

Taoism

Excerpts from the Tao Te Ching, by Lao-Tzu
Translated by J.H. McDonald, 1996

The Tao Te Ching is generally regarded as the earliest major expression of Taoism and is widely believed to have been written in the sixth century B.C. by philosopher **Lao Tzu** (or “Old Sage”). For the complete translation: www.wam.umd.edu/~stwright/rel/tao/TaoTeChing.html



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The tao that can be described
is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be spoken
is not the eternal Name.

The nameless is the boundary of Heaven and Earth.
The named is the mother of creation.

Freed from desire, you can see the hidden mystery.
By having desire, you can only see what is visibly real.

Yet mystery and reality
emerge from the same source.
This source is called darkness.

Darkness born from darkness.
The beginning of all understanding.

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The Tao of Heaven is eternal,
and the earth is long enduring.
Why are they long enduring?
They do not live for themselves;
thus they are present for all beings.

The Master puts herself last;
And finds herself in the place of authority.
She detaches herself from all things;
Therefore she is united with all things.

She gives no thought to self.
She is perfectly fulfilled.

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Nurture the darkness of your soul
until you become whole.
Can you do this and not fail?
Can you focus your life-breath until you become
supple as a newborn child?
While you cleanse your inner vision
will you be found without fault?
Can you love people and lead them
without forcing your will on them?
When Heaven gives and takes away
can you be content with the outcome?
When you understand all things
can you step back from your own understanding?

Giving birth and nourishing,
making without possessing,
expecting nothing in return.
To grow, yet not to control:
This is the mysterious virtue.

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Five colors blind the eye.
Five notes deafen the ear.
Five flavors makes the palate go stale.
Too much activity deranges the mind.
Too much wealth causes crime.

The Master acts on what she feels and not what she sees.
She shuns the latter, and prefers to seek the former.

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Success is as dangerous as failure,
and we are often our own worst enemy.

What does it mean that success is as dangerous as failure?
He who is superior is also someone's subordinate.
Receiving favor and loosing it both cause alarm.
That is what is meant by success is as dangerous as failure.
What does it mean that we are often our own worst enemy?

The reason I have an enemy is because I have "self".
If I no longer had a "self", I would no longer have an enemy.

Love the whole world as if it were your self;
then you will truly care for all things.

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Forget about knowledge and wisdom,
and people will be a hundred times better off.
Throw away charity and righteousness,
and people will return to brotherly love.
Throw away profit and greed,
and there won't be any thieves.

These three are superficial and aren't enough
to keep us at the center of the circle, so we must also:

Embrace simplicity.
Put others first.
Desire little.

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The greatest virtue you can have
comes from following only the Tao;
which takes a form that is intangible and evasive.

Even though the Tao is intangible and evasive,
we are able to know it exists.
Intangible and evasive, yet it has a manifestation.
Secluded and dark, yet there is a vitality within it.
It's vitality is very genuine.
Within it we can find order.

Since the beginning of time, the Tao has always existed.
It is beyond *existing* and *not existing* .
How do I know where creation comes from?
I look inside myself and see it.

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A good traveler leaves no tracks,
and a skillful speaker is well rehearsed.
A good bookkeeper has an excellent memory,
and a well made door is easy to open and needs no locks.

A good knot needs no rope and it can not come undone.

Thus the Master is willing to help everyone,
and doesn't know the meaning of rejection.
She is there to help all of creation,
and doesn't abandon even the smallest creature.
This is called embracing the light.

What is a good person but a bad person's teacher?
What is a bad person but raw materiel for his teacher?
If you fail to honor your teacher or fail to enjoy your student,
you will become deluded no matter how smart you are.
It is the secret of prime importance.

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Those who know others are intelligent;
those who know themselves are truly wise.
Those who master others are strong;
those who master themselves have true power.

Those who know they have enough are truly wealthy.

Those who persist will reach their goal.

Those who keep their course have a strong will.
Those who embrace death will not perish,
but have life everlasting.

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The highest good is not to seek to do good,
but to allow yourself to become it.
The ordinary person seeks to do good things,
and finds that they can not do them continually.

The Master does not force virtue on others,
thus she is able to accomplish her task.
The ordinary person who uses force,
will find that they accomplish nothing.

The kind person acts from the heart,
and accomplishes a multitude of things.
The righteous person acts out of pity,
yet leaves many things undone.
The moral person will act out of duty,

and when no one will respond
will roll up his sleeves and uses force.

When the Tao is forgotten, there is righteousness.
When righteousness is forgotten, there is morality.
When morality is forgotten, there is the law.
The law is the husk of faith,
and trust is the beginning of chaos.

Our basic understandings are not from the Tao
because they come from the depths of our misunderstanding.
The master abides in the fruit and not in the husk.
She dwells in the Tao,
and not with the things that hide it.
This is how she increases in wisdom.

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The Tao gave birth to One.
The One gave birth to Two.
The Two gave birth to Three.
The Three gave birth to all of creation.

All things carry Yin
yet embrace Yang.
They blend their life breaths
in order to produce harmony.

People despise being orphaned, widowed and poor.
But the noble ones take these as their titles.
In losing, much is gained,
and in gaining, much is lost.

What others teach I too will teach:
"The strong and violent will not die a natural death."

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Without opening your door,
you can know the whole world.
Without looking out your window,
you can understand the way of the Tao.

The more knowledge you seek,
the less you will understand.

The Master understands without leaving,
sees clearly without looking,
accomplishes much without doing anything.

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One who seeks knowledge learns something new every day.
One who seeks the Tao unlearns something new every day.
Less and less remains until you arrive at non-action.
When you arrive at non-action,
nothing will be left undone.

Mastery of the world is achieved
by letting things take their natural course.
You can not master the world by changing the natural way.

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If I understood only one thing,
I would want to use it to follow the Tao.
My only fear would be one of pride.
The Tao goes in the level places,
but people prefer to take the short cuts.

If too much time is spent cleaning the house
the land will become neglected and full of weeds,
and the granaries will soon become empty
because there is no one out working the fields.
To wear fancy clothes and ornaments,
to have your fill of food and drink
and to waste all of your money buying possessions
is called the crime of excess.
Oh, how these things go against the way of the Tao!

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Those who know do not talk.
Those who talk do not know.

Stop talking,
meditate in silence,
blunt your sharpness,
release your worries,
harmonize your inner light,
and become one with the dust.
Doing this is called the dark and mysterious identity.

Those who have achieved the mysterious identity
can not be approached, and they can not be alienated.
They can not be benefited nor harmed.
They can not be made noble nor to suffer disgrace.
This makes them the most noble of all under the heavens.

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The world talks about honoring the Tao,
but you can't tell it from their actions.
Because it is thought of as great,
the world makes light of it.
It seems too easy for anyone to use.

There are three jewels that I cherish:
compassion, moderation, and humility.
With compassion, you will be able to be brave,
With moderation, you will be able to give to others,
With humility, you will be able to become a great leader.
To abandon compassion while seeking to be brave,
or abandoning moderation while being benevolent,
or abandoning humility while seeking to lead
will only lead to greater trouble.
The compassionate warrior will be the winner,
and if compassion is your defense you will be secure.
Compassion is the protector of Heavens salvation.

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Knowing you don't know is wholeness.
Thinking you know is a disease.
Only by recognizing that you have an illness
can you move to seek a cure.

The Master is whole because
she sees her illnesses and treats them,
and thus is able to remain whole.

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The living are soft and yielding;
the dead are rigid and stiff.
Living plants are flexible and tender;
the dead are brittle and dry.

Those who are stiff and rigid
are the disciple of death.
Those who are soft and yielding
are the disciples of life.

The rigid and stiff will be broken.
The soft and yielding will overcome.