who know the natural way  
have no need of boasting,  
whilst those who know but little,  
may be heard most frequently;  
thus, the sage says little,  
if anything at all.

Not demanding stimuli,  
he tempers his sharpness well,  
reduces the complex to simplicity,  
hiding his brilliance, seemingly dull;  
he settles the dust,  
whilst in union with all natural things.

He who has attained enlightenment  
(without contriving so to do)  
is not concerned with making friends,  
nor with making enemies;  
with good or harm, with praise or blame.  
Such detachment is the highest state of man.

## **57. SIMPLIFICATION**

With natural justice, people must be ruled,  
and if war be waged, strategy and tactics used.  
To master one's self,  
one must act without cunning.

The greater the number of laws and restrictions,  
the poorer the people who inhabit the land.  
The sharper the weapons of battle and war,  
the greater the troubles besetting the land.  
The greater the cunning with which people are ruled,  
the stranger the things which occur in the land.  
The harder the rules and regulations,  
the greater the number of those who will steal.

The sage therefore does not contrive,  
in order to bring about reform,  
but teaches the people peace of mind,  
in order that they might enjoy their lives.  
Having no desires, all he does is natural.  
Since he teaches self-sufficiency,  
the people who follow him return  
to a good, uncomplicated life.

## 58. TRANSFORMATIONS ACCORDING TO CIRCUMSTANCES

When the hand of the ruler is light,  
the people do not contrive,  
but when the country is severely ruled,  
the people grow in cunning.

The actions of the sage are sharp,  
but they are never cutting,  
they are pointed, though never piercing,  
they are straightforward, not contrived,  
and not without restraint,  
brilliant but not blinding.  
This is the action of the sage,  
because he is aware  
that where happiness exists,  
there is also misery and strife;

that where honesty may be found,  
there is occasion for dishonesty,  
and that men may be beguiled.

The sage knows that no-one can foretell  
just what the future holds.

## 59. GUARDING THE TAO

By acting with no thought of self-advancement,  
but with self-restraint,  
it is possible to lead,  
and genuinely care for others.  
This happens by acting virtuously,  
and leaving nothing to be done.

A foundation virtuous and firm,  
rooted in receptivity,  
is a prerequisite of good leadership,  
and for a life both long and strong.  
He whose virtue knows no limit,  
is most fitting to lead.  
His roots are deep,  
and his life protected  
by his meditative practice,  
as the bark protects the tree.

## 60. RULING

To rule a country,  
one must act with care,  
as when frying the smallest fish.

If actions are approached,  
and carried out in the natural way,  
the power of evil is reduced,  
and so the ruler and the ruled  
are equally protected.  
They will not contrive to harm each other,

for the virtue of one refreshes the other.

## **61. HUMILITY**

A great country remains receptive and still,  
as does a rich and fertile land.  
The gentle overcomes the strong  
with stillness and receptivity.

By giving way to the other,  
one country may conquer another;  
a small country may submit to a large,  
and conquer it, though having no arms.

Those who conquer must be willing to yield;  
to yield may be to overcome.

A fertile nation may require a greater population,  
to use its resources to the full,  
whilst the country without such natural wealth  
may require them to meet its people's needs.  
By acting in unity, each may achieve  
that which it requires.

## **62. SHARING THE TREASURE**

The source of all things is in the Tao.  
It is a treasure for the good,  
and a refuge for all in need.

Whilst praise can buy titles,  
good deeds gain respect.

No man should be abandoned  
because he has not found the Tao.

On auspicious occasions, when gifts are sent,  
rather than sending horses or jade,  
send the teaching of Tao.

When we first discover the natural way,  
we are happy to know that our misdeeds  
are in the past, where they belong,  
and so are happy to realize  
that we have found a treasure.

### **63. BEGINNING AND COMPLETING**

Act without contriving;  
work naturally, and taste the tasteless;  
magnify the small; increase the few,  
and reward bitterness with care.  
Seek the simple in the complex,  
and achieve greatness in small things.

It is the way of nature  
that even difficult things are done with ease,  
and great acts made up of smaller deeds.  
The sage achieves greatness by small deeds multiplied.

Promises easily made are most easily broken,  
and acting with insufficient care  
causes subsequent trouble.  
The sage confronts problems as they arise,  
so that they do not trouble him.

### **64. STAYING WITH THE MYSTERY**

If problems are accepted,  
and dealt with before they arise,  
they might even be prevented before confusion begins,  
In this way peace may be maintained.

The brittle is easily shattered,  
and the small is easily scattered.  
Great trees grow from the smallest shoots;  
a terraced garden, from a pile of earth,  
and a journey of a thousand miles

begins by taking the initial step.

He who contrives, defeats his purpose;  
and he who is grasping, loses.

The sage does not contrive to win,  
and therefore is not defeated;  
he is not grasping, so does not lose.

It is easy to fail when nearing completion,  
therefore, take care right to the end,  
not only in the beginning.

The sage seeks freedom from desire,  
not grasping at ideas.  
He brings men back when they are lost,  
and helps them find the Tao.

## **65. VIRTUOUS GOVERNMENT**

Knowing it is against the Tao  
to try to enforce learning,  
the early sages did not contrive  
to teach the way of the Tao.

There are two ways of government.  
One is to be cunning, to act with guile,  
and to contrive to cheat the people.  
When this way is used to rule,  
the people grow in cunning,  
and contrive to cheat the ruler.

The second way to govern the land,  
is to do so without contriving.  
People so governed are truly blessed,  
for they are governed with virtue,  
and virtuous government is fair to all,  
thus leading to unity.

## **66. LEADING FROM BEHIND**

The sea is the ruler of river and stream,  
because it rules from well beneath.

The teacher guides his students best,  
by allowing them to lead.

When the ruler is a sage,  
the people do not feel oppressed;  
they support the one who rules them well,  
and never tire of him.

He who is non-competitive  
invites no competition.

## **67. THE THREE PRECIOUS ATTRIBUTES**

Those who follow the natural way  
are different from others in three respects.  
They have great mercy and economy,  
and the courage not to compete.  
From mercy there comes courage;  
from economy, generosity;  
and from humility, willingness to lead from behind.

It is the way of sickness to shun the merciful,  
and to acclaim only heroic deeds,  
to abandon economy, and to be selfish.

They are sick, who are not humble,  
but try always to be first.

Only he who is compassionate  
can show true bravery,  
and in defending, show great strength.  
Compassion is the means by which  
mankind may be guarded and saved,  
for heaven arms with compassion,  
those whom it would not see destroyed.

## **68. WITHOUT DESIRE**

An effective warrior acts  
not from nihilistic anger,  
nor from desire to kill.

He who wins should not be vengeful.  
An employer should have humility.

If we wish for peace and unity,  
our dealings with our fellow man  
must be without desire for self-advantage,  
and carried out without contention.

## **69. THE USE OF THE MYSTERIOUS TAO**

Arguments may be won by waiting,  
rather than making an aggressive move;  
by withdrawing rather than advancing.

By moving without appearing to move,  
by not making a show of strength,  
but by conserving it well;  
by capturing without attacking,  
by being armed, but with no weapons,  
great battles may be won.

Do not underestimate  
those you enjoin in battle,  
for this can result in losing  
what is of greatest value.  
When a battle is enjoined,  
by remembering this,  
the weaker may still win.

## **70. HIDDEN IDENTITY**

Though the words of the sage are simple,  
and his actions easily performed,

they are few among many,  
who can speak or act as a sage.

For the ordinary man it is difficult  
to know the way of a sage,  
perhaps because his words  
are from the distant past,  
and his actions naturally disposed.

Those who know the way of the sage  
are few and far between,  
but those who treat him with honesty,  
will be honored by him and the Tao.

He knows he makes no fine display,  
and wears rough clothes, not finery.  
It is not in his expectancy of men  
that they should understand his ways,  
for he carries his jade within his heart.

## **71. WITHOUT SICKNESS**

To acknowledge one's ignorance  
shows strength of personality,  
but to ignore wisdom is a sign of weakness.

To be sick of sickness is a sign of good health,  
therefore the wise man grows sick of sickness,  
and sick of being sick of sickness,  
'til he is sick no more.

## **72. LOVING THE SELF**

The sage retains a sense of awe, and of propriety.  
He does not intrude into others' homes;  
does not harass them,  
nor interfere without request,  
unless they damage others.  
So it is that they return to him.

'Though the sage knows himself  
he makes no show of it;  
he has self-respect, but is not arrogant,  
for he develops the ability to let go of that  
which he no longer needs.

### **73. ACTING WITH A SUFFICIENCY**

A brave man who is passionate  
will either kill or be killed,  
but a man who is both brave and still  
might preserve his own and others' lives.  
No one can say with certainty,  
why it is better to preserve a life.

The virtuous way is a way to act  
without contriving effort,  
yet, without contriving it overcomes.  
It seldom speaks, and never asks,  
but is answered without a question.  
It is supplied with all its needs  
and is constantly at ease  
because it follows its own plan  
which cannot be understood by man.  
It casts its net both deep and wide,  
and 'though coarse meshed, it misses nothing in the tide.

### **74. USURPING THE TAO**

If the people are not afraid of death,  
they have no fear of threats of death.

If early death is common in the land,  
and if death is meted out as punishment,  
the people do not fear to break the law.

To be the executioner in such a land as this,  
is to be as an unskilled carpenter

who cuts his hand  
when trying to cut wood.

## **75. INJURING THROUGH GREED**

When taxes are too heavy,  
hunger lays the people low.  
When those who govern interfere too much,  
the people become rebellious.

When those who govern demand too much  
of people's lives, death is taken lightly.  
When the people are starving in the land,  
life is of little value,  
and so is more easily sacrificed by them  
in overthrowing government.

## **76. AGAINST TRUSTING IN STRENGTH**

Man is born gentle and supple.  
At death, his body is brittle and hard.  
Living plants are tender,  
and filled with life-giving sap,  
but at their death they are withered and dry.

The stiff, the hard, and brittle  
are harbingers of death,  
and gentleness and yielding  
are the signs of that which lives.  
The warrior who is inflexible  
condemns himself to death,  
and the tree is easily broken,  
which ever refuses to yield.  
Thus the hard and brittle will surely fall,  
and the soft and supple will overcome.

## **77. THE WAY OF THE TAO**

The Tao is as supple as a bow;  
the high made lower, and the lowly raised.  
It shortens the string which has been stretched,  
and lengthens that which has become too short.

It is the way of the Tao to take from those  
who have a surplus to what they need,  
providing for those without enough.  
The way of the ordinary person,  
is not the way of the Tao,  
for such people take from those who are poor  
and give to those who are rich.

The sage knows that his possessions are none,  
therefore he gives to the world;  
without recognition, doing his work.  
In this way he accomplishes  
that which is required of him;  
without dwelling upon it in any way,  
he gives of his wisdom without display.

## **78. SINCERITY**

There is nothing more yielding than water,  
yet when acting on the solid and strong,  
its gentleness and fluidity  
have no equal in any thing.

The weak can overcome the strong,  
and the supple overcome the hard.  
Although this is known far and wide,  
few put it into practice in their lives.

Although seemingly paradoxical,  
the person who takes upon himself,  
the people's humiliation,  
is fit to rule;  
and he is fit to lead,  
who takes the country's disasters upon himself.

## 79. FULFILLING ONE'S OBLIGATIONS

When covenants and bonds are drawn  
between the people of the land,  
that they might know their obligations,  
it is commonplace for many  
to fail to meet their dues.

The sage ensures his dues are met,  
'though not expecting others to do the same;  
in this way he is virtuous.

He is without virtue of his own,  
who asks of others that they fulfil  
his obligations on his behalf.

The way of nature does not impose  
on matters such as these  
but stays with the good for ever,  
and acts as their reward.

## 80. STANDING ALONE

A small country may have many machines,  
but the people will have no use for them;  
they will have boats and carriages  
which they do not use;  
their armor and weapons  
are not displayed,  
for they are serious when regarding death.  
They do not travel far from home,  
and make knots in ropes,  
rather than do much writing.

The food they eat is plain and good,  
and their clothes are simple;  
their homes are secure,  
without the need of bolts and bars,  
and they are happy in their ways.

'Though the cockerels and dogs  
of their neighbors  
can be heard not far away,  
the people of the villages  
grow old and die in peace.

## **81. MANIFESTING SIMPLICITY**

The truth is not always beautiful,  
nor beautiful words the truth.

Those who have virtue,  
have no need of argument for its own sake,  
for they know that argument is of no avail.

Those who have knowledge of the natural way  
do not train themselves in cunning,  
whilst those who use cunning to rule their lives,  
and the lives of others,  
are not knowledgeable of the Tao,  
nor of natural happiness.

The sage seeks not to have a store  
of things or knowledge, for he knows,  
the less of these he has, the more he has,  
and that the more he gives,  
the greater his abundance.

The way of the sage is pointed  
but does not harm.

The way of the sage  
is to work without cunning.