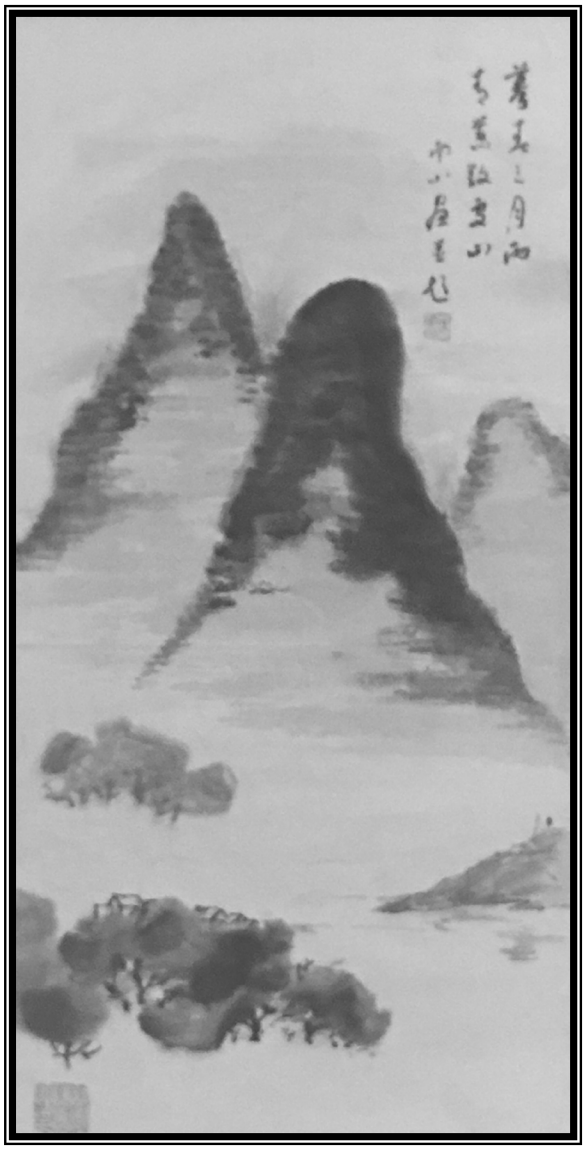
Daodejing

道德經



Translated by Robert Eno
Version 1.4 (2010-2025)

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Note for readers:

This translation was originally prepared for use by students in a general course on early Chinese thought. It should not be regarded as a scholarly translation, which, in the case of the *Daodejing*, would involve a great deal of analysis concerning the variant versions of the text now available, both traditionally received versions and the archeologically recovered version mentioned in the Introduction. The list of projects I prepared for my retirement includes replacing this classroom version of the text with a truly scholarly online edition; however, I have not yet done so, and it seems increasingly unlikely that I will.

This translation does not follow a strong or innovative theory of the philosophy behind the *Daodejing*: I am, in fact, skeptical that a consistent philosophy lay behind the gradual generation of the text we have today. My initial intention in preparing this translation was simply to provide my own students with a version that conveyed the way I thought the text was probably best understood. Of course, I was also happy to make a reasonably responsible rendering of the text available for my students at no cost. I later posted the text online with this latter goal in mind for teachers who wished to select portions of the text for classroom discussion without requiring students to make additional costly purchases or dealing with issues of copyright in assembling extracts.

There are many thoughtful English translations of the text in commercially published form, and the best of these reflect critical analysis derived from scholarly devotion to the text beyond my own. This translation is not intended to replace them, and anyone interested in the serious study of Daoism should look to published translations more scholarly than this one.

Bob Eno
December 2016

Version 1.4 (2025) corrects the omission of chapter 8 <b> and <c> in previous versions.

Introduction

If you walk into a Barnes & Noble bookstore and browse the shelves devoted to "Eastern Thought," you may find one or two translations of the *Analects* of Confucius. The books will probably be plain and low priced, perhaps reprints of long out-of-print editions that are profitable to republish because royalties do not have to be paid to the long-dead translators.

Nearby you will find editions of Laozi's Daoist classic, the *Daodejing*, stretching in an impressive line. Cheap reprints will sit between handsome new hardback publications, some quite pricy, and the selection will also include glossy oversize editions illustrated with elegant calligraphic ink designs or sinuous color paintings. Some of the translators will have been paid six figure sums for their (often incompetent) renderings of Laozi's brief text (perhaps a quarter the size of the *Analects*). Mini-editions may be included too, for those who feel they should carry the words of the sage in their pocket at all times, in case wisdom should be suddenly required when away from home.

Everyone familiar with the field of Chinese thought knows that Daoism sells in America and Confucianism doesn't. And it's no wonder. Daoist books are beautifully written, poetic, imaginative, and often playful. And as far as serious thinking goes, Daoist texts sound deeply profound, while Confucians have a tendency to seem shallow and pedantic. One of the great attractions of Daoist texts is actually that the sense of wisdom they convey is so deep that it frequently seems impossible to understand what they mean. But when we hear Laozi utter majestic words such as, "Reaching the ultimate of emptiness, deeply guarding stillness, the things of the world arise together; thereby do I watch their return," it seems almost sacrilegious to ask precisely what he's talking about.

Major Daoist works

When we speak of Daoism in the Classical period, we generally mean by the term the ideas of two rather mysterious texts that date from about the fourth century BCE. These are the *Daodejing* (道德經, The Classic of the Dao and of Virtue) by Laozi 老子 and the works of the quirky recluse Zhuangzi 莊子, which appear in a book that takes his name as its title. There are a number of other texts that share many ideas with these two books, but we are not sure whether we should actually refer to them as Daoist. Part of the reason we are unsure just which texts to classify as Daoist is that the term "Daoism" itself is much vaguer than is the term Confucianism.

While the Confucians were an identifiable school during the Warring States period (450-221), with teachers and students who shared an identity as disciples of the great Master, Confucius, there was, during the same period, no group of people who called themselves "Daoists" or were labeled by that term. The books we call Daoist are instead independent works, negative reactions against Confucianism that share many features, but whose authors were not necessarily aware of one another or conscious of contributing towards the formation of a school of thought. We do not know, for example, whether the authors of the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* were teachers with students or merely solitary writers whose words were read and passed down by friends and admirers chiefly after their deaths. Only after the Classical period was long over did scholars group these texts into a single school and coin a name for it, calling it the "School of Dao" because of the unique role that the authors of these texts assigned to the term Dao. For these writers, the Dao was not just a teaching that they promoted, in competition with the Daos that other teachers offered. For Daoists, the term "Dao" referred to a fundamental order of the universe that governed all experience and that was the key to wisdom and human fulfillment.

The origins of Daoism

Daoism appears to have begun as an escapist movement during the early Warring States period, and in some ways it makes sense to see it as an outgrowth of Confucianism and its doctrine of "timeliness." That doctrine originated with Confucius's motto: "When the Way prevails in the world, appear; when it does not,

hide!" Even in the Confucian *Analects*, we see signs of a Confucian trend towards absolute withdrawal. The character and comportment of Confucius's best disciple, Yan Hui, who lived in obscurity in an impoverished lane yet "did not alter his joy," suggest this early tendency towards eremitism (the "hermit" lifestyle). In Book 18 of the *Analects*, Confucius himself seems half drawn to this path of absolute social withdrawal.

> Chang Ju and Jie Ni were ploughing the fields in harness together. Confucius passed by and sent his disciple Zilu over to ask directions. Chang Ju said, "Who is that holding the carriage reins?"
>
> Zilu said, "That is Kong Qiu."
>
> "Kong Qiu of Lu?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Why, then, he knows where he can go!"
>
> Zilu then asked Jie Ni. Jie Ni said, "And who are you?"
>
> "I am Zhong You."
>
> "Are you a disciple of Kong Qiu of Lu?"
>
> "I am."
>
> "The world is inundated now. Who can change it? Would you not be better off joining those who have fled from the world altogether, instead of following someone who flees from this man to that one?" Then the two of them went on with their ploughing.
>
> Zilu returned to report to Confucius. The Master's brow furrowed. "I cannot flock together with the birds and beasts!" he cried. "If I am not a fellow traveler with men such as these, then with whom? If only the Dao prevailed in the world I would not have to try to change it!" (18.6)

Righteous hermits were much admired in Classical China, and men who withdrew from society to live in poverty "in the cliffs and caves" paradoxically often enjoyed a type of celebrity status. The legend of Bo Yi, a hermit who descended from his mountain retreat because of the righteousness of King Wen of Zhou, led to the popular idea of hermits as virtue-barometers -- they rose to the mountains when power was in the hands of immoral rulers, but would come back down to society when a sage king finally appeared. Patrician lords very much valued visits from men with reputations as righteous hermits, and this probably created the opportunity for men to appear at court seeking patronage on the basis of their eremitic purity.

Possibly during the fourth century, this eremitic tradition seems to have generated a complex of new ideas that included appreciation for the majestic rhythms of the natural world apart from human society, a celebration of the isolated individual

whose lonely stance signaled a unique power of enlightenment, and a growing interest in the potential social and political leverage that such renunciation of social and political entanglements seemed to promise. The product that emerged from these trends is the *Daodejing* of Laozi, perhaps the most famous of all Chinese books.

Laozi, the guy

Despite the fact that after his death he became one of the world's two or three best-selling authors, Laozi never actually died. In traditional China, many people believed that this was so because Laozi had possessed the secret of immortality and had evaded death by transforming his body into a non-perishable form, after which, being able to fly, he had moved his home to heavenly realms. Modern scholars believe that the reason Laozi never died is because he never lived. There was never any such person as Laozi.

"Laozi" means "the Old Master." Lao is not a Chinese surname and Laozi was clearly never meant to be understood as an identifiable author's name. The *Daodejing* is an anonymous text. Judging by its contents, it was compiled by several very different authors and editors over a period of perhaps a century, reaching its present form perhaps during the third century BCE.*

However, the authorial voice in the *Daodejing* is so strong that readers of the text were from the beginning fascinated with the personality of the apparent author, and among the deep thinkers who claimed to understand the book, there were some who also claimed to know all about the man who wrote it. Pieces of biography began to stick to the name Laozi, and, to make sure that readers understood that Laozi was a more authoritative person than Confucius, his biography came to include tales of his personal relationship to Confucius. Laozi, it seemed, had actually lived before Confucius and had actually been Confucius's teacher. Confucius had journeyed far to study with the great Daoist master, whose sageliness he recognized. Unfortunately, Confucius had not been wise enough to grasp Laozi's profound message and Laozi,

*Manuscript versions of portions of the text dating from the beginning of that century or slightly earlier were archaeologically recovered in 1993; they show a text still significantly distant from the one we have today. Of several bamboo proto-*Daodejing* texts, none constitutes more than about a third of the present text, though taken together they comprise a much larger portion, and the differences of chapter arrangement and of texts of individual chapters are very significant.

for his part, had found Confucius to be a well-meaning but unintelligent pupil. Later in Chinese history, Daoist initiates discovered that before becoming an immortal, Laozi had traveled from China to India, where he went by the name "Buddha" – but that's a story for another course.

The *Daodejing*

Much of the attraction of the *Daodejing* is the product of its very powerful rhetoric. It is written in a uniquely resonant style, and fortunately it is possible to capture some of this resonance even in English translation. The arcane or mysterious style of the *Daodejing* is not an accident. It seems very clear that the composers of the text wanted the book to be mysterious. Part of the message that the *Daodejing* is meant to convey is precisely that there *is* a type of wisdom that is so subtle and esoteric that it is difficult for ordinary minds to comprehend.

The opening phrase of the text sets its tone: "A Dao that may be spoken is not the enduring Dao." What does this say about the book we are about to read -- among other things, that it will not tell us what the Dao is, since this is beyond the power of words to convey. In the original Chinese, the first line is famously difficult to understand. Since the term that the text chooses to use for the word "spoken" is *Dao* (which includes "to speak" among its meanings), the first six words of the book include the word *Dao* three times (more literally it reads: "A *Dao* you can *Dao* isn't the enduring Dao.") Throughout the *Daodejing* the very compressed language challenges readers to "break the code" of the text instead of conveying ideas clearly. Every passage seems to deliver this basic message: Real wisdom is so utterly different from what usually passes for wisdom that only a dramatic leap away from our ordinary perspective can allow us to begin to grasp it.

Basic ideas of the *Daodejing*

The *Daodejing* is often a vague and inconsistent book and it is sometimes tempting to wonder whether its authors really had any special insight to offer, or whether they just wanted to sound impressive. But the book does in fact articulate ideas of great originality and interest, ideas that have had enormous influence on Asian culture. The following eight points are among those most central to the text:

1. *The nature of the Dao*. There exists in some sense an overarching order to the cosmos, beyond the power of words to describe. This order, which the book refers to as the Dao, has governed the cosmos from its beginning and continues to pervade every aspect of existence. It may be understood as a process that may be glimpsed in all aspects of the world that have not been distorted by the control of human beings, for there is something about us that runs counter to the Dao, and that makes human life a problem. Human beings possess some flaw that has made our species alone insensitive to the Dao. Ordinary people are ignorant of this fact; the *Daodejing* tries to awaken them to it.

2. *Changing perspective*. To understand the nature of human ignorance, it is necessary to undergo a fundamental change in our perspective. To do this, we need to disentangle ourselves from beliefs we live by that have been established through *words* and experience life directly. Our intellectual lives, permeated with ideas expressed in language, are the chief obstacle to wisdom.

3. *Value relativity*. If we were able to escape the beliefs we live by and see human life from the perspective of the Dao, we would understand that we normally view the world through a lens of *value judgments* -- we see things as good or bad, desirable or detestable. The cosmos itself possesses none of these characteristics of value. All values are only human conventions that we project onto the world. Good and bad are *non-natural* distinctions that we need to discard if we are to see the world as it really is.

4. *Nature and spontaneity*. The marks of human experience are value judgments and planned action. The marks of the Dao are freedom from judgment and spontaneity. The processes of the Dao may be most clearly seen in the action of the non-human world, Nature. Trees and flowers, birds and beasts do not follow a code of ethics and act spontaneously from instinctual responses. The order of Nature is an image of the action of the Dao. To grasp the perspective of the Dao, human beings need to discard judgment and act on their spontaneous impulses. The *Daodejing* celebrates spontaneous action with two complementary terms, "self-so" and "non-striving" (*ziran* and *wuwei*, see Glossary). The inhabitants of the Natural world are "self-so," they simply are as they are, without any intention to be so. Human beings live by purposive action, planning and striving. To become Dao-like, we need to return to an animal-like responsiveness to simple instincts, and act without plans or effort. This "*wuwei*" style of behavior is the most central imperative Daoist texts recommend for us.

5. *The distortion of mind and language*. The source of human deviation from the Dao lies in the way that our species has come to use its unique property, the mind (*xin*, see Glossary). Rather than allow our minds to serve as a responsive mirror of the world, we have used it to develop language and let our thoughts and perceptions be governed by the categories that language creates, such as value judgments. The mind's use of language has created false wisdom, and our commitment to this false wisdom has come to blind us to the world as it really is, and to the Dao that orders it. The person who "practices" *wuwei* quiets the mind and leaves language behind.

6. *Selflessness*. The greatest barriers to discarding language and our value judgments are our urges for things we believe are desirable and our impulse to obtain these things for ourselves. The selfishness of our ordinary lives makes us devote all our energies to a chase for possessions and pleasures, which leaves us no space for the detached tranquility needed to join the harmonious rhythm of Nature and the Dao. The practice of *wu-wei* entails a release from pursuits of self-interest and a self-centered standpoint. The line between ourselves as individuals in accord with the Dao and the Dao-governed world at large becomes much less significant for us.

6. *Power and sagehood*. The person who embraces the spontaneity of *wu-wei* and leaves self-interest behind emerges into a new dimension of natural experience, and becomes immune to all the frightening dangers that beset us in ordinary experience. Once weakness, poverty, injury, and early death are no longer concepts we employ in our lives, we discover that such dangers do not really exist. Once we are part of the spontaneous order of Nature, it presents no threat to us and we gain tremendous leverage over it. We have the power (*de*, see Glossary) of the Dao. This active power is wisdom, and the person who possesses it is a sage.

7. *The human influence of the sage*. The selfless power of the sage endows him or her with a social prestige that cannot be matched by ordinary people. So magnificent is the presence of the sage that those who come into contact with such a person cannot help but be deeply influenced. As in the case of Confucianism, *de* (character, virtue, power) has power over other people, who will spontaneously place themselves under the protection of and seek to emulate the sage.

8. *The political outcome*. As the Daoist sage comes effortlessly to subdue the world, he will necessarily be treated as its king. The rule of such a king will be to discard all human institutions and social patterns that are the product of human intellectual effort and value judgments. The people will be returned to a simple and primitive state close to animal society, and this social environment will itself nurture in the population a stance of *wuwei*. Ultimately,

> the world will return to the bliss of ignorance and fulfillment in a stable life of food gathering, food consumption, and procreation, all governed by the seasonal rhythms of Nature and the Dao.

It is not hard to see how a philosophy along these lines could have emerged from a group of hermits who had withdrawn out of social disillusionment. The anti-Confucian elements of the *Daodejing* should also be easy to identify. The most important metaphors that the text uses to symbolize the Dao and the sage are an uncarved block of wood and an undyed piece of cloth, which contrast clearly with the Confucian celebration of the elaborate ritual patterns institutionalized by legendary sage kings.

What is more surprising, however, is that the *Daodejing* proved to be a very popular text among the ruling class of late Classical China. This was the result of the fact that it seemed to provide a paradoxical path to social and political wealth and power through the act of renouncing interest in wealth and power. "The sage places his person last and it comes first," the *Daodejing* tells us. Daoists who arrived at feudal courts in the Classical period found that they could attract the interest of ambitious men by linking their Dao of selflessness to an outcome in accord with the most selfish of ambitions.

One important difference between the ideas of the *Daodejing* and those of the Confucian writers is that while the Confucians made very clear the practical path that people needed to follow to achieve wisdom – the ritual syllabus of the Confucian Finishing School – the *Daodejing* is extremely vague when it comes to practical advice. While *wuwei* may be simple in the abstract (just behave more or less like your dog does), in practice there are problems (hey, nobody filled my dish!). If you spend one hour following the imperative to eliminate value judgments and the desires associated with them, you will discover that without a teacher or model rules to follow, it is difficult to follow the Dao of the *Daodejing*.

Structure of the text

The *Daodejing* consists of eighty-one brief chapters. Portions or all of many are in verse-like form, though others are unrhymed and much simpler rhetorically. The integrity of the chapters seems to have evolved at an early date. In the earliest extant

manuscripts, datable to the last part of the fourth century BCE, we see many of the chapters already fully formed, although ordered differently. In some cases, parts of the chapters seem not to have yet been incorporated; we don't know whether that is because they were "inserted" later, or whether there were simply multiple versions of the text circulating at the time and a different version is the ancestor of the received text that has been preserved until today.

The text was traditionally divided into two halves. The first 37 chapters constituted the upper portion, and was traditionally known as the "Classic of the Dao," in part because the initial word of the text is the word *dao* 道, and in part because these chapters seem, on the whole, more focused on that key concept. The rest of the chapters were known as the "Classic of *De*," in part because the initial phrase of chapter 38 is, "highest virtue (*de* 德)," using the second key term of the text's title, and in part because there is, on the whole, a somewhat greater emphasis on this notion of a power of character in this portion of the text. A second century BCE silk version of the text that was archaeologically recovered in 1973 places the "Classic of *De*" portion first, which tells us both that the division of the text into these two portions is very old, and that different versions of the text varied in the choice of which to place first.

Most *Daodejing* chapters appear to be a collection of brief sayings, rather than the product of a single literary impulse. Many component portions of chapters appear multiple times in the text. In his excellent 1963 translation of the text, the late D.C. Lau began a practice of labeling these separate sub-sections according to his judgment of where divisions within chapters occurred. Others have since followed this practice, and the version below does the same.

Daodejing

1.

a> **A *dao* that may be spoken is not the enduring Dao. A name that may be named is not an enduring name.**
No names – this is the beginning of heaven and earth. Having names – this is the mother of the things of the world.

b> **Make freedom from desire your constant norm; thereby you will see what is subtle. Make having desires your constant norm; thereby you will see what is manifest.**
These two arise from the same source but have different names. Together they may be termed 'the mysterious'.
Mystery and more mystery: the gate of all that is subtle.

2.

a> **All in the world deem the beautiful to be beautiful; it is ugly. All deem the good to be good; it is bad.**

b> **What is and what is not give birth to one another,**
What is difficult and what is easy complete one another,
Long and short complement one another,
High and low incline towards one another,
Note and noise harmonize with one another,
Before and after follow one another.

c> **Therefore the sage dwells in the midst of non-action (*wuwei*) and practices the wordless teaching.**

d> **Herein arise the things of the world, it does not turn from them; what it gives birth to it does not possess; what it does it does not retain. The achievements complete, it makes no claim to them. Because it makes no claim to them, they never leave it.**

3.

a> **Do not honor the worthy. This will keep the people from contention. Do not prize rare things. This will keep the people from becoming thieves. Do not display the desirable. The hearts of the people will not be turbulent.**

b> **Hence the governance of the sage:**
Empty their minds and fill their bellies,
Weaken their wills and strengthen their bones.
Always render the people free of knowledge and desire. Ensure that the clever do not dare to act.

c> **Engage in non-action (*wuwei*) and nothing will go unruled.**

4.

a> **The Dao is empty yet you may keep drawing from it as though it could never fill your need.**

b> **It is an abyss, like the ancestor of the world of things.**

c> **Blunt the point,**
Undo the tangle,
Soften the glare,
Join the dust.

d> **Dim, it seems almost to exist. I know not whose child it may be. It seems the forerunner of the Lord.**

5.

a> **Heaven and earth are not *ren*: they treat the things of the world as straw dogs. The sage is not *ren*: he treats the people as straw dogs.**

b> **All between heaven and earth is like a great bellows--**
Empty, yet it does not collapse,
The more it is moved the more it issues forth.

c> **Many words are soon exhausted;**
Better to preserve the central.

6.

The spirit of the ravine is undying; it is called the dark vagina. The gateway of the dark vagina is called the root of the world.
Stretching further and further, as though always there; use it, effortless.

7.

Heaven endures; earth long abides. Heaven endures and earth long abides because they do not give birth to themselves. Hence they are long lived.
Hence the sage places his person last, and it comes first; he treats it as something external to him and it endures.
Does he not employ selflessness? Hence he attains his self-regarding ends.

8.

a> **Highest good is like water: water benefits the things of the world and does not contend. It dwells in places that the masses of men despise.**
Hence it comes close to the Dao.

b> **The quality of a home lies in its location.**
The quality of a mind lies in its depth.
The quality of a companion lies in his *ren*.
The quality of words lies in their faithfulness.
The quality of governance lies in its order.
The quality of work lies in one's ability.
The quality of action lies in its timeliness.

c> **Because it does not contend it is without error.**

9.

a> **It is better to stop pouring than to grasp it until it is full; the blade forged to full sharpness will not last long.**
Halls filled with gold and jade can never be secured; pride in wealth and rank brings disaster upon itself.

b> **The work being done, step out of view – that is the *dao* of Tian.**

10.

a> **As you carry your bodily soul embracing oneness, can you never depart from it?**
As you concentrate your *qi* and extend your suppleness, can you be as a new born babe?
As you polish the dust from your mysterious mirror, can you render it free of all blemishes?
As you cherish the people and order the state, can you do so without awareness?
As heaven's gate swings open and shut can you keep to the female?
As your brilliant awareness penetrates everywhere can you refrain from employing it in action?

b> **You give birth to it, you nurture it – yet in giving birth you do not possess it, in doing it you do not retain it, in leading it you employ no authority: this is called mysterious power (*de*).**

11.

Thirty spokes share a single hub; grasp the nothingness at its center to get the use of the wheel.
Clay is fashioned to make a vessel; grasp the nothingness at the center to get the use of the vessel.
Bore windows and doors to create a room; grasp the nothingness of the interior to get the use of the room.
That which is constitutes what is valuable, but that which is not constitutes what is of use.

12.

The five colors blind men's eyes,
The five tones deafen men's ears,
The five flavors numb men's mouths,
Racing at a gallop in pursuit of the hunt maddens men's minds.
Rare objects obstruct men's conduct.
Therefore the sage is for the belly and not for the eye. Therefore he discards the one and selects the other.

13.

Great favor and disgrace startle alike. Prize great troubles as you do your body.

What do I mean by "great favor and disgrace startle alike?" When an inferior receives a superior's favor, he is startled when he gets it, and startled when he loses it. That is the meaning of "great favor and disgrace startle alike."

What do I mean by "prize great troubles as you do your body?" The only reason I have great troubles is because I have a body; if I had no body, what trouble would I have?

Therefore, he who prizes his body as if it were the world can be given charge of the world. He who loves his body as if it were the world can be entrusted with the world.

14.

a> **What you look at but cannot see is called 'transparent'; what you listen to but cannot hear is called 'rarified'; what you grab at but cannot grasp is called 'minute'. These three cannot be probed through, thus they are conflated to one.**

b> **Its top is unshining, its bottom not darkened – endless, it cannot be named. Returned to a state without things, it is called the form of no form, the image of no things; it is called the indistinct.**

c> **Encountering it you do not see its head; pursuing it you do not see its back. Grasp the *dao* of the past to steer what there is today.**

d> **To be able to know the beginning of the past is called the guideline of the Dao.**

15.

a> **In the past, those who were good at being gentlemen were subtle, marvelous, mysterious, penetrating – so deep they could not be fathomed. Just because they cannot be fathomed, I strain to describe their appearance:**

Hesitant, as though crossing a winter stream;
Timid, as though fearing all nearby;
Reverent, like a guest;
Rent, like river ice soon to melt;
Solid, like an uncarved block;
Vacant, like a valley;
Turbid, like muddied water.

b> **Who can be turbid, yet settling slowly clear?**
Who can be at rest, yet moving slowly come to life?

c> **One who protects this *dao* does not wish to become full. It is precisely because he is not full that he can be tattered yet new made.**

16.

Reaching the ultimate of emptiness, deeply guarding stillness, the things of the world arise together; thereby do I watch their return.
The things of the world burst out everywhere, and each returns to its own root.
Returning to the root is called stillness; this is called returning to destiny; returning to destiny is called constant; knowing the constant is called enlightenment.
Not knowing the constant one acts blindly and ill-omened.
Knowing the constant one can accommodate; accommodation leads to impartiality; impartiality leads to kingliness; kingliness leads to Tian; Tian leads to the Dao.
With the Dao one may endure, and to the end of life one will not be in danger.

17.

The best: those below are aware that he is there. Next best: they love and praise him. Next best, they fear him. Next best: they insult him.
Insufficient faith above, unfaithfulness below.
Far off, he speaks but rarely. When the work is accomplished and the task is complete, the people all say, "We did it of ourselves."

18.

When the Great Dao was discarded, only then came *ren* and right. When wisdom and insight emerged, only then came the Great Artifice. When the six kinship classes fell out of harmony, only then came filiality and parental kindness. When the state is darkened with chaos, only then do the loyal ministers appear.

19.

Cut off sagehood! Cast out wisdom! The people will benefit a hundredfold.
Cut off *ren*! Cast out right! The people will return to filiality and parental kindness.
Cut off cleverness! Cast out profit! Brigands and thieves will nowhere be found.
As patterns, these three are insufficient and only make the people seek to add to them.

Exhibit the plainness of undyed cloth; embrace the uncarved block.
Be little self-regarding and make your desires few.

20.

a> **To assent and to object – how different are they? Beauty and ugliness – what is the distinction between them?**

b> **What others fear, one must fear too – how baseless! Far off the mark!**

c> **How joyous the mass of people are, as if banqueting on the sacrificed ox, as if mounting a tower in spring –**

I alone am still, without visible sign, like a new born baby yet to smile, all listless, like one with no home.
The mass of people have more than enough –
I alone appear bereft; I, with the mind of a dolt, so slow.
Ordinary men are brilliant –
I am dim.
Ordinary men are perceptive –
I am closed.
Sudden, like the sea, like a tempest, as though endless, the mass of people all have their means –
I alone am obstinate, uncouth.
I alone wish to be different from others, and value feeding from the mother.

21.

a> **The bearing of abundant virtue is to follow the Dao alone.**

b> **As a thing the Dao is shadowed, obscure.**

Shadowed, obscured,
A thing lies within;
Obscured, shadowed,
An image lies within.
Dark, dim,
An essence lies within.
So sound is the essence,
Full concord lies within.

c> **From the past to the present, its name has never left it, and hence it has pleased the multitude of elders. How do I know this of the multitude of elders? By means of this.**

22.

"A fragment, thus whole": bent, thus straight; hollow, thus full; worn, thus new.
Few, thus gaining; many, thus confused – therefore the sage embraces One and is a standard for the world.
Not revealing himself, thus bright; not asserting himself, thus shining; not praising himself, thus meritorious; not boasting of himself, thus enduring.
He does not contend, thus none can content with him.
The old saying, "A fragment, thus whole," how could it be empty words? Truly, it will return whole in the end.

23.

To be sparse in speech is to be spontaneous.
Thus wind squalls do not outlast the morning and teeming rain does not outlast the day. Who causes these? Heaven and earth. Even heaven and earth cannot long persist thus, how much less can man.
Those who follow the Dao are alike in Dao with others who follow the Dao, are alike in virtue with others who have virtue, are alike is loss with others who have loss.
Alike in Dao with others who follow the Dao - he delights indeed in grasping the Dao; alike in virtue with others who have virtue - he delights indeed in having virtue; alike in loss others who have loss - he delights indeed in having loss.
Where faithfulness is insufficient there is unfaithfulness.

24.

One on tiptoe cannot stand; one whose legs are spread cannot walk.
One who shows himself cannot be bright; one who asserts himself cannot shone; one who praises himself can be meritorious; one who boasts of himself cannot endure.
For the Dao, these are called "excess store and superfluous acts." Things detest them; therefore, the man of the Dao does not abide in them.

25.

There is a thing formed from confusion and born before heaven and earth. Silent, solitary, alone and unchanging. It revolves everywhere and is

never in danger. It can be the mother of all under heaven. I do not know its name, but I style it 'the Dao'.
If forced to give it a name, I call if 'the Great'. The Great I call 'Receding'. Receding I call 'Distant'. Distant I call 'Reversing'.
Thus the Dao is great, heaven is great, earth is great, and the king is great as well.
Within the realm there are four great ones, and the king sits as one among them.
Men emulate earth; earth emulates heaven (*tian*); heaven emulates the Dao; the Dao emulates spontaneity.

26.

a> **Heaviness is the root of lightness; tranquility is the lord of haste.**

b> **Therefore, to the day's end the traveling sage never leaves his laden carts. Though beside lavish towers, he stays by them all aloof.**

c> **How could the ruler of a thousand chariot state take his own body as of lesser weight than the world?**

d> **To be light is to lose the root; to be hasty is to lose one's lord.**

27.

a> **Good traveling leaves no wheel ruts; good talking makes no slips; good counting uses no counters.**
Good shutting uses no bolts, yet cannot be opened; good tying uses no cords, yet cannot be undone.

b> **Therefore, the sage is always good at rescuing people, thus he never abandons any person; he is always good at rescuing affairs, thus he never abandons any affair.**
This is called stretching enlightenment.
Thus the good person is the teacher of those who are not good, and those who are not good are grist to the good person.
Not to honor one's teacher, not to cherish one's grist – though one may be clever, this is to be lost adrift.
This is called the pivotal mystery.

28.

a> **One who knows the male but preserves the female becomes a ravine to the world. Such a one never swerves from constant virtue and returns again to be a new born baby.**
One who knows white but preserves black becomes a standard for the world. Such a one never deviates from constant virtue and returns again to being limitless.
One who knows glory but preserves shame becomes a valley to the world. Such a one is always supplied with constant virtue and returns again to be an uncarved block.

b> **When the uncarved block is dispersed, vessels are made from it. The sage uses these to become the leader of the officers of state. Thus the greatest carving never cuts.**

29.

a> **The wish to grasp the world and control it – I see its futility. The world is a spiritlike vessel; it cannot be controlled. One who would control it would ruin it; one who would grasp it would lose it.**

b> **Thus things may lead or follow, blow hot or cold, be strong or weak, sustain or destroy.**
Therefore the sage discards the excessive, the extravagant, the overbearing.

30.

a> **He who assists a ruler by means of the Dao does not coerce the world by means of arms. Consequences come back around like a ring.**
Where troops encamp, brambles grow;
After great armies, crops always fail.
The good man is simply resolute; he never employs coercion. Be resolute without boast, resolute without threat, resolute without pride.
Resolute from necessity, be resolute without coercion.

b> **When things in their prime grow old, they are called 'contrary to the Dao'. What is contrary to the Dao comes to an early end.**

31.

Weapons are ill fortuned tools. Things may detest them, hence the man of the Dao does not rely on them.

When a *junzi* is at leisure he honors what is at his left; use of weapons honors the right. Thus weapons are not tools of a *junzi*.

Weapons are ill fortuned tools; they must be used only from necessity. It is best to use them without gusto, to prevail without relish. To relish victory is to take joy in killing men. The man who takes joy in killing men will never attain his ambition in the world.

Affairs of good fortune honor the left; affairs of ill fortune honor the right. The lieutenant's place is to the left, the commander's place is to the right. This means that mourning rites are the model. When the masses of another lord are killed, one should mourn them with wailing – for victory in battle, mourning rites are the model.

32.

a> **The Dao is ever nameless. Though the uncarved block be small, it cannot be made the subordinate of any in the world. If a king or lord could preserve it, the things of the world would come to him of themselves. As heaven and earth conjoin to send down sweet dew, the people will settle themselves, though none so decrees.**

As soon as it is cut, then there are names. Once there are names one must know it's time to stop. Knowing to stop is the way to avoid danger.

b> **The Dao is to the world as the Yangzi and sea are to streams and brooks.**

33.

He who knows men is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened.

He who conquers men has strength; he who conquers himself is strong.

He who knows when he has enough is wealthy; he who perseveres has strong will.

He who does not lose his place is lasting; he who lasts beyond his death is long lived.

34.

a> **The Great Dao flows everywhere, at our every right and left. Relying upon it, the things of the world are born, yet it remains wordless; its work done it takes no name as the doer.**

b> **Clothing and nourishing the things of the world, it never acts as their lord – constant without desire, it may be termed small. The things of the world return to it but it never acts as their lord – it may be termed great.**

Because it never takes itself to be great it is able to complete its greatness.

35.

a> **Grasp the great image and the world will come; coming and encountering no harm, it will settle in great peace.**

b> **Where there is music and food, travelers stop.**

c> **When the Dao is spoken as words, how thin it is, without taste. Look at it and it cannot be seen; listen to it and it cannot be heard. But use it, and it cannot be exhausted.**

36.

a> **To shrink it you must stretch it; to weaken it you must strengthen it; to discard it you must raise it up; to seize it you must bestow it – this is called subtle discernment.**

b> **The weak and supple overcomes the strong and hard.**

c> **Fish must not emerge from the deeps; the vital tools of a state must not be revealed.**

37.

The Dao is ever non-acting (*wuwei*), yet nothing is undone. If a lord or king can preserve this the things of the world will of themselves be transformed.

Transformed, should desire arise, I will press it down with the uncarved block of namelessness. The uncarved block of namelessness--surely then they shall be without desire. Without desire and thus still, so will the world be settled of itself.

38.

The highest virtue (*de*) is without virtue, hence it has virtue. The lowest virtue never deviates from virtue, hence it lacks virtue. The highest virtue does not act (*wuwei*) and has no reason to act; the lowest virtue acts and has reason to act. The highest *ren* acts without any reason to act. The highest right (*yi*) acts and has reason to act. The highest *li* acts, and if no persons respond, rolls up its sleeves and twists their arms.

Hence, only after the Dao is lost is there virtue; only after virtue is lost is there *ren*; only after *ren* is lost is there right; only after right is lost is there *li*.

***Li* is the thinning of loyalty and faithfulness, when chaos first raises its head. Foreknowledge is the blossom of the Dao, when ignorance first begins.**

Therefore, the great man dwells in the thick, not in the thin; abides in the fruit, not in the blossom. Thus he discards the one and grasps the other.

39.

a> **Those of old that gained the One:**

The sky (*tian*) gained the One and was thus clear;
Earth gained the One and was thus calm;
The spirits gained the One and were thus potent;
The valley gained the One and was this full;
The things of the world gained the One and were thus born;
Kings and lords gained the One and were models to the world –

This is what the One brought about.

Without what makes it clear, the sky would likely split;
Without what makes it calm, the earth would likely collapse;
Without what makes them potent, the spirits would likely dissipate;
Without what makes it full, the valley would likely run dry;
Without what gives them birth, the world of things would likely be extinguished;
Without what makes them honored, kings and lords will likely topple.

b> **Therefore, the honored takes the lowly as root; high takes low as foundation. For this reason, kings and lords refer to themselves as 'the orphan', 'the widow', 'the unemployed' – does this take the lowly as the root or does it not?**

Hence the utmost renown is to be unknown. Have no wish be glossy like jades, rather be hard like stones.

40.

a> **Reversal is the motion of the Dao. Weakness is the method of the Dao.**

b> **The things of the world are born from being, and being is born of nothing.**

41.

a> **When the best gentlemen hear the Dao they practice it assiduously. When middling gentlemen hear the Dao, sometimes they seem to have it, sometimes they seem to have lost it. When the least of gentlemen hear the Dao they laugh out loud. If they did not laugh out loud, it would not be the Dao.**

b> **Thus the 'Standard Sayings' says:**
The bright *dao* seems dark,
The advancing *dao* seems to retreat,
The level *dao* seems steep.
Highest virtue (*de*) seems a valley,
Greatest white seems sullied,
Broad virtue seems inadequate,
Vigorous virtue seems to shirk,
Plain virtue seems soiled.
The great square is cornerless
The great vessel is last complete,
The great note is rarified sound,
The great image has no form.

c> **The Dao hides in wordlessness. Only the Dao is well begun and well completed.**

42.

a> **The Dao gives birth to one; one gives birth to two; two gives birth to three; three gives birth to the ten thousand things.**

b> **The things of the world bear Yin on their backs and embrace the Yang. They exhaust their *qi* in harmony.**

c> **People detest being orphaned or widowed or unemployed, yet these are the terms kings and lords use to refer to themselves.**

d> **One may detract from a thing and it is enhanced thereby, or enhance it and so detract from it.**

e> **What others teach I teach as well: 'Bullies do not die natural deaths.' But I shall make this the wellspring of my teaching.**

43.

a> **The most pliant thing in the world will ride roughshod over the hardest. What comes out from where nothing is enters into what has no apertures.**

b> **Hence I know the advantage of non-action (*wuwei*). The wordless teaching and the advantage of non-action – few in the world attain to these.**

44.

One's reputation or one's body: which is dearer?
One's body or one's goods: which is worth more?
Gaining or losing: which is worse?
Therefore, miserliness leads to great expense, hoarding leads to deep loss.
Know what is enough and escape shame; know when to stop and escape danger – thus can one long endure.

45.

a> **Great perfection appears defective, so use can never make it worn; great fullness seems vacant, so use can never make it empty. Great straightness seems bent; great skill seems clumsy; great eloquence seems inarticulate.**

b> **Haste overcomes cold, tranquility overcomes heat.**

c> **Clear and tranquil, be a standard to the world.**

46.

a> **When the Dao prevails in the world, fast horses are corralled for manure; when the Dao does not prevail in the world, steeds of war are born in the city pastures.**

b> **There is no calamity greater than not knowing what is sufficient; there is no fault greater than wishing to acquire. Thus the sufficiency of knowing what is sufficient is eternal sufficiency.**

47.

Without going out your door, know the world; without looking out the window, know the Dao of Tian.
The further you travel, the less you know.
Hence the sage knows without going to it, names it without seeing, does nothing and it is achieved.

48.

a> **He who studies is daily enlarged; he who follows the Dao is daily diminished. Diminished and then diminished yet more, at last attaining non-action (*wuwei*). Never acting, nothing is undone.**

b> **To control the world, undertake nothing. Once you undertake to do anything you are unfit to control the world.**

49.

The sage has no constant mind: he takes the mind of the people as his mind.
When I treat the good as good and I also treat those who are not good as good, my virtue is good.
When I treat the faithful as faithful and I also treat the unfaithful as faithful, my virtue is faithful.
The sage appears shut to the world, and towards the world he blanks his mind in a daze. The people all entrust their eyes and ears to him; he treats them as children.

50.

Coming we are born, going we die.
Three in ten are followers of life; three in ten are followers of death – at birth begun to move towards the death, these too are three in ten. Why is this? Because they treat life as life.
I have heard that one good at protecting his life walks in the hills but never encounters rhinoceros or tiger, charges against armies and is never touched by weapon or armor. The rhinoceros finds no place to thrust its horn; the tiger finds no place to grip its claws; weapons find no place to drive their blades. Why is this? Because he has no death place in him.

51.

a> **The Dao gives birth to them, virtue (*de*) rears them, things give them form, circumstances complete them.**
Thus all things in the world revere Dao and honor virtue. That the Dao is revered and virtue honored is ordained by no one; it is ever so of itself.
Thus the Dao gives birth to them and virtue rears them – fosters them, nurtures them, settles them, completes them, nourishes them, covers them.

b> **To live but not possess, to act but depend on nothing, to lead without directing, this is called mysterious virtue.**

52.

a> **The world has a beginning – take it to be the mother of the world. Having grasped the mother, you can know the child. Having grasped the child, return to preserve the mother and you will live out your life without danger.**

b> **Block the portals and shut the gate, you will live out your days and never be troubled. Open the portals and turn to the tasks, you will live out your days and never be rescued.**

c> **To see the small is called enlightenment; to preserve the pliant is called strength.**
Use the gleam to return to enlightenment without bringing calamity upon oneself.
This is to make the constant your habit.

53.

a> **Had I the least wisdom I would walk the great Dao. I would fear only side paths. The great Dao is so level, yet people prefer shortcuts.**

b> **The court is so tainted, the fields so overgrown, the granaries so empty. Robes gleaming with patterns, belts hung with swords, sated with food and drink, goods in excess – such is to rob the destitute. Robbing the destitute is not the Dao.**

54.

a> **What is firmly planted cannot be uprooted; what is tightly embraced cannot be stripped away. Descendants will thereby sacrifice without cease.**

b> **Cultivate it in yourself and your virtue (*de*) will be authentic; cultivate it in the family and it will have virtue in abundance; cultivate it in the village and its virtue will endure; cultivate it in the state and its virtue will be rich; cultivate it through the world and it virtue will spread everywhere.**

c> **Hence see people through oneself; see families through your family; see villages through your village; see states through your state; see the world through the world.**
How do I know the world is thus? By means of this.

55.

a> **One who possesses virtue in abundance may be compared to a new born babe. Wasps and scorpions, poisonous snakes: none will bite him. Fierce beasts will not maul him, predatory birds will not swoop down upon him.**
His bones are weak, his muscles pliable, and his grasp is firm. He knows nothing of the female and the male, yet his male organ stirs. His essence is at its most pure. He can scream all day and not become hoarse. This is harmony at its height.

b> **Knowing harmony is called constant; knowing the constant is called enlightened.**
To increase one's nature is called inauspicious; when the mind directs the *qi* it is called self-coercion.

c> **When things in their prime grow old, they are called 'contrary to the Dao'. What is contrary to the Dao comes to an early end.**

56.

a> **Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know.**

b> **Blunt the point,**
Undo the tangle,
Soften the glare,
Join the dust.
This is called the dark joining.

c> **Hence one cannot become close to it, one cannot become distant from it, one cannot profit it, one cannot harm it, one cannot honor it, one cannot disdain it.**
Thus it is honored by the world.

57.

a> **To order a state use uprightness; to lead troops use stratagems; to control the world undertake nothing.**

How do I know it is so? By means of this.

b> **As the world is filled with more taboos the people grow poorer; as the people possess more sharp weapons the state grows benighted; as men use more crafty skills strange goods increasingly appear; as laws are proclaimed with increasing clarity bandits become more common.**

c> **Hence the sage says: If I take no action the people will transform of themselves; if I love tranquility the people will be upright of themselves; if I undertake nothing the people will create wealth of themselves; if I have no desires the people will of themselves become uncarved blocks.**

58.

a> **When the government is narrow and dull the people are simple and pure; when the government is clear and acute the people are sharp and crafty.**

b> **Disaster – good fortune adheres therein; good fortune – disaster lurks therein.**
Who knows its limit? It possesses no settled norm. The norm turns into the anomaly, the good turns into the monstrous.
It has been long indeed that men have lost their way.

c> **Hence the sage is like a square that does not cut, a corner that is not sharp, a straight line that cannot align, a light that does not shine.**

59.

a> **In governing people and serving Tian, there is nothing like parsimony. Parsimony may be called 'submitting in advance'. Submitting in advance may be called piling up virtue (*de*). If you pile up virtue there is nothing you cannot overcome, and if there is nothing you cannot overcome, the limit of it cannot be known. When the limit cannot be known, you may possess the state. If you possess the mother of the state, you may long endure.**

b> **This is called the deep root and the solid trunk; it is the *dao* of long gazing upon enduring life.**

60.

a> **Governing a large state is like cooking a small fish.**

b> **When one approaches governing the world by means of the Dao, ghosts will have no potency. It is not that they have no potency, but that their potency will not harm people, It is not that their potency will not harm people, but that the sage too will not harm people. These two will do no mutual harm, and therein will virtue (*de*) commingle and return.**

61.

A large state lies downstream; it is the female of the world. In intercourse, the female overcomes the male by means of stillness, because stillness lies below. Thus when the large state takes the lower position it controls the small state. When a small state takes the lower position, it places itself under the control of the large state. In the one case the state takes the lower position to control, in the other it takes the lower position to place itself under control.

Large states wish no more than to annex and nurture people; small states wish no more than to enter into service. Both gain what they wish.

It is appropriate that the large dwell below.

62.

a> **The Dao is the altar of the things of the world. It is the treasure of the good person and the protection of the bad person.**

Fine words can be marketed; honorable conduct can add to one's rank. As for the bad person, how can they be abandoned?

a> **Hence when the Son of Tian assumes the throne, in appointing the three high ministers, he who bears the jade disk of court and presents a team of horses is not esteemed so much as he who sits in place and offers this *dao*.**

a> **Why was this *dao* so esteemed in the past? Is it not said that by means of it one will get what one seeks, and transgressors will evade punishment? Hence it was esteemed by the world.**

63.

a> **Engage in non-action, undertake having no undertakings, taste the tasteless. Enlarge the small, increase the few, requite hostility with virtue (*de*).**

b> **Plan for the difficult on the basis of the simple, do great things on the basis of details – the difficult undertakings of the world are all arise from simple situations, and the greatest undertakings in the world all arise**

from small details.

c> **Hence the sage never does a great act, and is thus able to complete his greatness.**

d> **Thoughtless assent always brings little trust; many easy acts always lead to many difficulties. Therefore the sage seems to treat them as difficult, and thus never has difficulties.**

64.

a> **When things are at rest they are easy to maintain; when situations have not yet emerged they are easy to plan for. When brittle, things are easy to split; when minute things are easy to disperse.**
Deal with things before they occur; order things before they are disordered.

b> **A tree trunk several arm spans round was born of the tiniest seed. Towers nine stories high rise from foundations of piled earth. A journey of a thousand *li* begins with the first footfall.**

c> **He who acts, fails; he who grasps, loses.**
Therefore the sage takes no action (*wuwei*) and hence has no failure, does no grasping and hence takes no loss.

d> **When people pursue an undertaking, it is always at the point of success that they ruin it. Attend at the end as you did at the start and you will have no failures.**

e> **Therefore, the sage desires not to desire and does not value goods hard to come by; he learns not to learn and redeems the errors of the masses.**
Assisting the things of the world to be as they are in themselves, he dares not act.

65.

a> **Men of the past who were good at following the Dao did not use it to enlighten the people, they used it to make them ignorant. People are difficult to govern is when they have much knowledge.**

b> **Hence one who governs by means of knowledge plunders the state; one who does not govern by means of knowledge brings fortune to the state. Indeed, these two constitute the standard – to be always aware of the standard is called dark virtue (*de*).**

c> **Dark virtue is profound, far reaching; it revolves together with things. Only then does it attain great compliance.**

66.

The reason that the Yangzi and the sea rule as kings over hundreds of river valleys is because they know well to take the lower position; that is why they rule as kings over hundreds of river valleys.
Hence if you wish to rule above the people you must employ words to take the lower position; if you wish to lead people you must place yourself behind them.
Therefore, the sage dwells above and the people don't consider him heavy, he stands ahead of them and they do not consider it an injury to them. Hence the world delights in supporting him untiringly.
Because he does not contend, no one in the world can contend with him.

67.

a> **All in the world say my *dao* is huge, but appears to be worthless. It is indeed because it is huge that it appears worthless. If it were worthy would it not long since have become small?**

b> **I possess three treasures; I protect them in my grasp. One is compassion, the second is frugality, and third, I dare not take the lead in the world. Compassionate, thus I can have valor; frugal, thus I can extend my territory; unwilling to take the lead in the world, thus my works endure.**

c> **Now were I to discard compassion in favor of valor, frugality in favor of territory, taking my place behind in favor of leading, I would die.**

d> **He who goes to battle with compassion prevails; who defends his state with compassion will be impregnable. He whom Tian wishes to save it protects by means of compassion.**

68.

A good warrior does not act fearsome; one good at battle does not become angry; one good at defeating the enemy does not contest; one good at directing people takes the lower position.
This is the virtue of not contending; this is called directing the strength of others; this is called companion to Tian – the utmost limit of the past.

69.

a> **Military strategists have a saying: I dare not act as the host, but rather the guest; I dare not advance an inch, but rather retreat a foot.**
This is called walking where there is no road, rolling up the sleeve where there is no arm, grasping where there is no weapon, struggling where there is no enemy.

b> **There is no calamity greater than having no enemy, without an enemy, I have almost lost my treasure. Thus when two matched armies contest, it is the victor that mourns.**

70.

a> **My words are so easy to understand and so easy to put in practice; none in the world can understand or practice them.**

b> **Words have a governing meaning, affairs have a ruling actor.**

c> **It is because they are have no knowledge that they do not understand me. Those who understand me are few; those who emulate me are esteemed.**

d> **Therefore, the sage wears coarse clothes and conceals in them a precious jade.**

71.

To know you do not know is best; not to know that one does not know is to be flawed.
One who sees his flaws as flaws is therefore not flawed.
The sage is flawless. He sees his flaws as flaws, therefore he is flawless.

72.

a> **When the people do not hold the awesome in awe, awful events occur.**

b> **Do not narrow their living space nor crush their means of livelihood. Because you do not crush them, they will not view you as a crushing burden.**

c> **Therefore the sage knows himself but does not display himself, cherishes himself but does not honor himself.**
Thus he discards the one and takes the other.

73.

a> **One who is valiant in being daring will be killed. One who is valiant in being timid will live. Of these two, one is profitable and one is harmful.**

b> **Who knows why Tian hates what it hates? Even the sage takes this to be difficult.**

c> **The *dao* of Tian excels at prevailing though it does not contend; it excels at responding, though it does not speak; things come of themselves though it does not summon; it excels at planning though it is flexible.**

d> **The net of Tian is vast; though the mesh is broadly spaced, nothing gets through.**

74.

a> **If the people do not fear death, what good is threatening them with death? If you make the people ever fearful of death and threaten to execute any who innovate new things, who will dare to do so?**

b> **Always have an executioner whose charge it is to kill. One who takes the place of an executioner is like one who takes the carpenter's place in hewing wood. Few who take the carpenter's place fail to wound their hands.**

75.

When the people starve it is because their ruler extracts too much in taxes, that is why they starve. When the people are hard to govern it is because their ruler takes action, that is why they are hard to govern. When the people regard death as unimportant it is because they seek life too assiduously, that is why they regard death as unimportant.
It is precisely doing nothing for the sake of life that makes one worthier than those who value life.

76.

a> **When born, people are pliant and weak; when they die they are stiff and strong. The things of the world, such as trees and grasses, are born pliant and fragile; they die shriveled and dry.**

b> **Thus the hard and strong are followers of death; the pliant and weak are followers of life.**

c> **Therefore, when a weapon is strong it cannot conquer; when a tree is strong it is put to the axe. The strong and great dwell below; the pliant and weak dwell above.**

77.

a> **The *dao* of Tian is like the stretching of a bow: the high is brought down and the low is raised up; it takes from what has abundance and supplies what is wanting. The *dao* of Tian takes from what has abundance and supplies what is wanting, but the *dao* of man is not thus. It takes from what is wanting in order to supply what has abundance.**

b> **Who can serve Heaven by means of abundance? Only one who possesses the Dao.**

c> **Hence the sage acts but relies on nothing. His task accomplished, he does not take the credit: he does not wish to manifest his worth.**

78.

a> **Nothing in the world is more weak and soft than water, yet nothing surpasses it in conquering the hard and strong – there is nothing that can compare.**
All know that the weak conquers the strong and the soft conquers the hard. But none are able to act on this.

b> **Thus the sage says that he who receives the derision of the state is the lord of the state altars; he who receives the misfortune of the state is the king of the world.**

c> **Straight words seem to reverse themselves.**

79.

a> **When making peace between disputants, there is always some remaining sense of dispute – how can this constitute a good act?**

b> **Therefore, the sage keeps hold of the creditor's tally but never calls in the debts others owe him.**

c> **One with virtue (*de*) oversees the tally, one without virtue oversees the payment.**

d> **The *dao* of Tian has no favorites; it always shifts to the good person.**

80.

Make the state small and the people few. Let there be arms for troops in tens and hundreds, but unused. Make the people treat death seriously and not move to distant places.
Though there be boats and carriages, they shall not be ridden. Though there be armor and weaponry, they shall not be deployed.
Let the people return to keeping records by knotted rope.
Their food sweet to them, their clothes beautiful to them, their homes comfortable to them, their customs joyful to them.
Though neighboring states be in sight of one another and the sounds of the cocks and dogs heard from one to the other, the people of one will never visit the other, even as they grow old and die.

81.

a> **Trustworthy words are not beautiful; beautiful words are not trustworthy. Good words are not eloquent; eloquent words are not good.**

b> **The wise are not broadly learned; the broadly learned are not wise.**

c> **The sage does not hoard. Having used what he has for others, his possessions increase; having given what he has to others, he has more and more.**

d> **The *dao* of Tian benefits and does not harm. The *dao* of the sage is for others and does not contend.**

Glossary of Key Terms in the *Daodejing*

The following terms are considered in this Glossary

Dao
de (virtue)
mind/heart (*xin*)
ren (benevolence)
sage (*sheng*)
Tian (Heaven)
wuwei (non-striving)
ziran (spontaneously so)

Dao 道

This term is often translated as "the Way," but the increasing use of the Chinese term in contemporary English makes it better to leave the term untranslated. In ancient texts, the word *dao* actually possesses a wide range of meanings.

The earliest known forms of the graph for Dao include elements showing a foot, a crossroads, and an eye decorated with an elaborate eyebrow, an element that represents the word *shou* 首: head. The head element may have served only to denote the phonetic value of the word *dao* (the two words were related phonetically in Old Chinese), but the graph may also have been designed to convey semantic information, indicating an early use connected with magical incantations and dances performed by a shaman (a person able to communicate with the world of spirits) as he or she purified a pathway to be used in a religious procession. If so, then from this pathway connection, the word Dao derives its modern meaning of a path or way; from the formula of the dance, the word derives a meaning of "formula," "method"; from the spoken element of the incantation, the word derives the meaning of "a teaching," and also serves as a verb "to speak."

All ancient schools of philosophy referred to their teachings as *dao*s. Confucius and his followers claimed that they were merely transmitting a Dao — the social methods practiced by the sage kings of the past: "the Dao of the former kings."

Texts in the tradition of early thought that came later to be called "Daoist" used the word in a special sense, which is why the Daoist tradition takes its name from this term. Daoists claimed that the cosmos itself followed a certain natural "way" in its spontaneous action. They called this the "Great Dao," and contrasted it to the *dao*s of other schools, which were human-created teachings, and which they did not believe merited the name Dao in their special sense.

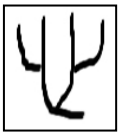
De 德 (character, power, virtue)

De is a difficult word to translate; its meaning varies considerably with context. Its early graph shows an upward looking eye next to a half-crossroad, and the significance of this form has been much debated without much result. In its

early uses, *de* seems to refer to the prestige that well-born and powerful aristocrats possessed as a result of the many gifts they dispensed to loyal followers, family members, and political allies (rather like the prestige associated with a Mafia godfather). Later, the term came to be associated with important attributes of character. Although it can be used to refer to both positive or negative features of person, it usually refers to some form of personal "excellence," and to say that someone has much *de* is to praise him.

The concrete meaning of this term varies among different schools. Confucians use it most often to refer to a person's moral dispositions (moral according to Confucians, at any rate), and in this sense, the word is often best rendered as "character" or "virtue." Daoists, however, speak of *de* as an attribute of both human and non-human participants in the cosmos, and they often describe it as a type of charismatic power or leverage over the limits of nature that the Daoist sage is able to acquire through self-cultivation. As such, it may be best rendered as "power." The title of the famous book, *Daodejing* (attributed to an equally famous though probably mythical author named Laozi) means "The Classic of the Dao and De," and in this title, *de* is best understood as a type of power derived from transcending (going beyond) the limits of the human ethical world.

Mind/Heart (*xin* 心)



In Chinese, a single word was used to refer both to the function of our minds as a cognitive, reasoning organ, and its function as an affective, or emotionally responsive organ. The word, *xin*, was originally represented in written form by a sketch of the heart. There are really four aspects fused in this term. The mind/heart thinks rationally, feels emotionally, passes value judgments on all objects of thought and feeling, and initiates active responses in line with these judgments. Sometimes, the "unthinking" aspects of people, such as basic desires and instinctual responses, are pictured as part of the mind/heart. However, the *Daodejing*, typically uses the term *xin* to denote the cognitive mind and its functions of contemplation, judgment, and so forth, all of which the text views as features that distance human beings from the Dao.

Ren 仁 (benevolence)

No term is more important in Confucianism than *ren*. Prior to the time of Confucius, the term does not seem to have been much used; in the earliest texts the word seems to have meant "manly," an adjective of high praise in a warrior society. Confucius, however, changed the meaning of the term and gave it great ethical weight, using it to denote a type of all-encompassing virtue which distinguishes the truly ethical person. Confucian texts often pair this term with Righteousness, and it is very common for the two terms together to be used as a general expression for "morality." Other schools also use the term *ren*, but they usually employ it either to criticize Confucians, or in a much reduced sense, pointing simply to people who are well-meaning, kind, or benevolent. The *Daodejing* employs the term in this reduced sense, and tendentiously contrasts it with the amorality of the natural world and those who emulate the Dao.

The Sage 聖 (*sheng*)

All of the major schools of ancient Chinese thought, with the possible exception of the Legalists, were essentially prescriptions for human self-

perfection. These schools envisioned the outcome of their teachings — the endpoint of their Daos — in terms of different models of human excellence. A variety of terms were used to describe these images of perfection, but the most common was *sheng*, or *shengren* 聖人, which we render in English as "sage person" or, more elegantly, "sage." The original graph includes a picture of an ear and a mouth on top (the bottom part merely indicates the pronunciation, and was sometimes left out), and the early concept of the sage involved the notion of a person who could hear better than ordinary people. The word is closely related to the common word for "to listen" (*ting* 聽). What did the sage hear? Presumably the Dao.

Tian 天 (Heaven)

Tian was the name of a deity of the Zhou people which stood at the top of a supernatural hierarchy of spirits (ghosts, nature spirits, powerful ancestral leaders, Tian). Tian also means "the sky," and for that reason, it is well translated as "Heaven." The early graph is an anthropomorphic image (a picture of a deity in terms of human attributes) that shows a human form with an enlarged head. Heaven was an important concept for the early Zhou people; Heaven was viewed as an all-powerful and all-good deity, who took a special interest in protecting the welfare of China. When the Zhou founders overthrew the Shang Dynasty in 1045, they defended their actions by claiming that they were merely receiving the "mandate" of Heaven, who had wished to replace debased Shang rule with a new era of virtue in China. All early philosophers use this term and seem to accept that there existed some high deity that influenced human events. The Mohist school was particularly strident on the importance of believing that Tian was powerfully concerned with human activity. They claimed that the Confucians did not believe Tian existed, although Confucian texts do speak of Tian reverently and with regularity. In fact, Confucian texts also seem to move towards identifying Tian less with a conscious deity and more with the unmotivated regularities of Nature. When Daoist texts speak of Heaven, it is often unclear whether they are referring to a deity, to Nature as a whole, or to their image of the Great Dao.

Wuwei 無為 (without purpose; without effort; purposelessness)

Wuwei literally means "without [*wu*] doing [*wei*]." The initial component, *wu*, indicates absence or non-existence. As a verb, the second term, *wei*, means "to do; to make," and therefore the compound term *wuwei* is sometimes rendered as "non-action": an absence of doing. However, in the *Daodejing*, the term is used to characterize the action of the Dao in its creative role and ongoing transformations, and clearly describes a manner of action, rather than an absence of action. The term *wei* 為 is both phonetically and graphically cognate to a word generally used pejoratively to mean "fake; phoney": *wei* 偽. The third century BCE Confucian thinker Xunzi, however, uses the term *wei* 偽 in a difference and, for him, very positive sense, meaning that which humans accomplish through planning and effort. In this, Xunzi was challenging Daoist celebration of the processes of the non-human, "Dao-governed" world, which are precisely "without *wei* 偽": that is, unplanned and free of any purposive intent. This is probably the best way to understand how *wuwei* functions in Daoist texts: action that occurs without the agency

and intent that is characteristic of behavior governed by the human mind. The Daoist sage has perfected the ability to respond to his environment in this purpose-free way.

Ziran 自然 (so of itself; spontaneous; natural)

Like *wuwei*, *ziran* is a compound term; The initial component (*zi*) means "self; in itself," and the second term, *ran*, means "as things are; things being so." Hence, *ziran* describes a thing as it is in itself, without regard for forces that may act upon it: spontaneous. The term ultimately came to be used as a noun, meaning "Nature" (the non-human, or non-cognition-influenced elements of the world we live in). In the translation here, *ziran* is rendered flexibly in context. For example: "To be sparse in speech is to be *spontaneous* (*ziran*)" [23]; "That the Dao is revered and virtue honored is ordained by no one; it is ever *so of itself*. (*ziran*)" [51]; "Assisting the things of the world *to be as they are in themselves* (*ziran*)" [64]. *Ziran* and *wuwei* are closely related terms in the *Daodejing*, since a thing or person that is spontaneous in the manner of its being may be understood to be acting without purpose and effort. In appreciating Daoist thought, it is useful to accommodate the notion that the ideals of *ziran* and *wuwei* do not inherently foreclose the notion of exerting purposive effort in the pursuit of a cultivated state of purposeless spontaneity.