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 had
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 he 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 form 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 in 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 with out 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