

TAO TE CHING

1. One cannot cognize Tao³ only by speaking about It.

One cannot name by a human name that Origin of the sky and the earth Which is the Mother of everything.

Only those who are free from worldly passions can see It, and those who have such passions can see only Its Creation.

Tao and Its Creation are One in essence, though They are called by different names. The passage which exists between Them is a doorway to all that is miraculous.

2. When people know beauty, they also understand what is ugly.

When people learn what is good, they also realize what is evil.

In this way, existence and non-existence, hard and easy, long and short, high and low allow knowing each other.

Different sounds mix and create harmony. And so the preceding and the succeeding follow each other harmoniously.

The wise prefer *non-doing*⁴ and live in *quietness*⁵. Everything happens around them as if by itself. They are

³ Synonyms of this word of Chinese origin are Primordial Consciousness, Creator, God-the-Father, Ishvara, Allah, Sva-rag, etc.

⁴ That is the calm of mind and body, which includes stopping of the flow of thoughts. It allows one to master the art of meditation and to develop oneself as a consciousness. (Those who are not used to the word *non-doing* can mentally replace it with the word *meditation* when reading this text).

not attached to anything on the Earth. They do not own anything made by them. They are not proud of their works.

Since they do not exalt themselves, do not boast, and do not require special respect from others, they are pleasant to all.

3. If the chosen are not exalted, no one envies them. If material treasures are not praised, no one steals them. In other words, if the objects of passions are not shown off, there are no temptations.

The wise ruler does not create such temptations for people but takes care that people have enough food. This eliminates passions and strengthens people's health. The wise ruler always strives to prevent temptations and passions and does not let evil people act.

The absence of all that has been mentioned brings calm.

4. Tao looks like a void. Yet, It is omnipotent!

It is in the *Depths*.⁶

It is the Origin of everything.

It controls everything.

It pervades everything.

It manifests Itself as shining *Light*.

It is the *Subtlest*!

It is the Main Essence of everything!

One cannot describe Its origin, for It is Primordial.

⁵ Here Lao Tse means *inner quietness*, which is called *hesychia* in Greek. Hesychasm, an ancient tradition of the Christian mysticism, is named after it (see [5,6]).

⁶ In the depths of multidimensional space. In other words, at the *subtle* end of the multidimensional scale.

5. Matter — both in the sky and on the earth — is dispassionate towards all creatures, be they plants, animals, or people, however, it is the base of all of them.

In the same way, the wise are dispassionate towards others.

The space above the earth is void and free like the space inside a bellows or a flute. The more space there is for action, the more efficient the action can be.

The one who interferes with the actions of others and talks too much becomes unbearable for people.

Therefore, it is always better to follow the principle of non-interference and keep inner calm.

6. The life and development of the *Subtlest*⁷ are eternal and infinite.

It is the *Deepest Base* of everything.

On It the material world exists.

It acts without violence.

7. The sky and the earth are lasting. They last long because they exist not by themselves and *not for the sake of themselves*, they are created by Tao and exist *for It*.

The wise place themselves behind others and thus do not hinder other people and can lead them. The wise do not treasure the lives of their bodies, but their lives are guarded by Tao.

This happens because the wise exist here *not for the sake of themselves*. This is why their personal needs get realized *for them*.

The wise exist *for Tao* and serve It.

⁷ Tao.

8. The wise live like water. Water serves all beings and does not require anything for itself. It exists below all things. In this respect, it is similar to Tao.

Life has to follow the principle of naturalness.

Follow the *Path of the heart*! Be friendly!

Tell only the truth!

When guiding others, follow the principle of being calm!

Every action has to be realizable and done in time.

The one who does not strive to be ahead of others can avoid many mistakes.

9. One should not pour water into a full vessel. And there is no sense in sharpening the edge of a knife too much. And if a room is overfilled with gold and jasper, who will guard it?

Excessiveness in anything causes troubles.

When the work is finished, one should retire.

Such are the laws of harmony suggested by Tao.

10. In order to maintain calm, one has to feel *Unity with Everything*⁸. Then one does not develop false ego-centric desires.

One has to refine the consciousness. Let **one**, in this **respect**, become similar to a newborn baby. The one who becomes this subtle becomes free from delusions.⁹

One has to rule the country and the people with love for them and without violence.

The gate from the world of matter to the hidden world is open when one stays in calm. The understanding of this truth comes in *non-doing*.

⁸ To feel oneself as an integral part of the Absolute.

⁹ Only through this can one cognize Tao.

To educate without violence, to make something without boasting, to create without feeling ownership of what was created, to be older than others and not command them, this is the true righteousness of Great Te¹⁰!

11. Thirty spokes are united in one wheel. But the use of the wheel also depends on the space between the spokes.

Vessels are made of clay. Yet, their usefulness depends on the empty space inside them.

Buildings consist of walls, doors, and windows. Yet, the building's usefulness also depends on the space in it.

This is the relation between the usefulness of objects and emptiness.

12. The one who sees only five colors in the world is like the blind.

The one who hears only the sounds of the material world is similar to the deaf.

The one who partakes of only material food and feels only its taste is deluded.

The one who, in pursuit of prey, races at full speed is insane.

By accumulating jewelry and adornments, people act to the detriment of themselves.

The efforts of the wise are directed at having enough food, not at accumulating many objects. They, being satisfied with little in the world of matter, choose *the Primordial*.

13. Glory and disgrace are equally feared. Fame is a great distress in life.

¹⁰ I.e., the higher ethics suggested by Te, by the Holy Spirit (Brahman).

What does it mean that glory and disgrace are equally feared? It means that people fight for glory and then fear to lose it.

And what does it mean that fame is a great distress in life? It means that one suffers great distress because one treasures one's name.

When one ceases to treasure one's name, one will have no distress.

Thus, the wise do not seek praise from people. They just serve people self-sacrificingly; therefore, they can live among people in peace. They do not fight against anyone for something; therefore, they are invincible.

14. If you look at Tao, you cannot notice It immediately. This is why It is called hard-to-be-seen.

If you listen to Tao, you cannot hear It immediately. This is why It is called hard-to-be-heard.

If you try to grasp Tao, you cannot reach It. This is why It is called hard-to-be-caught.

In Tao are Those Who fill you with delight!¹¹ All Those in Tao are merged into *One*.

Tao is equal above and below.

Tao, infinite in size, cannot be called by the name of any One of Them.

They come out from Tao manifesting Their Individualities, then come back to the state without individual manifestations in It.

Tao has no corporeal image or face. This is why one regards It as hidden and mysterious.

¹¹ Holy Spirits Who come out from Tao and Who are consubstantial to It. In the Christian tradition, They are called, in the aggregate sense, the Holy Spirit.

Meeting Tao, I do not see Its face. Following Tao, I do not see Its back.

By strictly following the primordial Path of transformation of oneself as a consciousness, one can cognize the *Eternal Origin*. This Path is the Path to Tao.

15. Since ancient times, those capable of achieving spiritual Enlightenment cognized hidden and hardly cognizable small and large steps of this Path.

Such seekers were hard to recognize. Let me outline their appearance: they were cautious like a man crossing a river in winter, they were circumspect because they were wary of strangers, they were alert because they knew that one's time on the Earth is limited, they were watchful as if they walked on melting ice, they were simple, they were vast like a valley, they were hidden from idle looks.

They were those who, in calm, could transform dirty into pure.

They were those who contributed to the Evolution of Life.

They worshipped Tao and they needed little in this world to be satisfied. Not desiring much, they were content with what they had and did not seek more.

16. Make *emptiness*¹² in yourself complete and achieve full calm! Let everything around you move by itself! Let everyone bloom spiritually and advance to cognition of their true Essence¹³!

¹² Here it means the meditative state Nirodhi. In this state, the individual "I" completely disappears by dissolving in Tao.

¹³ Atman, Higher Self, Tao.

Those who have cognized their true Essence achieve full calm. Thus they attain the common *Abode of All Those Who Have Attained It*¹⁴.

One's presence in this *Abode* has to become constant. The One Who has achieved this goal is called Enlightened, Perfect, and the Possessor of the Higher Wisdom.

Those Who have attained that *Abode* represent the *United We*, which is the *Highest Ruler*. That *Abode* is also called *Heaven*¹⁵. This is the Abode of Eternal Tao.

Tao is non-corporeal. It cannot be caught by anyone. Thus, It is invincible.

17. The *Highest Ruler* provides all Its people with the possibility to develop the consciousness. But It does not seek to reward them with something worldly. It also does not try to make people fear It.

Those who believe foolishly do not know about this. But those who have cognized It do not believe foolishly anymore.

This truth is so profound!

Having achieved success, I go further, and a greater understanding about *Everything* opens up to me.

18. If people in a country deny Great Tao, they begin to talk about 'humanism' and 'justice'... But in this situation, these talks are nothing more than hypocrisy!

In a similar way, when there is discord in the family, then there arise demands of "filial obedience" and "parental love"...

And when in a whole country there is such disarray, there appear slogans of "patriotism" and "love for the motherland"...

¹⁴ The Abode of the Creator.

¹⁵ Or Heavens.

19. When falsity and hypocrisy of this kind are removed, people are much happier. Falsity, aspiration to wealth, theft, and cruelty towards living beings disappear when people possess true knowledge. It is so because the reason for all people's vices is a lack of knowledge. It is knowledge that makes people understand that it is in their personal interest to be simple and kind, to control one's own worldly desires, and to liberate oneself from pernicious passions.

20. Cease to adhere to the objects to which you are attached, and you will be free from sorrow and self-pity! Only by living so can one find the true *Base*¹⁶ in life! Isn't this goal worthy of renouncing common beliefs and habits?

So great is the difference between good and evil!

Do not do anything undesired unto others. With this single principle, one can reduce chaos and establish order in society.

But now... all people indulge in vanity and society is immersed in chaos...

I alone stay calm and do not elevate myself over people. I am similar to a child who was not born in this world of vanity...

All people are bound by worldly desires. I alone have abandoned everything that they value. I am indifferent to this.

All people live in their egocentrism. I alone chose to get rid of it.

I flow as a Stream of Consciousness in Space and do not know when I will stop...

I cognize Tao *in my heart!* It is so *subtle!*

¹⁶ Tao.

I differ from others by valuing That Which created our lives.

21. Te comes out from Tao. And Tao abides in the *Primordial Depths*.

Te is That Which acts and drives. It is as mysterious and hidden as Tao. Yet, It also exists!

It can assume a form.

It possesses Power. Its Power is superior to everything existing in this world.

Te can be seen. From ancient times till present, the Voice of Te sounds and tells the Will of the Creator of the entire material world.

Where can I see the countenance of Te? Everywhere!

22. Being satisfied with little, you can gain much. Seeking much, you will go astray. The wise heed this precept. If it could only be so with all people!

The wise trust not only their physical eyes, thus they can see *clearly*.

The wise do not think that they alone are right, thus they know the truth.

They do not seek glory, yet people respect them.

They do not seek power, yet people follow them.

They do not fight against anyone, thus no one can vanquish them.

They do not feel pity for themselves, thus they can develop successfully.

Only those who do not seek to be ahead of others are capable of living in harmony with everyone.

The wise care about everyone, and thus they become an example to all.

They do not praise themselves, yet they are respected.

They do not elevate themselves, yet they are esteemed by others.

In ancient times, people said that imperfect moves towards becoming perfect. Are these words vain? No! Truly, by achieving *Unity*, you come to Perfection!

23. Speak less and be simple!

Strong winds do not blow all morning. Strong rain does not continue all day long. What does this depend on? On the sky and the earth.

The sky and the earth, though large, cannot give birth to anything *eternal*. Neither can man. Therefore, it is better to serve *Eternal Tao*.

Those who serve Tao with their deeds receive the right to attain Mergence with It.

Those who have refined themselves¹⁷ to the state of Te become coessential to Te.

Those who have refined themselves to the state of Tao become coessential to Tao.

Those who are coessential to Te gain the bliss of Te.

Those who are coessential to Tao gain the bliss of Tao.

But the unworthy one is deprived of this possibility.

It is unwise to doubt this truth!

24. The one who stands on tiptoes cannot stand for long.

The one who walks with long strides cannot walk for long.

The one who is seen by everyone cannot keep power for long.

The one who praises oneself cannot win glory.

¹⁷ As a consciousness (soul).

The one who lives pitying oneself becomes weak and cannot develop.

The one who is envious cannot achieve success.

The one who praises oneself cannot gain prestige.

The one who indulges in gluttony, does meaningless things, and becomes irritated by everything, cannot find peace.

Looking from Tao, one can see that all this is caused by vicious desires. All this is absurd behavior. Everyone turns away from such people.

On the contrary, the one who aspires to Mergence with Tao does not do anything like this.

25. Oh That Which was born before the sky and the earth, living in calm, having no form, the Subtlest, the Only Existing, Abiding everywhere, Boundless, Invincible, the Mother of everything! You are called Tao. I call You also the Greatest, That Which is eternal in Its infinite development!

Man, earth, and sky depend on Tao. But Tao exists by Itself.

26. Hard work allows one to achieve an easy life in the future.

Yet, we also know that calm is the main thing in movement.

Therefore, the wise work hard all day long and do not avoid hard work. Nevertheless, they stay in the state of perfect calm.

They can even live in luxury and do not get deprived by it.

Why is the owner of 10,000 chariots haughty and disdains the entire world? Disdain destroys the soul!

And the absence of calm leads to the loss of the *Base!...*

27. The one who knows the Path can find the right direction even if there is no treaded trail. The one who knows how to speak does not make mistakes. The one who knows how to count does not miscount. The best treasury has no lock, yet no one can open it. The best fetters are those which bind by nothing material, yet cannot be broken.

The wise can save people and save them constantly. The wise can help and do not leave anyone in trouble without help. Thus acts the deep wisdom!

The wise also instruct evil people so that such people can find the *Base*.

But if evil people do not value this help and do not like the *Base*, the wise leave them: the wise do not value relations with such people.

This principle is very important!

28. If you are brave, be humble! And then the entire nation will follow you.

If you become a leader among people, let Great Te be your Guide. And be a pure, gentle, and subtle soul, like a child!

Abiding in good, do not forget about the existence of evil! And be an example of righteousness for everyone!

The one who becomes such an example for everyone does not differ by the quality of the soul from Great Te and then moves to Mergence with Eternal Tao.

Such a person, though knowing about his or her personal achievements and merits, chooses to be unknown, and thus becomes a wise leader.

It is favorable that such a wise person be a leader among people; then there will be order in such a country.

29. Some people have a great desire to rule the entire world, and they try to succeed in this aspiration. I do not see how it can be possible, since the world is a con-

tainer of wonderful, invincible Tao! And no one can rule Tao!

The one who aspires to this will fail for sure!

Everyone has a choice: to oppose the harmonious flow of events or to follow it. The former struggle and lose strength, the latter bloom in harmony and strengthen.

The wise never aspire to power, surfeit, luxuries, and prodigality.

30. A ruler faithful to Tao will not send an army to a foreign country. This would cause calamity to such a ruler in the first place.¹⁸

The land where an army has passed becomes desolate. After a war, lean years come.

A wise commander is never bellicose. A wise warrior never gets angry. The one who knows how to defeat an enemy does not attack. The one who has achieved victory stops and does not do violence to the defeated enemies. The victorious do not praise themselves. They win but do not feel proud. They do not like to wage wars. They win because they are forced to fight. They win even though they are not bellicose.

If man, in the prime of life, begins to weaken and gets ill, this happens only because of living in disharmony with Tao. The life of such a person ends before the due time.

31. Weapons are a means that cause affliction, they must be discarded.

Therefore, the one who follows Tao does not use weapons.

Good leaders are yielding. They use power for defense only. They exert every effort to maintain peace.

¹⁸ At least, according to the *law of karma*.

To glorify oneself with a military victory means to rejoice over killing people. Is it right to respect those who are glad about killing?

And respect leads to wellbeing. Wellbeing contributes to the creative process.

Violence leads to afflictions.

If many people are killed, it is a grievous event. The victory has to be “celebrated” with a funeral ceremony.

32. Tao is eternal and has no human appearance.

Though Tao is a tender Being, no one in the whole world can subjugate It.

If the nobility and rulers of a country lived in harmony with Tao, the common people would be peaceful and calm. The sky and the earth would unite in harmony, prosperity and wellbeing would come, people would quiet down without orders!

For the sake of establishing order in a country, laws are created. Yet, the laws must not be too severe.

Tao is like the ocean. The ocean is lower than all rivers, yet all rivers flow into it.

33. The one who knows people is reasonable. The one who has cognized oneself is enlightened.¹⁹ The one who can conquer enemies is strong. The one who has conquered oneself²⁰ is powerful.

The one who has material wealth is rich. The one who acts resolutely possesses willpower. But the one who indulges one’s own desires is weak and foolish.

¹⁹ I.e., the one who has cognized one’s own multidimensional organism.

²⁰ I.e., the one who has conquered one’s own vices, including their base (the lower self with its egocentrism).

The one who attains Mergence with Tao and does not lose it also attains the Highest Existence. After the death of the body, such a person continues to live in Tao as truly Immortal.

34. The Eternal Tao pervades everything. It is present to the left and to the right. Thanks to It, souls arise, live, and develop.

Though Tao is so Great and performs such great work, It does not seek to glorify Itself.

It raises all beings with love. It does not exert violence over them. It does not insist that people realize Its desires.

It is Great, though It does not insist on this.

Wise people aspire to It, to the Great!

35. All the Perfect Ones flow into Great Tao.

Follow this Path! By doing so you will not harm yourself, on the contrary, you will achieve calm, harmony, and the fullness of life.

I, in the state of *non-doing*, travel in the Infinity of Tao. One cannot convey this with words! Tao is the Subtlest and most Blissful!

36. Worldly passions make man weak. Resoluteness fills man with power!

Worldly passions cripple man. Resoluteness elevates man and strengthens the consciousness!

Worldly passions enslave man. Resoluteness makes man free!

That which is dispassionate, gentle, and yielding conquers that which is passionate, hard, and coarse!

37. Tao does not act directly in the world of matter.²¹ Yet, the entire Creation is a product of Its creativity.

Act in the same manner, and all the living will develop in a natural way!

When you live with simplicity, without paying attention to gossip and hostile attitudes, in harmony with Tao, you come to the state when you have no attachments and passions!

The absence of worldly desires brings one to the state of inner calm, and then order is established all around.

38. Those representing Great Te do not force Themselves to do good deeds: behaving righteously is natural for Them.

Those who are far from Te force themselves to perform good deeds: righteousness is not natural for them.

Those representing Great Te do not aspire to activity in the world of matter: They act in the state of *non-doing*.

Those who are far from Te live in vanity and act under the influence of their passions. In the religious aspect of life, their activity is reduced only to rituals, but believing in the “magic” of rituals signifies the degradation of religion! Such people also force others to act like them.

This happens only to those who do not have Tao in their lives. They cannot be trusted. They have betrayed Tao and can betray anyone.

The wise who have cognized Tao are capable of distinguishing people by these features. They choose to communicate only with people of goodness.

²¹ It is Te that acts.