

INTRODUCTION

Anything written about the TAO must be in the form of an apology, since to claim to introduce the TAO is to contradict Taoist teachings as expressed in the first line of the first poem:

The TAO that can be spoken of is not the TAO itself.....

poem 56:

One who is aware does not talk
One who talks is not aware.

poem 41:

Understand TAO as if you do not understand it
Enter into TAO as if you were leaving it.

poem 48:

To learn, one accumulates day by day,
To study TAO, one reduces day by day.

This reduction refers to abandoning the intellectualization about the differences between good and evil, mind and body until one is free from all intellectualism and ones inner self identifies with the higher reality (TAO). This inner experience is a mystic experience and is nameless and formless and can only be expressed in poetic images. Even worse than attempting to introduce TAO, I have attempted to improve on an excellent translation of the TAO TE CHING by Chang Chung-Yuan by using other translations of the TAO TE CHING.

I can offer no justification for any of this presumption other than the alterations are of my own personal preference and choice. I am neither a sinologist nor a Chinese scholar nor do I have any academic training in philosophy or literature, Chinese or Western. Like others I have been moved by the wisdom contained in the writings left by Lao Tsu (or someone else with the same name) about 2,500 years ago. His teachings are contained in the form of eighty-one poems. It is through this poetry that one can understand the TAO, and not by an intellectual conquest no matter how heroic. It is with poetry in mind that I have made some alterations to the translation by Chang Chung-Yuan. Also some of the wording has been simplified or changed in keeping with modern English usage. My hope is that the poetry and wisdom of the TAO TE CHING remains unchanged.

Note: **Chung-yuan Chang** was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He died in 1988, aged 84.

Aside: This was originally compiled in 1986 while residing at Purakanui, a collection of seaside batches, 15 km from Dunedin, NZ.

Historical Perspective

According to legend, Lao Tzu was the keeper of the Imperial Archives at Loyang in the 6th century B.C. Sick at heart at the ways of men he decided to ride off on the back of an ox into the desert to die. He was persuaded by a gatekeeper in

Northwestern China to write down his teachings for posterity. The writings were in the form of 81 poems which amounted to an open letter to a king. Today the reader can be a king and the poems are directed towards him.

The prevailing philosophy at the time was Confucism. To Lao Tzu the philosophy of Confucism was artificial and there are frequent implications in the poems to the harmful effects of religious and civil rituals. In later years Taoism fell into disrepute and became associated with an amalgam of alchemy, magic and health-culture.

We are living in a different society from that of the Middle Kingdom of China in 300 B.C. when these proverbs, hymns and instructional pieces were probably collected. However, these poems remain the 'white dwarfs' of philosophical literature and continue to give insights into man's place in the Universe.

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1

The TAO that can be spoken of is not the TAO itself.
A description of TAO would require a duplication of the TAO.
The unnameable is the source of the universe.
The nameable is the originator of all things.
Its wonder and its manifestations are one and the same.
Since their emergence, they have been called by different names.
Their identity is called the mystery.
From mystery to further mystery:
It is the gateway to all mysteries.

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2

When beauty is universally affirmed as beauty, therein is ugliness.
When goodness is universally affirmed as goodness, therein is evil.
Therefore: being and non-being complement each other.
Difficult and easy complement each other.

Long and short contrast each other.
High and low rest on each other.
Voice and tone harmonize each other
Front and back follow each other.
Thus, the wise deals with things through non-interference
and teaches through no-words.
All things flourish without interruption.
They grow by themselves, and no one possesses them.
Work is done, and no one depends on it.
Achievements are made, but no one claims credit,
Because no one claims credit, achievements last forever.

3

If no one esteems the best, men will be free from contention.
If no one values the precious, men will be free from illegal gain.
If men see nothing to desire, their minds will be free from
confusion.
Therefore, the wise guides men by relaxing their minds and
satisfying their inner needs.
He does not promote ambition, but supports their self-sufficiency.
He does not complicate their lives with knowledge of things
unnecessarily.
By being contented himself, he sets an example for his people.

4

TAO functions through its nothingness.
And can not be conceived of as full of things
Profound indeed, it is the model of all things.
Dulling its sharpness,
Releasing its entanglements,
Tempering its light, and
Unifying with the earth,
Hidden deep but ever present.
From where does it come I do not know
Perhaps it has always existed.

5

Heaven and earth are not benevolent:
They treat ten thousand things indifferently.
The wise is not benevolent:
He treats men indifferently.
The entire universe is basically void, like a bellows:
When it is in non-action, it does not lack anything;
When it is in action, it is even more productive.
Debating with words leads to limitations.
Therefore, nothing is better than to remain in the state before
things are stirred.

6

The spiritual reality of the void never ceases to exist.
We call it the mystery of passivity.
The entry to the mystery of passivity is the origin of the
universe.
Unceasing, it always remains.
Drawn upon, it is never exhausted.

7

The existences of heaven and earth are long-lasting.
Their existences are long-lasting because they do not conceive
of their existences as existences.
Therefore, their existences are long-lasting.
When the wise stays back, he steps forward.
When he forgets his self, he finds his self.
It is not through selflessness that one achieves selfhood?

8

That which is best is similar to the water.
Water profits ten thousand things and does not oppose them.
It is always at rest in humble places.
Thus, it is close to TAO.
Therefore, for staying, we prefer a humble place.

For minds, we prefer profundity.
For companions, we prefer kindness.
For words, we prefer sincerity.
For government, we prefer good order.
For affairs, we prefer ability.
For actions, we prefer the right time.
Because we do not strive,
We are free from fault.

9

To hold things and to be proud of them is not as good as
not to have them,
Because if one insists on an extreme, that extreme will not
dwell long.
When a room is full of precious things, one will never be able
to preserve them.
When one is wealthy, high ranking, and proud of himself, he
invites misfortune.
Having achieved your goal, be satisfied not to go further.
For this is the way of Nature!

10

Can you unify the body and the spirit into one and not let them be
divided?
Can you concentrate on your breathing to reach harmony and
become as supple as a babe?
Can you clean the mirror within yourself and let nothing
remain there?
Can you love the people and govern the state and do so without
interference?
Can you enter and leave the realm of Non-being and let these
actions take place by themselves?
Can the clear illumination radiate to all directions without your
having knowledge of it?
Cultivate it, and nourish it,
Produce it, but do not possess it,
Labour on it, but do not depend on it,

Lead it, but do not manage it.
This is called the mystic attainment.

11

Thirty spokes are joined at the hub.
From their non-being arises the function of the wheel.
Lumps of clay are shaped into a vessel.
From their non-being arises the function of the vessel.
Doors and windows are constructed together to make a
chamber.
From their non-being arises the function of the chamber.
Therefore, as individual beings, these things are useful
materials.
Constructed together in their non-being, they give rise to
function.

12

Numerous colours make man sightless.
Numerous sounds make man unable to hear.
Numerous tastes make man tasteless.
Racing and pursuing game make man's heart violent
Valuing rare things makes man worry about their safety.
Therefore, the wise is guided by what he feels and not by
what he sees
Thus, he abides in the one and foregoes the other.

13

Honour and dishonour both move us
Because we are troubled by having a self.
Why do we say that honour and dishonour move us?
Because honour lifts us upward
And dishonour lowers us downward,
Thus, when we are honoured we are moved.
When we are dishonoured we are also moved.
That is why honour and dishonour are both said to move us.
Why do we say that the great trouble is having a self?
Simply because we have a self we have great trouble.
If we are selfless, then where is the trouble?
If we identify our self with the world,

Then within our self there is the world.
If we love the world as we love our self,
Then within our self there is only the world.

14

Gaze at it, there is nothing to see.
It is called the formless.
Heed it, there is nothing to hear.
It is called the soundless.
Grasp it, there is nothing to hold on to.
It is called the immaterial.
We cannot inquire into these three,
Hence, they interfuse into one.
Its rising brings no light;
Its sinking, no darkness.
Invisible, it cannot be called by any name.
It returns again to nothingness.
Thus, we call it the form of the formless
The image of the imageless.
It is the evasive.
Approach it; you cannot see its face.
Go after it; you cannot see its back.
Adhere to the TAO of the remote past,
And apply it to the present.
This will enable you to understand the primordial beginning.
This is the essential TAO.

15

In ancient times the best man of TAO was refined and deeply
enlightened.
His depth can hardly be measured.
Because his depth can hardly be measured,
I will try to draw a picture of him.
Prudent, as if he were wading in a cold stream in the winter;
Calm, as if he did not want to disturb his neighbours;
Respectful, as if he were a guest;
Fluid, as if he were ice melting;
Solid, as if he were an uncarved block;
Vacant, as if he were a valley;
Lacking clear discriminations, as if he were impure;
Who is able to gradually reach purity from impurity through

quiescence?

Who is able to gradually grow lively from motion through motionlessness?

One who abides in TAO never desires to reach an extreme. Because he never desires to reach an extreme, He can remain in the old, yet become the new.

16

Contemplate the ultimate void.

Remain truly in quiescence.

All things are together in action.

Things are unceasingly moving and restless,

Yet each one is proceeding back to the origin.

Proceeding back to the origin is quiescence.

To be in quiescence is to return to the destiny of being.

The destiny of being is reality.

To understand reality is to be enlightened.

Reality is all-embracing.

To be all-embracing is to be openhearted.

Being openhearted, you will act royally.

Being royal, you will attain the divine.

Being divine, you will be at one with the TAO.

Being at one with the TAO is eternal.

Even when the body dies, the TAO will never pass away.

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17

The best leader is one whom no one knows.

The next best is one who is intimate with the people and is loved by them.

The next is one who is feared by the people.

The next is one who is held in contempt by the people.

Therefore, when one's sincerity is not sufficient, one does not have the confidence of the people.

Be cautious! and spare words.

Then when work is done and things are accomplished,

People will say that things happened by themselves.

18

As soon as the great TAO is forgotten,
The teaching of benevolence and righteousness arises.
As soon as intellection and prudence are esteemed,
The great pretence begins.
As soon as the members of a family are no longer at peace,
There is a demand for filial piety and love.
As soon as a nation is in confusion and rebellion,
There is a claim for loyal officers.

19

Let the people be free from discernment and relinquish
intellection,
Then they will be many times better off.
Stop the teaching of benevolence and get rid of the claim of
justice,
Then the people will love each other once more.
Cease the teaching of cleverness and give up profit,
Then there will be no more stealing and fraud.
Discernment and intellection, benevolence and justice,
cleverness and profit are nothing but outward refinements.
Hence we must seek something other than these.
Reveal simplicity,
Hold to one's original nature,
Rid one's self of selfishness,
Cast away covetousness,
Eliminate artificial learning and one will be free from anxieties.

20

What is the difference between the respectful and the
disrespectful ?
Of what is the difference between good and bad?
What others are afraid, must I be afraid, too?
How extremely ridiculous this is!
The people are rejoicing as if they are enjoying a sacrificial
feast,
Or walking up a terrace in the blossoming spring.

How quiescent I am, alone unstirred, like a baby before he
knows how to make pleasant expressions.
How aimlessly I wander, with no home to turn to.
People all have many ambitions and desires.
I, alone, seem to have left all of them.
How ignorant I am! My mind must be that of a fool.
People are glorious and shining.
I, alone, am dark and dull.
People are clear and inquisitive.
I, alone, am obscure and blunt.
How tranquil I am, like the placid sea.
How loftily drifting, as if I am bound nowhere.
People all have their motives.
I, alone, am good for nothing and uncouth.
I am not like the others.
I am an infant still nursing at the breast.

21

That which is inherent in the great attainment is the
echo of TAO.
That which is TAO is indistinct and ineffable.
Ineffable and indistinct, yet therein are forms.
Indistinct and ineffable, yet therein are objects.
Unfathomable and invisible, yet therein are essences.
The essence is indeed genuine, therein is the vivid reality.

22

To bend is to maintain integrity.
To deviate is to be direct.
To be concave is to be convex.
To be exhausted is to be rejuvenated.
To be wanting is to be endowed.
To have much is to be deprived.
Therefore, the wise identifies opposites as one,
And sets an example for the world.
He remains in concealment and spontaneously is unconcealed.
He does not assert himself, therefore he is eminent.
He does not claim credit, therefore he receives credit.
He is not vain, therefore he is the best.

Because he does not oppose anyone in the world, no one can oppose him.
Thus, the ancient saying "to bend is to maintain integrity" is the word of truth.
Indeed, integrity is attributed to this.
Through no words,
It takes place by itself.

23

Nature rarely expresses itself in words.
When a hurricane occurs, it does not last all morning.
Neither does a heavy shower last the whole day.
These are actions of heaven and earth.
Thus, even heaven and earth cannot maintain their actions for long.
How can man?
He who engages himself in TAO is identified with TAO.
He who engages himself in virtue is identified with virtue.
He who engages himself in abandonment is identified with abandonment.
Identified with TAO he will be well received by TAO.
Identified with virtue he will be well received by virtue.
Identified with abandonment he will be well received by abandonment.

24

He who stands on tiptoe is not steady.
He who strides cannot maintain the pace.
He who makes a show is not enlightened.
He who is self-righteous is not respected.
He who boasts achieves nothing.
He who brags will not endure.
From the point of view of TAO, all of these are extra and unnecessary.
Therefore, the man of TAO avoids them.

25

There was a thing, a "gathering" chaos,
Which existed prior to heaven and earth.
Silent! Empty!
Existing by itself, unchanging,
Pervading everywhere, inexhaustible,
It might be called the mother of the world.
Its name is unknown;
I simply call it TAO.
If I were to exert myself to define it,
I might call it great.
Great means extending to the limitless.
Extending to the limitless means reaching the extreme distance.
Reaching the extreme distance means returning to "nearness".
Thus, TAO is great,
Heaven is great, earth is great, and man is great, too.
In the universe we have four greatnesses, and man is but one.
Man conforms to earth,
Earth conforms to heaven,
Heaven conforms to TAO,
TAO conforms to itself.

26

The weighty is the origin of the weightless.
Stillness is the fountain of restlessness.
Therefore, the ruler journeys from the morning until night and
never separates himself from his heavy supply cart.
Although he is in a glorious atmosphere, he remains quiescent
and above it.
How can a leader "with ten thousand chariots" take himself
lightly before the world?
To take himself lightly is to lose the origin.
To be restless is to lose one's origin.

27

The best action is free from marks.
The best words are free from stains.
The best calculator is free from calculation.
The best closure has no bolts, yet it cannot be opened.
The best knot has no cord, yet it cannot be untied.

Thus, the wise knows how to rescue men, hence, no one is excluded.

He also knows how to rescue things, hence, nothing is excluded.

This is called double enlightenment.

Therefore good men are bad men's instructors,

And bad men are good men's materials.

Those who do not love their materials,

Though expedient, are in fact grossly confused.

This is called the indispensable wonder.

28

He who knows the masculine and yet keeps to the feminine
Will become a channel drawing all the world towards it;
Being a channel of the world, he will not be severed from the
eternal virtue,

And then he can return again to the state of infancy.

He who knows the white and yet keeps to the black

Will become the standard of the world;

Being the standard of the world, with him eternal virtue
will never falter,

And then he can return again to the absolute.

He who knows honour and yet keeps to humility

Will become a valley that receives all the world into it;

Being a valley of the world, with him eternal virtue will be
complete,

And then he can return again to wholeness.

Wholeness, when divided, will make vessels of utility;

These when employed by the wise will become officials and
chiefs.

However, for a great function no discrimination is needed.

29

Do you think you can take over the task of governing the universe
and improving it?

It can not be done.

The universe is a spiritual vessel and you can not control it.

Trying to control it leads to failure.

If you try to hold it, you will lose it.
Sometimes things are ahead and sometimes they are behind;
Sometimes breathing is hard and sometimes it comes easily;
Sometimes there is strength and sometimes weakness;
Sometimes one is up and sometimes down;
Thus, the wise is not excessive, overindulgent, or extreme.

30

Whenever advising a ruler in the way of TAO,
counsel him not to use superiority of arms.
Depending on the superiority of arms creates consequences.
Wherever there are armies, disorder occurs.
After a great battle, there is a year of deprivation.
Victory is merely the outcome of a contest.
One should not dare to claim superiority of power.
As victory is merely an outcome, one should not boast about it.
As it is merely an outcome, one should not show off because
of it.
As it is merely an outcome, one should not be proud of it.
As it is merely an outcome, one cannot help but have it.
As it is merely an outcome, one should not claim superiority
of power.
Claiming to be strong leads to decay.
This violates TAO.
That which violates TAO will not last.

31

Weapons are instruments of fear; all creatures hate them.
Therefore, the man of TAO does not abide by them.
Weapons are implements of ill omen, they are not
a wise man's tools.
He uses them only when one cannot avoid it.
Even if he engages in fighting, he should remain quiescent
and indifferent.
Even if the war is won, one should not glorify it.
To glorify it means that one enjoys slaying men.
If one enjoys slaying men, one will never be successful in the
world.

TAO is real, yet unnameable.
 It is original non-differentiation and invisible.
 Nevertheless, nothing in the universe can dominate it.
 If rulers and lords were able to abide with it, all things
 in the universe would yield to them naturally.
 Heaven and earth are unified and shed the dew of peace.
 Without being ordered to do so, people become harmonious by
 themselves.
 When discrimination begins, names arise.
 After names arise, one should know where to abide.
 When one knows where to abide, one is never exhausted.
 To abide with TAO in the world is to be the same as mountain
 streams flowing to the rivers and to the sea.

To know others is to be wise.
 To be aware of one's self is to be enlightened.
 To overcome others is to have superior strength.
 To overcome one's self is to be vigorous.
 One who knows he has enough is wealthy.
 Perseverance is a sign of will power.
 To retain one's source is to be long-lasting.
 To die yet not to perish is to be eternally present.

The magnificent TAO is all-pervading.
 It may penetrate to either this side or that side.
 All creatures abide with it and grow; none are excluded from it.
 When its work is done, it does not demand merit.
 It nurtures all things, but does not rule them.
 When it is without intention, it may be called lesser.
 When all things return to it, yet it does not possess them,
 it may be called greater.
 Therefore, the wise does not endeavour to be great.
 Hence, his attainment is great.

When one maintains the great image in dealing with the world,
One deals with the world without harming it.
Instead, one makes the world serene, tranquil, and peaceful.
Music and delicacies may attract passersby to remain
momentarily.
But the taste of TAO is plain and without flavour.
Look at it, nothing can be seen.
Listen to it, nothing can be heard.
Employ it, it cannot be exhausted.

36

That which shrinks must first be expanded.
That which is weakened must first be strong.
That which is destroyed must first be allowed to flourish.
Before receiving there must be giving.
This is called invisible illumination.
The soft overcomes the unshakable;
The weak overcomes the strong.
Just as fish stay deep in the pond,
The best arms in the nation are those that remain invisible.

37

TAO abides in non-action, yet nothing is left undone.
If rulers abide by it, the ten thousand things would develop
naturally.
If they still desire to act,
They should return to the simplicity of formless substance.
Without form there is no desire.
Without desire there is tranquility.
And in this way the world is naturally led to tranquility.

38

The highest attainment is free from attainment.
The lowest attainment is never free from attainment.
The highest attainment never acts and is purposeless.
The lowest attainment acts and is purposeful.
The highest benevolence acts and is purposeless

The highest righteousness acts and is purposeful.
The highest propriety acts and no one follows it.
Therefore, when TAO is lost, there is goodness.
When goodness is lost, we have benevolence.
When benevolence is lost, we have justice.
When justice is lost, we have ritual.
Ritual is due to a lack of trustworthiness and is the
beginning of disorder.
Anticipated knowledge is the superficiality of TAO and is the
beginning of foolishness.
Hence, the great man dwells on what is real and not on
superficiality, on the fruit and not the flower.
Thus, he grasps the one and foregoes the other.

39

In the remote past there were those who attained the One.
Attaining the One, heaven became pure;
Attaining the One, earth became peaceful.
Attaining the One, God became spiritual.
Attaining the One, the ocean became full.
Attaining the One, ten thousand things came into life.
Attaining the One, rulers became the models of the world.
All of them became so through the One.
Without becoming pure, heaven would have broken.
Without becoming peaceful, the earth would have quaked.
Without becoming spiritual, God would have crumbled.
Without becoming full, the ocean would have drained.
Without coming into life, ten thousand things would have
perished.
Without becoming the models of the world, rulers would have
stumbled.
Therefore, the worthless serves as the foundation of the
worthy.
The inferior serves as the basis of the superior.
Thus, rulers call themselves isolated men, without merit, and
worthless.
Is this not enough to prove that the worthless serve as the
foundation of the worthy?
Hence, the perfect fame is no fame.
Rulers do not want to be esteemed as a tingling jade, they would
rather be plain, solid rock.

40

Reverse is the movement of TAO.
Yielding is the action of TAO.
Ten thousand things in the universe are created from being.
Being is created from non-being.

41

When a man of superior talent listens to TAO, he earnestly
applies it.
When an ordinary man listens to TAO, he seems to believe it
and yet not to believe it.
When the worst man listens to TAO, he greatly ridicules it.
If he did not ridicule it, it would not be TAO.
Understand TAO as if you do not understand it;
Enter TAO as if you are coming out of it;
Move smoothly with TAO as if you are having difficulties.
The highest attainment is as if it is no attainment.
All-embracing attainment is as if it is lacking attainment.
Rigorous attainment is as if it is indolent loafing.
Real essence is as if it is empty.
The great white is as if it is black.
The great square is without corners.
Great talents ripen late.
Great music is without sound.
The great image is without form.
TAO is concealed and without name.
Nevertheless, TAO furnishes all things and fulfils them.

42

From the TAO, one is created;
From one, two;
From two, three;
From three, ten thousand things.
All of them achieve harmony through the unification of yin and yang.
They achieve harmony by combining these forces.
Other ancients have taught this;

I teach it too.

"The daring and violent do not die a natural death".

This I regard as a basic motto.

43

The meekest in the world

Penetrates the strongest in the world.

That without substance can enter where there is no room.

Hence, I am aware of the value of non-action

And of the value of teaching with no words,

As for the value of non-action,

Nothing in the world can match it.

44

Man's name or man's self -- which is closer to him?

Man's self or his property -- which is more valuable to him?

Success or failure -- which is more harmful to him?

The miser pays the highest price.

The hoarder takes the greatest loss.

The man who is self-sufficient is free from shame.

The man who knows the right time to stop is free from danger.

Thus, he will last long.

45

When accomplishment reaches its utmost,

It is as if nothing is accomplished.

Its application is never exhausted.

When fullness reaches its utmost,

It is as if it is still vacant.

Its application leads to limitlessness.

Thus, perfect straightness seems bent.

Great intelligence seems stupid.

Great eloquence seems awkward.

Hence, movement overcomes cold,

Stillness overcomes heat,

Purity and stillness sets things in order in the world.

46

When the world is governed according to TAO,
Horses are used to work on the farm.
When the world is not governed according to TAO,
War-horses and weapons are produced for the frontier.
There is no crime greater than having too many desires.
There is no misfortune greater than being discontent.
There is no fault greater than being envious.
Therefore, to know that enough is enough
Is always to have enough.

47

Without going out of the gate,
One is aware of the world.
Without peering outside,
One sees the way of heaven.
The farther you go,
The less you know
Therefore, the wise is aware of all things
Without moving a step.
He sees without looking.
He completes all things
Without action.

48

To learn,
One accumulates day by day.
To study TAO.
One reduces day by day.
Through reduction and further reduction
One reaches non-action,
And everything is acted upon.
Therefore, one often wins over the world
Through non-action.
It cannot be ruled by interfering.

49

The wise man has no self;
He makes the self of the people his self.
To the good he acts with goodness;
To the bad he also acts with goodness
Thus goodness is attained.
To the faithful he acts with faith;
To the faithless he also acts with faith
Thus faith is attained.
The wise lives in the world in concord, and rules
over the world in simplicity.
Because people rely on their senses of hearing and seeing,
The wise treats them as innocent children.

50

To live or to die:
Three out of ten men live,
While three out of ten men die.
Further, three out of ten men cling to life,
But they lose it.
Why? Because they all crave life.
He who knows how to safeguard his life
Does not encounter tigers or rhinoceroses,
In the battlefield
He does not avoid dangerous weapons.
Rhinoceroses cannot gore him,
Tigers cannot claw him,
Dangerous weapons cannot harm him.
Why? Because there is no place in him for death.

51

TAO creates all things;
Virtue cultivates them.
Things are shaped according to their natures;

Circumstances bring them to maturity.
Therefore, ten thousand things all revere the source of TAO
And value virtue.
TAO is revered and virtue is valued spontaneously;
No one orders that it be so.
Thus, TAO creates and cultivates all things;
Gives them birth.
Nourishes them.
Shapes them.
Gives them qualities.
Shelters them.
Guards them.
Gives them life yet claims no possession.
Benefits them yet exacts no gratitude.
Brings them to maturity, yet exercises no authority.
This is called invisible attainment.

52

The world has its beginning,
Which may be called the origin of the world.
When one is aware of the origin,
One knows its manifestations.
When one is aware of its manifestations,
Yet abides with its origin,
One never falls short in all of one's life.
Ceasing verbal expressions,
Stopping the entry of sensations,
One is never exhausted.
On the contrary, when one is full of words
And entangled with one's affairs,
One is never able to save one's self.
To see what is invisible is to be awakened.
To remain gentle is to be strong.
Apply illumination and return to awakening.
Then one is free from disaster.
This is called living in accordance with reality.

53

If I had even a slight awareness,
And practiced the great Way,
What I would fear would be deviating from it.

The great Way is a very level road,
But men like to take circuitous paths.
Thus, the palaces are extremely elegant,
But the people's farms are extremely desolate,
And there is no grain reserved in the storehouses.
The rulers wear expensive garments,
Carry fine swords,
Sate themselves with food and drink,
And possess inordinate riches and precious things.
This is the greatest robbery,
And is indeed against the great Way.

54

Nothing can be taken away if it is well-founded.
Nothing can be lost if it is well-grasped.
For generations to come, the worship will not be discontinued.
To cultivate TAO in one's self makes attainment real.
To cultivate TAO in one's family makes attainment a surplus.
To cultivate TAO in one's community makes attainment
long-lasting.
To cultivate TAO in one's nation makes attainment abundant.
To cultivate TAO in one's world makes attainment all-
embracing.
Thus, through the self, one contemplates the self.
Through the family, one contemplates the family.
Through the community, one contemplates the community.
Through the nation, one contemplates the nation.
Through the world, one contemplates the world.
How do I know the nature of the world?
It is through this.

55

Whosoever holds fast to completeness,
Is like a newborn infant.
He is free from the stings of insects,
Free from the claws of wild beasts,
Free from the attacks of devouring birds.
None of his bones or muscles are said to be strong,
But the grip of his hand is always firm.

Nothing concerning the union of male and female is yet known,
But potentiality is evident.
The essence of his life is perfect.
He can cry all day long without losing his voice.
His inner harmony is supreme.
To be aware of inner harmony is to abide with reality.
To abide with reality is to be enlightened.
However, to push life to the full leads to disaster.
The mind forcing one's potential is artificial.
When things are artificial, they lead to decay.
This deviates from TAO.
That which deviates from TAO ends life soon.

56

One who is aware does not talk.
One who talks is not aware.
Cease verbal expressions,
Guard your senses,
Temper your sharpness,
Simplify your problems,
Mask your brightness,
Unify with the earth:
This is called the identity of TAO.
Hence, no nearness can reach him nor distance affect him.
No gain can touch him nor loss disturb him.
No esteem can move him nor shame distress him.
Thus, he has attained the highest post in the world.

57

Guide the country through tranquillity.
Engage in war with rare operations.
Win over the world through non-action.
How am I aware that this ought to be so?
Because of this, the more restrictions and limitations there are,
The more impoverished men will be.
The more arms men possess,
The more disordered the country will be.
The more scheming and deceitful men are,
The more strange things will occur.

The more rules and precepts are enforced,
The more bandits and crooks will be produced.
Hence, we have the words of the wise:
Through my non-action,
Men are spontaneously transformed.
Through my quiescence,
Men spontaneously become tranquil.
Through my non-interfering,
Men spontaneously increase their wealth.
Through my non-willing,
Men spontaneously return to their original simplicity.

58

When the country is governed through simplicity and leniency,
The people are genuine and honest.
When the country is governed through harshness and sharp
investigation,
The people are more deceitful and dishonest.
From misfortune, good fortune is derived.
In good fortune, misfortune is conceived.
Who can determine the ultimate truth?
Or is there no ultimate truth at all?
As truth often turns out to be untruth,
Goodness often turns out to be evil.
This has long confused the people.
Thus, when the wise deals with things he is firm in his
principles,
Yet not sharp.
He is pure, yet not harmful.
He is straightforward, yet not violent.
He is illuminated, yet not glittery.

59

In guiding people and working according to nature,
There is nothing like stores saved up.
By "stores saved up" is meant forehandedness.
By forehandedness is meant accumulated attainment.
By accumulating attainment, everything can be dealt with.
Dealing with everything leads to limitlessness.
With limitlessness, one can govern the country.

Governing the country through its origin leads to endurance.
This means that to root deeply and to plant firmly leads to
longevity and eternal consciousness.
Therefore, govern a large nation as a small fish is cooked.

60

When TAO prevails in the world, evil loses its power.
It is not that evil no longer possesses spiritual power.
It is that its power does not damage men.
Indeed, it is not that its power does not damage men.
It is primarily that the ruler does not become harmful to men.
When opposites no longer damage each other,
Both are benefitted through the attainment of TAO.

61

A great nation must be humble and like a reservoir
Where all the waters join together.
It is the passivity of the universe.
Passivity always prevails over activity through quiescence.
Quiescence is humble before activity.
When a greater nation is humble before a lesser nation,
It prevails over the lesser nation.
When a lesser nation is humble before a greater nation,
It prevails over the greater nation.
Thus, by being humble one prevails over others.
Or, by being originally in a lower position,
One prevails over others.
A greater nation simply likes to bring people together
And to nurture them.
A lesser nation simply likes to participate
And work together with others.
In this way, both have what they like,
But the greater nation must be humble.

62

TAO is concealed in the depths of all things.
The worthy value it.

The unworthy are protected by it.
Good words may be traded for honour.
Good works may impress men.
Even if a man is unworthy,
TAO will never exclude him.
Therefore on the day the emperor is crowned,
And the ministers are appointed,
Do not send a gift of jade and a team of horses,
But remain still and offer the TAO.
TAO has been highly esteemed since the remote past.
Why? Because not searching for it, one obtains it.
Even if one has faults, one is free from them.
Thus, the TAO is the most highly esteemed thing in the universe.

63

Action or non-action, work or non-work, knowledge or
non-knowledge,
Large or small, more or less:
It is just like returning hatred with love,
Contemplating the difficult with the easy,
Working on the great through the small.
Because the hard tasks in the world must be preceded by what
is easy,
Great affairs in the world must begin with what is minute.
Hence, the wise works on what is small;
And he achieves what is great.
A promise lightly made,
Inspires little confidence.
The more lightly things are taken,
The more difficulties occur.
Therefore, by choosing hardship, the wise,
Never meets with hardship all his life.

64

That which is motionless is easy to maintain.
Trouble is easily overcome before it starts.
That which is just beginning is easy to destroy.
That which is minute is easy to disperse.
Deal with it before it happens.

Set things in order before there is confusion.
Big trees grow out of small shoots.
A nine story tower begins to be built from one little lump.
A journey of a thousand miles begins from where one stands.
Those who proceed through action fail.
Those who grasp on to a thing loses it.
Therefore, the wise does not act on things and is free from failure.
He does not grasp on to things, and does not lose them.
People who are engaged with things often fail when they almost complete them.
Therefore, one should be as careful in the last stage of one's work as at the beginning.
Then one will be free from failure.
Hence, the wise, seeks freedom from desire.
He does not collect precious things.
He learns not to hold on to ideas.
He brings men back to what they have lost.
He helps the ten thousand things find their own nature.
But refrains from action.

65

In the remote past, the man who knew TAO did not try to enlighten others,
But let them remain ignorant of it.
The difficulty in cultivating men is that they are full of intellectual cleverness.
Governing the nation through intellectual cleverness is harmful to it.
Those who rule without intellectual cleverness are a blessing to the land.
Knowing the difference between these two sets a standard.
To be aware of this standard is profound attainment.
Profound attainment is deep and far-reaching.
It is the reversal of ordinary things, yet it leads to great harmony with TAO.

66

Rivers and seas become the kings over all the waters
from the highlands
Because they place themselves in low positions before the other
waters.
That is why rivers and seas become the kings over all the waters
from the highlands.
Thus, when the ruler wishes to become the leader of his people,
He first humbles himself before them.
If he would lead them, he must follow behind.
In this way when he rules, people will not feel oppressed.
When he is front of his people, they will not feel any
obstruction.
Therefore, all the people will want to support him, and no one
will dislike him.
Because he does not compete, he will not meet opposition.

67

The world says that I am beyond determination
And cannot be identified with anything.
It is because I am beyond determination that I cannot be
identified with anything.
If I could be identified with anything,
I would no longer be beyond determination.
There are three essentials that I value and maintain:
These are gentleness, frugality, and humility.
When one is gentle, he has no fear of retaliation.
When one is frugal, he can afford to be generous.
When one is humble, no one challenges his leadership.
But when rudeness replaces gentleness
And extravagance replaces frugality
And pride replaces humility
Then one is doomed.
Since a gentle attack arouses little antagonism,
And a gentle defense provokes little anger,
Nature predisposes to gentleness those most suited for survival.

68

A good soldier is free from violence.

A good fighter is free from rage.
A good winner is free from competition.
A good leader is humble before the people.
This is called the attainment of non-contention,
Or the application of the strength of others.
It is also called identity with the ultimate
Beyond space and time.

69

On military operations we have:
"I do not boldly attack others first,
But take action only after being attacked."
"I do not boldly move forward even an inch,
But withdraw a foot."
This called the operation of non-operation,
Bearing the arms of non-arms,
Charging the enemy of non-enemy,
Carrying the weapons of non-weapons.
There is no more serious misfortune
Than to engage in war lightly.
To engage in war lightly is to violate my essential teachings
of compassion, renunciation, and never longing to be first
in the world.
Therefore, when two armies join in battle,
The one that is compassionate wins.

70

It is not difficult to grasp my words or to follow them.
Yet no one in the world can grasp them or follow them.
Because words must derive from the source of words,
Action requires an actor who acts.
Since you are not aware of this, you cannot know me.
The less people know me, the more valuable I am.
Thus, the wise is covered in tattered clothes which conceal
precious jade.

71

Knowing that which cannot be known is perfect.
Not being aware of this knowing is a defect.

To be aware of defects as defects is to be free of defects.
The wise is free from defects.
Because he is aware of defects as defects.
Therefore, he is free from defects.

72

When people lack a sense of awe,
There will be disaster.
Because they are not limited by the places in which they stay,
They are at peace with their lives.
Because they are at peace with their lives,
Their lives are peaceful.
Therefore, the wise is aware of himself,
But does not display himself.
He cultivates himself,
But is not proud of himself.
He leaves behind small fear,
But experiences a sense of awe.

73

Courageous but foolhardy, one perishes.
Courageous but not foolhardy, one's life is saved.
Between these two, one gains, the other loses.
Who knows what nature loathes?
Even the sage can hardly make a wise choice.
According to the way of heaven,
Without contending, one inevitably wins.
Without asking, one spontaneously receives a response.
Without invitation, success comes by itself.
Unintentionally, the heavenly way is well-devised.
The net of nature is all-embracing.
Although the spaces are large, nothing escapes it.

74

Men are no longer afraid to die.
Why should we frighten them with dying?
If men were still as afraid of death as they used to be,
We could catch a criminal and put him to death.
Who would have the courage to commit a crime?

(In nature), there is always one who is responsible for ending
the life of man.

If we take over the responsibility of killing,
It is like taking over the great carpenter's work of
cutting wood.

If we take over the great carpenter's work of cutting,
We can hardly help but hurt our hands.

75

When men are deprived of food,
It is because their kings tax them too heavily.

Therefore, they are deprived of food.

When men are hard to govern,

It is because their kings interfere with their lives.

Therefore, they are hard to govern.

When men give up their lives lightly,

It is because their kings are anxious to live extravagantly.

Therefore, men give up their lives lightly.

Only one who disregards his own life
Knows how to value the lives of others.

76

When a man is alive,
His body is soft and frail.

After his death,

It is hard and solid.

When grass and trees are growing,

They are delicate and fragile.

After their deaths,

They are wizened and decayed.

Therefore, what is hard is close to death.

What is soft is close to life.

Thus, when troops are inflexible, they lose the war.

When a wood board is dried hard, it cracks.

What is strongest and most solid remains low.

What is softest and meekest remains high.

77

Is not the TAO of heaven like the drawing of a bow?
It brings down the part which is high;
It raises the part which is low;
It lessens the part which is redundant;
It fills up the part which is insufficient.
The TAO of heaven is to lessen the redundant and fill up the
insufficient.
The TAO of man, on the contrary, is to take from the insufficient
and give to the redundant.
Who can take from the redundant and give to the insufficient?
Only the man of TAO can.
Therefore, with the wise, work is done without recognition.
Achievements are made, but no one claims credit.
He is free from showing his superiority.

78

Water is the softest and meekest thing in the world,
Yet it is best able to overcome that which is strong and solid.
This is the truth and cannot be changed.
"The meek suppresses the solid, the soft suppresses the strong."
All the people in the world know this,
Yet they cannot apply it to their lives.
Therefore, the wise says:
"Those who can accept the blame for the entire nation
Will be the leaders of the nation.
Those who can endure the evil omens of the world
Will be the kings of the world."
The truth often sounds paradoxical.

79

When a serious resentment is reconciled,
Some resentment certainly remains.
Thus, reconciliation cannot be considered the best way.
Therefore the wise adheres to his duty and demands
nothing of others.
The man of virtue holds only to his duty,
While the man without virtue presses for his rights.
The way of TAO is free from intimacy,
Yet it constantly stays with the good man.

There is a kingdom which is small and sparsely populated.
 There are numerous implements, but no one uses them.
 The people love their lives and no one wants to move afar.
 Boats and carriages are available, but no one rides them.
 Fine weapons are in their possession, but no one uses them.
 The people are back in the times when knotted cords were used
 to record things.
 They enjoy fine delicacies and are handsome in their dress.
 They are happy with their residences and are pleased with
 their traditions.
 Although the next state is within sight, and the sounds of cocks
 crowing and dogs barking are heard,
 The people live their whole lives without travelling to and fro.

Honest words may not sound fine,
 Fine words may not be honest ones.
 A good man does not argue, and
 An arguer may not be good.
 The knowers are not learned men,
 And learned men may never know.
 The wise does not accumulate.
 The more he works for other people, the more he gains.
 The more he shares with other people, the more he receives.
 The TAO followed by heaven is to do good and not to harm.
 The TAO followed by the wise is to work and not to claim
 credit.