

# Tao Te Ching

a modern interpretation of Lao Tzu  
perpetrated by Ron Hogan  
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(see back for details)

## FOREWORD

"Ancient Chinese Secret, Huh?"

In the spring of 1994, I was handed a master's degree in film studies and politely invited not to return to graduate school in the fall. So I went to work at Dutton's, a fantastic indie bookstore in Brentwood, less than a mile from the Simpson condo, but that's another story. Doug, the owner, lets his employees borrow books from the inventory, on the principle that you can sell books better if you know them better, and that's how I discovered the Tao Te Ching (or TTC, as I'll abbreviate it from now on).

Oh, I knew about the book beforehand. I knew it existed, anyway, and I knew it was a classic of Eastern philosophy. But that's all I knew. Not that there's that much to know after that, about all anybody can really say about Lao Tzu is that according to legend, about six centuries before Christ, he got fed up with the royal court's inability to take his advice and decided to leave. Then, the story goes, he was stopped at the Great Wall by a guard who begged him to write down some of his teachings for posterity, and the result was this slim volume. Once I actually started to read the thing, I was hooked. Here was a book that managed to say with clarity what I'd been struggling to figure out about spirituality for several years.

The TTC I found at Dutton's was written by Stephen Mitchell, a version which remains popular nearly twenty years after its original composition. Having read a couple dozen translations since, it's still one of the most accessible versions I've seen, but even then, I found his style a bit too refined, too full of a certain "wisdom of

the ancients" flavor. For example, here's how Mitchell starts the first chapter:

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

At the time, I was newly infatuated with the writing of Quentin Tarantino and David Mamet, so my dream version of a TTC reflected the simplicity and grit of their dialogue:

"If you can talk about it, it ain't Tao.  
If it has a name, it's just another thing."

Anyway, I grabbed a couple other translations and started looking at the different ways they expressed the same sentiments--or, as I quickly discovered, how much poetic license Mitchell and other translators were willing to take with the original text. I don't think this necessarily matters all that much; many current English-language versions are by people who don't know Chinese well, if at all, and I can't read or speak it myself. To that extent, then, we're \*all\* (unless we're fluent in Chinese, that is) at the mercy of, at best, a secondhand understanding of what Lao Tzu said.

Once I thought I had a rough idea what was behind the words, though, I went about rephrasing the chapters in my own voice. My guiding principle was to take out as much of the "poetry" as possible, to make the text sound like dialogue, so the reader could imagine someone telling him or her what Tao's all about. You can't take the "poetry" out completely, because the TTC is always going to have those lines about Tao being an

"eternal mystery" and whatnot.

But the beauty of the book isn't in its language, at least not for me--it's in the practical advice Lao Tzu offers us about how to live a productive, meaningful life on a day to day basis. What I wanted to do was to make that advice as clear to a modern American reader as it would have been to the guard who first asked Lao Tzu to write it down.

I worked through the first twenty chapters, then put the rough draft up on my website under a pseudonym I used online back in those days. A bunch of fan mail came in, so I kept plugging away at the text, then my hard drive collapsed and all my files were completely erased. I was freelancing pretty steadily then, and what little free time I had I spent building my own website, so the TTC went on hold. I got an occasional email asking about the other chapters, and I developed a stock answer. When it was time for me to finish the job, I told people, I would.

Years went by. I'd left LA for San Francisco, then moved up to Seattle, chasing after big dotcom money. It was great for a while, but as Lao Tzu says, "If you give things too much value, you're going to get ripped off." In the middle of the worst of the frustration, I rediscovered the Tao Te Ching, and realized I needed to finish what I started.

I dug out all my old copies of the TTC and went shopping for more versions, some of which were even better than the ones I'd found the first time. Brian Browne Walker's translation comes close to the modern oral quality I was striving for, though his voice is still much more of an "Eastern sage" voice than mine. David

Hinton is somewhat more poetic, but I think he does a wonderful job of capturing what Lao Tzu may have actually sounded like to his contemporaries. And Ursula K. LeGuin strikes a balance between the modern and classical voices that gave me a new perspective on Tao; her commentaries on several chapters are enlightening as well.

I wish I could say that I wrote the remaining sixty-one chapters in a hurried creative frenzy, but things took a little longer than I thought. I got distracted by the decision to move to New York City, and though I did get some work done on the book, it was a little over a year later, when (and, yes, I know how cliched this sounds) the planes crashed into the World Trade Center and I realized I'd still been wasting too much of my life on things that didn't pan out. Instead of talking about getting serious about my life, it was time to actually do it. (Living through the following two and a half years has also made me appreciate chapters 30 and 31 a lot more, for reasons that will become readily apparent.)

So here you are--with my own name attached, as the pseudonym has long since fallen away. From a scholar's point of view, this TTC is unfaithful to the original text on more than one occasion, if not in every single line. Case in point: in chapter 20, Lao Tzu didn't exactly say, "Don't spend too much time thinking about stupid shit." For all the liberties I've taken with his words, however, I've made every attempt to stay true to his message, and I hope you'll find something useful in my efforts.

--Ron Hogan  
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*PART ONE*  
*TAO (THE WAY)*

1.

If you can talk about it,  
it ain't Tao.  
If it has a name,  
it's just another thing.

Tao doesn't have a name.  
Names are for ordinary things.

Stop wanting stuff;  
it keeps you from seeing what's real.  
When you want stuff,  
all you see are things.

Those two sentences  
mean the same thing.  
Figure them out,  
and you've got it made.

2.

If something looks beautiful to you,  
something else must be ugly.  
If something seems good,  
something else must seem bad.

You can't have  
something without nothing.  
If no job is difficult,  
then no job is easy.  
Some things are up high  
because other things are down low.  
You know you're listening to music  
because it doesn't sound like noise.  
All that came first,  
so this must be next.

The Masters get the job done  
without moving a muscle  
and get their point across  
without saying a word.

When things around them fall apart,  
they stay cool.  
They don't own much,  
but they use whatever's at hand.  
They do the work  
without expecting any favors.  
When they're done,  
they move on to the next job.  
That's why their work is so damn good.

3.

If you toss compliments around freely,  
people will waste your time  
trying to impress you.  
If you give things too much value,  
you're going to get ripped off.  
If you try to please people,  
you'll just make them pissed.

The Master leads  
by clearing the crap  
out of people's heads  
and opening their hearts.  
He lowers their aspirations  
and makes them suck in their guts.

He shows you how to forget  
what you know and what you want,  
so nobody can push you around.  
If you think you've got the answers,  
he'll mess with your head.

Stop doing stuff all the time,  
and watch what happens.

4.

How much Tao is there?  
More than you'll ever need.  
Use all you want,  
there's plenty more  
where that came from.

You can't see Tao, but it's there.  
Damned if I know where it came from.  
It's just always been around.

5.

Tao's neutral:  
it doesn't worry about good or evil.  
The Masters are neutral:  
they treat everyone the same.

Lao Tzu said Tao is like a bellows:  
It's empty,  
but it could help set the world on fire.  
If you keep using Tao, it works better.  
If you keep talking about it,  
it won't make any sense.

Be cool.

6.

Tao is an eternal mystery,  
and everything starts with Tao.

Everybody has Tao in them.  
They just have to use it.

7.

Tao never stops. Why?  
Because it isn't trying to accomplish anything.

The Masters hang back.  
That's why they're ahead of the game.

They don't hang on to things.  
That's how they manage to keep them.

They don't worry  
about what they can't control.  
That's why they're always satisfied.



8.

"Doing the right thing" is like water.  
It's good for all living things, and flows without thinking  
about where it's going

...just like Tao.

Keep your feet on the ground.  
Remember what's important.  
Be there when people need you.  
Say what you mean.  
Be prepared for anything.  
Do whatever you can,  
whenever it needs doing.

If you don't  
compare yourself to others,  
nobody can compare to you.

9.

If you drink too much, you get drunk.  
The engine won't start  
if you're always tinkering with it.

If you hoard wealth,  
you fall into its clutches.  
If you crave success,  
you succumb to failure.

Do what you have to do,  
then walk away.  
Anything else will drive you nuts.

10.

Can you hold on to your ego  
and still stay focused on Tao?

Can you relax your mind and body  
and brace yourself for a new life?

Can you check yourself  
and see past  
what's in front of your eyes?

Can you be a leader  
and not try to prove you're in charge?

Can you deal with what's happening  
and let it happen?

Can you forget what you know  
and understand what's real?

Start a job and see it through.  
Have things  
without holding on to them.  
Do the job  
without expectation of reward.  
Lead people  
without giving orders.  
That's the way you do it.

11.

A wheel has spokes,  
but it rotates around a hollow center.

A pot is made out of clay or glass,  
but you keep things in the space inside.

A house is made of wood or brick,  
but you live between the walls.

We work with something,  
but we use nothing.

12.

Sight obscures.  
Noise deafens.

Desire messes with your heart.  
The world messes with your mind.

A Master watches the world  
but keeps focused on what's real.

13.

Winning can be just as bad as losing.  
Confidence can mess you up  
just as much as fear.

What does  
"winning can be just as bad as losing" mean?

If you're down,  
you might be able to get up.  
But if you're up,  
you can get knocked down real fast.  
Don't worry about the score,  
just do what you have to do.

What does  
"confidence can mess you up  
just as much as fear" mean?

Fear can keep you  
from getting the job done,  
but confidence  
can get you in over your head.  
Walk tall, but don't get cocky.

Know your limits,  
and nothing can ever hold you back.  
Deal with what you can.  
The rest will follow.

14.

You can't see Tao,  
no matter how hard you look.  
You can't hear Tao,  
no matter how hard you listen.  
You can't hold on to Tao,  
no matter how hard you grab.

But it's there.

It's in you, and it's all around you.

Remember that.

15.

The ancient Masters  
were damn impressive.  
They were deep. Real deep.  
Words can't even begin to describe  
how deep they were.  
You can only talk  
about how they acted.

They were careful,  
like a man walking on thin ice.  
They were cautious,  
like a soldier behind enemy lines.  
They were polite,  
like a guest at a party.  
They moved quickly, like melting ice.  
They were as plain as a block of wood.  
Their minds were as wide as a valley,  
and their hearts as clear  
as spring water.

Can you wait  
for that kind of openness and clarity  
before you try to understand the world?

Can you hold still  
until events have unfolded  
before you do the right thing?

When you act without expectations,  
you can accomplish great things.

16.

Keep your head clear.  
Stay calm.  
Watch  
as everything happens around you.

Everything reverts  
to its original state,  
which was nothing.  
And when something becomes nothing,  
it gets right with Tao.

If you don't understand that,  
you're going to screw up  
somewhere down the line.  
If you figure it out,  
you'll always know what to do.

If you get right with Tao,  
you won't be afraid to die,  
because you know you will.

17.

When a Master takes charge,  
hardly anybody notices.  
The next best leader  
is obeyed out of love.  
After that,  
there's the leader obeyed out of fear.  
The worst leader is one who is hated.

Trust and respect people.  
That's how you earn  
their trust and respect.

The Masters don't give orders;  
they work with everybody else.  
When the job's done,  
people are amazed  
at what they accomplished.

18.

When people lose touch with Tao,  
they start talking about  
"righteousness" and "sanctity."

When people forget what's true,  
they start talking about  
"self-evident truths."

When people have no respect  
for one another,  
they start talking about  
"political correctness"  
and "family values."

When the nation is unstable,  
people start talking about "patriotism."

19.

Get rid of sanctity.  
People will understand the truth  
and be happier.

Get rid of morality.  
People will respect each other  
and do what's right.

Get rid of value and profit.  
People will not steal  
if they do not desire.

If that's not possible, go to Plan B:  
Be simple. Be real.  
Do your work as best you can.  
Don't think about what you get for it.  
Stay focused. Get rid of all your crap.

20.

Don't spend too much time  
thinking about stupid shit.  
Why should you care  
if people agree or disagree with you?  
Why should you care  
if others find you attractive or not?  
Why should you care  
about things that worry others?  
Call bullshit on all that.

Let other people  
get worked up  
and try to enjoy themselves.  
I'm not going to give myself away.  
A baby doesn't know how to smile,  
but it's still happy.

Let other people  
get excited about stuff.  
I'm not going to hang on to anything.  
I'm not going to fill my mind with ideas.  
I'm not going to get stuck in a rut,  
tied down to any one place.

Other people are clever;  
I guess I must be stupid.  
Other people have goals;  
I guess I must be aimless.  
Like the wind. Or the waves.

I'm not like other people.  
I'm getting right with Tao.

21.

A Master stays focused on Tao.  
Nothing else, just Tao.

But you can't pin Tao down--  
you can't even see it!  
How are you supposed to focus on something like that?

Just remember what Lao Tzu said:  
The universe began as a void.  
The void fills with images.  
Images lead to the creation of objects.  
And every object has Tao at its core.

That's the way it's been,  
ever since the world began.  
How can I be so sure?  
I just know.

22.

Learn how to stand still  
if you want to go places.  
Get on your knees  
if you want to stand tall.  
If you want wisdom,  
empty your mind.  
If you want the world,  
renounce your riches.  
Push yourself until you're exhausted,  
and then you'll find your strength.

You can go far  
if you don't have anything to carry.  
The more you acquire,  
the less you can really see.

A Master takes this to heart  
and sets an example  
for everybody else.

She doesn't show off  
so people take notice.  
She's not out to prove anything  
so people take her at her word.  
She doesn't brag about herself  
but people know what she's done.  
She hasn't got an agenda  
but people know what she can do.  
She's not out to get anybody  
so nobody can get in her way.

"Learn how to stand still  
if you want to go places."  
That's not as crazy as it sounds.  
Get in touch with Tao,  
and you'll see what I mean.



23.

When you have nothing to say,  
you may as well keep your mouth shut.  
The wind and the rain  
don't go on forever.  
If nature knows enough  
to give it a rest sometimes,  
so should you.

If you're ready for Tao,  
you can live with Tao.  
If you're ready to succeed,  
you can live with success.  
If you're ready to fail,  
you can live with failure.

Trust your instincts,  
and others will trust you.

24.

Keep your feet firmly planted  
unless you want to fall on your face.  
Learn how to pace yourself  
if you want to get anywhere.  
Don't call attention to yourself  
if you want people to notice your work.

Nobody respects people  
who always have excuses.  
Nobody gives credit to people  
who always take it.  
People who hype themselves  
have nothing else to offer.

Think of being in touch with Tao  
like eating at a buffet:  
Take only what you need.  
Save some for everybody else.

25.

Something perfect  
has existed forever,  
even longer than the universe.  
It's a vast, unchanging void.  
There's nothing else like it.  
It goes on forever and never stops,  
and everything else came from it.

I don't know what else to call it  
so I'll call it Tao.  
What's it like?  
I can tell you this much: it's great.

So great that it endures.  
Something that endures  
goes a long way.  
And something that goes a long way  
always comes back to the beginning.

Tao's great.  
Heaven's great.  
Earth's great.  
And someone in touch with Tao  
is great, too.  
Those are the four greatest things  
in the universe.

Someone who's in touch with Tao  
is in touch with the earth.  
The earth is in touch with heaven.  
Heaven's in touch with Tao.  
Tao's in touch with the way things are.

26.

To be light on your feet,  
you need a steady mind.  
If your body is active,  
your mind should be relaxed.

A Master can travel long distances  
and still see everything she owns.  
She may be surrounded by beauty  
but she isn't caught up in it.

Why run around thoughtlessly?  
If you act lightly,  
you lose your bearings.  
If you act recklessly,  
you lose your self-control.

27.

With enough practice,  
you could come and go without a trace,  
speak without stumbling over words,  
do complicated math problems  
in your head.

You could build a door with no lock  
that nobody could open.  
You could tie something down  
with no knots,  
without even a rope,  
and nobody could pry it loose.

Masters have time to help everybody,  
and ignore nobody.  
They use their resources wisely,  
wasting nothing.  
Some people call this  
"following the light."

Good people teach others  
because they have the potential  
to be good too.  
Brains count for nothing  
if you fail to respect your teachers  
or to honor the potential in others.  
That's one of the most important lessons of Tao.

28.

If you are strong,  
but remain sensitive,  
power will flow through you.  
With that power,  
you'll always be right with Tao:  
It's like a whole new life.

If you are idealistic,  
but stay rooted in reality,  
you are an example to others.  
Set that example,  
and you'll always be right with Tao:  
There is no limit to what you can do.

If you are honorable,  
but remain humble,  
you will see things as they are.  
If you see things as they are,  
you'll always be right with Tao:  
Your life will become simple,  
yet full of potential.

Let Tao show you  
how to get right with Tao,  
so your slightest gesture  
can change the world.

29.

Want to take over the world?  
Think again.  
The world's a holy place.  
You can't just fuck around with it.  
Those who try to change it destroy it.  
Those who try to possess it lose it.

With Tao, you push forward,  
or maybe you stay behind.  
Sometimes you push yourself,  
other times you rest.  
Sometimes you're strong,  
sometimes you're weak.  
Sometimes you're up,  
and sometimes you're down.

A Master lives simply,  
avoiding extravagance and excess.

30.

Listen up:  
If you want to be a leader  
who's in touch with Tao,  
never use violence  
to achieve your goals.

Every act of violence backfires.  
An army on the move  
leaves a trail of tears,  
and a military victory  
always lies in ruins.

The Masters do what needs doing  
and that's all they do.  
Do what you have to do  
without arrogance or pride.  
Get the job done  
and don't brag about it afterwards.  
Do what you have to do,  
not for your own benefit,  
but because it needs to be done.  
And don't do it the way  
you think it should be done,  
do it the way it needs to be done.

The mighty will always lose their power  
and any connection  
they ever had to Tao.  
They will not last long;  
if you're not right with Tao,  
you might as well be dead.

31.

Weapons are terrible things.  
If you want to get right with Tao,  
reject weapons.

The Master,  
knowing all things came from Tao,  
recognizes what he has in common  
with his enemies  
and always tries to avoid conflict.

But when there is no other choice,  
he uses force reluctantly.  
He does so with great restraint,  
and never celebrates a victory;  
to do so would be to rejoice in killing.  
A person who would rejoice in killing  
has completely lost touch with Tao.

When you win a war,  
you preside over a funeral.  
Pay your respects to the dead.

32.

Tao is an eternal mystery,  
so small you can never take hold of it.

If a leader gets right with Tao,  
people will follow him on instinct.  
All will be right with the world.  
People will do the right thing  
without being told.

Everything that comes from Tao  
needs a name.  
But once everything has its name,  
you should make no other distinction between things.  
This prevents you  
from becoming trapped by them.

Everything in the universe is full of Tao  
and leads to Tao,  
just like the water in rivers  
that flows into oceans.

33.

Knowing things makes you smart,  
but knowing yourself makes you wise.  
To rule others, you must be powerful,  
but to rule yourself,  
you must be strong.

If you have only what you need,  
you have true wealth.  
If you never give up,  
you will find a way.  
If you stay true to yourself,  
you will never be lost.  
If you stay alive your whole life,  
you've really lived.

34.

Tao flows in all directions.  
It's in everything,  
but nothing can contain it.  
Everything needs Tao,  
so Tao provides,  
and never expects anything in return.

Everything comes from Tao,  
but Tao doesn't call attention to itself.  
It wants for nothing.  
Think nothing of it.

Everything leads to Tao,  
but Tao doesn't call attention to itself.  
Pretty impressive, huh?

It doesn't strive for success.  
That's why it succeeds.

35.

When you get right with Tao,  
everybody wants to be your friend.  
When they're around you,  
they can relax and enjoy themselves.

People can be easily distracted  
by music or good food.  
When we try to talk about Tao,  
it seems boring by comparison.

It doesn't look like much.  
It doesn't sound like much.  
But no matter how much you use,  
there's still plenty left.

36.

To make something smaller,  
you need to appreciate its size.  
To make something weaker,  
you must recognize its strength.  
To get rid of something,  
you need to hold it tight.  
To take something,  
you must give it up entirely.

To put it another way:  
Sensitivity and weakness  
overcome unfeeling strength.

37.

Tao never does anything  
but nothing is left undone.

If our leaders  
could get in touch with Tao,  
the world would take care of itself.  
Even if they wanted  
to impose their own ideas,  
they'd be drawn back to Tao's  
nameless simplicity.

When our lives are that simple,  
we want for nothing.  
We can relax,  
and the world becomes a better place.

*PART TWO*  
*TE (POWER)*



38.

People with integrity  
don't even think about it.  
That's how you can tell  
they have integrity.  
Other people talk about  
how much integrity they have,  
when they really don't have much.  
If any.

Truly powerful people  
don't do anything,  
but they get the job done.  
Other people are always busy  
doing something,  
but nothing ever gets done.

When kind people act,  
they do so without thinking about it.  
When the just act,  
they're always sure  
they're doing the right thing.  
But when the righteous act,  
and nobody reacts,  
they try to force everyone  
to do things their way.

If you're not in touch with Tao,  
at least you can still have integrity.  
If you don't have integrity,  
there's always kindness.  
If you don't have kindness,  
there's always justice.  
If you don't have justice,  
all you have left is righteousness.

Righteousness is an pale imitation  
of true faith and loyalty,  
and always leads to trouble.  
If you've already made up your mind,  
you don't know the first thing about Tao,  
and you never will.

The Masters pay attention  
to what's beneath the surface.  
They'll look at a tree's leaves,  
but eat the fruit.  
They turn all that down,  
so they can accept this.

39.

Since time began,  
this is what it's meant  
to be in touch with Tao:

Tao made the heavens clear.  
Tao made the earth solid.  
Tao made our spirits strong.  
Tao made the valleys fertile.  
Tao gave all living things life.  
Tao gave rulers authority.

Without Tao,  
the heavens would collapse.  
Without Tao,  
the earth would crumble.  
Without Tao,  
our spirits would fade away.  
Without Tao,  
the valleys would dry up.  
Without Tao,  
all life would become extinct.  
Without Tao,  
rulers would stumble and fall.

Humility gives us power.  
Our leaders should think of themselves  
as insignificant, powerless,  
unworthy of their stature.  
Isn't that what humility is all about?

Be strong,  
but pay no attention to hollow praise.  
Don't call attention to yourself.  
Don't make a scene.

40.

Tao is always heading  
back to where it came from.  
Tao advances by not pressing forward.

Things exist because they are.  
They are because they once were not.

41.

When a wise person hears about Tao,  
he gets right with it.  
When an ordinary person  
hears about Tao,  
he tries to get right with it,  
but eventually gives up.  
When a fool hears about Tao,  
he just laughs and laughs.  
If he didn't laugh, it wouldn't be Tao.

Here's what they find so funny:  
The path to enlightenment  
seems covered in shadows.  
The way forward  
feels like taking a step back.  
The easiest path seems difficult.  
Those with the most virtue  
seem debased.  
Those who are most pure  
seem to be grubby and soiled.  
The deepest thoughts appear shallow.  
The greatest strength  
looks like weakness.  
What is most real  
strikes us as imaginary.  
The largest space has no boundaries.  
The greatest talent  
seems to produce nothing.  
The greatest voice is unhearable.  
The greatest beauty is invisible.

Tao is hidden to us  
and it has no name.  
It is the source and the strength of all things.

42.

Chapter 42 starts out  
with some cosmic mumbo-jumbo  
about Tao making one,  
one making two,  
two making three,  
and three making everything else.

I don't know what it means,  
and, frankly,  
I wouldn't worry about it too much.

Let's get to the practical part:  
Men hate to be called powerless, insignificant, or  
unworthy,  
but that's how  
Masters describe themselves.

Because when we lose, we've won.  
And when we succeed, we've failed.

Other people will tell you  
what I'm telling you now:  
"Live by the sword, die by the sword."  
That's pretty much what Chapter 42  
boils down to.  
(See Chapter 46 for more details.)

43.

The softest force in the universe  
can overcome the hardest of objects.  
Something without substance  
can pass through the space between atoms.

That's how I know  
about the power of doing nothing.

The silent teachings  
and the power of doing nothing  
can only be understood  
by a few people.

44.

What's more important,  
fame or your well-being?  
What's worth more,  
your money or your life?  
What is more dangerous,  
winning or losing?

If you are too attached  
to your possessions,  
they will bring you misery.  
If you hang on to your riches,  
you will suffer substantial loss.  
If you know when you have enough,  
you will never be disgraced.  
If you practice moderation,  
you can stay out of trouble.

And that's the secret to lasting success.

45.

The greatest achievements  
may look like mistakes,  
but you will always be able  
to build upon them.

The fullest reserves may seem empty,  
but you will always be able  
to draw upon them.

The straightest line looks crooked.  
The most skilled people  
come off as clumsy.  
The most eloquent people  
are usually silent.

When it's cold,  
you can move around to stay warm.  
When it's hot,  
you should keep still and stay cool.  
But whatever the weather,  
if you stay calm,  
the world will sort itself out around you.

46.

"When the world is right with Tao,"  
Lao Tzu said,  
"horses haul fertilizer to the fields.  
When the world loses touch with Tao,  
horses are trained for cavalry."

Nothing is more insidious than possession.  
Nothing is more dangerous than desire.  
Nothing is more disastrous than greed.

If you know when enough is enough,  
you will always have enough.

47.

You don't have to leave your room  
to understand what's happening in the world.

You don't have to look out the window  
to appreciate the beauty of heaven.

The farther you wander,  
the less you know.

The Masters don't wander around  
They know.  
They don't just look.  
They understand.  
They don't do anything,  
but the work gets done.

48.

Usually,  
we try to learn something new every day.

But if we want to get right with Tao,  
we have to let go of something every day.

We do less and less,  
until we end up doing nothing.  
And it's when we do nothing  
that we get the job done.

Let events take their course,  
and everything will turn out  
in your favor.  
If you act on your ambitions,  
they will never pan out.

49.

The Masters  
don't make up their minds.  
They turn their thoughts  
to other people.

They are good to good people,  
and they're good to bad people.  
This is real goodness.

They have faith in the faithful,  
and they have faith in the unfaithful.  
This is real faith.

A Master throws himself  
into the world completely,  
forgetting everything he's been told.  
People pay attention to him  
because he lives a life of child-like wonder.

50.

People who look  
for the secret of long life  
wind up dead.

Their bodies are the focus of their lives  
and the source of their death,  
because they think a healthy body  
is all there is to life.

Lao Tzu used to say  
a man who truly understood life  
could walk through the jungle  
without fear  
or across a battlefield  
without armor, totally unarmed.  
Wild animals and weapons couldn't kill him.

I know, I know:  
what the hell does that mean?  
"Well, he couldn't be killed,"  
Lao Tzu said,  
"because his body  
wasn't where he kept his death."

51.

Tao is the source of all living things,  
and they are nourished  
by Tao's power.  
They are influenced  
by the other living things around them,  
and they are shaped  
by their circumstances.

Everything respects Tao  
and honors its power.  
That's just the way it is.

Tao gives life to all things,  
and its power watches out for them,  
cares for them, helps them grow,  
protects them, and comforts them.

Create something  
without holding on to it.  
Do the work  
without expecting credit for it.  
Lead people  
without giving them orders.  
That's the secret of the power of Tao.



52.

Everything starts with Tao,  
the mother of all things.  
If you know the mother,  
you know the children.  
If you know the children  
and remember the mother,  
you have nothing to fear in your life.

Shut your mouth and keep still,  
and your life will be full of happiness.  
If you talk all the time,  
always doing something,  
your life will be hopeless.

It takes insight to see subtlety.  
It takes strength  
to yield gently to force.  
Use that strength  
to hang on to your insight,  
and you will always be at peace.  
That's how to get right with Tao.

53.

If I had any sense,  
I'd be trying to get right with Tao,  
and the only thing I'd worry about  
would be messing up.  
It's not that hard to get right with Tao,  
but people are easily distracted.

"When the king's palace is full of treasure,"  
Lao Tzu said,  
"ordinary people's fields  
are smothered with weeds,  
and the food supplies run out."

Today, you see sharply dressed people  
carrying flashy weapons  
and living the high life.

They own more  
than they could ever use,  
let alone need.

They're nothing  
but gangsters and crooks.  
That's not what Tao's about.

54.

Tao's power is so deeply entrenched  
it can never be uprooted.  
Tao's power clings so tightly  
it can never slip away.  
It will endure for generations.

If you get in touch  
with the power of Tao,  
it will become real.  
If your family gets in touch  
with the power of Tao,  
the power will flourish.

If your community gets in touch  
with the power of Tao,  
the power will grow even stronger.  
If your country gets in touch  
with the power of Tao,  
the power will become abundant.

If the world gets in touch  
with the power of Tao,  
the power will be everywhere.

How can I know this?  
I just do.

55.

A person filled with the power of Tao  
is like a baby boy:  
bees can't sting him,  
wild beasts can't attack him.

A baby has soft bones  
and weak muscles,  
but a firm grip.  
He hasn't had sex,  
but he can get an erection.  
That's because he's got lots of energy.  
He can cry all day  
and never lose his voice.  
That's because he's at one with his world.

If you're at one with the world,  
you know constancy.  
And if you know constancy,  
you've been enlightened.

It's not healthy  
to try to prolong your life.  
It's unnatural to impose the mind's will  
upon the body.  
People waste time and energy  
trying to be strong or beautiful,  
and their strength and beauty fade.  
They've lost touch with Tao,  
and when you lose touch with Tao,  
you might as well be dead.

56.

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

Shut your mouth.  
Be still. Relax.  
Let go of your worries.  
Stay out of the spotlight.  
Be at one with the world  
and get right with Tao.

If you get right with Tao,  
you won't be worried  
about praise or scorn,  
about winning or losing,  
about honor or disgrace.  
That's the way to be.

57.

You can run a country  
by sticking to principles,  
and you can win a war  
with strategy and tactics.  
But you can gain the entire world  
by doing nothing at all.

How do I know this?  
I've seen it happen:  
The more restrictions  
a nation imposes,  
the poorer its people become.  
When a nation hoards weapons,  
troubles arise from within  
and from without.  
When its leaders try  
to be cunning and clever,  
the situation spins  
further out of control.  
When they try to fix things  
by passing more laws,  
they only increase the number of outlaws.

A wise leader says to himself:  
"I do nothing,  
and people transform themselves.  
I keep silent,  
and they do the right thing  
on their own.  
I stay out of the way,  
and they prosper.  
I want for nothing,  
and they lead simple lives."

58.

When a nation is ruled  
with a light touch,  
people lead simple lives.  
When a government  
is harsh and demanding,  
people will spend their time  
trying to outsmart it.

Happiness is rooted in misery,  
and misery lurks beneath all joy.  
Who knows what could happen tomorrow?

Everything is relative;  
what's considered proper today  
may become improper.  
Correct appearances  
may hide dishonesty and sinfulness.

No wonder so many people get confused.

The Masters have sharp minds,  
not sharp tongues.  
They are austere,  
but never judgmental.  
They are straightforward,  
but not provocative.  
They are brilliant,  
but not flashy.

59.

Leadership is based on moderation.  
Practice moderation,  
and you'll get in touch  
with the power of Tao.

If you get right with Tao,  
nothing is impossible.  
If you get right with Tao,  
there's no limit to what you can do.  
If you get right with Tao,  
you can be a true leader.

Remember this advice  
if you want to be a leader:  
Plant deep roots in firm soil.  
Get right with Tao,  
and you'll always see things clearly.

60.

Being a leader  
is like cooking a small fish;  
get right with Tao,  
and it's quick and easy.

When you're in touch with Tao,  
you don't need to worry  
about misfortune.  
You can't make it go away, of course,  
but you can keep it  
from harming other people.

Also, as a wise leader,  
you cause no harm to others,  
so people won't have to worry  
about getting hurt,  
and they'll take the opportunity  
to do the right thing.

61.

Power flows down  
to every level of existence  
like a river to the ocean.

Victory comes  
from lying perfectly still  
and waiting for power  
to come your way.

If you yield to someone  
less powerful than yourself,  
you will be in a position  
to influence them.

If you submit to someone  
more powerful than yourself,  
you create an opportunity  
to get your own way.

So if you want to get ahead,  
lay low and bide your time.  
That way, everybody's happy.

62.

Every living thing  
gets its strength from Tao.  
Good people respect the value of Tao.  
The wicked and foolish don't,  
but Tao provides for them anyway.

Some people gain power and prestige  
through fancy words,  
others through great deeds.  
But Tao is available to everyone,  
not just the powerful.  
So don't look down on anybody.

When people become powerful,  
and everybody lines up  
to kiss their ass,  
sit still and stay right with Tao.

Why have the Masters  
always respected Tao?  
Because when you get right with Tao,  
you can always find  
what you need to get by,  
and trouble can never find you.

63.

Keep still.  
Don't work so hard.  
Learn to appreciate everyday life.  
Pay attention to details.  
Start small and work your way up.  
When people give you trouble,  
let it slide.

Break everything down to its essentials.  
Get the job done  
before it becomes a chore.

With the right preparation,  
difficult tasks  
can be completed with ease;  
every major project  
consists of simple steps.

The Masters don't take on  
more than they can handle,  
which is why  
they can do just about anything.

Don't promise  
more than you can deliver,  
and don't underestimate the task:  
You'll only make things harder for yourself.

The Masters are always aware  
of the difficulties involved,  
which is why  
they never have to deal with them.

64.

It's easy to maintain balance.  
Trouble can be nipped in the bud.  
Fragile things break easily,  
and small things are easy to lose.

Deal with the situation  
before it becomes a problem.  
Keep everything straight  
so it can't get messed up.

Every tree was once a seed.  
Every skyscraper started out  
with a shovelful of dirt.  
And--stop me if you've heard this one before--  
a journey of a thousand miles  
begins with a single step.

When you try too hard,  
you defeat your own purpose.  
Cling to stuff,  
and you will suffer loss.  
The Masters make no effort,  
so they never fail.  
They aren't attached to things,  
so they never feel loss.

People often screw up  
when the job's nearly done.  
Pay as much attention  
to the finishing touches  
as you do to the initial steps,  
and you won't screw up like that.

The Masters try to be free from desire.  
They don't collect precious things.  
They don't cling to any beliefs.  
They pay attention  
to what everybody else ignores.  
They help the world get right with Tao,  
but don't try to change a thing.

65.

In ancient times,  
leaders who were right with Tao  
didn't teach everybody  
how to become enlightened.  
They kept people's lives simple.

People who know too much  
can't be taught anything.  
Leaders who try to be clever  
always screw things up.  
Leaders who keep things simple  
always make things right.

If you get that,  
you'll understand  
the mysterious power of Tao.

That kind of power is so deep,  
so extensive,  
it penetrates into every level of existence.

66.

An ocean is greater  
than the hundred rivers  
that flow into it,  
and all it does is wait  
to receive what they bring.

If you want to teach people,  
don't talk down to them.  
If you want to lead them,  
find out where they want to go.

People love leaders  
who make them feel safe  
without smothering them.  
They'll always support  
a leader like that,  
and because he doesn't try  
to compete with anybody,  
nobody is able to compete with him.



67.

Everywhere I go, people tell me,  
"Tao is so powerful, so immense,  
it's inconceivable!"

But it's only powerful  
because it's inconceivable.  
If we could wrap our minds around it,  
Tao would be just another thing.

The three most important qualities in life are  
compassion, or showing kindness and mercy to others,  
moderation, or knowing what a thing is worth, and  
modesty, or knowing your place in the world.

Courage stems from showing  
kindness and mercy to others.  
Generosity starts with knowing  
what a thing is worth.  
True leadership begins with knowing  
your place in the world.

But these days,  
I see everyone trying to act courageous  
without any trace of compassion.  
They try to be generous  
but they don't practice moderation  
in their own lives.  
They act like leaders,  
but they have no sense of modesty.  
No good can come of this.

If you want to get ahead,  
show people compassion.  
When other people attack you,  
defend yourself with compassion.  
It's the most powerful force in the universe.

68.

A true warrior never uses force  
with an attitude of pride or anger.  
A true victor  
does not pursue vengeance.  
A true leader shows humility.

This is the power of modesty.  
It's the best way to deal with people.  
It's always been an excellent way  
to get right with Tao.

69.

There's an old military saying:  
"I'd rather face an attack  
than have to make one.  
I'd rather retreat a foot  
than try to advance an inch."

That's the secret to moving forward  
while staying put,  
preparing for battle  
without revealing your strength.

When you defend yourself  
without any show of force,  
you give your opponent  
nothing to fight.

Attacking an enemy  
you've underestimated  
is a costly mistake.  
When two forces oppose each other,  
the winner is the one most reluctant to fight.

70.

Lao Tzu's advice  
was easy to understand  
and easy to follow.  
But nobody understood him  
or did what he suggested.

His words  
stemmed from ancient wisdom,  
and his actions were highly disciplined.  
People didn't get that,  
which is why  
they didn't understand him.  
And the less they understood him,  
the more meaningful his advice became.

That's why the Masters live simply,  
hiding their wisdom deep within themselves.

71.

If you know  
what you don't know,  
you're doing great.  
If you don't know  
what you don't know,  
you're sick.

The only way  
to get rid of that sickness  
is to be sick of it.

The Masters aren't sick,  
because they got sick of being sick.

72.

When you show no fear at all,  
the universe gives you something  
to really be afraid of.

Don't try to fence people in  
or grind them down.  
Just let them be,  
and they'll always be on your side.

The Masters know themselves,  
but they don't reveal themselves.  
They love themselves,  
but they know  
what their lives are worth.  
They let go of all that  
to concentrate on this.

73.

Those who dare to be bold die.  
Those who dare to be careful survive.  
So--what do you want to do?

Why is life like that, you ask?  
I don't know.

This is how Tao works:  
It doesn't push itself,  
and it always succeeds.  
It acts silently, and it always reacts.  
It can't be summoned;  
it comes whenever it's ready.  
It can't be rushed; it's always on time.

"Heaven casts a wide net,  
with big holes,"  
Lao Tzu used to say,  
"but nothing ever gets by it."

74.

If people's lives suck,  
and they look forward to death,  
what good does it do  
to threaten to kill them?

If people are afraid to die,  
and the wicked are condemned to death,  
then who would dare to commit evil?

But that doesn't mean you or I  
can just take life and death  
into our own hands.  
That'd be like walking up  
to an industrial buzzsaw  
and trying to use it  
without any training.  
We'd only end up hurting ourselves.

75.

People starve  
because the government  
taxes them to death.  
People rebel  
because the government  
tries to run their lives.  
People act like life is meaningless  
because the government  
takes everything they have.

People who know how to enjoy life  
are wiser than people who value their lives.

76.

A baby's body is soft and gentle.  
A corpse is hard and stiff.  
Plants and trees are tender  
and full of sap.  
Dead leaves are brittle and dry.

If you are rigid and unyielding,  
you might as well be dead.  
If you are soft and flexible,  
you are truly alive.

Soldiers trained to fight to the death will die.  
A tree that cannot bend with the wind  
will snap.

Here's a useful saying:  
The harder they come,  
the harder they fall.

Here's another:  
The meek shall inherit the earth.

77.

Lao Tzu said using Tao  
was like pulling on a bowstring:  
The top bends down,  
the bottom bends up,  
and all the energy  
is focused in the middle.

Tao takes energy from where it is,  
and sends it where it needs to be.  
But most people take from those  
who don't have enough,  
so those who have too much already  
can have more.

So who in this world  
is truly generous to others?  
People who are in touch with Tao.  
They do their work  
without taking credit.  
They get the job done and move on.  
They aren't interested in showing off.

78.

Nothing is softer  
or more yielding  
than water.  
Yet, given time,  
it can erode even the hardest stone.  
That's how the weak  
can defeat the strong,  
and the supple  
can win out over the stiff.

Everybody knows it.  
So why don't we apply it to our own lives?

Lao Tzu used to say:  
"Take on people's problems,  
and you can be their leader.  
Deal with the world's problems,  
and you'll be a Master."

Sometimes the truth makes no sense.

79.

Sometimes,  
when an argument is settled,  
feelings of resentment still remain  
on either side.  
What's the point of carrying a grudge?

The Masters care  
about what they owe other people,  
not what other people owe them.

People who are in touch with Tao  
do their duty.  
People who aren't  
try to force others into submission.

Tao doesn't play favorites.  
But if you do right by Tao,  
Tao will do right by you.

80.

Lao Tzu had a dream  
about a small country  
with very few people.

They didn't need machines  
to get their work done faster.  
They took their lives seriously,  
and stayed close to home.

They may have owned  
boats and carriages,  
but they never went anywhere.  
They may have owned weapons,  
but they kept those weapons  
locked up, securely hidden.  
They had so few responsibilities,  
they never had to make a To-Do list  
to remember what had to be done.

They enjoyed simple foods,  
dressed plainly,  
lived comfortably,  
and kept their traditions alive.

And even though  
their neighbors were so close  
they could hear  
the dogs barking at night,  
they had no interest  
in leaving their homes,  
where they grew old peacefully  
and died.

81.

The truth isn't flashy.  
Flashy words aren't true.

Educated people  
aren't always smart.  
Smart people  
don't always have an education.

Good people don't argue.  
People who argue aren't good.

The Masters don't hang on to things.  
They're always doing something  
for other people,  
so they always have more to give.  
They give away  
whatever they have,  
so what they have is worth more.

If you want to get right with Tao,  
help other people, don't hurt them.  
The Masters always work with people,  
never against them.



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