

Tao – the Way

i

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao,
the nameless cannot be named.
origin of heaven and earth,
names that mother 10,000 things.
Send desire away; know mystery.
Filled with desire, its manifestations abound.
Within, without – these differ only in name,
arising from one source – a mystery.
Darkness within darkness,
the gateway to all mystery.

ii

All under heaven see beauty as beauty
only because they also see ugliness;
know good as good
only because they also know evil.
Thus being and nothing
give birth to one another;
the difficult falls into place
while the easy becomes difficult;
long and short measure one another;
high climbs on low;
notes harmonize noise;
front and back follow one another.
Who knows who began this work?
The true person acts without striving
and teaches without words.
Deny nothing to the 10,000 things;

nourish them, but make no claims.
Benefit them but do not presume.
Do the work, then move on.
That way, what is done endures.

iii

Not exalting the favored forestalls rivalry,
not flaunting bling forestalls stealing –
take it off display, put an end
to confusion of the heart!
Just so, the true person governs
by emptying egos and filling centers,
weakening ambitions and strengthening bones.
When hearts are freed from desire
the clever ones never dare to interfere.
Follow the watercourse way –
nothing is “done”, it all works out.

iv

Tao is an empty bowl.
Use it, it is never used up!
Unfathomably deep
source of 10,000 things –
though the water is clear,
no one can see the bottom.

Blunt the sharpness
untangle the knot
soften the glare
settle with the dust.

Hidden deep yet ever present,
I do not know whose child it is –
it was here before the first ancestor.

v

Heaven and earth are not moved
by offerings of straw dogs;
the true person is not moved
by offerings of straw dogs.
Between heaven and earth
Tao works like a bellows,
empty, yet never exhausted –
the more it works, the more comes out.
Many words lead to exhaustion.
Better to hold fast to your center.

vi

The valley Spirit never dies –
the first Mother's dark womb,
root of heaven and earth
dimly veiled yet always present,
bare as breath.
Draw from it all you will –
it is inexhaustible.

vii

"Heaven is long and the earth enduring."
Why is heaven long and earth enduring?
They do not live for themselves, and so they last forever.
Thus the true person steps back and is found in front,
lets go to be safe, acts selflessly to be fulfilled.

viii

Look to the Te of water –
it benefits 10,000 things without striving.
Content to settle in low places –
a position people disdain – where the Tao goes.

Wherever you dwell, live close to the land.
In meditation, go deep.
With others, be kind,
speak in good faith.
In business, be businesslike –
govern the way water flows.
Do the right thing when the time is right.
When there is no strife
nothing goes amiss.

ix

Better to stop in time than fill to the brim.
Hone a blade to the sharpest point
and it will soon be dulled.
Fill your house with gold and jade
and no one can protect it.
Swell with pride and invite disaster.
Retire when the work is done –
that is the way of heaven.

x

What have you attained?
Can you hold fast the first slice of the new moon?
Breathe soft as a newborn? Mirror no speck?
Help without spouting pedantry?

Open and close the womb of heaven?
Watch all things pass as they go out
in the four directions,
yet make no effort to redirect them?
Tao begets them, Te keeps them –
nothing to do, no credit to earn:
dark-of-the-moon virtue.

xi

Thirty spokes connect to the wheel's hub,
yet it is the hole at the center on which they turn.

Shape clay into a pot – it is
the emptiness within that we fill.

Cut doors and windows into a room,
it is the space they open that we inhabit.

Thus advantage comes from what is,
usefulness from what is not.

xii

The five colors blind the eye,
The five notes deafen the ear
The five tastes jade the palate
Racing and hunting madden the heart
Goods that are hard to obtain entangle the life.
Therefore the true person is guided more
by this within than that without.

xiii

Be forewarned, favor and disgrace are one.
What is meant by favor and disgrace are one?
Favor walks on the precipice that the disgraced climb back to favor.
Just so, take favor or disgrace with little notice.

Great trouble comes from having a body.
What is meant by great trouble comes from having a body?
The body piles calamity on calamity.
Its misfortunes are the human condition.

Refuse to barter your body or the world's body.
Respect the body's needs and care for all life.
Honor the world as your home, love all as yourself,
and you may be entrusted with all things under heaven.

xiv

Look, it cannot be seen – too indistinct.
Listen, it cannot be heard – too faint.
Grasp it – it is like a breath in the fingers.
Indefinable, it cannot be investigated.
No bright quarter lighted above,
no dark quarter shadowed below,
ceaselessly the unnamed returns to the unnamed,
an unbroken thread of constant change.
It has the form of the formless,
the image of the imageless.
You may meet it, but not at the beginning.
You may follow it, but not to the end.
Stay with the ancient Tao,
the unnamable way.

xv

The ancient followers of Tao were subtle.
Mysterious and penetrating –
too deep to be fathomed.
All we can do is describe their appearance:
Careful, as if crossing a winter stream.
Watchful, as if aware of neighbors on all sides.
Respectful, like a visiting guest.
Yielding, like ice beginning to melt.
Simple, like an uncarved block.
Open, like a valley.
Obscure, like muddy water.

Who can be still while the water clears?
Who can remain at rest until the time comes to act?
Those who hold fast to Tao
do not try to fill themselves to the brim.
Because they do not try to be full,
they age, but are ever rejuvenated.

xvi

Empty, grounded in stillness,
watch 10,000 things constantly change
until they return to their root in stillness.
Becoming still, become part of the always-so,
follow the constancy in change.
Only the ignorant suffer misfortune in vain.
Remaining with what is always so, endure.
Enduring, embrace all.
Embracing all, be possessed by no desire.
Acting impartially, dispense kingly justice.

Kingly, heavenly; heavenly – at one with Tao.
At one with Tao – abiding forever.
The body dies; Tao never.

xvii

The best leader is barely known.
Next, one loved and praised.
After that, one feared.
Last, one despised and defied.
If you do not trust enough
you will not be trusted.
Do not offer words lightly.
When the work is done,
the people will say, “we did it ourselves”.

xviii

When Great Tao is forgotten
benevolence arises, and moral codes.
Where there is intelligence and knowledge,
great hypocrisies also spring up.
When there is no harmony in the family,
filial manners develop.
When the nation is in disorder,
loyal ministers appear.

xix

Stop the learned pedantry –
troubles will lessen.
Give up wisdom, discard cleverness –
a hundred times better for all.
Give up condescending kindness,

quit being so righteous -
 people will show their natural compassion.
 Give up sharp dealing, throw away personal profit -
 thieves and robbers disappear from our lives.
 Yet these are not enough.
 Wear raw silk, hold to the uncarved block.
 Let self-interest fade, limit desires -
 let all things take their course.

XX

What difference is there between yes and no?
 How great is the span between good and evil?
 Must I fear what others fear?
 Others are gay, enjoying the Great Sacrifice
 before the moon wanes, climbing the terraces in spring.
 I drift alone without direction, not knowing who I am.
 Everyone seems so alert and self-assured -
 the deeper way is lonely and confusing.
 Everyone seems bright and clever -
 the deeper way, dark, uncertain.
 Others seem purposeful and busy -
 the deeper way unsettled as the waves of the sea,
 the restless wind - I ride them as if I had no home.
 What is to be done with this stubborn,
 awkward way, so lonely and so different?
 While others attend to the affairs of the people,
 what is this urge to go to the Great Mother's breasts?

xxi

Ta Te¹ follows only Tao.
 Shadowy and intangible,

¹Ta Te = Great Virtue

intangible and evasive –
yet within, images form.
Evasive and intangible,
yet within, substance forms.
Shadowy, dark, yet within
something vital
becoming real and reliable.
None exist without it, and it
appears but through them.
From ancient times, unforgotten –
through it, glimpse the beginning.
How do I know? Because it is within me.

xxii

Yield – and overcome.
Bend – and straighten.
Empty – and be filled.
Wear down – and be renewed.
Own little and gain –
Own too much; confusion reigns.

Thus the true person, merging into Tao, serves all.
Not staring into mirrors, self-worth is seen.
Not bothering with self-justification, is distinguished.
Not boasting, natural merit accumulates.
Not inflamed by pride, work endures.
Striving with no one, no one can strive with that one.

The Old Ones say, “Yield and overcome” –
it is no empty phrase.
Being whole, Tao arrives in every breath.
Do not try to understand. Just go there.

xxiii

The way of Tao is wordless.
Speak little, follow nature -
high winds do not blow all morning,
a sudden shower does not last all day.
Who would prolong gusts?
If heaven and earth do not make them
unnaturally long, why should we?
Those of Tao are one with Tao.
When they work, they are one with their work;
when they lose the way, they are one with loss.
They hold to Tao and are welcomed,
hold to their work and are welcomed,
hold to their loss and are welcomed.
Trust enough and all will become reliable.

xxiv

Walking on tiptoe - so unsteady.
Go striding out: fade fast.
The Narcissist is soon forgotten,
the self-righteous disregarded,
the braggart unheeded.
The prideful has no staying power.
These are like overeating or overdoing -
stop.
The way of Tao does not linger
in these doorways.

xxv

Something formless, yet complete,
there before heaven and earth.

Silent and limitless, it stands alone
and does not change.
Reaching everywhere, it does not tire.
Perhaps it is the Mother of 10,000 things.
I do not know its name.
I call it Tao.

When I must describe it, I call it Great.
Being Great, it flows.
Ever-flowing, it is far-reaching.
Tao returns to Tao.

Going and returning at once, Tao is Great.
Heaven is Great, Earth Great, People Great –
four Great things in Nature; we among them.
People conform to the Earth,
Earth conforms to Heaven,
Heaven conforms to Tao.
Tao conforms to its own Nature.

xxvi

Weight sits at the root of the light.
The restless settle in stillness.
Though traveling all day, the true person
remains close to the things he needs,
like a great general who never outruns
the heavy carts that haul his army's supplies.
That one knows how much beauty can be seen
by remaining quietly at home.
Should the Lord of 10,000 things
flit about like a fool?
To be blown to and fro is to lose the root.
To be restless is to lose self-mastery.

xxvii

The one who follows original nature
travels, yet leaves no tracks;
chooses words well, yet need not argue;
counts well, yet need not go beyond One;
clicks like a well-made door that needs no bolt,
yet cannot be opened;
knots no cord, yet binds what cannot be untied.
Following original nature,
the true person abandons nobody.
Cloaking his light he teaches
those who are as yet unaware –
they are the raw material for the true person.
Those who do not respect the teacher
do not care for the material
and travel a road to confusion.
They will not be saved by cleverness.
This is essential to know.

xxviii

Know the male, yet keep to the female.
Be the brook that receives all under heaven.
Virtue flows constantly into it –
bobbing on it, one can return
to be simple as a child again.
Know the pure, but live among the sullied.
Become her valley, receiving all under heaven
where ancient virtue pools.
Return to the uncarved block,
before it was shaped into a particular thing.
Being that block, master the things
and officials of the realm.

"The finest carver cuts little."

xxix

Who seeks to tyrannize, grasps water.
Leave it to the unforced flow of Tao.
Sticking one's hand in, one stirs only eddies.
Grasping, it slips away.

Time to move forward
Time to stay behind
Time to breathe easy
Time for heavy breath
Time for vigor
Time for exhaustion
Time to gather
Time to release
Time to risk danger
Time to be safe.

The true person avoids extremes,
self-indulgence, extravagance.

xxx

In counseling rulers, advise the use of Tao, not force.
Weapons harm most those who handle them.
Where troops have camped, thorn brush grows.
Lean years follow the wake of great armies.
Deploying soldiers makes enemies.
Poisonous thoughts return you your own evil.

Strike, then stop, taking no advantage.
Bring it to a conclusion but do not glory in it.

Bring it to a conclusion but not with cruel pride.
Bring it to a conclusion but not in arrogance.
Bring it to a conclusion following the Way.
Bring it to a conclusion without violence.

The use of force is followed by the loss of power.
This is not the way of Tao.
What goes against Tao comes to an early end.

xxxii

Fine weapons are ill-omened,
followers of the Tao do not own them.
At home, in peace, the place of honor sits to the left,
but to the right in time of war.
Weapons are not put to daily use by a population at peace –
they take them up only when they have no other choice.
The true person acts with dispassion, not reacting in anger.
Peaceful prosperity is valued, not glory in victory.
To glorify victory is to delight in slaughter.
Delight in slaughter never thrives under heaven.
Those standing to the left preside over happy events,
those who stand to the right preside over sorrow.
Commanders and officers at war are arrayed as at a funeral.
A slaughtering army should be received with sorrow.
Victors should be received with the rights of mourning.

xxxiii

The Tao is forever nameless. Though small,
the uncarved block is less than nothing.
If only leaders could hang on to it,
10,000 things would submit freely,
heaven and earth would unite

and a soft rain would fall.
People would live in harmony
with no law or decree.
Only when the block is carved do things need names.
When there are enough names, it is time to stop.
Knowing when to stop prevents trouble.
Why do 10,000 rivers vanish into the sea?
Because it is lower.

xxxiii

Knowing others is to be perceptive;
knowing yourself is to be wise.
Overcoming others requires force;
overcoming yourself, inner strength.
Knowing that you have enough is to be rich.
Rush ahead – you may get your way,
but return home and you will endure.
Live fully your days
and you will have had a long life.

xxxiv

The great Tao overflows all things,
drifting like floodwaters, left and right.
10,000 things depend upon it and are not denied.
It does its work, claiming no name of its own.
10,000 things are clothed and fed, yet nothing is mastered.
Shall we call it little?
10,000 things return to it, though it makes no demands.
Shall we call it great?
The true person wishes to be neither great nor small.
What shall we call that one?

xxxv

Hold to the Tao, and all under heaven come to you
because there they are sustained unharmed.
A passing guest may pause at the sound of music
and the smell of good food cooking.
By comparison, the Tao is mild and flavorless,
yet those who come to it find peace and security.
Looking for it, there is nothing to see.
Listening for it, there is nothing to hear,
Yet put to use, it is inexhaustible.

xxxvi

Those whose power shrinks once reached far.
The weak exhaust the strong.
Those cast down were once raised up.
That taken must first be given.

At their limits, all things turn.
The great, the strong, the exalted,
those who take at every hand –
there's a way to handle them.

Dim the light –
fish should be left in deep waters;
weapons should be kept in the shadows.

xxxvii

never striving,
undone – nothing,
leaders following,
10,000 unfolding,

still go striving,
wishing, sinking,
uncarved, unnamed,
desires reducing, stillness reigning,
under heaven, all remaining.

Te – Virtue

xxxviii

Don't obsess about Te – it is but Tao at work.
It's no good trying to look virtuous.
One way does nothing much,
and leaves nothing undone.
Another, always striving, has so much to do!
Kindness comes naturally, no need to plan.
The righteous have detailed plans; highly stressed
disciplinarians roll up their sleeves –
and if compliance comes grudgingly,
they unveil force.

When Tao is lost, there is virtue.
When virtue is lost, kindness takes its place.
When kindness is lost, the righteous step in.
When righteousness is lost, a husk of ritual remains –
a rind of faith, the beginning of confusion.
Rituals that chase augury are the beginning of folly;
this is not the flowering of Tao.

Focus on the fruit, not the showy flowers;
prefer this within to that without.

xxxix

From ancient times, arisen from the One
heaven clear because of the One
earth stable because of the One
spirit strong because of the One
valley full because of the One

10,000 things because of the One
leaders sure because of the One
all this from the One

When the heavens darken they soon split.
When the earth becomes infirm it soon heaves.
A weak spirit soon wears away.
A valley that does not refill soon runs dry.
If the 10,000 things did not reproduce,
they would soon die out.
If leaders no longer governed well,
the country would soon go asunder.

Just so, the humble is the root of the great;
the low is the foundation of the high.
The Great call themselves widowed, orphaned –
does this not acknowledge a humble root?

Too much success is no advantage.
Better to resound like stone bells
than tinkle like jade chimes.

xe

Reversal is the return of the Tao.
Yielding is the way of the Tao.
10,000 things are born of being
and being is born of non-being.

xli

The worthy student, hearing of the Tao, practices diligently.
The mediocre student wavers between practice and neglect.
The worthless student laughs aloud – if that one

did not laugh, it wouldn't be the Tao.

Thus it is said from of old:
the bright way looks dim
the road forward seems to retreat
the level path seems rugged
great Te looks like an abyss
tiny spots show out on great whiteness
abundant Te seems deficient
vigorous Te seems limp
simple Te looks shabby and faded.
The greatest square has no corners;
great talent ripens late;
the greatest sound has no voice;
great form is shapeless.

Tao is hidden and nameless
yet it alone supports all things
and brings them to completion.

xlii

Tao gives birth to one –
one to two; two, three
and three to 10,000 things,
which fall back on yin
and embrace yang,
harmonizing these vital breaths.

No one wants to be orphaned, widowed or destitute
yet this is how great leaders describe themselves,
for one gains by losing and loses by gaining.

What others teach I also teach:
tyrants never choose their deaths.
This is the basis of my teaching.

xliii

the most yielding of things
overcomes the hardest.
that without substance enters
where there is no room –
from this learn non-action.

learning without words,
working without effort –
few understand this.

xliv

Fame or health, which is closer?
Health or possessions, which is worth more?
Gain or loss, which harms most?
Thus the spendthrift pays dearly,
the hoarder suffers heavy losses.
Know when you have enough
and you will never be disgraced.
Know when to stop and stay out of trouble.
Only so can you long endure.

xlv

Great accomplishment seems incomplete
yet lives out a useful life.
Great fullness seems empty
yet cannot be drained.
The straightest way seem twisted,
the highly skilled appear clumsy,
the deepest eloquence is hard to comprehend.

Move around when you are cold;
be still, and you will not overheat.
Stillness and tranquility
set right the natural order.

xlvi

When leaders follow the Tao
the swift horses fertilize the fields.
When the Tao goes unheeded
war horses are bred on the borderlands.

There is no calamity like getting what you desire,
none worse than not knowing when you have enough
and no misfortune more cruel than avarice.

To know that enough is enough
is always to have enough.

xlvii

Without going outside
know the ways of the world.
Without looking through your window
see the ways of heaven.
The further you go, the less you know.
Thus the true person arrives without traveling
sees without looking
works by letting things happen.

xlviii

Every day, something is acquired
in pursuit of learning;
everyday something dropped

in pursuit of Tao.
As less and less is done,
nothing is done,
and nothing left undone.
All takes its course -
this cannot be done by interfering.

xlix

The true person has no self-mind
but is mindful of others.
Kind to both those who are kind
and to the unkind - kindness increases.
Trusting both those who are trustworthy
and those who are not - trust increases.
Shy and humble, a bit confusing -
hard to know what we see and hear,
like a little child.

e

Between birth and death, 3 in 10 are companions of life
three in ten are companions of death,
and the rest drift between life and death.
Why is this so?
Because they do not know how to live.
The one who knows how to live walks out
of the house with no fear of rhinoceros or tiger,
nor will that one be wounded in battle.
Why? Because there is nowhere
for the rhino to thrust its horns,
nowhere for the tiger to sink its claws,
nowhere for the sword tip to penetrate -
there is no place for death to enter in.

li

All things arise from the Tao;
its Te nourishes each one,
forming each according to its own nature,
adapted to its environment.

Thus the 10,000 things respect Tao,
and honor Te.

Nothing had to be commanded –
this happens naturally.

The Tao gives rise to all things
and develops them in Te; it grows them,
feeds, shelters, and protects them.

Giving life but claiming nothing,
benefitting but demanding no gratitude,
guiding without controlling –
this is called hidden Te.

lii

The beginning of the universe
is the mother of all things.

Knowing the mother, know the children.
Knowing the children, hold fast to their mother
and to the end of your days fear no danger.

Block the passages, shut up the doors
and to the end of your days, live without stress.

Open the passages, multiply activities
and to the end of your days, life is hurried.

Discern the small.

Develop pliant strength.

Use the bright to return to the bright

and live free of misfortune.
This is to follow the always-so.

liii

With even a grain of sense, one walks
the great path of Tao, fearing only to stray.
The Great Way is straight and smooth,
so why do people prefer the sideroads?
The courtyard is well-kept but the fields
are full of weeds and the granaries stand empty.
Everywhere are those who wear elegant clothes
carry sharp swords, pamper themselves with cuisine,
and own more than they can possibly use.
These are the ways of robbers, certainly far from the Tao.

liiv

What is firmly established cannot be uprooted.
What is firmly grasped will not slip away –
it will be honored from generation to generation.

Cultivate Te in yourself
and make Te real.
Maintain Te in family
and it will abide.
Cultivate Te in the village
and see it grow.
Maintain Te in the nation
and let it become abundant.
Cultivate Te in all things;
it will be everywhere.

Therefore know the body in the body

know family in the family
know village in the village
know nation in the nation
know all things in themselves –
How do I know the way is like this?
By following it mindfully.

Ev

A person of Te is like a newborn
whom wasps and poisonous serpents will not sting;
on whom wild beasts do not prey nor raptors swoop down.
Although its bones are soft and sinews weak, its grasp is firm.
Though it has never coupled, its vitality is strong.
Screaming all day, it doesn't get hoarse
because it lives in harmony.

To know harmony is to know the always-so.
To know the always-so is to be awakened.
Trying to fill life to the brim invites trouble.
If the mind makes demands on the breath, the body strains.
Whatever is forced to the peak of vigor, decays.
This is not the way of Tao.
That which cuts against the grain passes quickly away.

Evi

Those who know do not say.
Those who say, do not know.

Block the passages.
Shut the gates.
Blunt the sharpness.
Untangle the knot.

Soften the glare.
Settle with the dust.
Come to the dark union
that can't be embraced,
can't be abandoned,
can't be helped,
can't be harmed,
can't be exalted,
can't be disgraced,
but is revered in all places.

Evii

Govern straight-forwardly
but wage war surprisingly.
Master without interfering.
Look within: the more restrictions
and regulations, the poorer the people;
the sharper the weapons,
the more troubled the land;
the more clever the disingenuous,
the stranger the things they contrive;
the more arcane the laws,
the thicker the thieves.

Listen to the true person, who says:
I take no action but the people reform.
I sit quietly while they straighten themselves out.
I do not meddle and they prosper.
I have no desires, and they return
to the simplicity of the uncarved block.

lviii

Governed with a light hand, the people are simple.
Governed with severity, they become cunning.
Happiness roots in misery
misery lurks beneath happiness.
Who can say what will come?
Where there is no honesty,
the straight turns crooked,
the good are lost in black arts,
and stay lost a long time.
Just so, the true person is sharp but not cutting
pointed but not piercing,
straightforward but not unrestrained
brilliant but not blinding.

lix

Whether governing on earth or serving heaven,
nothing is better than moderation.
The moderate person returns to the path.
Returning to Tao, draw on its store of Te.
This store cannot be requisitioned.
Unconquerable Te is unlimited,
and thus fit to lead.
Who has this mother long endures.
The roots go deep, the trunk does not topple,
this is the Tao of long life and far sight.

lx

Govern a large country
as you would fry a small fish –
Tao is a way of non-action.

No demons manifest along its ways -
not that they lose power
but don't use it to harm people.
They are not the only ones
who have power and do not use it for harm.
The true person does no harm.
When no harm is done, Tao flows into Te.

Exi

A great country is like a lowland
where all waters meet
in the mother of All,
Male overcome by Female stillness,
lying low and still.

A great country, taking the lower place,
wins over the lesser.
The lesser, submitting,
yields to overcome -
those who would overcome, yield.

A great nation needs a large population;
the lesser needs employment for its people.
So that each will get what it needs,
it is fitting they both yield.

Exii

Tao is that toward which all things flow -
treasure of the virtuous,
refuge of wrongdoers.
A good word may be better than a bargain
in the marketplace; a good deed is a gift.

Do not abandon one who has done wrong.
On the day the emperor is crowned
or three ministers are installed
do not send jade and a quadrivia,
but remain still and offer Tao.

Why did the ancients revere the Tao?
Is it not that there, seekers find
and sinners are protected?
That is why what Tao offers is esteemed.

lxiii

Practice action without striving.
Work without stress.
Taste the tasteless.
Magnify the small, increase the few.
Reward bitterness with care.
Start when the complicated is still simple,
and greatness can begin in little things.
Handle the difficult while it is still easy.
Take on great acts with modesty in your first tries.
The true person is not inflated about doing
great things, and so achieves greatness.
Promises lightly made make for little trust.
Taking things carelessly ends in great difficulty.
The true person confronts difficulties
and so is never overcome by them.

lxiv

Peace is more easily maintained than gained;
trouble more easily handled when omens are first seen.
The brittle shatters, the small scatters -

deal with it before it happens;
set it in order before all becomes confused.
A tree too big to embrace began as a shoot.
Terraces nine stories high rise from baskets of dirt.
The journey of 1000 miles begins beneath your feet.
The one who obsesses, spoils; grasping, it slips away.

The true person waits and so is undefeated,
doesn't grasp and so doesn't lose hold.
How often people are ruined on the verge of success!
Give as much care to the end as the beginning.
The true person pursues no desires,
does not value things that are hard to obtain,
learns not to become invested in ideas,
brings people back to what they've overlooked.
That one helps 10,000 things find their own nature,
but refrains from directing them.

Exv

The ancient masters of the Way
sought not to enlighten
but to keep people as simple as the dark.
A little knowledge makes them unruly -
The too-clever-by-half spread evil,
but the disingenuous spread Te.
Are there other alternatives?
Knowing how to find this way
is called Dark Te
Dark Te goes deep, goes far,
goes the other way,
until it reaches the headwaters.

Exvi

How did the sea become king of 100 streams?

By lying below them.

Therefore it is king of 100 streams.

Thus the true person
guides with humble speech,
leads by following behind.

That way, no one feels weighed down.

When the true person takes a stand
no one is harmed.

None tire of those supported by Tao.

Because they strive with no one,
no one can strive with them.

Exvii

All say: great Tao, beyond compare.

Greatness makes it seem different.

If not, it would have vanished long ago.

Three treasures to hold on to:

First, compassion.

Second, simplicity.

Third, daring not to be ahead.

From compassion, courage.

From simplicity, generosity.

From humility, leadership.

Foresaking compassion, can you be brave?

Abandoning simplicity, can you be generous?

Scorning humility and always trying to be first –
you will not escape death.

The compassionate are well protected:
they have no enemies.
Thus heaven saves and guards.

lxviii

The good soldier does not make a show of violence.
A skilled fighter is not ruled by vengeance.
The true winner knows the mind of tolerance.
A good employer looks no askance.
These are Te of nonaggression.
This is known as the ability to handle people.
Since ancient times, this has been known as "one with heaven".

lxix

Soldiers have a saying,
I would rather play the guest
than the overbearing host;
withdraw a foot than advance an inch.
Better to march without appearing to move,
roll up your sleeve without baring your arm,
capture the foe without a battlefront,
arm yourself with no weapons.
There is no greater calamity
than attacking and finding no enemy.
Doing so will cost you what you most value.
Remember, when the battle is joined
the winners are those who take no delight in it.

lxx

My words are easy to understand
and easy to put into practice,

yet no one can analyze them
or teach them as a system.
Words have ancestors, actions are governed.
People who do not understand this,
do not understand me.
Those who know me are few
and should be respected.
The true person wears homespun clothes
and carries jade in the heart.

Exxi

Knowing that knowledge
is not my belonging
keeps me healthy -
delusions of knowledge are an illness.
Recovery from this illness
depends on getting sick of it.
The true person has had this sickness
and so is no longer sick.

Exxii

Those who lack a sense of awe
fear something worse will descend.
Give them room to live,
do not harass them in their work.
If you do not weary them,
they will not become weary of you.
True persons, knowing themselves, make no show.
Knowing their own value,
there is no need to exult.
They prefer this within, to that without.

Chixiii

Those who dare to act may meet death.
Those with the courage to dare not, may preserve life.
Of these two, which is good and which harmful?

Who knows why some things
are not favored by heaven?
Even the sage is unsure.

The Tao overcomes without strife,
is answered without speaking,
receives all it needs without asking,
is at ease as it carries out its plans.

Heaven's net casts wide.
Though its meshes are coarse,
nothing slips through.

Chixiv

No point threatening those unafraid to die.
Those who live in fear of death
dare not break the law anyway.

An executioner is always somewhere about.
Don't try to take that job - if you put yourself
within reach of the axe, it will be like
trying to pass yourself off as a master carpenter -
you'll only slice your hand.

Exxv

Why are people starving?
Their taxes are eaten up for political ends,
so they starve.

Why are they ready to rebel?
The government reaches into every part of their lives,
so they are rebellious.

Why do they think so little of death?
Because so much is demanded of their lives,
they take death lightly.

Having little to live on,
one knows better than to value life too much.

Exxvi

Humans are born soft and weak
but stiffen at death, becoming rigid.
Green plants are tender and succulent,
but wither and dry when dead.

Just so the unbending
are companions of death;
the yielding
are companions of life.

The inflexible army finds the battle it will lose,
great trees snap in the wind.
The hard and strong will fall.
The soft and weak, overcome.

Exxvii

The Tao of heaven is like the bending of a bow –
what is high is pulled down, the low is raised.
If the string is too long, it is shortened;
if not long enough, it is lengthened.
Thus Tao takes where there is too much
and gives where there is not enough.
Human ways are different.
They take from those who do not have enough
to give to those who already have too much.
Who has more than enough and gives it away?
Only those who hold to the Tao.
Therefore the true person expects nothing,
does the work, then moves on.
There is no desire to be better than others.

Exxviii

What is more soft and yielding than water?
Yet for wearing away rock, what is better?
Rock cannot wear away water.
Everyone knows the weak overcome the strong,
the supple master the stiff,
yet who puts this into practice?
Just so the true person wants to be last –
and in taking on that humiliation,
becomes fit to rule
and in taking on the country's calamities
earns the right to lead.
So often, paradoxical.

Chixix

After a bitter quarrel resentment remains.

What can one do?

The true person keeps the bargain
but makes no claim.

The person of Te performs his part,
while the one without Te levies taxes.

The Tao of heaven is impartial.
It stays with the true person.

Chxxx

Small country – few people;
heavy machinery
that can do the work of many –
not needed.

People there take death seriously,
don't travel far.

Boats and carriages idle;
armor, weapons, put away.

Knotted ropes are used,
rather than written marks.

Plain food is healthy;
simple clothes suffice;
homes secure.

Who is not happy in their ways?
Though the neighbors are in sight,
cocks crow, dogs bark,
yet they leave one another
in peace, grow old, die.

Chixxi

Truthful words are not elegant;
elegant words untruthful.
Those who know are not learned;
the learned do not know.
The good do not dispute;
the disputatious are not good.
The power of not accumulating
is boundless. using all they have
for others, true persons have still more.
The wealth of giving – inexhaustible.
The Tao of heaven, in helping, does no harm.
The Tao of the true person works without effort.

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