

# TAO TE CHING

By Lao Tzu

Translated by Jonathan Star

## Verse 1

A way that can be walked is not the Way  
A name that can be named is not the Name  
Tao is both Named and Nameless  
As Nameless, it is the origin of all things  
As Named, it is the mother of all things  
A mind free of thought, merged within itself, beholds the essence of Tao  
A mind filled with thought, identified with its own perceptions, beholds the mere forms of this world  
Tao and this world seem different but in truth they are one and the same  
The only difference is in what we call them  
How deep and mysterious this unity is  
How profound, how great!  
It is the truth beyond the truth, the hidden within the hidden  
It is the path to all wonder, the gate to the essence of everything!

## Verse 2

Everyone recognizes beauty only because of ugliness  
Everyone recognizes virtue only because of sin  
Life and death are born together  
Difficult and easy  
Long and short  
High and low – all these exist together arrive together  
Sound and silence blend together  
Before and after  
The Sage acts without action and teaches without talking  
All things flourish around him and he does not refuse any one of them  
He gives but not to receive

He works but not for reward  
He completes but not for results  
He does nothing for himself in this passing world so nothing he does ever passes.

### **Verse 3**

Putting a value on status will cause people to compete  
Hoarding treasure will turn them into thieves  
Showing off possessions will disturb their daily lives.  
Thus the Sage rules by stilling minds and opening hearts by filling bellies and strengthening bones  
He shows people how to be simple and live without desires  
To be content and not look for other ways  
With the people so pure  
Who could trick them?  
What clever ideas could lead them astray?  
When action is pure and selfless everything settles into its own perfect place

### **Verse 4**

Tao is empty yet it fills every vessel with an endless supply  
Tao is hidden yet it shines in every corner of the universe  
With it, the sharp edges become smooth the twisted knots loosen the sun is softened by a cloud the dust settles into place  
So deep, so pure, so still  
It has been this way forever  
You may ask, "Whose child is it?" - but I cannot say  
This child was here before the Great Ancestor

### **Verse 5**

Heaven and Earth have no permanence  
A man may choose one over another but to Heaven and Earth all are the same  
The high, the low, the great, the small – all are given light all get a place to rest  
The Sage is like Heaven and Earth  
To him none are especially dear or is there anyone he disfavours  
He gives and gives without condition offering his treasure to everyone  
The universe is like a bellows  
It stays empty yet is never exhausted  
It gives out yet always brings forth more  
Man is not like this

When he blows out air like a bellows he becomes exhausted  
Man was not made to blow out air  
He was made to sit quietly and find the truth within

### **Verse 6**

Endlessly creating  
Endlessly pulsating  
The Spirit of the Valley never dies  
She is called the Hidden Creator  
Although She becomes the whole universe  
Her immaculate purity is never lost  
Although She assumes countless forms  
Her true identity remains intact  
Whatever we see or don't see  
Whatever exists or doesn't exist  
Is nothing but the creation of this Supreme Power  
Tao is limitless, unborn, eternal –  
It can only be reached through the Hidden Creator  
She is the very face of the Absolute  
The gate to the source of all things eternal  
Listen to Her voice  
Hear it echo through creation  
Without fail, She reveals her presence  
Without fail, She brings us to our own perfection

### **Verse 7**

Heaven is ancient  
Earth is long-lasting  
Why is this so? –  
Because they have no claims to life  
By having no claims to life they cannot be claimed by death  
The Sage puts his own views behind so ends up ahead  
He stays a witness to life so he endures  
What could he grab for that he does not already have?  
What could he do for himself that the universe itself has not already done?

### **Verse 8**

The best way to life is to be like water  
For water benefits all things and goes against none of them  
It provides for all people and even cleanses those places a man is loath to go  
In this way it is just like Tao  
Live in accordance with the nature of things  
Build your house on solid ground  
Keep your mind still  
When giving, be kind  
When speaking, be truthful  
When ruling, be just  
When working, be one-pointed  
When acting, remember – timing is everything  
One who lives in accordance with nature does not go against the way of things  
He moves in harmony with the present moment always knowing the truth of just  
what to do

### **Verse 9**

Grabbing and stuffing – there is no end to it  
Sharpen a blade too much and its edge will soon be lost  
Fill a house with gold and jade and no one can protect it  
Puff yourself with honour and pride and no one can save you from a fall  
Complete the task at hand  
Be selfless in your actions  
This is the way of Heaven  
This is the way to Heaven

### **Verse 10**

Hold fast to the Power of the One  
It will unify the body and merge it with the spirit  
It will cleanse the vision and reveal the world as flawless  
It will focus the life-force and make one supple as a newborn  
As you love the people and rule the state can you be free of self-interest?  
As the gates of Heaven open and close can you remain steadfast as the mother bird  
who sits on her nest?  
As your wisdom reaches the four corners of the world can you keep the innocence of

a beginner?

Know this Primal Power that guides without forcing that serves without seeking that brings forth and sustains life yet does not own or possess it.

One who holds this Power brings Tao to this very Earth

He can triumph over a raging fire or the freeze of winter weather

Yet when he comes to rule the world it's with the gentleness of a feather

### **Verse 11**

Wu is nothingness, emptiness, no-existence

Thirty spokes of a wheel all join at at a common hub yet only the hole at the center allows the wheel to spin

Clay is molded to form a cup yet only the space within allows the cup to hold water

Walls are joined to make a room yet only by cutting out a door and a window can one enter the room and live there

Thus, when a thing has existence alone it is mere dead-weight

Only when it has wu, does it have life

### **Verse 12**

The five colours blind the eye

The five tones deafen the ear

The five flavours dull the palate

Racing, hunting, and galloping about only disturb the mind

Wasting energy to obtain rare objects only impedes one's growth

So the Sage is led by his inner truth not his outer eye

He holds to what is deep and not what lies on the surface

### **Verse 13**

"Be wary of both honour and disgrace"

"Endless affliction is bound to the body"

What does it mean, "Be wary of both honour and disgrace?"

Honour is founded on disgrace and disgrace is rooted in honour

Both should be avoided

Both bind a man to this world

That's why it says, "Be wary of both honour and disgrace"

What does it mean, "Endless affliction is bound to the body?"

Man's true self is eternal, yet he thinks, "I am this body, I will soon die"

This false sense of self is the cause of all his sorrow  
When a person does not identify himself with the body tell me, what troubles could touch him?  
One who sees himself as everything is fit to be guardian of the world  
One who loves himself as everyone is fit to be teacher of the world.

#### **Verse 14**

Eyes look but cannot see it  
Ears listen but cannot hear it  
Hands grasp but cannot touch it  
Beyond the senses lies the great Unity – invisible, inaudible, intangible  
What rises up appears bright  
What settles down appears dark  
Yet there is neither darkness nor light just an unbroken dance of shadows  
From nothingness to fullness and back again to nothingness  
This formless form  
This imageless image cannot be grasped by mind or might  
Try to face it  
In what place will you stand?  
Try to follow it  
To what place will you go?  
Know That which is beyond all beginnings and you will know everything here and now  
Know everything in this moment and you will know the Eternal Tao

#### **Verse 15**

The masters of this ancient path are mysterious and profound  
Their inner states baffle all inquiry  
Their depths go beyond all knowing  
Thus, despite every effort, we can only tell of their outer signs –  
Deliberate, as if treading over the stones of a winter brook  
Watchful, as if meeting danger on all sides  
Reverent, as if receiving an honoured guest  
Selfless, like a melting block of ice  
Pure, like an uncarved block of wood  
Accepting, like an open valley  
Through the course of Nature muddy water becomes clear

Through the unfolding of life man reaches perfection  
Through sustained activity that supreme rest is naturally found  
Those who have Tao want nothing else  
Though seemingly empty they are ever full  
Though seemingly old they are beyond the reach of birth and death

### **Verse 16**

Become totally empty  
Quiet the restlessness of the mind  
Only then will you witness everything unfolding from emptiness  
See all things flourish and dance in endless variation  
And once again merge back into perfect emptiness –  
Their true repose  
Their true nature  
Emerging. Flourishing, dissolving back again  
This is the eternal process of return  
To know this process brings enlightenment  
To miss this process brings disaster  
Be still  
Stillness reveals the secret of eternity  
Eternity embraces the all-possible  
The all-possible leads to a vision of oneness  
A vision of oneness brings about universal love  
Universal love supports the great truth of Nature  
The great truth of Nature is Tao  
Whoever knows this truth lives forever  
The body may perish, deeds may be forgotten  
But he who has Tao has all eternity

### **Verse 17**

To know Tao alone, without trace of your own existence, is the highest  
Next comes loving and praising it  
Then fearing it  
Then despising it  
If one doesn't trust himself how can he trust anyone else?  
The great ruler speaks little and his words are priceless

He works without self-interest and leaves no trace  
When all is finished, the people say, "It happened by itself"

### **Verse 18**

When the greatness of Tao is present action arises from one's own heart  
When the greatness of Tao is absent action comes from the rules of "kindness" and "justice"  
If you need rules to be kind and just, if you act virtuous, this is a sure sign that virtue is absent  
Thus we see the great hypocrisy  
Only when the family loses its harmony do we hear of "dutiful sons"  
Only when the state is in chaos do we hear of "loyal ministers"

### **Verse 19**

Abandon holiness  
Discard cleverness and the people will benefit a hundredfold  
Abandon the rules of "kindness"  
Discard "righteous" action and the people will return to their own natural affections  
Abandon book learning  
Discard the rules of behaviour and the people will have no worries  
Abandon plots and schemes  
Discard profit-seeking and the people will not become thieves  
These lessons are mere elaborations  
The essence of my teachings is this:  
See with original purity  
Embrace with original simplicity  
Reduce what you have  
Decrease what you want

### **Verse 20**

The difference between a formal "yes" and a casual "yeah" – how slight!  
The difference between knowing Truth and not knowing it – how great!  
Must I fear what others fear?  
Should I fear desolation when there is abundance?  
Should I fear darkness when that light is shining everywhere?  
Nonsense!

The people of this world are steeped in their merrymaking as if gorging at a great feast or watching the sights of springtime  
Yet here I sit, without a sign, staring blank-eyed like a child  
I am but a guest in this world  
While others rush about to get things done  
I accept what is offered  
Oh, my mind is like that of a fool aloof to the clamour of life around me  
Everyone seems so bright and alive with the sharp distinctions of day  
I appear dark and dull with the blending of differences by night  
I am drifting like an ocean, floating like the winds  
Everyone is so rooted in this world yet I have no place to lay my head  
Indeed I am different. . . .  
I have no treasures but the Eternal Mother  
I have no food but what comes from her breast

### **Verse 21**

Perfect action,  
Rue virtue,  
Supreme power,  
This is how the Tao is revealed through those who follow it completely  
Though formless and intangible  
It gives rise to form  
Though vague and elusive  
It gives rise to shapes  
Though dark and obscure  
It is the spirit, the essence, the life-breath of all things  
“But is it real?” you ask –  
I say its evidence is all of creation!  
From the first moment to the present  
The Name has been sounding  
It is the gate through which the universe enters  
The witness by which the universe sees  
How have I come to know all this?  
That the very Name has told me,  
That Name which is sounding tight here, right now

### **Verse 22**

“Surrender brings perfection”

The crooked become straight

The empty become full

The worn become new

Have little and gain much

Have much and be confused

So the Sage embraces the One and become a model for the world

Without showing himself, he shines forth

Without promoting himself, he is distinguished

Without claiming reward, he gains endless merit

Without seeking glory, his glory endures

The Sage knows how to follow so he comes to command

He does not compete so no one under Heaven can compete with him

The ancient saying, “Surrender brings perfection,” is not just empty words

Truly, surrender brings perfection and perfection brings the whole universe

### **Verse 23**

Speak little

Hold to your own nature

A strong wind does not blow all morning

A cloudburst does not last all day

The wind and the rain are from Heaven and Earth and even these do not last long

How much less so the efforts of man?

One who lives in accordance with the Truth becomes an embodiment of Tao

His actions become those of Nature his ways those of Heaven

It is through such a one that Heaven rejoices that Earth rejoices that all of life rejoices

### **Verse 24**

On his tiptoes a man is not steady

Taking long strides he cannot keep pace

To the self-serving, nothing shines forth

To the self-promoting, nothing is distinguished

To the self-appointing, nothing bears fruit

To the self-righteous, nothing endures

From the viewpoint of Tao, this self-indulgence is like rotting food and painful

growths on the body –  
Things that all creatures despise  
So why hold onto them?  
When walking the paths of Tao this is the very stuff that must be uprooted, thrown  
out, and left behind

### **Verse 25**

Something formless, complete in itself  
There before Heaven and Earth  
Tranquil, vast, standing alone, unchanging  
It provide for all things yet cannot be exhausted  
It is the mother of the universe  
I do not know its name so I call it “Tao”  
Forced to name it further  
I call it “The greatness of all things” “The end of all endings”  
I call it “That which is beyond the beyond” “That to which all things return”  
From Tao comes all greatness –  
I makes Heaven great  
It makes Earth great  
It makes man great  
Mankind depends on the laws of the Earth  
Earth depends on the laws of Heaven  
Heaven depends on the laws of Tao  
But Tao depends on itself alone  
Supremely free, self-so, it rests in its own nature

### **Verse 26**

The inner is foundation of the outer  
The still is the master of the restless  
The Sage travels all day yet never leaves his inner treasure  
Though the views are captivating and beg attention he remains calm and uninvolved  
Tell me, does the lord of a great empire go out begging for rice?  
One who seeks his treasure in the outer world is cut off from his own roots  
Without roots, he becomes restless  
Being restless, his mind is weak  
And with a mind such as this he loses all command below Heaven

### **Verse 27**

A knower of the Truth travels without leaving a trace speaks without causing harm  
gives without keeping an account  
The doors he shuts, though having no lock, cannot be opened  
The know he ties, though using no cord, cannot be undone  
The Sage is always on the side of virtue so everyone around him prospers  
He is always on the side of truth so everything around him is fulfilled  
The path of the Sage is called "The Path of Illumination"  
He who gives himself to this path is like a block of wood that gives itself to the chisel  
—  
Cut by cut it is honed to perfection  
Only a student who gives himself can receive the master's gift  
If you think otherwise, despite your knowledge, you have blundered  
Giving and receiving are one  
This is called, "The great wonder" "The essential mystery" "The very heart of all that  
is true"

### **Verse 28**

Hold your male side with your female side  
Hold your bright side with your dull side  
Hold your high side with your low side  
Then you will be able to hold the whole world  
When the opposing forces unite within there comes a power abundant in its giving  
and unerring in its effect  
Flowing through everything It returns one to the First Breath  
Guiding everything It returns one to No Limits  
Embracing everything It returns one to the Uncarved Block  
When the block is divided it becomes something useful and leaders can rule with a  
few pieces of it  
But the Sage holds the Block complete  
Holding all things within himself he preserves the Great Unity which cannot be ruled  
or  
divided

### **Verse 29**

Those who look down upon this world will surely take hold and try to change things

But this is a plan I've always seen fail  
The world is Tao's own vessel  
It is perfection manifest  
It cannot be changed  
It cannot be improved  
For those who go on tampering, it's ruined  
For those who try to grasp, it's gone  
Allow your life to unfold naturally  
Know that it too is a vessel of perfection  
Just as you breathe in and out  
Sometimes you're ahead and other times behind  
Sometimes you're strong and other times weak  
Sometimes you're with people and other times alone  
To the Sage all of life is a movement toward perfection  
So what need has he for the excessive, the extravagant, or the extreme?

### **Verse 30**

Those who rule in accordance with Tao do not use force against the world  
For that which is forced is likely to return –  
Where armies settle  
Nature offers nothing but briars and thorns  
After a great battle has been fought, the land is cursed, the crops fail, the Earth lies  
stripped of its motherhood  
A knower of the Truth does what is called for then stops  
He uses his strength but does not force things  
In the same way complete your task seek no reward make no claims  
Without faltering fully choose to do what you must do  
This is to live without forcing to overcome without conquering  
Things that gain a place by force will flourish for a time but then fade away  
They are not in keeping with Tao  
Whatever is not in keeping with Tao will come to an early end

### **Verse 31**

Even the finest warrior is defeated when he goes against natural law  
By his own hand he is doomed and all creatures are likely to despise him  
One who knows Tao never turns from life's calling  
When at home he honours the side of rest

When at war he honours the side of action  
Peace and tranquility are what he holds most dear so he does not obtain weapons  
But when their use is unavoidable he employs them with fortitude and zeal  
Do not flaunt your excellence  
Do not rejoice over victory  
With the loss of others weep with sorrow and grief  
After winning a battle, do not celebrate, observe the rites of a funeral  
One who is bound to action, proud of victory, and delights in the misfortune of others  
will never gain a thing from this world below Heaven

### **Verse 32**

Tao is eternal, one without a second  
Simple indeed yet so subtle that no one can master it  
If princes and kings could just hold it  
All things would flock to their kingdom  
Heaven and Earth would rejoice with the dripping of sweet dew  
Everyone would live in harmony, not by official decree, but by their own inner goodness  
This world is nothing but the glory of Tao expressed through different names and forms  
One who sees the things of this world as being real and self-existent has lost sight of the truth  
To him, every word becomes a trap every thing becomes a prison  
One who knows the truth that underlies all things lives in this world without danger  
To him, every word reflects the universe every moment brings enlightenment  
Rivers and streams are born of the ocean  
All creation is born of Tao  
Just as all water flows back to become the ocean  
All creation flows back to become Tao

### **Verse 33**

One who knows others is intelligent  
One who knows himself is enlightened  
One who conquers others is strong  
One who conquers himself is all-powerful  
One who approaches life with force surely gets something

One who remains content where he is surely gets everything  
One who gives himself to his position surely lives long  
One who gives himself to Tao surely lives forever

### **Verse 34**

The great Tao flows everywhere  
It fills everything to the left and to the right  
All things owe their existence to it and it cannot deny any one of them  
Tao is eternal  
It does not favour one over the other  
It brings all things to completion without their even knowing it  
Tao nourishes and protects all creatures yet does not claim lordship over them  
So we class it with the most humble  
Tao is the home to which all things return yet it wants nothing in return  
So we call it "The Greatest"  
The Sage is the same way –  
He does not claim greatness over anything  
He's not even aware of his own greatness  
Tell me, what could be greater than this?

### **Verse 35**

Hold fast to the Great Form within and let the world pass as it may  
Then the changes of life will not bring pain but contentment, joy, and well-being  
Music and sweets are passing pleasures yet they cause people to stop  
How bland and insipid are the things of this world when one compares them with  
Tao!  
One tastes, but the sweetness turns bitter  
One sees, but the colours grow faint  
One hears, but the sound fades into silence  
One may look for fulfillment in this world but his longings will never be exhausted  
The only thing he ever finds is that he himself is exhausted

### **Verse 36**

Contraction pulls at that which extends too far  
Weakness pulls at that which strengthens too much  
Ruin pulls at that which rises too high  
Loss pulls at life when you fill it with too much stuff

The lesson here is called “The wisdom of obscurity” –  
The gentle outlast the strong  
The obscure outlast the obvious  
Hence, a fish that ventures from deep water is soon snagged by a net  
A country that reveals its strength is soon conquered by an enemy

### **Verse 37**

Tao does not act yet it is the root of all action  
Tao does not move yet it is the source of all creation  
If princes and kings could hold it everyone under them would naturally turn within  
Should a doubt or old desire rise up  
The Nameless Simplicity would push it down  
The Nameless Simplicity frees the heart of desire and reveals its inner silence  
When there is silence one finds peace  
When there is silence one finds the anchor of the universe within himself

### **Verse 38**

To give without seeking reward  
To help without thinking it is virtuous – therein lies the great virtue  
To keep account of your action  
To help with the hope of gaining merit – therein lies no virtue  
The highest virtue is to act without a sense of self  
The highest kindness is to give without condition  
The highest justice is to see without preference  
When Tao is lost one must learn the rules of virtue  
When virtue is lost, the rules of kindness  
When kindness is lost, the rules of justice  
When justice is lost, the rules of conduct  
And when the high-blown rules of conduct are not followed people are seized by the  
arm and it is forced on them  
The rules of conduct are just an outer show of devotion and loyalty – quite confusing  
to the heart  
And when men rely on these rules for guidance –  
Oh, what ignorance abounds!  
The great master follows his own nature and not the trappings of life  
It is said, “He stays with the fruit and not the fluff” “He stays with the firm and not

the  
flimsy” “He stays with the true and not the false”

### **Verse 39**

From ancient times till now the One has been the source of all attainments  
By realizing One Heaven becomes clear, Earth becomes still spirits gain power and  
hearts fill up with joy  
By realizing the One kings and lords become instruments of peace and creatures live  
joyfully upon this earth  
Without the One Heaven has no clarity and would crack Earth has no peace and  
would crumble spirits have no power and would lose their charm  
Without the One hearts would dry up, empires would fall, all things would go  
lifelessly upon this earth  
Long ago kings and lords called themselves “orphaned,” “lonely,” and “unworthy”  
What honour can there be without humility?  
What heights can be reached without being low?  
The pieces of a chariot are useless unless they work in accordance with the whole  
A man’s life brings nothing unless he lives in accordance with the whole universe  
Playing one’s part in accordance with the universe is true humility  
So whether you’re a gem in the royal court or a stone on the common path  
If you accept your part with humility the glory of the universe will be yours

### **Verse 40**

The movement of Tao is to return  
The way of Tao is to yield  
Heaven, Earth, and all things are born of the existent world  
The existent world is born of the nothingness of Tao

### **Verse 41**

When the best seeker hears of Tao he strives with great effort to know it  
When an average seeker hears of Tao he thinks of it now and again  
When the poorest seeker hears of Tao he laughs out loud  
Tao is always becoming what we have need for it to become  
If it could not do this it would not be Tao  
There is an old saying,  
The clear way seems clouded

The straight way seems crooked  
The sure way seems unsteady  
The greatest power seems weak  
The purest white seems tainted  
The abundant seems empty  
The stable seems shaky  
The certain seems false  
The Great Square has no corners  
The Great Vessel is never filled  
A beginner may be clumsy but after practice – what talent!  
A large drum may sit silently but when banged – what noise!  
Tao lies hidden yet it alone is the glorious light of this world

#### **Verse 42**

Tao gives life to the one  
The one gives life to the two  
The two gives life to the three  
The three give life to ten thousand things  
All beings support yin and embrace yang and the interplay of these two forces fills the universe  
Yet only at the still-point, between the breathing in and the breathing out, can one capture these two in perfect harmony  
People suffer at the thought of being without parents, without food, or without worth  
Yet this is the very way that kings and lords once described themselves  
Who knows what fate may bring – one day your loss may be your fortune one day your fortune may be your loss  
The age-old lesson that others teach, I also teach – “As you plant, so you reap” “As you live, so you die”  
Know this to be the foundation of my teachings

#### **Verse 43**

The most yielding thing in the world will overcome the most rigid  
The most empty thing in the world will overcome the most full  
From this comes a lesson –  
Stillness benefits more than action  
Silence benefits more than words

Rare indeed are those who are still  
Rare indeed are those who are silent  
And so I say,  
Rare indeed are those who obtain the bounty of this world

#### **Verse 44**

One's own reputation – why the fuss?  
One's own wealth – why the concern?  
I say, what you gain is more trouble than what you lose  
Love is the fruit of sacrifice  
Wealth is the fruit of generosity  
Be content, rest in your own fullness –  
You will not suffer from loss  
You'll avoid the snare of this world  
You'll have long life and endless blessings

#### **Verse 45**

The Great Perfection seems imperfect yet this world it creates is never impaired  
The Great Fullness seems empty yet this world it creates is never lacking  
Great truth seems false  
Great skill seems clumsy  
Great eloquence seems like babble  
Keep moving and you'll miss the cold  
Keep silent and you'll beat the heat  
Be tranquil like the rain of spring  
Be pure like the sheen of silk  
Then the Great Perfection will be perfect and the Great Fullness will be full

#### **Verse 46**

When Tao is present in the empire men follow their own nature and riding horses  
work the fields  
When Tao is absent from the empire men go astray and war horses breed on sacred  
ground  
There is no greater loss than losing Tao  
No greater curse than desire

No greater tragedy than discontentment  
No greater fault than selfishness

### **Verse 47**

Without going outside one can know the whole world  
Without looking out the window one can see the ways of Heaven  
The farther one goes the less one knows  
Thus the Sage does not go, yet he knows  
He does not look, yet he sees  
He does not do, yet all is done

### **Verse 48**

To become learned, gain daily  
To obtain Tao, reduce daily  
Reduce and reduce again until all action is reduced to non-action  
Then no one is left  
Nothing is done yet nothing is left undone  
One who gives freely and without attachment gets a full life in return  
One who gives with the secret hope of getting is merely engaged in business  
Truly, they neither give nor receive any of the treasure from this world below  
Heaven

### **Verse 49**

The Sage has no fixed heart of his own  
Those who look at him see their own hearts  
Those who are good he treats with goodness  
Those who are bad he also treats with goodness because the nature of his being is good  
Those who are truthful he treats with truth  
Those who are not truthful he also treats with truth because the nature of his being is truthful  
The Sage lives in harmony with all below Heaven  
He sees everything as his own self  
He loves everyone as his own child  
All people are drawn to him every eye and ear is turned toward him

## **Verse 50**

Again and again

Men come in with birth and go out with death

One in three are followers of life

One in three are followers of death

And those just passing from life to death also number one in three

But they all die in the end

Why is this so?

Because they clutch to life and cling to this passing world

I hear that one who lives by his own truth is not like this

He walks without making footprints in this world

Going about, he does not fear the rhinoceros or tiger

Entering a battlefield, he does not fear sharp weapons

For in him the rhino can find no place to pitch its horn

The tiger no place to fix its claw

The soldier no place to thrust his blade

Why is this so?

Because he dwells in that place where death cannot enter

## **Verse 51**

Tao gives all things life

Te gives them fulfillment

Nature is what shapes them

Living is what brings them to completion

Every creature honours Tao and worships Te not by force but through its own living and breathing

Though Tao gives life to all things

Te is what cultivates them

Te is that magic power which raises and rears them completes and prepares them comforts and protects them

To create without owning

To give without expecting

To fill without claiming

This is the profound expression of Tao

The highest perfection of Te

## **Verse 52**

That which created the universe is the Mother of the world  
By knowing the Mother one knows her children  
By knowing her children one comes to know her  
Such is their unity that one does not exist without the other  
Fully embrace your life and you will share in the glory of creation  
The Mother herself will be your guardian  
And all her creation will be your guide  
Stay with the Mother, shut the mouth, close the gates and you are never in trouble  
Abandon the Mother, open the mouth, be busy with other and you are beyond all  
hope of rescue  
Seeing your own smallness is called insight  
Honouring your own tenderness is called strength  
The sun in all its glory reveals a passing world  
Only the inner light illuminates eternity  
Only that light can guide us back home  
Have faith  
Follow your own shining  
Be aware of your own awareness  
On the darkest nights you will not stumble  
On the brightest days you will not blink  
This is called "The Practice of Eternal Light"

## **Verse 53**

If I had the least bit of wisdom I could follow the path of Tao quite well  
My only fear would be trying to go my own way  
The Great Path is simple and direct yet people love to take the side-routes  
See how magnificent the courts have become  
The women are dressed in colourful gowns  
The men carry well-crafted swords  
Food and drink overflow  
Wealth and finery abound  
Yet in the shadow of all this splendour the fields grow barren the granaries empty  
I say this pomp at the expense of others is like boasting of thieves after a looting  
Surely it is contrary to Tao  
Surely it cuts against the grain of the whole empire

#### **Verse 54**

The truth, once established, can never be uprooted  
The truth, once imbibed, can never be stripped away  
A sacrifice to a higher cause is never lost  
An offering to an ancestor never goes to waste  
When a person embodies Tao his heart becomes true  
When a family embodies Tao it thrives  
When a village embodies Tao it is protected  
When a country embodies Tao it prospers  
When the world embodies Tao it reveals its perfection  
Tao is everywhere it has become everything  
To truly see it, one must see it as it has revealed itself  
In a person, see is as a person  
In a family, see is as a family  
In a country, see is as a country  
In the world, see is as the world  
How have I come to know all this?  
Tao has shown me – Tao as all this!

#### **Verse 55**

One who embraces Tao becomes pure and innocent like a newborn babe  
Deadly insects will not sting him  
Wild beasts will not attack him  
Birds of prey will not strike him  
He is oblivious to the union of male and female yet his vitality is full his inner spirit is complete  
He can cry all day without straining so perfect is his harmony so magically does he blend with this world  
Know this harmony – it brings the Eternal  
Know the Eternal – it brings enlightenment  
A full life – this is your blessing  
A gentle heart – this is your strength  
Things in harmony with the Tao remain  
Things that are forced, grow for a while but then wither away  
This is not in keeping with Tao  
Whatever is not in keeping with Tao comes to an early end

### **Verse 56**

One who speaks does not know  
One who knows does not speak  
Shut the mouth  
Close the gates  
Blunt the sharpness  
Loosen the knots  
Tempe the glare  
Become one with the dust of the world  
This is called "The Secret Embrace"  
One who knows this secret is not moved by attachment or aversion, swayed by profit  
or loss, nor touched by honour or disgrace  
He is far beyond the cares of men yet comes to hold the dearest place in their hearts

### **Verse 57**

To rule the state have a known plan  
To win a battle, have an unknown plan  
To gain the universe, have no plan at all  
Let the universe itself reveal to you its splendour  
How do I know this should be so?  
Because of this –  
The more restrictions, the more poverty  
The more weapons, the more fear in the land  
The more cleverness, the more strange events  
The more laws, the more law breakers  
Thus the Sages say,  
Act with a pure heart and the people will be transformed  
Love your own life and the people will be uplifted  
Give without conditions and the people will prosper  
Want nothing and the people will find everything

### **Verse 58**

When the ruler knows his own heart the people are simple and pure  
When he meddles with their lives they become restless and disturbed  
Bad fortune, yes – it rests upon good fortune  
Good fortune, yes – it hides within bad fortune

Oh the things that Heaven sends –  
Who can know their final aim?  
Who can tell of their endless ways?  
Today the righteous turn to trickery  
Tomorrow the good turn to darkness  
Oh what delusion abounds and every day it grows worse!  
But the Sage is here upon the Earth to gently guide us back  
He cuts but does not harm  
He straightens but does not disrupt  
He illumines but does not dazzle

### **Verse 59**

Rule the people and serve Heaven yet hold nothing more dear than the Mother's  
harvest  
Let every thought and every breath be the fruit of your offering –  
Do it now  
Let her power run thick in your blood  
There will be no obstacle you cannot overcome  
No limit you cannot surpass  
No empire you cannot rule  
Ah, but in all your glory never lose sight of the Mother  
Without her your empire will crumble your power will waste away  
For the Mother brings the harvest  
She alone causes all things to endure  
We call this "Deep roots and a solid trunk" "The way of long life and lasting insight"

### **Verse 60**

Govern the nation as you would fry a small fish  
When Tao is present in the empire dark spirits lose their power  
It's not that they have no power it's that their power can't harm anyone  
When Tao is present the people enjoy the blessing of Heaven  
They find unity  
They find peace  
What's this about spirits doing harm?  
The Sage is approaching and they are rushing in to sweep his path!

### **Verse 61**

A great state is like a river basin that receives everything flowing into it  
It is the place where all things come to rest where all the world is welcomed  
The low is greater than the high  
The still is greater than the restless  
The low country wins over its neighbour  
The still female wins over the male  
The Sage wants to uplift the people  
The people want to follow the Sage only by being low does this come to be  
The Sage bows to the people  
The people bow to the Sage  
And when they lift up their heads only greatness remains

### **Verse 62**

Tao is the treasure-house the true nature the secret source of everything  
It is the great wealth of those who are awake the great protector of those still  
sleeping  
If a person seems wicked do not cast him away –  
Awaken him with your words  
Elevate him with your deeds  
Recite his injury with your kindness  
Do not cast him away cast away his wickedness  
When the emperor is crowned or the three ministers installed they receive a gift of  
jade and horses  
But how can this compare to sitting still and gaining the treasure of Tao  
This is why the ancient masters honoured the inward path of Tao  
Did they not say “Seek and you will find”? “Err and you will be forgiven”?  
Within, within  
This is where the world’s treasure has always been

### **Verse 63**

Act without acting  
Give without giving  
Taste without tasting  
Tao alone becomes all things great and all things small  
It is the One in many

It is the many in One  
Let Tao become all your actions then your wants will become your treasure your  
injury will become your blessing  
Take on difficulties while they are still easy  
Do great things while they are still small  
Step by step the world's burden is lifted  
Piece by piece the world's treasure is amassed  
So the Sage stays with his daily task and accomplishes the greatest thing  
Beware of those who promise a quick and easy way for much ease brings many  
difficulties  
Follow your path to the end  
Accept difficulty as an opportunity  
This is the sure way to end up with no difficulties at all

#### **Verse 64**

A still mind can easily hold the truth  
The difficulties yet to come can easily be avoided  
The feeble are easily broken  
The small are easily scattered  
Begin your task before it becomes a burden  
Put your things in order before they get out of hand  
Remember,  
A tree that fills a man's embrace grows from a single seedling  
A tower nine stories high starts with one brick  
A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step  
Act and it's ruined  
Grab and it's gone  
People on the verge of success often lose patience and fail in their undertakings  
Be steady from the beginning to the end and you won't bring on failure  
The Sage desires that which has no desires and teaches that which cannot be taught  
He does not value the objects held by a few but only that which is held by everyone  
He guides men back to their own treasure and helps all things come to know the  
truth they have forgotten  
All this he does without a stir

### **Verse 65**

The ancient ones were simple-hearted and blended with the common people  
They did not shine forth  
They did not rule with cleverness  
So the nation was blessed  
Now the rulers are filled with clever ideas and the lives of people are filled with  
hardship  
So the nation is cursed  
He who knows the play of Tao and Te knows the nature of the universe  
Tao brings forth Te from its own being  
Te expands in all directions filling every corner of the world becoming the splendour  
of all creation  
Yet at every moment Te seeks Tao  
This is the movement that guides the universe  
This is the impulse that leads all things back home

### **Verse 66**

Why do the hundred rivers turn and rush toward the sea?  
Because it naturally stays below them  
He who wishes to rule over people must speak as if below them  
He who wishes to lead the people must walk as if behind them  
So the Sage rules over the people but he does not weigh them down  
He leads the people but he does not block their way  
The Sage stays low so the world never tires of exalting him  
He remains a servant so the world never tires of making him its king

### **Verse 67**

All the world talks about my Tao with such familiarity –  
What folly!  
Tao is not something found at the marketplace or passed on from father to son  
It is not something to be gained by knowing or lost by forgetting  
If Tao were like this  
It would have been lost and forgotten long ago  
I have three treasures that I hold dear the first is love the second is moderation the  
third is humility  
With love one is fearless

With moderation one in abundant  
With humility one can fill the highest position  
Now if one is fearless but has no love abundant but has no moderation rises up but  
has no humility  
Surely he is doomed  
Love vanquishes all attackers  
It is impregnable in defense  
When Heaven wants to protect someone does it send an army?  
No, it protects him with love

### **Verse 68**

The best warrior leads without haste fights without anger overcomes without  
confrontation  
He puts himself below and brings out the highest in his men  
This is the virtue of not confronting of working with the abilities you have of  
complying with the laws of Heaven  
This is the ancient path that leads to perfection

### **Verse 69**

The great warriors have a saying, "I dare not act as host but would rather be a guest I  
dare not advance an inch but would rather retreat a foot"  
So advance but do not use your feet  
Seize but do not use your arms  
Cut but do not use your sword  
Fight but do not use your own power  
There is no greater misfortune than feeling "I have an enemy"  
For when "I" and "enemy" exist together there is no room left for my treasure  
Thus, when two opponents meet the one without an enemy will surely triumph

### **Verse 70**

My teachings are very easy to understand and very easy to practice  
Yet so few in this world understand and so few are able to practice  
My words arise from that ancient source  
My actions are those of the universe itself  
If people do not know these how can they know me?

Those who follow my ways are rare and so I treasure them  
Even if they wear the clothes of a beggar they carry a priceless gem within

### **Verse 71**

Knowing what cannot be known – what a lofty aim!  
Not knowing what needs to be known – what a terrible result!  
Only when your sickness becomes sick will your sickness disappear  
The Sage's illness has become ill his renunciation has been renounced  
Now he is free  
And every place in the world is the perfect place to be

### **Verse 72**

When the people do not fear worldly power a greater power will arrive  
Don't limit the view of yourself  
Don't despise the conditions of your birth  
Don't resist the natural course of your life  
In this way you will never weary of this world  
The Sage knows himself, but not as himself he loves himself, but not as himself he  
honours himself, but not as himself  
Thus, he discards the view of his own self and chooses the view of the universe

### **Verse 73**

Bold action against others leads to death  
Bold action in harmony with Tao leads to life  
Good fortune, bad fortune  
One seems to bring benefit the other to cause harm  
But Heaven rejects them both  
Both, in the end, tether men to this world  
Who can know the reasons of Heaven?  
Who can know its endless ways?  
Not even the Sage has an answer to this one  
Heaven's way does not strive yet it always overcomes  
It does not speak, yet it responds  
It is not summoned, yet it appears  
It does not hurry, yet it completes everything on time  
The net of Heaven spans the universe yet not the slightest thing ever slips by

### **Verse 74**

If people do not fear death why threaten them with it?  
But suppose they did fear death and this was the fate handed to lawbreakers  
Who would dare to do the killing?

There is always a Lord of Death  
He who takes the place of the Lord of Death is like one who cuts with the blade of a  
master carpenter  
Whoever cuts with the blade of a master carpenter is sure to cut his own hands

### **Verse 75**

Why are the people starving? –  
Because their grain is being eaten up by taxes  
That's why they're starving  
Why are the people rebellious? –  
Because those above them meddle in their lives  
That's why they're rebellious  
Why do people regard death so lightly? –  
Because they are so involved with their own living  
That's why they regard death so lightly  
In the end,  
The treasure of life is missed by those who hold on and gained by those who let go

### **Verse 76**

When life begins we are tender and weak  
When life ends we are stiff and rigid  
All things, including the grass and trees, are soft and pliable in life dry and brittle in  
death  
So the soft and supple are the companions of life  
While the stiff and unyielding are the companions of death  
An army that cannot yield will be defeated  
A tree that cannot bend will crack in the wind  
Thus by Nature's own decree the hard and strong are defeated while the soft and  
gentle are triumphant

### **Verse 77**

Heaven operates like the bending of a bow - the high it pulls down the low it brings up  
It takes from that which has too much  
And gives to that which has too little  
The way of man is otherwise - he takes from that which is depleted and gives to that which has too much  
Who can offer an abundance to the world? –  
One who has Tao  
Such a one can give like the heavens  
The Sage gives without relying on his own effort  
He completes without waiting for a reward  
He illumines without stepping from the shadow

### **Verse 78**

Nothing in the world is as soft and yielding as water  
Yet for attacking the hard and strong none can triumph so easily  
It is weak, yet none can equal it  
It is soft, yet none can damage it  
It is yielding, yet none can wear it away  
Everyone knows that the soft overcomes the hard and the yielding triumphs over the rigid  
Why then so little faith?  
Why can no one practice it?  
So the Sages say, fulfill even the lowest position love even the weakest creature  
Then you will be called “Lord of every offering” “ King of all below Heaven”

### **Verse 79**

After settling a great dispute some resentment is sure to remain  
Being content with what you have is always best in the end  
The Sage always assumes the debt as if holding the left side of a contract  
He gives and gives, and wants nothing in return  
One with true virtue always seeks a way to give  
One who lacks true virtue always seeks a way to get  
To the giver comes the fullness of life to the taker just an empty hand

Though the Tao of Heaven has no favourites it always sides with the one who has a pure heart

### **Verse 80**

Let every state be simple like a small village with few people  
There may be tools to speed things up ten or a hundred times yet no one will care to use them  
There may be boats and carriages yet they will remain without riders  
There may be armour and weaponry yet they will sit collecting dust  
The people must take death seriously and not waste their lives in distant lands  
Let them return to the knotting of cord  
Let them enjoy their food and care for their clothing  
Let them be content in their homes and joyful in the way they live  
Neighbouring villages are within sight of each other  
Roosters and dogs can be heard in the distance  
Should a man grow old and die without ever leaving his village let him feel as though there was nothing he missed

### **Verse 81**

Words born of the mind are not true  
True words are not born of the mind  
Those who have virtue do not look for faults  
Those who look for faults have no virtue  
Those who come to know it do not rely on learning  
Those who rely on learning do not come to know it  
The Sage sees the world as an expansion of his own self  
So what need has he to accumulate things?  
By giving to others he gains more and more  
By serving others he receives everything  
Heaven gives and all things turn out for the best  
The Sage lives, and all things go as Tao goes all things move as the wind blows