

TAO TE CHING {approx 500 BC}
(The Way of Life)

The Mystic Wisdom of Ancient China

By Lao Tzu

Translated by Raymond B. Blakney {1955}

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The Way of Life - "Tao Te Ching" ...

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Translators Notes ...

The following notations have been gleaned from the commentary of the translator, Raymond Blakney, in 1955 ...

The identity of China's mystics is complicated by the rule that no true mystic would know himself to be such.

"Where there is no author, however, it is necessary to invent one; and by the time the Tao Te Ching had been put in form, legend had supplied **Lao Tzu**, and Ssu-ma Ch'ien incorporated the legend in his *Historical Records* (Chap.63). It presents Lao Tzu correctly enough as one who had given up civilised and is impatient with Confucian ideas and who accordingly departs for points unknown, presumably to live out life as a recluse."

"Confucius came to Chou to consult old Lao Tzu about ritual." [and spoke of the heroes of old ...]

"Lao Tzu said, *All those men of whom you speak have long since mouldered away with their bones.*

Only their words remain.

When a capable man's time comes, he rises; if it does not, then he wanders wearily around.

I have heard that good merchants keep their goods buried deeply to make it look as if they had none,

and that a superior man whose character is perfected will feign stupidity.

*Give up, sir, your proud airs, your many wishes, mannersims and extravagant claims.
They won't do you any good, sir!
That's all I have to tell you.'*

"Confucius went off and said to his students: 'I know that birds can fly and fish can swim and beasts can run. Snares can be set for things that run, nets for those that swim and arrows for whatever flies. But dragons! I shall never know how they ride the wind and cloud up into the sky. Today I saw Lao Tzu. What a dragon!'"

"Lao Tzu practiced the Way and its Virtue. He learned to do his work in self-effacement and anonymity. For a long time he lived in Chou, and when he saw that it was breaking up, he left. At the frontier, the official Yin Hsi said: 'Since, sir, you are retiring, I urge you to write me a book.'

"So Lao Tzu wrote a book in two parts, explaining the Way and its Virtue in something over five thousand words.
Then he went away.
No one knows where he died."

Translatory Notes ...

TAO: A road, a path, the way by which people travel, the way of nature and finally the Way of ultimate reality.

TE: Virtue, character, influence, moral force. The "outward effect of a man and the inward effect of the self."

The final comment by the translator before launching into the ancient chapters of text is the following:

*"The message of the book is still of general interest,
and that is important in a day when the old compartmentalisation of the world is so
shaken by the idea of 'One World'.
In 'One World' the Tao Te Ching would be quite at home."*

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

The arrangements of the 81 texts have been distributed over nine different web documents, each containing 9 verses.

In order to facilitate movement between the etexts and the index I have created the index document as a separate file.

[Translational & Editorial Notes]

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The Mystic Wisdom of Ancient China

"Tao Te Ching" ... the Way of Life

Part 1 of 9 - Chapters 1 to 9

TAO: A road, a path, the way by which people travel, the way of nature and finally the Way of ultimate reality.

TE: Virtue, character, influence, moral force. The "outward effect of a man and the inward effect of the self."

{01} There are ways but the Way is uncharted ...

There are ways but the Way is uncharted;
 There are names but not nature in words:
 Nameless indeed is the source of creation
 But things have a mother and she has a name.

The secret waits for the insight
 Of eyes unclouded by longing;
 Those who are bound by desire
 See only the outward container.

These two come paired but distinct
 By their names.
 Of all things profound,
 Say that their pairing is deepest,
 The gate to the root of the world.

{02} Duality and the Wise Man's Office ...

Since the world points up beauty as such,
 There is ugliness too.
 If goodness is taken as goodness,
 Wickedness enters as well.

For is and is-not come together;
 Hard and easy are complementary;
 Long and short are relative;
 High and low are comparative;
 Pitch and sound make harmony;
 Before and after are a sequence.

Indeed the Wise Man's office
 Is to work by being still
 He teaches not by speech
 But by accomplishment;
 He does for everything,
 Neglecting none;
 Their life he gives to all,
 Possessing none;
 And what he brings to pass
 Depends on no one else.
 As he succeeds,
 He takes no credit
 And just because he does not take it,
 Credit never leaves him.

{03} The People and the Wise Man's Policy ...

If those who are excellent find no preferment,
 The people will cease to contend for promotion.
 If goods that are hard to obtain are not favored,
 The people will cease to turn robbers or bandits.
 If things much desired are kept under cover,
 Disturbance will cease in the minds of the people.

The Wise Man's policy, accordingly,
 Will be to empty people's hearts and minds,
 To fill their bellies, weaken their ambition,
 Give them sturdy frames and always so,
 To keep them uniformed, without desire,
 And knowing ones not venturing to act.

Be still while you work
 And keep full control
 Over all.

{04} The Nature of the Way ...

The Way is a void,
 Used but never filled:
 An abyss it is,
 From which all things come.

It blunts sharpness,
 Resolves tangles;
 It tempers light,
 Subdues turmoil.

A deep pool it is,
 Never to run dry!
 Whose offspring it may be
 I do not know:
 It is like a preface to God.

{05} The Thoughts and Talk of the Wise Man ..

Is then the world unkind?
 And does it treat all things
 Like straw dogs used in magic rights?
 The Wise man too, is he unkind?
 And does he treat the folk
 Like straw dogs made to throw away?

Between the earth and sky
 The space is like a bellows,
 Empty but unspent.
 When moved its gift is copious.

Much talk means much exhaustion;
 Better far it is to keep your thoughts!

{06} The Valley Spirit ..

The valley spirit is not dead;
 They say it is the mystic female.
 Her gateway is, they further say,
 The base of heaven and earth.

Constantly, and so forever,
Use her without labour.

{07} The Wise Man ... Being Last & UnSelfish

The sky is everlasting
And the earth is very old.
Why so? Because the world
Exists not for itself;
It can and will live on.

The Wise Man chooses to be last
And so becomes the first of all;
Denying self, he too is saved.
For does he not fulfillment find
In being an unselfish man?

{08} Peace - the Goal of the Way ...

The highest goodness, water-like,
Does good to everything and goes
Unmurmuring to places men despise;
But so, is close in nature to the Way.

If the good of the house is from land,
Or the good of the mind is depth,
Or love is the virtue of friendship,
Or honesty blesses one's talk,
Or in government, goodness is order,
Or in business, skill is admired,
Or the worth of an act lies in timing,
Then peace is the goal of the Way
By which no one ever goes astray.

{09} To Know when to stop ...

To take all you want
 Is never as good
 As to stop when you should.
 Scheme and be sharp
 And you'll not keep it long.
 One can never guard
 His home when it's full
 Of jade and fine gold:
 Wealth, power and pride
 Bequeath their own doom.
 When fame and success
 Come to you, then retire.
 This is the ordained Way.

Part 2 of 9 - Chapters 10 to 18

TAO: A road, a path, the way by which people travel, the way of nature and finally the Way of ultimate reality.

TE: Virtue, character, influence, moral force. The "outward effect of a man and the inward effect of the self."

{10} The Mystic Virtue ...

Can you govern your animal soul, hold to the One and never depart from it?

Can you throttle your breath, down to the softness of breath in a child?

Can you purify your mystic vision and wash it until it is spotless?

Can you love all your people, rule over the land without being known?

Can you be like a female, and passively open and shut heaven's gates?

Can you keep clear in your mind the four quarters of earth and not interfere?

Quicken them, feed them;

Quicken but do not possess them.

Act and be independent;

Be the chief but never the lord:

This describes the mystic virtue.

{11} The Nature of Usefulness ...

Thirty spokes will converge
In the hub of a wheel;
But the use of the cart
Will depend on the part
Of the hub that is void.

With a wall all around
A clay bowl is molded;
But the use of the bowl
Will depend on the part
Of the bowl that is void.

Cut out windows and doors
In the house as you build;
But the use of the house
Will depend on the space
In the walls that is void.

So advantage is had
From whatever is there;
But usefulness rises
From whatever is not.

{12} Choice and Discrimination ...

The five colors darken the eye;
The five sounds will deaden the ear;
The five flavors weary the taste;
Chasing the beasts of the field
Will drive a man mad.
The goods that are hard to procure
Are hobbles that slow walking feet.

So the Wise Man will do
What his belly dictates
And never the sight of his eyes.
Thus he will choose this but not that.

{13} The Nature of Favour and Disgrace ...

"Favor, like disgrace
 Brings trouble with it;
 High rank, like self,
 Involves acute distress."

What does that mean, to say
 That "favor, like disgrace
 Brings trouble with it"?
 When favor is bestowed
 On one of low degree,

Trouble will come with it.
 The loss of favor too
 Means trouble for that man.
 This, then, is what is meant
 By "favor, like disgrace
 Brings trouble with it."

What does it mean, to say
 That "rank, like self,
 Involves acute distress"?
 I suffer most because
 Of me and selfishness.
 If I were selfless, then
 What suffering would I bear?

In governing the world,
 Let rule entrusted be
 To him who treats his rank
 As if it were his soul;
 World sovereignty can be
 Committed to that man
 Who loves all people
 As he loves himself.

{14} They Call it Elusive ...

They call it elusive, and say
 That one looks
 But it never appears.
 They say that indeed it is rare,
 Since one listens,

But never a sound.
 Subtle, they call it, and say
 That one grasps it
 But never gets hold.
 These three complaints amount
 To only one, which is
 Beyond all resolution.

At rising, it does not illumine;
 At setting, no darkness ensues;
 It stretches far back
 To that nameless estate
 Which existed before the creation.

Describe it as form yet unformed;
 As shape that is still without shape;
 Or say it is vagueness confused:
 One meets it and it has no front;
 One follows and there is no rear.

If you hold ever fast
 To that most ancient Way,
 You may govern today.
 Call truly that knowledge
 Of primal beginnings
 The clue to the Way.

{15} The Ancient masters of the Way of Nature ...

The excellent masters of old,
 Subtle, mysterious, mystic, acute,
 Were much too profound for their times.
 Since they were not then understood,
 It is better to tell how they looked.

Like men crossing streams in the winter, How cautious!
 As if all around there were danger, How watchful!
 As if they were guests on every occasion, How dignified!
 Like ice just beginning to melt, Self-effacing!
 Like a wood-block untouched by a tool, How sincere!
 Like a valley awaiting a guest, How receptive!
 Like a torrent that rushes along, And so turbid!

Who, running dirty, comes clean like still waters?
 Who, being quiet, moves others to fullness of life?
 It is he who, embracing the Way, is not greedy;
 Who endures wear and tear without needing renewal.

{16} The Way and Immortality ...

Touch ultimate emptiness,
 Hold steady and still.

All things work together:
 I have watched them reverting,
 And have seen how they flourish
 And return again, each to his roots.

This, I say, is the stillness:
 A retreat to one's roots;
 Or better yet, return
 To the will of God,
 Which is, I say, to constancy.
 The knowledge of constancy
 I call enlightenment and say
 That not to know it
 Is blindness that works evil.

But when you know
 What eternally is so,
 You have stature
 And stature means righteousness
 And righteousness is kingly
 And kingliness divine
 And divinity is the Way
 Which is final.

Then, though you die,
 You shall not perish.

{17} The Ruler of the People ...

As for him who is highest,
 The people just know he is there.
 His deputy's cherished and praised;

Of the third, they are frightened;
 The fourth, they depise and revile.
 If you trust people less than enough,
 Some of them never trust you.

He is aloof, as if his talk
 Were priced beyond the purchasing;
 But once his project is contrived,
 The folk will want to say of it:
 "Of course! We did it by ourselves!"

{18} The Decline of the Way ...

The mighty Way declined among the folk
 And then came kindness and morality.
 When wisdom and intelligence appeared,
 They brought with them a great hypocrisy.
 The six relations were no more at peace,
 So codes were made to regulate our homes.
 The fatherland grew dark, confused by strife:
 Official loyalty became the style.

Part 3 of 9 - Chapters 19 to 27

TAO: A road, a path, the way by which people travel, the way of nature and finally the Way of ultimate reality.

TE: Virtue, character, influence, moral force. The "outward effect of a man and the inward effect of the self."

{19} The Simplicity of Life ...

Get rid of the wise men!
 Put out the professors!
 Then people will profit
 A hundredfold over.

Away with the kind ones;
 Those righteous men too!
 And let people return
 To the graces of home.
 Root out the artisans;
 Banish the profiteers!
 And bandits and robbers
 Will not come to plunder.

But if these three prove not enough
 To satisfy the mind and heart,
 More relevant, then, let there be
 A visible simplicity of life,
 Embracing unpretentious ways,
 And small self-interest
 And poverty of coveting.

{20} On the Solitary Nature ...

Be done with rote learning
 And its attendant vexations;
 For is there distinction
 Of a "yes" from a "yea"
 Comparable now to the gulf
 Between evil and good?
 "What all men fear, I too must fear"-
 How barren and pointless a thought!

The reveling of multitudes
 At the feast of Great Sacrifice,
 Or up on the terrace
 At carnival in spring,
 Leave me, alas, unmoved, alone,
 Like a child that has never smiled.

Lazily, I drift
 As though I had no home.
 All others have enough to spare;
 I am the one left out.
 I have the mind of a fool,
 Muddled and confused!
 When common people scintillate
 I alone make shadows.
 Vulgar folks are sharp and knowing:

Only I am melancholy.
 Restless like the ocean,
 Blown about, I cannot stop.
 Other men can find employment,
 But I am stubborn; I am mean.

Alone I am and different,
 Because I prize and seek
 My sustenance from the Mother!

{21} The Omnipresent Virtue ...

The omnipresent Virtue will take shape
 According only to the Way.
 The Way itself is like some thing
 Seen in a dream, elusive, evading one.
 In it are images, elusive, evading one.
 In it are things like shadows in twilight.
 In it are essences, subtle but real,
 Embedded in truth.

From of old until now,
 Under names without end,
 The First, the Beginning is seen.
 How do I know the beginning of all,
 What its nature may be?
 By these!

{22} The Crooked shall be made Straight ...

The crooked shall be made straight
 And the rough places plain;
 The pools shall be filled
 And the worn renewed;
 The needy shall receive
 And the rich shall be perplexed.

So the Wise Man cherishes the One,
 As a standard to the world:
 Not displaying himself,
 He is famous;
 Not asserting himself,

He is distinguished;
 Not boasting his powers,
 He is effective;
 Taking no pride in himself,
 He is chief.

Because he is no competitor,
 No one in all the world
 can compete with him.

The saying of the men of old
 Is not in vain:
 "The crooked shall be made straight-"
 To be perfect, return to it.

{23} Sparing indeed is the Nature of its Talk ...

Sparing indeed is nature of its talk:
 The whirlwind will not last the morning out;
 The cloudburst ends before the day is done.
 What is it that behaves itself like this?
 The earth and sky! And if it be that these
 Cut short their speech, how much more yet should man!

If you work by the Way,
 You will be of the Way;
 If you work through its virtue
 you will be given the virtue;
 Abandon either one
 And both abandon you.

Gladly then the Way receives
 Those who choose to walk in it;
 Gladly too its power upholds
 Those who choose to use it well;
 Gladly will abandon greet
 Those who to abandon drift.

Little faith is put in them
 Whose faith is small.

{24} The Persons of the Way are humble ...

On tiptoe your stance is unsteady;
 Long strides make your progress unsure;
 Show off and you get no attention;
 Your boasting will mean you have failed;
 Asserting yourself brings no credit;
 Be proud and you will never lead.

To persons of the Way, these traits
 Can only bring distrust; they seem
 Like extra food for parasites.
 So those who choose the Way,
 Will never give them place.

{25} Before the Earth or Sky Began ...

Something there is, whose veiled creation was
 Before the earth or sky began to be;
 So silent, so aloof and so alone,
 It changes not, nor fails, but touches all:
 Conceive it as the mother of the world.

I do not know its name:
 A name for it is "Way";
 Pressed for designation,
 I call it Great.
 Great means outgoing,
 Outgoing, far-reaching,
 Far-reaching, return.

The Way is great,
 The sky is great,
 The earth is great,
 The king also is great.
 Within the realm
 These four are great;
 The king but stands
 For one of them.

Man conforms to the earth;
 The earth conforms to the sky;
 The sky conforms to the Way;
 The Way conforms to its own nature.

{26} The Place of Peace ...

The heavy is foundation for the light;
So quietness is master of the deed.

The Wise Man, though he travel all the day,
Will not be separated from his goods.
So even if the scene is glorious to view,
He keeps his place, at peace, above it all.

For how can one who rules
Ten thousand chariots
Give up to lighter moods
As all the world may do?
If he is trivial,
His ministers are lost;
If he is strenuous,
There is no master then.

{27} The Good Man and the Bad Man ...

A good runner leaves no tracks.

A good speech has no flaws to censure.

A good computer uses no tallies.

A good door is well shut without bolts and cannot be opened.

A good knot is tied without rope and cannot be loosed.

The Wise Man is always good at helping people, so that none are cast out;
he is always good at saving things, so that none are thrown away.
This is called applied intelligence.

Surely the good man is the bad man's teacher;
and the bad man is the good man's business.
If the one does not respect his teacher,
or the other doesn't love his business,
his error is very great.

This is indeed an important secret.

TAO: A road, a path, the way by which people travel, the way of nature and finally the Way of ultimate reality.

TE: Virtue, character, influence, moral force. The "outward effect of a man and the inward effect of the self."

{28} The Nature of Opposites and Change ...

Be aware of your masculine nature;
 But by keeping the feminine way,
 You shall be to the world like a canyon,
 Where the Virtue eternal abides,
 And go back to become as a child.

Be aware of the white all around you;
 But rememb'ring the black that is there,
 You shall be to the world like a tester,
 Whom the Virtue eternal, unerring,
 Redirects to the infinite past.

Be aware of your glory and honor;
 But in never relinquishing shame,
 You shall be to the world like a valley,
 Where Virtue eternal, sufficient,
 Sends you back to the Virginal Block.

When the Virginal Block is asunder,
 And is made into several tools,
 To the ends of the Wise Man directed,
 They become then his chief officers:
 For "**The Master himself does not carve.**"

{29} The World is a Sacred Vessel ...

As for those who would take the whole world
 To tinker as they see fit,
 I observe that they never succeed:
 For the world is a sacred vessel

Not made to be altered by man.
 The tinker will spoil it;
 Usurpers will lose it.

For indeed there are things
 That must move ahead,
 While others must lag;
 And some that feel hot,
 While others feel cold;
 And some that are strong,
 While others are weak;
 And vigorous ones,
 While others worn out.

So the Wise Man discards
 Extreme inclinations
 To make sweeping judgements,
 Or to a life of excess.

{30} The Means of the Way ...

To those who would help
 The ruler of men
 By means of the Way:

Let him not with his militant might
 Try to conquer the world;
 This tactic is like to recoil.
 For where armies have marched,
 There do briars spring up;
 Where great hosts are impressed,
 Years of hunger and evil ensue.

The good man's purpose once attained,
 He stops at that;
 He will not press for victory.
 His point once made, he does not boast,
 Or celebrate the goal he gained,
 Or proudly indicate the spoils.
 He won the day because he must:
 But not by force or violence.

That things with age decline in strength,
 You well may say, suits not the Way;
 And not to suit the Way is early death.

{31} Weapons at best are tools of bad omen ...

Weapons at best are tools of bad omen,
 Loathed and avoided by those of the Way.

In the usage of men of good breeding,
 Honor is had at the left;
 Good omens belong on the left
 Bad omens belong on the right;
 And warriors press to the right!
 When the general stands at the right
 His lieutenant is placed at the left.
 So the usage of men of great power
 Follows that of the funeral rite.

Weapons are tools of bad omen,
 By gentlemen not to be used;
 But when it cannot be avoided,
 They use them with calm and restraint.
 Even in victory's hour
 These tools are unlovely to see;
 For those who admire them truly
 Are men who in murder delight.

As for those who delight to do murder,
 It is certain they never can get
 From the world what they sought when ambition
 Urged them to power and rule.

A multitude slain!- and their death
 Is a matter for grief and for tears;
 The victory after a conflict
 Is a theme for a funeral rite.

{32} The Way eternal has no name ...

The Way eternal has no name.
 A block of wood untooled, though small,

May still excel the world.
 And if the king and nobles could
 Retain its potency for good,
 Then everything would freely give
 Allegiance to their rule.

The earth and sky would then conspire
 To bring the sweet dew down;
 And evenly it would be given
 To folk without constraining power.

Creatures came to be with order's birth,
 And once they had appeared,
 Came also knowledge of repose,
 And with that was security.

In this world,
 Compare those of the Way
 To torrents that flow
 Into river and sea.

{33} Wisdom and Enlightenment ...

It is wisdom to know others;
 It is enlightenment to know one's self.

The conqueror of men is powerful;
 The master of himself is strong.

It is wealth to be content;
 It is willful to force one's way on others.

Endurance is to keep one's place;
 Long life it is to die and not perish.

{34} The Great Way OverFlows on every Side ...

O the great Way o'erflows
 And spreads on every side!
 All beings come from it;
 No creature is denied.
 But having called them forth,

It calls not one its own.
 It feeds and clothes them all
 And will not be their lord.

Without desire always,
 It seems of slight import.
 Yet, nonetheless, in this
 Its greatness still appears:
 When they return to it,
 No creature meets a lord.

The Wise Man, therefore, while he is alive,
 Will never make a show of being great:
 And that is how his greatness is achieved.

{35} The great Form without form ...

Once grasp the great Form without form,
 And you roam where you will
 With no evil to fear,
 Calm, peaceful, at ease.

At music and viands
 The wayfarer stops.
 But the Way, when declared,
 Seems thin and so flavorless!

It is nothing to look at
 And nothing to hear;
 But used, it will prove
 Inexhaustible.

{36} The Way of Subtle Light ...

What is to be shrunken
 Is first stretched out;
 What is to be weakened
 Is first made strong;
 What will be thrown over
 Is first raised up;
 What will be withdrawn
 Is first bestowed.

This indeed is
 Subtle Light;
 The gentle way
 Will overcome
 The hard and strong.
 As fish should not
 Get out of pools,
 The realm's edged tools
 Should not be shown
 To anybody.

Part 5 of 9 - Chapters 37 to 45

TAO: A road, a path, the way by which people travel, the way of nature and finally the Way of ultimate reality.

TE: Virtue, character, influence, moral force. The "outward effect of a man and the inward effect of the self."

{37} The Way is always still, at rest ...

The Way is always still, at rest,
 And yet does everything that's done.
 If then the king and nobles could
 Retain its potency for good,
 The creatures all would be transformed.

But if, the change once made in them,
 They still inclined to do their work,
 I should restrain them then
 By means of that unique
 Original simplicity
 Found in the Virgin Block,
 Which brings disinterest,
 With stillness in its train,
 And so, an ordered world.

{38} A Man of Highest Virtue ...

A man of highest virtue
 Will not display it as his own;
 His virtue then is real.
 Low virtue makes one miss no chance
 To show his virtue off;
 His virtue then is nought.
 High virtue is at rest;
 It knows no need to act.
 Low virtue is a busyness
 Pretending to accomplishment.

Compassion at its best
 Consists in honest deeds;
 Morality at best
 Is something done, aforethought;
 High etiquette, when acted out
 Without response from others,
 Constrains a man to bare his arms
 And make them do their duty!

Truly, once the Way is lost,
 There comes then virtue;
 Virtue lost, comes then compassion;
 After that morality;
 And when that's lost, there's etiquette,
 The husk of all good faith,
 The rising point of anarchy.

Foreknowledge is, they say,
 The Doctrine come to flower;
 But better yet, it is
 The starting point of silliness
 . So once full-grown, a man will take
 The meat and not the husk,
 The fruit and not the flower.
 Rejecting one, he takes the other.

{39} The Ancient receipt of the One ...

These things in ancient times received the One:

The sky obtained it and was clarified;
 The earth received it and was settled firm;
 The spirits got it and were energized;
 The valleys had it, filled to overflow;
 All things, as they partook it came alive;
 The nobles and the king imbibed the One
 In order that the realm might upright be;
 Such things were then accomplished by the One.

Without its clarity the sky might break;
 Except it were set firm, the earth might shake;
 Without their energy the gods would pass;
 Unless kept full, the valleys might go dry;
 Except for life, all things would pass away;
 Unless the One did lift and hold them high,
 The nobles and the king might trip and fall.

The humble folk support the mighty ones;
 They are base on which the highest rest.
 The nobles and the king speak of themselves
 As "orphans," "desolate" and "needy ones."
 Does this not indicate that they depend
 Upon the lowly people for support?

Truly a cart is more than the sum of its parts.

Better to rumble like rocks
 Than to tinkle like jade.

{40} The Movement of the Way is a Return ...

The movement of the Way is a return;
 In weakness lies its major usefulness.
 From What-is all the world of things was born
 But What-is sprang in turn from What-is-not.

{41} On Hearing of the Way ...

On hearing of the Way, the best of men
 Will earnestly explore its length.
 The mediocre person learns of it
 And takes it up and sets it down.
 But vulgar people, when they hear the news,

Will laugh out loud, and if they did not laugh,
It would not be the Way.

And so there is a proverb:

*"When going looks like coming back,
The clearest road is mighty dark."*

Today, the Way that's plain looks rough,
And lofty virtue like a chasm;
The purest innocence like shame,
The broadest power not enough,
Established goodness knavery,
Substantial worth like shifting tides.

Great space has no corners;
Great powers come late;
Great music is soft sound;
The great Form no shape.

The Way is obscure and unnamed;
It is a skilled investor, nonetheless,
The master of accomplishment.

{42} On the Sun and the Shade ...

The Way begot one,
And the one, two;
Then the two begot three
And three, all else.

All things bear the shade on their backs
And the sun in their arms;
By the blending of breath
From the sun and the shade,
Equilibrium comes to the world.

Orphaned, or needy, or desolate, these
Are conditions much feared and disliked;
Yet in public address, the king
And the nobles account themselves thus.
So a loss sometimes benefits one
Or a benefit proves to be loss.

What others have taught
 I also shall teach:
 If a violent man does not come
 To a violent death,
 I shall choose him to teach me.

{43} Instruction without Words ...

The softest of stuff in the world
 Penetrates quickly the hardest;
 Insubstantial, it enters
 Where no room is.

By this I know the benefit
 Of something done by quiet being;
 In all the world but few can know
 Accomplishment apart from work,
 Instruction when no words are used.

{44} Which is Dearer, fame or self ..?

Which is dearer, fame or self?
 Which is worth more, man or self?
 Which would hurt more, gain or loss?

The mean man pays the highest price;
 The hoarder takes the greatest loss;
 A man content is never shamed,
 And self-restrained, is not in danger:
 He will live forever.

{45} The Wise Man, pure and still ...

Most perfect, yet it seems
 Imperfect, incomplete:
 Its use is not impaired.
 Filled up, and yet it seems
 Poured out, an empty void:
 It never will run dry.

The straightest, yet it seems
 To deviate, to bend;
 The highest skill and yet
 It looks like clumsiness.
 The utmost eloquence,
 It sounds like stammering.

As movement overcomes
 The cold, and stillness, heat,
 The Wise Man, pure and still,
 Will rectify the world.

Part 6 of 9 - Chapters 46 to 54

TAO: A road, a path, the way by which people travel, the way of nature and finally the Way of ultimate reality.

TE: Virtue, character, influence, moral force. The "outward effect of a man and the inward effect of the self."

{46} The Way of Contentment ...

When the Way rules the world,
 Coach horses fertilize the fields;
 When the Way does not rule,
 War horses breed in the parks.

No sin can exceed
 Incitement to envy;
 No calamity's worse
 Than to be discontented,
 Nor is there an omen
 More dreadful than coveting.
 But once be contented,
 And truly you'll always be so.

{47} The world may be known without leaving the house ...

The world may be known
 Without leaving the house;
 The Way may be seen
 Apart from the windows.
 The further you go,
 The less you will know.

Accordingly, the Wise Man
 Knows without going,
 Sees without seeing,
 Does without doing.

{48} The student learns by daily increment ...

The student learns by daily increment.
 The Way is gained by daily loss,
 Loss upon loss until
 At last comes rest.

By letting go, it all gets done;
 The world is won by those who let it go!
 But when you try and try,
 The world is then beyond the winning.

{49} Wise Men hear and see ...

The Wise Man's mind is free
 But tuned to people's need:
 "Alike to be good and bad
 I must be good,
 For Virtue is goodness.
 To honest folk
 And those dishonest ones
 Alike, I proffer faith,
 For Virtue is faithful."

The Wise Man, when abroad,
 Impartial to the world,
 Does not divide or judge.
 But people everywhere
 Mark well his ears and eyes;

For wise men hear and see
As little children do.

{50} How best to be at peace ...

On leaving life, to enter death:
Thirteen members form a living body;
A corpse has thirteen, too:
Thirteen spots by which a man may pass
From life to death. Why so?
Because his way of life
Is much too gross.

As I have heard, the man who knows
On land how best to be at peace
Will never meet a tiger or a buffalo;
In battle, weapons do not touch his skin.
There is no place the tiger's claws can grip;
Or with his horn, the buffalo can jab;
Or where the soldier can insert his sword.
Why so? In him there is no place of death.

{51} The Mystic Power ...

The Way brings forth,
Its virtue fosters them,
With matter they take shape,
And circumstance perfects them all:
That is why all things
Do honor the Way
And venerate its power.

The exaltation of the Way,
The veneration of its power,
Come not by fate or decree;
But always just because
By nature it is so.

So when the Way brings forth,
Its power fosters all:
They grow, are reared,
And fed and housed until

They come to ripe maturity.
 You shall give life to things
 But never possess them;
 Your work shall depend on none;
 You shall be chief but never lord.

This describes the mystic power.

{52} Practicing constancy ...

It began with a matrix:
 The world had a mother
 Whose sons can be known
 As ever, by her.
 But if you know them,
 You'll keep close to her
 As long as you live
 And suffer no harm.

Stop up your senses;
 Close up your doors;
 Be not exhausted
 As long as you live.
 Open your senses;
 Be busier still:
 To the end of your days
 There's no help for you.

You are bright, it is said,
 If you see what is small;
 A store of small strengths
 Makes you strong.
 By the use of its light,
 Make your eyes again bright
 From evil to lead you away.

This is called '**practicing constancy**.'

{53} Walking on the mighty Way ...

When I am walking on the mighty Way,
 Let me but know the very least I may,

And I shall only fear to leave the road.
 The mighty Way is easy underfoot,
 But people still prefer the little paths.

The royal court is dignified, sedate
 , While farmers' fields are overgrown with weeds;
 The granaries are empty and yet they
 Are clad in rich-embroidered silken gowns.
 They have sharp swords suspended at their sides;
 With gluttoned wealth, they gorge with food and drink.

It is, the people say,
 The boastfulness of brigandage,
 But surely not the Way!

{54} Set firm in the Way: none shall uproot you ...

Set firm in the Way: none shall uproot you;
 Cherish it well and none shall estrange you;
 Your children's children faithful shall serve
 Your forebears at the altar of your house.

Cultivate the Way yourself,
 and your Virtue will be genuine.
 Cultivate it in the home,
 and its Virtue will overflow.
 Cultivate it in the village,
 and the village will endure.
 Cultivate it in the realm,
 and the realm will flourish.
 Cultivate it in the world,
 and Virtue will be universal.

Accordingly,

One will be judged by the Man of the Way;
 Homes will be viewed through the Home of the Way;
 And the Village shall measure the village;
 And the Realm, for all realms, shall be standard;
 And the World, to this world, shall be heaven.

How do I know the world is like this?
 By this.

Part 7 of 9 - Chapters 55 to 63

TAO: A road, a path, the way by which people travel, the way of nature and finally the Way of ultimate reality.

TE: Virtue, character, influence, moral force. The "outward effect of a man and the inward effect of the self."

{55} Harmony experienced is known as constancy ...

Rich in virtue, like an infant,
Noxious insects will not sting him;
Wild beasts will not attack his flesh
Nor birds of prey sink claws in him.

His bones are soft, his sinews weak,
His grip is nonetheless robust;
Of sexual union unaware,
His organs all completely formed,
His vital force is at its height.
He shouts all day, does not get hoarse:
His person is a harmony.

Harmony experienced is known as constancy;
Constancy experienced is called enlightenment;
Exuberant vitality is ominous, they say;
A bent for vehemence is called aggressiveness.

That things with age decline in strength,
You well may say, suits not the Way;
And not to suit the Way is early death.

{56} Those who know do not talk and talkers do not know ...

Those who know do not talk
And talkers do not know.

Stop your senses,
 Close the doors;
 Let sharp things be blunted,
 Tangles resolved,
 The light tempered
 And turmoil subdued;
 For this is mystic unity
 In which the Wise Man is moved
 Neither by affection
 Nor yet by estrangement
 Or profit or loss
 Or honor or shame.
 Accordingly, by all the world,
 He is held highest.

{57} The world is won by refraining ...

"Govern the realm by the right,
 And battles by stratagem."

The world is won by refraining.
 How do I know this is so?
 By this:

As taboos increase, people grow poorer;
 When weapons abound, the state grows chaotic;
 Where skills multiply, novelties flourish;
 As statutes increase, more criminals start.

So the Wise Man will say:

As I refrain, the people will reform:
 Since I like quiet, they will keep order;
 When I forebear, the people will prosper;
 When I want nothing, they will be honest.

{58} Wise Men hear and see ...

Listlessly govern:
 Happy your people;
 Govern exactingly:
 Restless your people.

"Bad fortune will
Promote the good;
Good fortune, too,
Gives rise to the bad."

But who can know to what that leads?
For it is wrong and would assign
To right the strangest derivations
And would mean that goodness
Is produced by magic means!
Has man thus been so long astray?

Accordingly, the Wise Man
Is square but not sharp,
Honest but not malign,
Straight but not severe,
Bright but not dazzling.

{59} "There's nothing else like stores saved up." ...

"For ruling men or serving God,
There's nothing else like stores saved up."

By "stores saved up" is meant forehandedness,
Accumulate Virtue, such that nothing
Can resist it and its limit
None can guess: such infinite resource
Allows the jurisdiction of the king;
Whose kingdom then will long endure
If it provides the Mother an abode.
Indeed it is the deeply rooted base,
The firm foundation of the Way
To immortality of self and name.

{60} Rule a large country as small fish are cooked ...

Rule a large country
As small fish are cooked.

The evil spirits of the world
Lose sanction as divinities
When government proceeds

According to the Way;
 But even if they do not lose
 Their ghostly countenance and right,
 The people take no harm from them;
 And if the spirits cannot hurt the folk,
 The Wise Man surely does no hurt to them.

Since then the Wise Man and the people
 Harm each other not at all,
 Their several virtues should converge.

{61} The great land is a place to which the streams descend ...

The great land is a place
 To which the streams descend;
 It is the concourse and
 The female of the world:
 Quiescent, underneath,
 It overcomes the male.

By quietness and by humility
 The great land then puts down the small
 And gets it for its own;
 But small lands too absorb the great
 By their subservience.
 Thus some lie low, designing conquest's ends;
 While others lowly are, by nature bent
 To conquer all the rest.

The great land's foremost need is to increase
 The number of its folk;
 The small land needs above all else to find
 Its folk more room to work.
 That both be served and each attain its goal
 The great land should attempt humility.

{62} The good man's treasure is the bad man's refuge ...

Like the gods of the shrine in the home,
 So the Way and its mystery waits
 In the world of material things:

The good man's treasure,
The bad man's refuge.

Fair wordage is ever for sale;
Fair manners are worn like a cloak;
But why should there be such waste
Of the badness in men?

On the day of the emperor's crowning,
When the three noble dukes are appointed,
Better than chaplets of jade
Drawn by a team of four horses,
Bring the Way as your tribute.

How used the ancients to honor the Way?
Didn't they say that the seeker may find it,
And that sinners who find are forgiven?
So did they lift up the Way and its Virtue
Above everything else in the world.

{63} Act in repose - Choosing hardship ...

Act in repose;
Be at rest when you work;
Relish unflavored things.
Great or small,
Frequent or rare,
Requite anger with virtue.

Take hard jobs in hand
While they are easy;
And great affairs too
While they are small.
The troubles of the world
Cannot be solved except
Before they grow too hard.
The business of the world
Cannot be done except
While relatively small.
The Wise Man, then, throughout his life
Does nothing great and yet achieves
A greatness of his own.

Again, a promise lightly made
 Inspires little confidence;
 Or often trivial, sure that man
 Will often come to grief.
 Choosing hardship, then, the Wise Man
 Never meets with hardship all his life.

Part 8 of 9 - Chapters 64 to 72

TAO: A road, a path, the way by which people travel, the way of nature and finally the Way of ultimate reality.

TE: Virtue, character, influence, moral force. The "outward effect of a man and the inward effect of the self."

{64} Be as careful of the end as you were of the beginning ...

A thing that is still is easy to hold.
 Given no omen, it is easy to plan.
 Soft things are easy to melt.
 Small particles scatter easily.
 The time to take care is before it is done.
 Establish order before confusion sets in.
 Tree trunks around which you can reach with
 your arms were at first only miniscule sprouts.
 A nine-storied terrace began with a clod.
 A thousand-mile journey began with a foot put down.

Doing spoils it, grabbing misses it;
 So the Wise Man refrains from doing
 and doesn't spoil anything;
 He grabs at nothing so never misses.

People are constantly spoiling a project when
 it lacks only a step to completion.

To avoid making a mess of it, be as careful of
the end as you were of the beginning.

So the Wise Man wants the unwanted;
he sets no high value on anything
because it is hard to get.
He studies what others neglect
and restores to the world what multitudes have passed by.
His object is to restore everything to its natural course,
but he dares take no steps to that end.

{65} Those ancients who were skilled in the Way ...

Those ancients who were skilled in the Way
Did not enlighten people by their rule
But had them ever held in ignorance:
The more the folk know what is going on
The harder it becomes to govern them.

For public knowledge of the government
Is such a thief that it will spoil the realm;
But when good fortune brings good times to all
The land is ruled without publicity.
To know the difference between these two
Involves a standard to be sought and found.

To know that standard always, everywhere,
Is mystic Virtue, justly known as such;
Which Virtue is so deep and reaching far,
It causes a return, things go back
To that prime concord which at first all shared.

{66} How could the rivers and the seas become like kings to valleys ...?

How could the rivers and the seas
Become like kings to valleys?
Because of skill in lowliness
They have become the valley's lords.

So then to be above the folk,
You speak as if you were beneath;

And if you wish to be out front,
Then act as if you were behind.

The Wise Man so is up above
But is no burden to the folk;
His station is ahead of them
To see they do not come to harm.

The world will gladly help along
The Wise Man and will bear no grudge.
Since he contends not for his own
The world will not contend with him.

{67} Compassion, frugality and ruling ...

Everywhere, they say the Way, our doctrine,
Is so very like detested folly;
But greatness of its own alone explains
Why it should be thus held beyond the pale.
If it were only orthodox, long since
It would have seemed a small and petty thing!

I have to keep three treasures well secured:
The first, compassion; next, frugality;
And third, I say that never would I once
Presume that I should be the whole world's chief.

Given compassion, I can take courage;
Given frugality, I can abound;
If I can be the world's most humble man,
Then I can be its highest instrument.

Bravery today knows no compassion;
Abundance is, without frugality,
And eminence without humility:
This is the death indeed of all our hope.

In battle, 'tis compassion wins the day;
Defending, 'tis compassion that is firm:
Compassion arms the people God would save!

{68} The Stature of the Ancients ...

A skillful soldier is not violent;
 An able fighter does not rage;
 A mighty conqueror does not give battle;
 A great commander is a humble man.

You may call this pacific virtue;
 Or say that it is mastery of men;
 Or that it is rising to the measure of God,
 Or to the stature of the ancients.

{69} Strategy and Compassion ...

The strategists have a saying:
 "If I cannot be host,
 Then let me be guest.
 But if I dare not advance
 Even an inch,
 Then let me retire a foot."

This is what they call

A campaign without a march,
 Sleeves up but no bare arms,
 Shooting but no enemies,
 Or arming without weapons.

Than helpless enemies, nothing is worse:
 To them I lose my treasures.
 When opposing enemies meet,
 The compassionate man is the winner!

{70} Honour comes when least I'm Known ...

My words are easy just to understand:
 To live by them is very easy too;
 Yet it appears that none in all the world
 Can understand or make them come to life.

My words have ancestors, they work a prince;
 Since none know this, unknown I too remain.
 But honor comes to me when least I'm known:

The Wise Man, with a jewel in his breast,
Goes clad in garments made of shoddy stuff.

{71} True knowledge, aberrations and health of mind ...

To know that you are ignorant is best;
To know what you do not, is a disease;
But if you recognize the malady
Of mind for what it is, then that is health.

The Wise Man has indeed a healthy mind;
He sees an aberration as it is
And for that reason never will be ill.

{72} Revealing Inner Nature to the World ...

If people do not dread your majesty,
A greater dread will yet descend on them.
See then you do not cramp their dwelling place,
Or immolate their children or their stock,
Nor anger them by your own angry ways.

It is the Wise Man's way to know himself,
And never to reveal his inward thoughts;
He loves himself but so, is not set up;
He chooses this in preference to that.

Part 9 of 9 - Chapters 73 to 81

TAO: A road, a path, the way by which people travel, the way of nature and finally the Way of ultimate reality.

TE: Virtue, character, influence, moral force. The "outward effect of a man and the inward effect of the self."

{73} Its mesh is coarse but none are lost ...

A brave man who dares to, will kill;
 A brave man who dares not, spares life;
 And from them both come good and ill;
 "God hates some folks, but who knows why?"
 The Wise Man hesitates there too:
 God's Way is bound to conquer all
 But not by strife does it proceed.

Not by words does God get answers:
 He calls them not and all things come.
 Master plans unfold but slowly,
 Like God's wide net enclosing all:
 Its mesh is coarse but none are lost.

{74} The fear of death ...

The people do not fear at all to die;
 What's gained therefore by threat'ning them with death?
 If you could always make them fear de cease,
 As if it were a strange event and rare,
 Who then would dare to take and slaughter them?
 The executioner is always set
 To slay, but those who substitute for him
 Are like would-be master carpenters
 Who try to chop as that skilled craftsman does
 And nearly always mangle their own hands!

{75} To value life above its worth ...

The people starve because of those
 Above them, who consume by tax
 In grain and kind more than their right.
 For this, the people are in want.

The people are so hard to rule
 Because of those who are above them,
 Whose interference makes distress.
 For this, they are so hard to rule.

The people do not fear to die;
 They too demand to live secure:

For this, they do not fear to die.
 So they, without the means to live,
 In virtue rise above those men
 Who value life above its worth.

{76} Unbending rigor is the mate of death, and wielding softness, company of life ...

Alive, a man is supple, soft;
 In death, unbending, rigorous.
 All creatures, grass and trees, alive
 Are plastic but are pliant too,
 And dead, are friable and dry.

Unbending rigor is the mate of death,
 And wielding softness, company of life:
 Unbending soldiers get no victories;
 The stiffest tree is readiest for the axe.
 The strong and mighty topple from their place;
 The soft and yielding rise above them all.

{77} The Way of the Bow well bent ...

Is not God's Way much like a bow well bent?
 The upper part has been disturbed, pressed down;
 The lower part is raised up from its place;
 The slack is taken up; the slender width
 Is broader drawn; for thus the Way of God
 Cuts people down when they have had too much,
 And fills the bowls of those who are in want.
 But not the way of man will work like this:
 The people who have not enough are spoiled
 For tribute to the rich and surfeited.

Who can benefit the world
 From stored abundance of his own?
 He alone who has the Way,
 The Wise Man who can act apart
 And not depend on others' whims;
 But not because of his high rank
 Will he succeed; he does not wish
 To flaunt superiority.

{78} The Paradox of the Nature of Water ...

Nothing is weaker than water,
But when it attacks something hard
Or resistant, then nothing withstands it,
And nothing will alter its way.

Everyone knows this, that weakness prevails
Over strength and that gentleness conquers
The adamant hindrance of men, but that
Nobody demonstrates how it is so.

Because of this the Wise Man says
That only one who bears the nations shame
Is fit to be its hallowed lord;
That only one who takes upon himself
The evils of the world may be its king.

This is paradox.

{79} The Way favours the good men ...

How can you think it is good
To settle a grievance too great
To ignore, when the settlement
Surely evokes other piques?

The Wise Man therefore will select
The left-hand part of contract tallies:
He will not put the debt on other men.
This virtuous man promotes agreement;
The vicious man allots the blame.

"Impartial though the Way of God may be,
It always favors good men."

{80} The ideal land is small ...

The ideal land is small
Its people very few,

Where tools abound
 Ten times or yet
 A hundred-fold
 Beyond their use;
 Where people die
 And die again
 But never emigrate;
 Have boats and carts
 Which no one rides.
 Weapons have they
 And armor too,
 But none displayed.
 The folk returns
 To use again
 The knotted chords.
 Their meat is sweet;
 Their clothes adorned,
 Their homes at peace,
 Their customs charm.

And neighbor lands
 Are juxtaposed
 So each may hear
 The barking dogs,
 The crowing cocks
 Across the way;
 Where folks grow old
 And folks will die
 And never once
 Exchange a call.

{81} The Wise Man's way, to do his work without contending for a crown. ...

As honest words may not sound fine,
 Fine words may not be honest ones;
 A good man does not argue, and
 An arguer may not be good!
 The knowers are not learned men
 And learned men may never know.

The Wise Man does not hoard his things;
 Hard-pressed, from serving other men,
 He has enough and some to spare;

But having given all he had,
He then is very rich indeed.

God's Way is gain that works no harm;
The Wise Man's way, to do his work
Without contending for a crown.