

# Tao Te Ching

Lao Tzu

February 2004

## Introduction

The specific date of birth of Lao Tzu is unknown. Legends vary, but scholars place his birth between 600 and 300 B.C.E. Lao Tzu is attributed with the writing of the "Tao-Te Ching," (tao-meaning the way of all life, te-meaning the fit use of life by men, and ching-meaning text or classic). Lao Tzu was not his real name, but an honorific given the sage, meaning "Old Master."

Legend says that in the end Lao Tzu, saddened by the evil of men, set off into the desert on a water buffalo leaving civilization behind. When he arrived at the final gate at the great wall protecting the kingdom, the gatekeeper persuaded him to record the principles of his philosophy for posterity. The result was the eighty-one sayings of the "Tao-Te Ching." This ancient Chinese text is the world's most translated classic next to the Bible.

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One

生

*Existence is beyond the power of words to define:  
Terms may be used, but none of them are absolute.*

*In the beginning of heaven and earth there were no words,  
Words came out of the womb of matter;  
And whether a person dispassionately sees to the core of life  
Or passionately sees its surface,  
The core and the surface are essentially the same,  
Words making them seem different only to express appearance.*

*If name be needed, then wonder names them both;  
From wonder into wonder existence opens.*

## Two



*People through finding one thing beautiful  
Think something else ugly,  
Through finding one person fit, find another person unfit.*

*Life and death, though stemming from each other  
Seem to conflict as stages of change,  
Difficult and easy as phases of achievement,  
Long and short as measures of contrast,  
High and low as degrees of relation.*

*But since the varying of tones gives music to the voice  
And what is is the was of what shall be,  
the sanest person sets up no deed, lays down no law,  
Takes everything that happens as it comes,  
As something to animate, not appropriate,  
To earn, not to own,  
To accept naturally without self-importance:  
If you never assume self-importance, you never lose it.*

## Three



*It is better not to make merit a matter of reward  
Lest people conspire to contend,  
Not to pile up rich belongings, lest they rob  
Not to excite by display, lest they covet.*

*A sound leader's aim is to open people's hearts,  
Fill their stomachs, calm their pride, brace their bones,  
And so to clarify their thoughts  
That no cunning meddler could touch them:  
Without being forced, without strain or constraint,  
Good government comes of itself.*

## Four



*Existence, by nothing bred,  
Breeds everything.*

*Parent of the universe-  
It smooths rough edges, unties hard knots,  
Tempers the sharp sun, lays blowing dust,  
Its image in the wellspring never fails.*

*But how was it conceived?  
This image of no other sire.*



## Five



*Nature, immune as to a sacrifice of straw dogs,  
Faces the decay of its fruits.*

*A sound person immune as to a sacrifice of straw dogs,  
Faces the passing of human generations.*

*The universe, like a bellows,  
Is always emptying, always full:  
The more it yields, the more it holds.*

*More words matter less; hold fast to the center.*



*The breath of life  
Moved through a deathless valley  
Of mysterious motherhood,  
Which conceives and bears the universal seed,  
The seeming of a world never to end,  
Breath for people to draw from at will:  
And the more they take of it,  
The more remains.*

## Seven



*The universe is deathless,  
Is deathless because, having never been born,  
It remains ever living.*

*Sound people, by not advancing themselves  
Are sustained outside themselves:  
By never becoming an end in their own self  
They endlessly become themselves.*

## Eight



*People, at their best, are like water,  
They serve as they go along:  
Like water they find their own level,  
In the common level of life,  
Love living close to the earth,  
Living clear down in their hearts,  
Love kinship with neighbors,  
The pick of words that tell the truth,  
The even tenor of a well run state,  
The fair profit of able dealing,  
The right timing of useful deeds,  
And for blocking no one's way,  
No one blames them.*

Nine

生

*It is better to have less than to have too much.*

*Over sharpen the blade, and the edge will soon blunt.*

*Amass a great store of treasures, and no one can protect them.*

*Claim wealth and titles and you will lose them.*

*Do enough without vying, this is the tao.*



*Having both a body and a soul and loving the world,  
 Can you avoid separation?  
 Can you, with the simple stature of a child,  
 breathing nature, become notwithstanding an adult?  
 Cleansing yourself to be as a clean vessel,  
 Can you be without stain?  
 Loving all people and ruling the country,  
 Can you be without cleverness?  
 Obtaining the mastery of all that is within your reach,  
 Can you also be submissive?  
 Can your learned head take lessons from  
 The wisdom of your heart?*

*Giving birth and nourishing,  
 Bearing and yet not possessing,  
 Working and yet without credit,  
 Leading and yet without dominating,  
 This is the essence of virtue.*

## Eleven



*Thirty spokes make the wheel's hub;  
It is the center hole that makes them useful.  
Shape clay into a vessel,  
And it is the space within that makes it useful.  
With the doors and windows of a house,  
That they are holes is what makes them useful.  
Thus are we helped by what is not to use what is.*

## Twelve



*Five colors blind the eye.  
Five tones deafen the ear.  
Five flavors dull the taste.  
Racing and hunting madden the mind.  
Booty leaves no one at peace.  
Therefore a sensible person prefers the inner to the outer eye.  
They have their 'yes' and they have their 'no.'*



## Thirteen

生

*Favor and disfavor have been called equal worries,  
Success and failure have been called equal ailments.*

*How can favor and disfavor be equal worries?  
Because winning favor burdens a person with the fear of losing  
it.*

*How can success and failure be equal ailments?  
Because a person thinks of the personal body as self.*

*When a person no longer considers themselves only a body,  
Neither success nor failure can ail them.  
One who knows their lot to be the lot of all other people  
Is a safe person to guard them.*

*One who recognizes all people to be members of their own body  
Is a sound person to guard them.*

## Fourteen



*What we look for beyond seeing and call unseen,  
 Listen for beyond hearing and call unheard,  
 Grasp for beyond reaching and call withheld  
 Merge beyond understanding in a oneness,  
 Which does not merely rise and give light,  
 Does not merely set and leave darkness,  
 But forever sends forth a succession of living things  
 As mysterious as the unbegotten existence  
 To which it will return.*

*This is why people call them empty phenomena,  
 Meaningless images, a mirage with no face to meet,  
 No back to follow.*

*Yet one who is anciently aware of existence  
 Is master of every moment,  
 Feels no break since time beyond time  
 In the way life flows.*

## Fifteen



*Long ago the land was ruled with a wisdom  
 Too fine, too deep to be fully understood,  
 And since it was beyond mankind's full understanding,  
 Only some of it has come down to us, as in these sayings:  
 "Alert as a winter farer on an icy stream,"  
 "Wary as a man in ambush,"  
 "Considerate as a welcome guest,"  
 "Selfless as melting ice,"  
 "Green as an uncut tree,"  
 And this also, "Roiled as a torrent."*

*Why roiled as a torrent?  
 Because when a person is in turmoil  
 How shall they find peace, save by staying patient  
 Until the stream clears?  
 How can a person's life keep to its course  
 If the person will not let it flow?  
 Those who seek to flow as life flows  
 Know they need no other force:  
 Not seeking fulfillment,  
 They are not swayed by desire for change.*

## Sixteen



*Allow all things to fall from you;  
 Let your mind rest in peace.  
 Be at one with all these living things  
 That having risen and flourished  
 Return to the quiet from whence they came;  
 Like the healthy growth of vegetation  
 Falling back upon the root.*

*The way of nature is unchanging.  
 Knowing constancy is insight.  
 Not knowing constancy leads to misfortune.  
 Knowing constancy, the mind is open;  
 Being open minded, you will be open-hearted,  
 Being open hearted, you will act nobly.  
 Acting noble, you will attain the divine.  
 Being divine, you will be at one with the tao.  
 Being at one with the tao is forever;  
 Though the body is no more, the tao will remain.*

## Seventeen



*A leader is best when the people barely know that the leader  
exists,  
Not so good when they obey and acclaim the leader,  
And worst when they despise and fear their leader.*

*"Fail to honor people and they fail to honor you;"  
But of a good leader, who talks little,  
When their work is done and their aim is fulfilled,  
The people will say, "we did this ourselves."*

## Eighteen



*When people lost sight of the way of life,  
Came codes of love and honesty,  
Learning came, charity came,  
And hypocrisy took charge.*

*When differences weakened family ties,  
Came benevolent fathers and dutiful sons;  
When lands were disrupted and misgoverned,  
Came ministers commended as loyal.*

## Nineteen



*Rid of formalized wisdom and learning  
People would be a hundred-fold happier;  
Rid of conventionalized duty and honor  
People would find their families dear;  
Rid of legalized profiteering  
And people would have no thieves to fear.*

*These methods of life have failed all three,  
Set people free, as their hearts as they long to be  
From private greeds and wanton needs.*

## Twenty



*Leave off fine learning!  
End the nuisance of saying  
'yes' to this and 'perhaps' to that,  
Distinctions of how little merit!  
Categorical this, categorical that,  
What slightest use are they?  
'If one person leads, another must follow,'  
How silly and how false.*

*Yet conventional men lead an easy life  
With all their days feast days,  
A constant Spring visit to the Tall Tower,  
While I am a simpleton, a do-nothing  
Not yet old enough to raise a hand,  
Not grown enough to smile,  
A harmless, worthless waif.*



*Other people have a surplus of goods,  
While I am left out, owning nothing.  
What an idiot I must be to not know my way around  
What a fool I must be!  
The average person is so crisp and confident  
That I ought to be miserable  
Going on and on like the sea, drifting nowhere.  
All of these people are making their mark upon the world,  
While I, pig-headed, awkward, different from the rest,  
Am only an infant still nursing at the breast.*

## Twenty-one



*The surest test if a person is sane  
Is if they accept life whole, as it is,  
When without needing to measure or touch to understand  
The measureless, untouchable source of its images,  
The measureless, untouchable source of its substances,  
Which, while it appears dark emptiness  
Brims with a quick force farthest away,  
and yet nearest at hand from the oldest time until today,  
Is changing its images with origin:  
What name need I know of the origin than this?*

Twenty-two



*"Yield and you need not break"*

*"Bend and you can straighten"*

*"Emptied and you can hold"*

*"Torn and you can mend."*

*"As want can reward you - so wealth can bewilder."*

*Aware of these things, the sane person  
Has a simple return which other people seek;  
Without inflaming himself he is kindled  
Without explaining himself is explained  
Without taking credit, is accredited  
Laying no claim, is acclaimed.  
And because he does not compete,  
He finds peaceful competence.*

*How true is the old saying: "Yield and you need not break!"  
And how completely it comes home!*

## Twenty-three



*Nature does not have to insist  
 Can blow for only half a morning,  
 Rain for only half a day  
 And what were these winds and rains but natural?  
 If nature does not have to insist  
 Why should mankind?*

*It is natural also that whoever follows the way of life feels alive  
 That whoever uses it properly feels well used  
 Whereas the person who loses the way of life feels lost  
 That whoever keeps to the way of life feels at home  
 Whoever uses it properly feels welcome  
 Whoever uses it improperly feels improperly used:  
 "Fail to honor people and they fail to honor you."*

## Twenty-four



*Standing on tiptoe, a person loses balance  
Walking astride, a person has no pace  
Kindling himself, he fails to light  
Quitting himself, he forfeits his hearers  
Admiring himself, he does so alone  
Pride has never brought a person greatness  
but, according to the way of life, brings the ills  
That make him unfit  
That make him unclean in the eyes of his neighbor  
And a sane person will have none of them.*

## Twenty-five



*Before creation, a presence existed,  
Self-contained, complete, formless, voiceless,  
Mateless, changeless, which yet pervaded itself  
With unending motherhood.*

*Though there can be no name for it,  
I have called it 'the way of life,' the tao.  
Perhaps I should have called it 'the fullness of life,'  
Since fullness implies widening into space,  
Implies further widening into space  
Implies widening until the circle is whole.*

*In this sense the way of life is fulfilled,  
Heaven is fulfilled, earth is fulfilled  
And a fit person also is fulfilled.  
These are the four amplitudes of the universe  
And a fit person is one of them  
A person rounding the way of earth  
Earth rounding the way of heaven  
Heaven rounding the way of life  
Until the circle is full.*

## Twenty-six



*That which is heavy is the root of that which is light;  
The still is the master of unrest.*

*The traveler of true means, whatever the highway's pace,  
Does not lose sight of his baggage,  
And however fine the prospect offered,  
Is a person with a calm head.*

*The Lord of countless chariots would ride them in vain,  
Would make himself the fool of the realm,  
With pace beyond reign, speed beyond helm.*

## Twenty-seven

生

*One may move so well that a footprint never shows,  
 Speak so well that their tongue never slips.  
 Reckon so well that a tally is never needed,  
 Seal an entrance so tight that, though using no lock,  
 It cannot be opened,  
 Bind a hold so firm, though using no chord,  
 That it cannot be untied.*

*And these are the traits not only of a sound person  
 But of many a person thought to be unsound.  
 A sound person is good at salvage,  
 At seeing that nothing is lost.*

*Having what is called insight,  
 A sound person, before he can help an unsound person,  
 Finds in himself what is the matter with the unsound person.  
 And whichever person discounts the lesson  
 Is as far off the road as the other,  
 Whatever else they may know.  
 This is the heart of it.*



## Twenty-eight



*One who has a man's wings  
 And a woman's also  
 Is in themselves a womb of the world.  
 And being a womb of the world,  
 Continuously, endlessly,  
 Gives birth.*

*One who, preferring light,  
 Prefers darkness also,  
 Is in themselves an image of the world.  
 And being an image of the world,  
 Is continuously, endlessly,  
 The dwelling of creation.*

*One who is the highest of humanity  
 And the humblest also  
 Is in themselves a valley of the world.  
 And being a valley of the world,  
 Continuously, endlessly,  
 Conducts the source  
 From which vessels may be usefully filled.  
 Servants of the state are such vessels,  
 To be filled from an undiminishing supply.*

## Twenty-nine



*This who would take over the earth  
And shape it to their will  
Never, I notice, succeed.*

*The earth is like a vessel so sacred  
That at the mere approach of the profane  
It is marred  
And when they reach out their fingers it is gone.*

*For a time in the world some force themselves ahead  
And some are left behind,  
For a time in the world some make a great noise  
And some are held silent,  
For a time in the world some are puffed fat  
And some are kept hungry,  
For a time in the world some push aboard  
And some are tipped out.*

*At no time in the world will a person who is sane  
Over-reach themselves,  
Over-spend themselves,  
Over-rate themselves.*

## Thirty



*One who would guide a leader of people in the uses of life  
 Will warn against the use of arms for conquest.  
 Weapons often turn upon the wielder,  
 Thorn bushes spring up wherever an army has passed,  
 Conscription of a multitude of people  
 Drains the next year dry.*

*A good general, daring to march, dares also to halt,  
 Will never press triumph beyond need.  
 Achieve results, but not for glory,  
 Achieve results, but not for show,  
 Achieve results, but not for pride,  
 Achieve results  
 Because it is the natural way;  
 Achieve but never force results.*

*Force is followed by a loss of strength,  
 This is not the way at all.  
 That which runs contrary to the way of life  
 Comes to an early death.*

## Thirty-one

生

*Even the finest arms are an instrument of ill fortune,  
Good weapons are instruments of fear,  
All creatures fear them.*

*And the way for a vital person to go is not the way of a soldier.  
Weapons, being an instrument of fear,  
Are no measure of thoughtful people  
Until they fail of all other choice  
Save acceptance of them.*

*The person who thinks triumph is beautiful  
Is one with a will to kill,  
And one with a will to kill  
Shall never prevail upon the earth.  
On happy occasions, precedence is given to the left,  
The commander-in-chief on the right.  
War is thus conducted as a funeral.*

*The death of a multitude is cause for mourning:  
Conduct your triumph as a funeral.*

## Thirty-two



*Existence is infinite, not to be defined;  
And though it seems but a bit of wood  
In your hand to carve as you please,  
It is not to be lightly played with and put down.*

*When rulers adhered to the way of life,  
They were upheld by natural loyalty:  
Heaven and earth were joined and made fertile,  
Life was a freshness of rain,  
Subject to none,  
Free to all.  
But people of culture came, with their grades and distinctions;  
And as soon as such differences had been devised  
No one knew where to end them,  
Though the one who does know the end of all such differences  
Is a sound person:  
Existence  
Might be likened to the course  
Of many rivers reaching the one sea.*

## Thirty-three



*Knowledge studies others,  
Wisdom is self-known;  
Mastering others requires force,  
Mastering yourself requires strength.  
Content need never borrow,  
Ambition wanders blind:  
Knowing where you are, you endure.  
Vitality cleaves to the center  
Leaving death behind.*

## Thirty-four



*Bountiful life, letting anyone attend,  
Making no distinctions between left and right,  
Feeding everyone, refusing no one,  
Has not provided this bounty to show how much it owns,  
Had not fed and clad its guests with any thought of claim;  
And because it lacks the twist  
Of mind and body in what it has done,  
The guile of head and hands,  
It is not always respected by the guest.  
Others appreciate welcome from the perfect host  
Who, barely appearing to exist,  
Exists most.*

## Thirty-five



*If the sign of life is in your face,  
The person who responds to it  
Will feel secure and fit  
As when, in a friendly place,  
Sure of hearty care,  
A traveler waits.*

*Though it may not taste like food  
And you may not see the fare  
Or hear the sound of plates,  
How endless it is and how good!*



Thirty-six



*That which shrinks  
Must expand,  
The person who feels unarmed  
Must have carried arms,  
The person who feels belittled  
Must have been consequential,  
The person who feels deprived  
Must have had privilege.*

*Whereas a person with insight  
Knows that to keep under is to endure.  
What happens to a fish pulled from the pond?  
Or an implement of state pulled from the scabbard?  
Unseen they survive.*

## Thirty-seven



*The way of life is to do nothing through acting.  
The way of life is to do everything through being.  
When a leader knows this,  
The land naturally goes straight  
And the world's passion to stray from straightness  
Is checked at the core  
By the simple unnamable vital virtue  
Through which people cease from coveting,  
And to a land where the people have ceased from coveting  
Peace comes of course.*

## Thirty-eight



*A person of sure fitness,  
without making a point of their fitness,  
Stays fit.*

*A person of unsure fitness,  
assuming an appearance of fitness,  
Becomes unfit.*

*A person of sure fitness never makes an act of it  
Nor considers what it may profit them.*

*A person of unsure fitness makes an act of it  
And considers the profit of every action.*

*However a person with a kind heart proceed,  
They forget what it may profit them.*

*However a person with a just mind proceed,  
They remember what it may profit them.*

*However a person of conventional conduct proceed,  
If they are not complied with,  
Out go their fists to enforce compliance.*

*Here is what happens:  
Losing the way of life,  
people first rely on their fitness;  
Losing fitness, they turn to kindness;  
Losing kindness, they turn to justness,  
Losing justness, they turn to convention.  
Conventions are loyalty and honesty gone to waste;  
They are the entrance of disorder.  
Therefore a sane person dwells on what is real  
And not on that which is on the surface -  
Stays with the fruit  
Beyond the flowering:  
They have their no and they have their yes.*

## Thirty-nine



*The wholeness of life has,  
 From old, been made manifest in its parts:  
 Clarity has been manifest in heaven,  
 Firmness in earth,  
 Purity in spirit,  
 In the valley conception,  
 In the river procreation.*

*And so in a leader are the people made manifest for wholeness of  
 use.*

*But for clarity, heaven would be veiled,  
 But for firmness, the earth would have crumbled,  
 But for purity, spirit would have fumbled,  
 But for conception, the valley would have failed,  
 But for procreation, the river would have run dry.  
 So, save for the people, a leader will fail.  
 Always the low carry the high;  
 They are the root from which leaders grow.*

*What can stand lofty without a firm foundation?*

*No wonder that leaders of a land profess their stature and their  
station*

*To be servitude and lowliness.*

*If the rim and spoke were not,*

*Where would be the chariot?*

*Who would prefer the jingle of jade pendants if*

*They have heard stone growing in a cliff?*

Forty

生

*Life on its way returns into a mist,  
Its quickness is its quietness again.  
Existence of this world of things and people  
Renews its never needing to exist.*

## Forty-one



*People of stamina, knowing the way of life,  
 Steadily keep to it.  
 Unstable people, knowing the way of life,  
 Keep to it or not, depending on the occasion.  
 Stupid people, knowing the way of life,  
 And having once laughed at it, laugh again the louder.  
 If you need to be sure which way is right,  
 You can tell by their laughing at it.*

*They fling the same old charges:  
 "A wick without oil,"  
 "For every step forward, a step or two back."  
 To such laughers, a level road look steep,  
 Going forward seems a retreat,  
 Enough is lack,  
 Endurance is weakness,  
 Simplicity is a faded flower.*

*Eternity belongs to those who go straight around the circle,  
 Foundation belongs to those who can feel beyond touch,  
 Harmony belongs to those who can see beyond shape,  
 Life belongs to those who can tell beyond words.  
 It is the way of life itself  
 That bring everything  
 To that which fulfills life.*



## Forty-two



*Life, when it came to be,  
Bore one, then two, then three  
Elemental things.*

*And thus the three began:  
Heaven, earth, and humanity  
To balance happenings,  
Cool night, warm day,  
For the living, for the dead.*

*Though the common person may not wish  
To admit  
That we are all of common earth,  
Great leaders often state  
How humbly they are leading,  
Because in true succession  
High and low correlate.*

*It is an ancient thought  
That a person who over-reaches and tries to  
Force the world to be as they desire  
Shall achieve nothing more than  
Their own demise;  
And thus my own heart teaches.*

## Forty-three



*What is of all things most yielding  
Can overcome that which is hard;  
Being without substance it can enter in  
Even where there is no crevice.*

*That is how I know the value  
Of action which is actionless  
Which few indeed understand.*

## Forty-four



*Which means more to you,  
You or your renown?  
Which brings more to you  
You or what you own?  
And which would cost you more  
If it were gone?  
The niggard pays,  
The miser loses.  
The least ashamed of people  
Goes back if they choose to:  
They know both ways  
And can start again.*

## Forty-five



*A person's work, however finished it seems,  
Continues as long as they live.*

*A person, however perfect they seem  
Is needed as long as they live.*

*As long as truth appears false,*

*A wise person a fool,*

*A prophet a dumb lout,*

*If you want to keep warm, rush about  
if you wish to keep cool, keep still;*

*And in the world, no doubt,*

*Your way will be the rule.*

Forty-six



*In the land where the way of life is understood  
Race horses are led back to serve in the fields;  
In the land where the way of life is misunderstood  
War horses are bred on the autumn harvest.*

*Owning is entanglement.  
Wanting is bewilderment.  
Taking is the presentment:  
Only a person who contains content  
Remains content.*

## Forty-seven



*There is no need to run outside  
For better seeing,  
Nor to peer through a window.  
Rather abide  
At the center of your being.  
For the more you leave it, the less you learn.  
Search your heart and see  
If you are wise when taking every turn:  
The way to do is to be.*

## Forty-eight



*A person anxious for knowledge  
Adds more to themselves every minute;  
A person acquiring life, loses themselves in it,  
Has less and less to bear in mind,  
Less and less to do.  
Life, they find, happens as it will  
And being included in life, they happen as they will, also.  
Often a person sways the world like a wind  
But not by deed;  
And if you think you have need of deeds to sway the world,  
It has left you behind.*

## Forty-nine



*A sound person's heart is not shut within itself  
But is open to other people's hearts.  
I am good to people who are good,  
And I am good to bad people,  
If I am good enough.  
I trust people who are true to their word,  
And I trust liars,  
If I am true enough.  
I feel the heartbeats of others  
Above my own  
If I am enough of a mother  
And enough of a child.*



Fifty



*Death might appear to be the issue of life,  
Since in every ten alive, three are busy being born  
While another three are busy dying.*

*Then why  
Should another three out of ten continue breeding death?  
Because of the sheer madness to multiply.*

*But there is one out of ten, they say, so sure of life  
That the tiger and the wild boar stay clear of their inland way.  
Weapons turn from them on the battle field,  
No bull horn could tell where to gore such a person,  
No tiger claw could find a place to tear,  
No weapon where to enter in.  
And why is this?*

*Because this person has no death to die.*

## Fifty-one



*Existence having born them  
 And fitness having bred them,  
 While matter varied their forms  
 And breath empowered them,  
 All created things render, to the existence and fitness they depend  
 on,  
 An obedience.*

*Not commanded, but out of their nature.  
 And since this is the way existence bears issue,  
 And fitness raises, attends, shelters, feeds, and protects,  
 Do you likewise:  
 Be a parent, not an owner,  
 A steward, not a master,  
 Be contented not with obedience but with benefit,  
 And you are at the core of living.*

Fifty-two



*The source of life is as a mother.  
Loving the mother, one loves also the children.  
Be fond of both the mother and her children,  
But know the mother dearer  
And you will outlive death.*

*Curb your tongue and your senses  
And you are beyond trouble.  
Let them loose  
And you are beyond help.*

*Discover that nothing is too small for clear vision,  
Too insignificant for tender strength.*

*Use outlook and insight  
Use them both  
And you are immune:  
For you have witnessed eternity.*

## Fifty-three

生

*If I had any learning  
Of a highway wide and fit,  
Would I lose it at each turning?  
Yet look at people spurning  
Natural use of it!*

*See how fine the palaces  
And see how poor the farms,  
How bare the peasants' granaries  
While the gentry wear embroideries  
Hiding sharpened arms.*

*And the more they have, the more they seize,  
How can such people live  
Who never hunger, never thirst,  
Having far more possessions than uses!*

*There are other brigands, but these are the worst  
Of the highway's harms.*

## Fifty-four



*Since true foundation cannot fail  
 But holds as good as new,  
 Many a worshipful child hails  
 A parent who lived according to their conscience.*

*Realized in a person, fitness begins,  
 Realized in a family, fitness multiplies,  
 Realized in a village, fitness gathers momentum,  
 Realized in a country, fitness becomes great,  
 And realized in a world, fitness fills the heavens.*

*And thus the fitness of one person  
 You find in the family they began,  
 You find in the village that resulted  
 You find in the country that followed,  
 You find in the world that fitness filled.*

*And how do I know that this is true?  
 Because it could all begin with me.*

## Fifty-five



*A person whom life fulfills,  
 Though she remains a child,  
 Wasps and serpents will not harm,  
 Wild beasts will not capture,  
 Birds of prey will not attack.*

*They need no more sinew and bone than a baby's for sure hold.  
 Without thought of the sexual, they are gender,  
 Which grows firm and does not fail.*

*Though their voice should call out at full pitch all day,  
 It would not grow hoarse, but stay tender  
 Through the perfect balancing  
 Of the person at endless ease with everything  
 Because of the life they have led.*

*This is harmony:  
 Knowing harmony is constancy,  
 Knowing constancy is enlightenment.*

*It is foolish to rush about  
To control breath is to cause strain.  
If too much energy is expended, exhaustion follows.*

*Let life ripen and fall.  
Contesting with your will achieves nothing;  
That which goes contrary to the way of life  
Comes to an early end.*

## Fifty-six



*Those who know, do not tell.  
Those who tell, do not know.*

*Not to set the tongue loose  
But to curb it,  
Not to have edges that catch,  
But to remain disentangled,  
Unblinded,  
Unconfused,  
Is to find balance.*

*And the person who holds balance beyond sway of love or hate,  
Beyond the reach of profit or loss,  
Beyond the care of praise or blame,  
Has attained the highest post in the world.*



Fifty-seven

生

*A realm is governed by ordinary acts,  
A battle is governed by extraordinary acts,  
The world is governed by no acts at all.*

*And how do I know this? This is how:  
Act after act prohibits  
Everything but poverty,  
Weapon after weapon conquers  
Everything but chaos,  
Business after business provides  
A craze of waste,  
Law after law breeds  
A multitude of thieves.*

*Therefore, a sensible person says:  
If I keep from meddling with people, they take care of themselves.  
If I keep from commanding people, they behave themselves.  
If I keep from preaching at people, they improve themselves.  
If I keep from imposing on people, they become themselves.*

## Fifty-eight



*When the country is ruled with a light hand  
The people are simple.*

*When the country is ruled with severity  
The people are cunning.*

*Happiness is rooted in misery and misery lurks beneath happiness.  
And who knows what the future will bring?*

*Thus there is no honesty,  
Goodness becomes witchcraft  
And humanity's bewilderment lasts a long time.*

*Therefore a sound person is  
Sharp, but not cutting,  
Pointed, but not piercing,  
Straightforward, but not unconstrained,  
Brilliant, but not blinding.*

Fifty-nine



*To lead people  
And follow the way of life  
Weigh the worth  
Of the one source:  
Using the single force  
Which doubles the strength of the strong  
By enabling a person to do what is right, and disabling them from  
doing wrong,  
Be so charged with the nature of life that you give people birth,  
That you mother your land,  
That you are the fit and ever-living root of it:  
The seeing root, whose eye is infinite.*

## Sixty



*Handle a large country with as gentle a touch  
As if you were cooking a small fish.  
If you manage people by letting them alone,  
Ghosts of the dead will not haunt you.*

*Not that there are no ghosts,  
But that their influence becomes propitious  
In the sound existence of a living person.  
There is no difference between the quick and the dead,  
They are facets of the single channel of vitality.*

Sixty-one

生

*A large country is the low level of inter-flowing rivers.  
It draws people to the sea-end of a valley,  
As the female draws the male,  
Receives it into absorbing depth  
Because depth always absorbs.*

*And so a large country,  
Insofar as it is deeper than a small country  
Absorbs the small –  
Or a small country,  
Insofar as it is deeper than a large country  
Absorbs the large.*

*Some countries consciously seek depth into which to draw others.  
Some countries naturally have depth into which to draw others.  
A large country needs to admit,  
A small country needs to emit,  
So that each country can naturally have what it needs  
If the large country submits.*

## Sixty-two



*From the way of life  
Comes all things;  
It is the treasure of a sound person  
And the refuge of an unsound person.  
Clever performances come dear or cheap,  
Sweet words can buy a measure of honor,  
Goodness comes free.*

*And how shall a person who acts better deny a person who acts  
worse?  
In an instant they can change places.*

*Therefore, when a new government comes into being,  
Let ministers be appointed to receive the gifts of  
A grateful people;  
And let them receive also the motionless gift of integrity –  
The gift prized as highest by those of old who said,  
"Only pursue an offender to show them the way."*

*What people on earth could imagine  
More wealth than this?*

## Sixty-three



*People, knowing the way of life,  
 Do without acting,  
 Effect without enforcing,  
 Taste without consuming;  
 Through the many they find the few,  
 Through the humble the great;  
 Rewarding bitterness with care,  
 They face the simple fact before it becomes involved.  
 They solve the small problem before it becomes large.*

*The most involved fact in the world  
 Could have been faced when it was simple.  
 The largest problem in the world,  
 Could have been solved when it was small.*

*The simple fact that a person finds no problem large  
 Is the sane person's prime achievement.  
 If you say "yes" too quickly,  
 You may need to say "no."*

*If you think things are done too easily  
 You may find them too hard to do.  
 If you face trouble sanely  
 It cannot trouble you.*

## Sixty-four



*Before it moves, hold it.  
 Before it goes wrong, mend it.  
 Drain off water in winter before it freezes.  
 Before weeds grow, sow them to the wind.  
 You can deal with what has not yet happened  
 You can foresee harmful events  
 And not allow them to come to be.*

*For as naturally as a single seed becomes a massive tree  
 A tall tower can arise from a single handful of earth,  
 Or here at your feet, a thousand mile journey can begin.  
 Quick action bruises,  
 Quick grasping loses.*

*Therefore, a sane person's care is to not exert  
 One move that can miss, one move that can hurt.  
 Most people who miss, after almost winning,  
 Should have known the end from the beginning.  
 A sane person is sane in knowing  
 What things they can spare,  
 In not wishing what most people wish,  
 In not reaching for things because they seem rare.  
 The cultured might call such a person a brute,  
 This person of few words,  
 Because their own care is not to interfere  
 But to allow nature to renew  
 The sense of direction that people misplace.*



Sixty-five

生

*Sound old rulers, it is said,  
Left the people to themselves,  
Instead of wanting to teach everything  
And start the people arguing.  
With mere instruction in command,  
So that people understand less than they know,  
The people were most unhappy.  
But happy is the land that is ordered such that  
People understand more than they know.*

*This is a double key that  
Locks and unlocks just the same.  
If modern people would use it  
They would find old wisdom in young hearts  
And clear vision enough to see  
From start to finish and finish to start  
The whole circle of life.*

## Sixty-six



*Why are the rivers and seas said to be the Lords of the waters?  
Because they afford the common level  
And so become Lords of the waters.  
The common people love a sound person  
Because such a person does not talk above their level,  
Because, although they are leading,  
Their leadership follows the people,  
Imposing no weight on them.  
And they, in turn, because this person impedes no one,  
they find it easy and natural to yield, content.  
People never tire of anyone  
Who is not bent upon comparison.*

Sixty-seven



*Everyone says that my way of life  
 Is the way of life of a simpleton.  
 Being largely the way of the life of a simpleton is what  
 Makes it worthwhile.  
 If it were not the way of life of a simpleton  
 It would long ago have been worthless.  
 These possessions of a simpleton, being the  
 Three I choose and cherish:  
 To care  
 To be fair  
 To be humble.  
 When a person cares, they are unafraid.  
 When a person is fair, they leave enough for others.  
 When a person is humble, they can grow.  
 Whereas, if like clever people of today  
 A person is bold without caring,  
 Self-indulgent without sharing,  
 Self-important without shame  
 They are dead.  
 The invincible shield of caring  
 Is a weapon from above  
 Against being dead.*

## Sixty-eight

**生**

*The best officer does not plunge in headlong,  
Nor is the best soldier a person eager to fight.  
The greatest victor wins without a battle;  
The person who overcomes people, understands them.  
There is a quality of quietness  
Which quickens people by no stress:  
"Fellowship with heaven" as of old,  
Is fellowship with people that maintains itself.*

## Sixty-nine



*There is a saying among soldiers:*

*"I dare not make the first move but would rather play the guest,  
I dare not advance an inch but would rather withdraw a foot."*

*Which means:*

*Look a person straight in the face and make no move,*

*Roll up your sleeve and clench no fist,*

*Open your hand and show no weapon,*

*Bare your breast and find no foe.*

*But as long as there are foes, value your foes,*

*Respect them, measure them, be humble toward them,*

*Let them not strip from you, regardless of how strong they are*

*Compassion, the one wealth that can afford them.*

## Seventy



*My way is so simple to feel, so easy to apply,  
That only a few will ever apply it.  
If it were not the lasting way, the natural way to try,  
If it were a passing craze, everyone would try it.  
But however few shall go my way,  
Or feel concerned with me,  
There will be some  
Who witness what they see:  
Sanity is indeed like a gossamer sheath  
Containing a jewel beyond price.*

## Seventy-one



*People who know how little they know are well,  
People who know how much they know are sick,  
If, when you see the symptoms, you can tell you are sick,  
Then your cure is quick,  
Sound people know that sickness makes them sick  
And before they catch anything else they cure their ills.*

生

*Upon those who defy authority  
Shall be visited,  
But not behind prison walls  
Nor through the oppression of their families.  
People, sanely led  
Are not led under duress.  
To know yourself and yet not show yourself,  
To think well of yourself without telling yourself,  
Be that your no and your yes.*



## Seventy-three



*A person with outward courage dares to die.  
A person with inward courage dares to live.  
But either of these people  
Has a better and a worse side than the other.  
And who can tell exactly  
To which qualities heaven objects?  
Heaven does nothing to win the day:  
Says nothing - is echoed,  
Orders nothing - is obeyed,  
Advises nothing - is right.  
And which of us  
Seeing that nothing is outside the vast wide-meshed net of heaven  
Knows just how it is cast?*

## Seventy-four



*Death is no threat to people  
Who are not afraid to die:  
But even if these offenders feared death night and day,  
Who should be rash enough  
To act as executioner?  
Nature is executioner.  
When humanity usurps the place,  
It is like the carpenter's apprentice  
Who takes place of the Master;  
An apprentice hacking with the Master's ax  
May slice their own hand.*

## Seventy-five



*People starve if taxes eat their grain,  
And the faults of starving people  
Are the faults of their rulers.  
That is why people rebel.  
People who have to fight for their living  
And are not afraid to die for it  
Are higher people than those who, though stationed high,  
Are too fat to dare to die.*

## Seventy-six



*When born, a person is soft and weak,  
In death a person becomes stiff and hard.  
All the animals and plants that are,  
While alive they are supple and soft,  
But in death they become brittle and dry.  
Truly that which is stiff and hard is a companion of death.  
Therefore the weapon that is too hard will be broken;  
The tree with the hardest wood  
will be the first cut down.*

## Seventy-seven



*Is not existence  
 Like a drawn bow?  
 The ends approach,  
 The height shortens, the narrow widens.  
 If the string is too long, it is shortened,  
 If there is not enough, it is made longer.  
 The living would take from those with too much  
 Enough for those with too little,  
 Whereas humanity exacts from those with too little  
 Still more for those with too much.  
 Now what person will have enough wealth to share with all  
 humanity,  
 Save one who can freely draw from the common means?  
 A sane person needs no better support, no richer reward,  
 Than this common means,  
 Through which everyone is everyone's equal.*

## Seventy-eight



*What is more fluid, more yielding than water?  
Yet back it comes again, wearing down the rigid strength  
Which cannot yield to withstand it.  
So it is that the strong are overcome by the weak,  
The haughty by the humble.  
This we know but never learn,  
So that when wise people tell us,  
"The person who grovels in the mud is the owner of the earth" or  
"The most persecuted is king"  
They seem to twist the truth.*

## Seventy-nine



*If terms to end a quarrel leave bad feeling,  
What good are they?  
So a sensible person takes the poor end of the bargain  
Without dispute.  
It is sensible to make terms,  
Foolish to be stubborn.  
Though heaven may prefer no person,  
A sane person prefers heaven.*

## Eighty

生

*If the land is small, and its people few  
 With tenfold enough to occupy each in full measure  
 And if no one has taught them how to waste  
 What must suffice for all in the land:  
 Then not a boat, nor a cart  
 Can tempt the people to leave;  
 Not a sword, nor a whip  
 Is needed to encourage them.  
 People reckon simply,  
 Relish plain food set on a plain table,  
 Wear plain clothing that suits their need;  
 They remain content to  
 Live in homes their customs and habits can  
 Easily afford.  
 And should another town be located so close  
 that you might hear its dogs barking and roosters crowing,  
 These people are so glad of their own lives  
 They know so well  
 That they have no need to visit any other place.*



## Eighty-one



*Real words are not in vain,  
Vain words are not real;  
And since those who argue prove nothing  
A sensible person does not argue.  
Sensible people are wiser than they know,  
While a fool knows more than is wise.  
Therefore, a sensible person does not devise resources:  
The greater my use to others  
The greater their use to me,  
The more I yield to others  
The more they yield to me.  
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