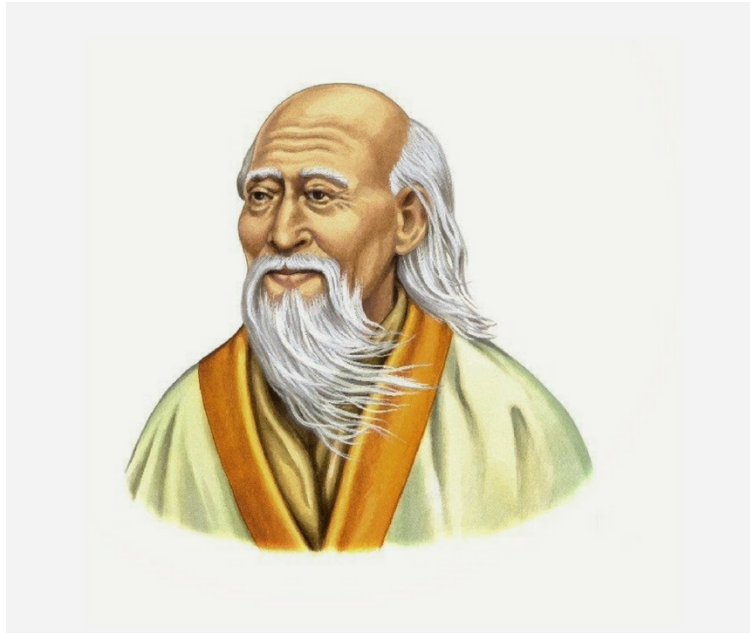


# Tao Te Ching

by Lao Tzu (-601, -531)

updated by Ruben Arth.



## 1

The tao that can be told  
is not the eternal Tao  
The name that can be named  
is not the eternal Name.

The unnamable is the eternally real.  
Naming is the origin  
of all particular things.

Free from desire, you realise the mystery.  
Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations.

Yet mystery and manifestations  
arise from the same source.  
This source is called darkness.

Darkness within darkness.  
The gateway to all understanding.

When people see some things as beautiful,  
other things become ugly.  
When people see some things as good,  
other things become bad.

Being and non-being create each other.  
Difficult and easy support each other.  
Long and short define each other.  
High and low depend on each other.  
Before and after follow each other.

Therefore the Master  
acts without doing anything  
and teaches without saying anything.  
Things arise and s/he lets them come;  
things disappear and s/he lets them go.  
S/he has but doesn't possess,  
acts but doesn't expect.  
When the work is done, s/he forgets it.  
That is why it lasts forever.

If you overesteem great humans,  
people become powerless.  
If you overvalue possessions,  
people begin to steal.

The Master leads  
by emptying people's minds  
and filling their cores,  
by weakening their ambition  
and toughening their resolve.  
He helps people lose everything  
they know, everything they desire,  
and creates confusion  
in those who think that they know.

Practice not-doing,  
and everything will fall into place.

The Tao is like a well:  
used but never used up.  
It is like the eternal void:  
filled with infinite possibilities.

It dulls the sharp,  
unties the knotted,  
shades the lighted,  
& unites all of creation with dust.

It is hidden but always present.  
I don't know who gave birth to it.  
Only that it precedes heaven.

The Tao doesn't take sides,  
it gives birth to both good and evil.  
The Master doesn't take sides,  
s/he welcomes both saints and sinners.

The Tao is like a bellows:  
it is empty yet infinitely capable.  
The more you use it, the more it produces;  
the more you talk of it, the less you understand.

Hold on to the center.  
To sit quietly and find the truth within.

The spirit that never dies  
is called the mysterious feminine.  
Although she becomes the whole universe,  
her immaculate purity is never lost.  
Although she assumes countless forms,  
her true identity remains intact.

It is always present within you.  
You can use it any way you want.

The Tao is infinite, eternal.  
Why is it eternal?  
It was never born;  
thus it can never die.  
Why is it infinite?  
It has no desires for itself;  
thus it is present for all beings.

The Master stays behind;  
that is why s/he is ahead.  
S/he is detached from all things;  
that is why s/he is one with them.  
Because s/he has let go of herself,  
s/he is perfectly fulfilled.

The supreme good is like water,  
which nourishes all things without trying to.  
It is content with the low places that people disdain.  
Thus it is like the Tao.

In dwelling, live close to the ground.  
In thinking, keep to the simple.  
In conflict, be fair and generous.  
In governing, don't try to control.  
In work, do what you enjoy.  
In family life, be completely present.

When you are content to be simply yourself  
and don't compare or compete,  
everybody will respect you.



Fill your bowl to the brim  
and it will spill.  
Keep sharpening your knife  
and it will blunt.  
Fill your house with jade & gold  
and it brings insecurity.  
Care about people's approval  
and you will be their prisoner.

Do your work, then step back.  
The only path to serenity.

Can you coax your mind from its wandering  
and keep to the original oneness?  
Can you let your body become  
supple as a newborn child's?  
Can you wash and cleanse the primal vision,  
and be without stain?  
Can you love people and lead them  
without imposing your will?  
Can you deal with the most vital matters  
by letting events take their course?  
Can you step back from your own mind  
and thus understand all things?

Giving birth and nourishing,  
having without possessing,  
acting with no expectations,  
leading and not trying to control:  
this is the supreme virtue.

We join spokes together in a wheel,  
but it is the center hole  
that makes the wagon move.

We shape clay into a pot,  
but it is the emptiness inside  
that holds what we want.

We hammer wood for a house,  
but it is the inner space  
that makes it livable.

We work with being,  
but non-being is what we use.

Colors blind the eye.  
Sounds deafen the ear.  
Flavors numb the taste.  
Thoughts weaken the mind.  
Desires wither the heart.

The Master observes the world  
but trusts the inner vision.  
S/he allows things to come and go.  
A heart open like the sky.

Success is as dangerous as failure.  
Hope is as hollow as fear.

What does it mean that success is as dangerous as failure?  
Whether you go up the ladder or down it,  
your position is shaky.  
When you stand with your two feet on the ground,  
you will always keep your balance.

What does it mean that hope is as hollow as fear?  
Hope and fear are both phantoms  
that arise from thinking of the self.  
When we don't see the self as self,  
what do we have to fear?

See the world as your self.  
Have faith in the way things are.  
Love the world as your self;  
then you can care for all things.

Look, and it can't be seen.  
Listen, and it can't be heard.  
Reach, and it can't be grasped.  
These three are indefinable,  
Therefore they are joined in one.

Above, it isn't bright.  
Below, it isn't dark.  
Seamless, unnamable,  
it returns to the realm of nothing.  
Form that includes all forms,  
image without an image,  
subtle, beyond all conception.

Approach it and there is no beginning.  
Follow it and there is no end.  
Stay with the ancient Tao,  
Move with the present.  
Discovering things have always been,  
the essence of Tao.

The ancient Masters were profound and subtle.  
Their wisdom was unfathomable.  
There is no way to describe it;  
all we can describe is their appearance.

They were careful  
as someone crossing an iced-over stream.  
Alert as a warrior in enemy territory.  
Courteous as a guest.  
Fluid as melting ice.  
Shapable as a block of wood.  
Receptive as a valley.  
Clear as a glass of water.

Do you have the patience to wait  
till your mud settles and the water is clear?  
Can you remain unmoving  
till the right action arises by itself?

The Master doesn't seek fulfillment.  
Not seeking, not expecting,  
s/he is present, and can welcome all things.

Empty your mind of all thoughts.  
Let your heart be at peace.  
Watch the workings of all beings,  
but contemplate their return to the source.

Each separate being in the universe  
returns to the common source.  
Returning to the source is serenity.

Knowledge of the source is called being constant.  
Knowing the constant is called 'enlightenment'.  
Not knowing is losing our roots, the source of evil deeds.

By knowing the constant we can accept things as they are.  
By accepting things as they are, we become impartial.  
By being impartial, we become one with Heaven.  
By being one with Heaven, we become one with Tao.

Being one with Tao, we are no longer concerned about  
losing our life because we know the Tao is constant.



When the Master governs, the people  
are hardly aware that s/he exists.  
Next best, is a leader who is loved.  
Next, one who is feared.  
The worst is one who is despised.

If you don't trust the people,  
you make them untrustworthy.

The Master doesn't talk, s/he acts.  
When the work is done,  
the people say, "We have  
done it all by ourselves."

On the decline of the great Tao,  
The doctrine of 'humanity' and 'justice' arise.  
When knowledge and cleverness appeared,  
Great hypocrisy followed in its wake.  
When there is no peace in the family,  
filial piety begins.  
When the country falls into chaos,  
patriotism is born.

Give up sainthood and wisdom,  
and people will be a hundred times happier.  
Give up morality and justice,  
and people will do the right thing.  
Give up industry and profit,  
and there won't be any thieves.

All of these are superficial outward forms alone,  
they are not sufficient in themselves.  
Just stay at the center of the circle  
and let all things take their course.

It is more important  
to see the simplicity,  
to realise one's true nature,  
to cast off selfishness  
and temper desire.

Stop thinking, and end your problems.  
What difference between yes and no?  
What difference between success and failure?  
Must you value what others value,  
avoid what others avoid?  
How ridiculous.

Other people are excited,  
like on the feast of the ox.  
I alone am inert, giving no sign,  
like an infant before it can smile.

Other people have what they need;  
I alone possess nothing.  
I alone am a guest in this world,  
Drifting with no aim.  
I am like a fool, my mind is empty.

Other people are bright;  
I alone am dark.  
Other people are sharper;  
I alone am dull.  
I drift like a wave on the ocean,  
Without clear directions.

Alone, different from others.  
Nourished by the Great Mother.

The greatest virtue is to follow the Way.  
Its nature is vague and evasive.  
How evasive and vague,  
Yet its center has form.  
How vague and evasive,  
Yet its center has substance.  
How deep and obscure,  
Yet its center has essence.  
This essence is real,  
So, its center can be trusted.

Since before this universe,  
the Tao is.  
It is beyond 'is' and 'is not'.  
How do I know this is true?  
I look inside myself and see.

If you want to become whole,  
let yourself be partial.  
If you want to become straight,  
let yourself be crooked.  
If you want to become full,  
let yourself be empty.  
If you want to be reborn,  
let yourself die.  
If you want to be given everything,  
give everything up.

The Masters, by residing in the Tao,  
sets an example for all beings.  
Without putting on a display,  
people can see their light.  
Without justifying themselves,  
people can trust their words.  
Without praising themselves,  
people recognise themselves in their heart.  
Without boasting,  
they get recognition.  
Without quarrels,  
Nobody quarrels with them.

When the ancient Masters said,  
"If you want to be given everything,  
give everything up,"  
they weren't using empty phrases.  
Be whole with Tao,  
you will become yourself.

Express yourself completely,  
then keep quiet.  
Be like the forces of nature:  
when it blows, there is only wind;  
when it rains, there is only rain;  
when the clouds pass, the sun shines through.

If you open yourself to the Tao,  
you are at one with the Tao  
and you can embody it completely.  
If you open yourself to insight,  
you are at one with insight  
and you can use it completely.  
If you open yourself to loss,  
you are at one with loss  
and you can accept it completely.

Open yourself to the Tao,  
then trust your natural responses;  
and everything will fall into place.

Those who stand on their toes are not steady.  
Those who rush ahead don't go far.  
Those who try to shine dim their own light.  
Those who are self-righteous are not prominent.  
Those who have power over others are not respected.  
Those who praise themselves do not prevail.

If you want to accord with the Tao,  
do your work, then let go.



There was something formless and perfect  
before the universe was born.  
It is serene. Empty.  
Solitary. Unchanging.  
Infinite. Eternally present.  
It is the mother of the universe.  
For lack of a better name,  
I call it the Tao.

It flows through all things,  
inside and outside, and returns  
to the origin of all things.

The Tao is great.  
The Universe is great.  
Earth is great.  
Humankind is great.  
These are the four great powers.

Humankind follows the earth.  
Earth follows the universe.  
The universe follows the Tao.  
The Tao follows what is natural.

Heaviness is the root of lightness.  
Stillness is the source of movement.

Thus the Master travels all day  
without leaving its mind.  
However splendid the views,  
s/he stays serenely in the self.

Why should leaders be amused  
at the foolishness of the world?  
If you let yourself be blown with lightness,  
you lose touch with your root.  
If you let restlessness create movement,  
you lose touch with who you are.

A good traveler has no fixed plans  
and is not intent upon arriving.  
A good artist lets his intuition  
lead him wherever it wants.  
A good scientist has freed himself of concepts  
and keeps his mind open to what is.

Thus the Master is available to all people  
and doesn't reject anyone.  
S/he is ready to use all situations  
and doesn't waste anything.  
This is called embodying the light.

What is a good person but a bad person's teacher?  
What is a bad person but a good person's job?  
If you don't understand this, you will get lost,  
however intelligent you are.  
It is the great secret.

Know the male,  
yet keep to the female:  
receive the world in your arms.  
If you receive the world,  
the Tao will never leave you  
and you will be like a little child.

Know the white,  
yet keep to the black:  
be a pattern for the world.  
If you are a pattern for the world,  
the Tao will be strong inside you  
and there will be nothing you can't do.

Know the personal,  
yet keep to the impersonal:  
accept the world as it is.  
If you accept the world,  
the Tao will be luminous inside you  
and you will return to your primal self.

The world is formed from the void,  
like utensils from a block of wood.  
The Master knows the utensils,  
yet keeps to the block:  
thus s/he can use all things.

Do you want to improve the world?  
I don't think it can be done.

The world is sacred.  
It can't be improved.  
If you tamper with it, you'll ruin it.  
If you treat it like an object, you'll lose it.

There is a time for being ahead,  
a time for being behind;  
a time for being in motion,  
a time for being at rest;  
a time for being vigorous,  
a time for being exhausted;  
a time for being safe,  
a time for being in danger.

The Master sees things as they are,  
without trying to control them.  
S/he lets them go their own way,  
and resides at the center of the circle.

Whoever relies on the Tao in governing  
humans doesn't try to force issues  
or defeat enemies by force of arms.  
For every force there is a counterforce.  
Violence, even well intentioned,  
always rebounds upon oneself.

The Master does its job  
and then stops.  
Masters understand that the universe  
is forever out of control,  
and that trying to dominate events  
goes against the current of the Tao.  
Because s/he believes in her/himself,  
s/he doesn't try to convince others.  
Because s/he is content with her/himself,  
s/he doesn't need other's approval.  
Because s/he accepts her/himself,  
the whole world is in acceptance.

Weapons are the tools of violence;  
all decent person detest them.

Weapons are the tools of fear;  
a decent person will avoid them  
except in the direst necessity  
and, if compelled, will use them  
only with the utmost restraint.  
Peace is his highest value.  
If the peace has been shattered,  
how can s/he be content?  
Enemies are not demons,  
but human beings like her/himself.  
S/he doesn't wish them personal harm.  
Nor does s/he rejoice in victory.  
How could s/he rejoice in victory  
and delight in the slaughter of humans?

S/he enters a battle gravely,  
with sorrow and with great compassion,  
as if s/he were attending a funeral.

The Tao can't be perceived.  
Infinitely small,  
it contains uncountable galaxies.

If powerful men and women  
could remain centered in the Tao,  
all things would be in harmony.  
The world would become a paradise.  
All people would be at peace,  
and the law would be written in their hearts.

When you have names and forms,  
know that they are provisional.  
When you have institutions,  
know where their functions should end.  
Knowing when to stop,  
you can avoid any danger.

All things end in the Tao  
as rivers flow into the sea.



Knowing others is intelligence;  
knowing yourself is true wisdom.  
Mastering others is strength;  
mastering yourself is true power.

If you realise that you have enough,  
you are truly rich.  
If you stay in the center  
and embrace death with your whole heart,  
you will endure forever.

The great Tao flows everywhere.  
All things are born from it,  
yet it doesn't create them.  
It pours itself into its work,  
yet it makes no claim.  
It nourishes infinite worlds,  
yet it doesn't hold on to them.  
Since it is merged with all things  
and hidden in their hearts,  
it can be called humble.  
Since all things vanish into it  
and it alone endures,  
it can be called great.  
It isn't aware of its greatness;  
thus it is truly great.

S/he who is centered in the Tao  
can go where s/he wishes, without danger.  
S/he perceives the universal harmony,  
even amid great pain,  
because s/he has found peace inside the heart.

Music or the smell of good cooking  
may make people stop and enjoy.  
But words that point to the Tao  
seem monotonous and without flavor.  
When you look for it, there is nothing to see.  
When you listen for it, there is nothing to hear.  
When you use it, it is inexhaustible.

If you want to shrink something,  
you must first allow it to expand.  
If you want to get rid of something,  
you must first allow it to flourish.  
If you want to take something,  
you must first allow it to be given.  
This is called the subtle perception  
of the way things are.

The soft overcomes the hard.  
The slow overcomes the fast.  
Let your workings remain a mystery.  
Just show people the results.

The Tao never does anything,  
yet through it all things are done.

If powerful men and women  
could venter themselves in it,  
the whole world would be transformed  
by itself, in its natural rhythms.  
People would be content  
with their simple, everyday lives,  
in harmony, and free of desire.

When there is no desire,  
all things are at peace.

The Master doesn't try to be powerful;  
thus s/he is truly powerful.  
The ordinary human keeps reaching for power;  
thus s/he never has enough.

The Master does nothing,  
yet s/he leaves nothing undone.  
The ordinary human is always doing things,  
yet many more are left to be done.

The kind person does something,  
yet something remains undone.  
The just person does something,  
and leaves many things to be done.  
The moral person does something,  
and when no one responds  
s/he raises its arms and uses force.

When the Tao is lost, goodness is born.  
When goodness is lost, morality is born.  
When morality is lost, laws are born.  
Laws are the end of fidelity and honesty,  
the beginning of confusion.

Therefore the Master concerns itself  
with the depths and not the surface,  
with the fruit and not the flower.  
S/he has no will of its own.  
S/he dwells in reality,  
and lets all illusions go.

In harmony with the Tao,  
the sky is clear and spacious,  
the earth is solid and full,  
all creature flourish together,  
content with the way they are,  
endlessly repeating themselves,  
endlessly renewed.

When humans interferes with the Tao,  
the sky becomes filthy,  
the earth becomes depleted,  
the equilibrium crumbles,  
creatures become extinct.

The Master views the parts with compassion,  
because s/he understands the whole.  
Constantly practicing humility.  
S/he doesn't glitter like a jewel  
but lets itself be shaped by the Tao,  
as rugged and common as stone.

Return is the movement of the Tao.  
Yielding is the way of the Tao.

All things are born of being.  
Being is born of non-being.



When a superior human hears of the Tao,  
s/he immediately begins to embody it.  
When an average human hears of the Tao,  
he half believes it, half doubts it.  
When a foolish human hears of the Tao,  
he laughs out loud.  
If s/he didn't laugh,  
it wouldn't be the Tao.

Thus it is said:  
The path into the light seems dark,  
the path forward seems to go back,  
the direct path seems long,  
true power seems weak,  
true purity seems tarnished,  
true steadfastness seems changeable,  
true clarity seems obscure,  
the greatest are seems unsophisticated,  
the greatest love seems indifferent,  
the greatest wisdom seems childish.

The Tao is nowhere to be found.  
Yet it nourishes and completes all things.

The Tao gives birth to One.  
One gives birth to Two.  
Two gives birth to Three.  
Three gives birth to all things.

All things have their backs to the female  
and stand facing the male.  
When male and female combine,  
all things achieve harmony.

Ordinary humans hate solitude.  
But the Master makes use of it,  
embracing its aloneness, realising  
s/he is one with the whole universe.

The gentlest thing in the world  
overcomes the hardest thing in the world.  
That which has no substance  
can penetrate where there is no opening.  
This shows the value of non-action.

Teaching without words,  
performing without actions:  
that is the Master's way.

Fame or integrity: which is more important?  
Money or happiness: which is more valuable?  
Success or failure: which is more destructive?

If you look to others for fulfillment,  
you will never truly be fulfilled.  
If your happiness depends on money,  
you will never be happy with yourself.

Be content with what you have;  
rejoice in the way things are.  
When you realise there is nothing lacking,  
the whole world belongs to you.

True perfection seems imperfect,  
yet it is perfectly itself.  
True fullness seems empty,  
yet it is fully present.

True straightness seems crooked.  
True wisdom seems foolish.  
True art seems artless.

The Master allows things to happen.  
S/he shapes events as they come.  
S/he steps out of the way  
and lets the Tao speak for itself.

When a country is in harmony with the Tao,  
the factories make trucks and tractors.  
When a country goes counter to the Tao,  
war horses are bred outside the cities.

There is no greater illusion than fear,  
no greater wrong than preparing to defend yourself,  
no greater misfortune than having an enemy.

Whoever can see through all fear  
will always be safe.

Without opening your door,  
you can open your heart to the world.  
Without looking out your window,  
you can see the essence of the Tao.

The more you know,  
the less you understand.

The Master arrives without leaving,  
sees the light without looking,  
achieves without doing a thing.

In pursuit of knowledge,  
every day something is added.  
In the practice of the Tao,  
every day something is dropped.  
Less and less do you need to force things,  
until finally you arrive at non-action.  
When nothing is done,  
nothing is left undone.

True mastery can be gained  
by letting things go their own way.  
It can't be gained by interfering.



The Master has no mind of her own.  
S/he works with the mind of the people.

S/he is good to people who are good.  
S/he is also good to people who aren't good.  
This is true goodness.

S/he trusts people who are trustworthy.  
S/he also trusts people who aren't trustworthy.  
This is true trust.

The Master's mind is like space.  
People don't understand it.  
They look to the Master and wait.  
S/he treats them like its own children.

The Master gives himself up  
to whatever the moment brings.  
S/he knows that s/he is going to die,  
and has nothing left to hold on to:  
no illusions in the mind,  
no resistances in the body.  
S/he doesn't think about its actions;  
they flow from the core of its being.  
S/he holds nothing back from life;  
therefore s/he is ready for death,  
as a person is ready for sleep  
after a good day's work.

Every being in the universe  
is an expression of the Tao.  
It springs into existence,  
unconscious, perfect, free,  
takes on a physical body,  
let circumstances complete it.  
That is why every being  
spontaneously honors the Tao.

The Tao gives birth to all beings,  
nourishes them, maintains them,  
cares for them, comforts them, protects them,  
takes them back to itself,  
creating without possessing,  
acting without expecting,  
guiding without interfering.  
That is why love of the Tao  
is in the very nature of things.

In the beginning was the Tao.  
All things issue from it;  
all things return to it.

To find the origin,  
trace back the manifestations.  
When you recognise the children  
and find the mother,  
you will be free of sorrow.

If you close your mind in judgements  
and traffic with desires,  
your heart will be troubled.  
If you keep your mind from judging  
and aren't led by the senses,  
your heart will find peace.

Seeing into darkness is clarity.  
Knowing how to yield is strength.  
Use your own light  
and return to the source of light.  
This is called practicing eternity.

The great Way is easy,  
yet people prefer the side paths.  
Be aware when things are out of balance.  
Stay centered within the Tao.

When rich speculators prosper  
While farmers lose their land;  
when government officials spend money  
on weapons instead of cures;  
when the upper class is extravagant and irresponsible  
while the poor have nowhere to turn-  
all this is robbery and chaos.  
It is not in keeping with the Tao.

Whoever is planted in the Tao  
will not be rooted up.  
Whoever embraces the Tao  
will not slip away.  
Your name will be held in honor  
from generation to generation.

Let the Tao be present in your life  
and you will become genuine.  
Let it be present in your family  
and your family will flourish.  
Let it be present in your country  
and your country will be an example  
to all countries in the world.  
Let it be present in the universe  
and the universe will sing.

How do I know this is true?  
By looking inside myself.

S/he who is in harmony with the Tao  
is like a newborn child.  
Its bones are soft, its muscles are weak,  
but its grip is powerful.  
It doesn't know about the union  
of male and female,  
yet its penis can stand erect,  
so intense is its vital power.  
It can shout all day,  
yet it never becomes hoarse,  
so complete is its harmony.

The Master's power is like this.  
He lets all things come and go  
effortlessly, without desire.  
He never expects results;  
thus he is never disappointed.  
He is never disappointed;  
thus his spirit never grows old.

Those who know don't talk.  
Those who talk don't know.

Close your mouth,  
block off your senses,  
blunt your sharpness,  
untie your knots,  
soften your glare,  
settle your dust.  
This is the primal identity.

Be like the Tao.  
It can't be approached or withdrawn from,  
benefited or harmed,  
honored or brought into disgrace.  
It gives itself up continually.  
That is why it endures.



If you want to be a great leader,  
you must learn to follow the Tao.  
Stop trying to control.  
Let go of fixed plans and concepts,  
and the world will govern itself.

The more prohibitions you have,  
the less virtuous people will be.  
The more weapons you have,  
the less secure people will be.  
The more subsidies you have,  
the less self-reliant people will be.

Therefore the Master says:  
I do not act,  
And people become reformed by themselves.  
I am at peace,  
And people become fair by themselves.  
I do not interfere,  
And people become rich by themselves.  
I have no desire to desire,  
And people become like the uncarved wood by themselves

If a country is governed with tolerance,  
the people are comfortable and honest.  
If a country is governed with repression,  
the people are depressed and crafty.

When the will to power is in charge,  
the higher the ideals, the lower the results.  
Try to make people happy,  
and you lay the groundwork for misery.  
Try to make people moral,  
and you lay the groundwork for vice.

Thus the Master is content  
to serve as an example  
and not to impose its will.  
S/he is pointed, but doesn't pierce.  
Straightforward, but supple.  
Radiant, but easy on the eyes.

For governing a country well  
there is nothing better than moderation.

The mark of a moderate human  
is freedom from its own ideas.  
Tolerant like the sky,  
all-pervading like sunlight,  
firm like a mountain,  
supple like a tree in the wind,  
s/he has no destination in view  
and makes use of anything  
life happens to bring its way.

Nothing is impossible.  
Because s/he has let go,  
s/he can care for the people's welfare  
as a parent cares for its child.

Governing a large country  
is like frying a small fish.  
You spoil it with too much poking.

Center your country in the Tao  
and evil will have no power.  
Not that it isn't there,  
but you'll be able to step out of its way.

Give evil nothing to oppose  
and it will disappear by itself.

When a country obtains great power,  
it becomes like the sea:  
all streams run downward into it.  
The more powerful it grows,  
the greater the need for humility.  
Humility means trusting the Tao,  
thus never needing to be defensive.

A great nation is like a great Master:  
When s/he makes a mistake, s/he realises it.  
Having realised it, s/he admits it.  
Having admitted it, s/he corrects it.  
S/he considers those who point out its faults  
as the most benevolent teachers.  
S/he thinks of its enemy  
as the shadow that the self casts.

If a nation is centered in the Tao,  
if it nourishes its own people  
and doesn't meddle in the affairs of others,  
it will be a light to all nations in the world.

The Tao is the center of the universe,  
the good person's treasure,  
the bad person's refuge.

Honors can be bought with fine words,  
respect can be won with good deeds;  
but the Tao is beyond all value,  
and no one can achieve it.

Thus, when a new leader is chosen,  
don't offer to help  
with your wealth or your expertise.  
Offer instead  
to teach about the Tao.

Why did the ancient Masters esteem the Tao?  
Because, being one with the Tao,  
when you seek, you find;  
and when you make a mistake, you are forgiven.  
That is why everybody loves it.

Act without doing;  
work without effort.  
Think of the small as large  
and the few as many.  
Confront the difficult  
while it is still easy;  
accomplish the great task  
by a series of small acts.

The Master never reaches for the great;  
thus s/he achieves greatness.  
When s/he runs into a difficulty,  
s/he stops and gives the body & mind to it.  
S/he doesn't cling to its own comfort;  
thus problems are not problems.

What is rooted is easy to nourish.  
 What is recent is easy to correct.  
 What is brittle is easy to break.  
 What is small is easy to scatter.

Prevent trouble before it arises.  
 Put things in order before they exist.  
 The giant pine tree  
 grows from a tiny sprout.  
 The journey of a thousand miles  
 starts from beneath your feet.

Rushing into action, you fail.  
 Trying to grasp things, you lose them.  
 Forcing a project to completion,  
 you ruin what was almost ripe.

Therefore the Master takes action  
 by letting things take their course.  
 S/he remains as calm  
 at the end as at the beginning.  
 S/he has nothing,  
 thus has nothing to lose.  
 What s/he desires is non-desire;  
 what s/he learns is to unlearn.  
 S/he simply reminds people  
 of who they have always been.  
 S/he cares about nothing but the Tao.  
 Thus s/he can care for all things.



The ancient Masters  
didn't try to educate the people,  
but kindly taught them to not-know.

When they think that they know the answers,  
people are difficult to guide.  
When they know that they don't know,  
people can find their own way.

If you want to learn how to govern,  
avoid being clever or rich.  
The simplest pattern is the clearest.  
Content with an ordinary life,  
you can show all people the way  
back to their own true nature.

All streams flow to the sea  
because it is lower than they are.  
Humility gives it its power.

If you want to govern the people,  
you must place yourself below them.  
If you want to lead the people,  
you must learn how to follow them.

The Master is above the people,  
and no one feels oppressed.  
S/he goes ahead of the people,  
and no one feels manipulated.  
The whole world is grateful.  
Because Masters competes with no one,  
no one can compete with them.

Some say that my teaching is nonsense.  
Others call it elevated but impractical.  
But to those who have looked inside themselves,  
this nonsense makes perfect sense.  
And to those who put it into practice,  
this elevation has roots that go deep.

I have just three things to teach:  
simplicity, patience, compassion.  
These three are your greatest treasures.  
Simple in actions and in thoughts,  
you return to the source of being.  
Patient with both friends and enemies,  
you accord with the way things are.  
Compassionate toward yourself,  
you reconcile all beings in the world.

Excellent warriors are not violent.  
Excellent soldiers are not furious.  
Excellent conquerors do not engage.  
Excellent leaders of people lower themselves.

This is called the virtue of non competition.  
This is called the use of people's skills.  
This is called the union with Heaven.  
It is the perfection of the ancients.

The generals have a saying:  
"Rather than make the first move  
it is better to wait and see.  
Rather than advance an inch  
it is better to retreat a yard."

This is called  
going forward without advancing,  
pushing back without using weapons.

There is no greater misfortune  
than underestimating your enemy.  
Underestimating your enemy  
means thinking that s/he is evil.  
Thus you destroy your three treasures  
and become an enemy yourself.

When two great forces oppose each other,  
the victory will go to  
the one that knows how to withdraw.

My teachings are easy to understand  
and easy to put into practice.  
Still, no one in the world  
understands or practice them.

My teachings are older than the world.  
How can you grasp their meaning?

If you want to know,  
look inside your heart.

Not-knowing is true knowledge.  
Presuming to know is a disease.  
First realise that you are sick;  
then you can move toward health.

The Master is its own physician.  
S/he has healed alone of all knowing.  
Thus s/he is truly whole.

When people lose their sense of awe,  
it leads to disaster.  
When they no longer trust themselves,  
they begin to depend upon authority.

Therefore the Master steps back  
so that people won't be confused.  
S/he teaches without a teaching,  
so that people will have nothing to learn.



The Tao is always at ease.  
It overcomes without competing,  
answers without speaking a word,  
arrives without being summoned,  
accomplishes without a plan.

Its net covers the whole universe.  
And though its meshes are wide,  
it doesn't let a thing slip through.

If you realise that all things change,  
there is nothing you will try to hold on to.  
If you aren't afraid of dying,  
there is nothing you can't achieve.

Trying to control the future  
is like trying to take the master carpenter's place.  
When you handle the master carpenter's tools,  
chances are that you'll cut your hand.

When taxes are too high,  
people go hungry.  
When the government is too intrusive,  
people lose their spirit.

Act for the people's benefit.  
Trust them; leave them alone.

Humans are born soft and supple;  
dead, they are stiff and hard.  
Plants are born tender and pliant;  
dead, they are brittle and dry.

Thus whoever is stiff and inflexible  
is a disciple of death.  
Whoever is soft and supple  
is a disciple of life.

The hard and stiff will be broken.  
The soft and supple will prevail.

As it acts in the world, the Tao  
is like the bending of a bow.  
The top is bent downward;  
the bottom is bent up.  
It adjusts excess and deficiency  
so that there is perfect balance.  
It takes from what is too much  
and give to what isn't enough.

Those who try to control,  
who use force to protect their power,  
go against the direction of the Tao.  
They take from those who don't have enough  
and give to those who have far too much.

The Master can keep giving  
because there is no end to its wealth.  
S/he acts without expectation,  
succeeds without taking credit,  
and doesn't think that s/he is better  
than anyone else.

Nothing in the world  
is as soft and yielding as water.  
For dissolving the hard and inflexible,  
nothing can surpass it.

The soft overcomes the hard;  
the gentle overcomes the rigid.  
Everyone knows this is true,  
but few can put it into practice.

Therefore the Master remains  
serene in the midst of sorrow.  
Evil cannot enter its heart.  
Because s/he has given up helping,  
s/he is people's greatest help.

True words seem paradoxical.

Failure is an opportunity.  
If you blame someone else,  
there is no end to the blame.

Therefore the Master  
fulfills its own obligations  
and corrects its own mistakes.  
S/he does what needs to be done  
and demands nothing of others.

If a country is governed wisely,  
its inhabitants will be content.  
They enjoy the labor of their hands  
and don't waste time inventing  
labor-saving machines.  
Since they dearly love their homes,  
they aren't interested in travel.  
There may be a few wagons and boats,  
but these don't go anywhere.  
There may be an arsenal of weapons,  
but nobody ever uses them.  
People enjoy their food,  
take pleasure in being with their families,  
spend weekends working in their gardens,  
delight in the doings of the neighborhood.  
And even though the next country is so close  
that people can hear its roosters crowing and its dogs  
barking,  
they are content to die of old age  
without ever having gone to see it.



True words aren't eloquent;  
eloquent words aren't true.  
Wise people don't need to prove their point;  
people who need to prove their point aren't wise.

The Master has no possessions.  
The more s/he does for others,  
the happier s/he is.  
The more s/he gives to others,  
the wealthier s/he is.

The Tao nourishes by not forcing.  
By not dominating, the Master leads.