

# TAO TE CHING

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1



# WHAT IS THE TAO

The Tao that can be understood cannot be the primal, or cosmic, Tao, just as an idea that can be expressed in words cannot be the infinite idea.

And yet this ineffable Tao was the source of all spirit and matter, and being expressed was the mother of all created things.

Therefore not to desire the things of sense is to know the freedom of spirituality; and to desire is to learn the limitation of matter. These two things spirit and matter, so different in nature, have the same origin. This unity of origin is the mystery of mysteries, but it is the gateway to spirituality.

# II



# SELF- DEVELOPMENT



When every one recognizes beauty to be only a masquerade, then it is simply ugliness. In the same way goodness, if it is not sincere, is not goodness. So existence and non-existence are incompatible. The difficult and easy are mutually opposites. Just as the long and the short, the high and the low, the loud and soft, the before and the behind, are all opposites and each reveals the other.

Therefore the wise man is not conspicuous in his affairs or given to much talking. Though troubles arise he is not irritated. He produces but does not own; he acts but claims no merit; he builds but does not dwell therein; and because he does not dwell therein he never departs.

# III



# QUIETING PEOPLE

Neglecting to praise the worthy deters people from emulating them; just as not prizing rare treasures deters a man from becoming a thief; or ignoring the things which awaken desire keeps the heart at rest.

Therefore the wise ruler does not suggest unnecessary things, but seeks to satisfy the minds of his people. He seeks to allay appetites but strengthen bones. He ever tries by keeping people in ignorance to keep them satisfied and those who have knowledge he restrains from evil. If he, himself, practices restraint then everything is in quietness.

# IV



# TAO, WITHOUT ORIGIN

The Tao appears to be emptiness but it is never exhausted. Oh, it is profound! It appears to have preceded everything. It dulls its own sharpness, unravels its own fetters, softens its own brightness, identifies itself with its own dust.

Oh, it is tranquil! It appears infinite; I do not know from what it proceeds. It even appears to be antecedent to the Lord.

# V



# IMPARTIALITY

Heaven and earth are not like humans, they are impartial. They regard all things as insignificant, as though they were playthings made of straw. The wise man is also impartial. To him all men are alike and unimportant. The space between heaven and earth is like a bellows, it is empty but does not collapse; it moves and more and more issues. A gossip is soon empty, it is doubtful if he can be impartial.

# VI



# THE INFINITUDE OF CREATIVE EFFORT



The Spirit of the perennial spring is said to be immortal, she is called the Mysterious One. The Mysterious One is typical of the source of heaven and earth. It is continually and endlessly issuing and without effort.

# VII



# HUMILITY

Heaven is eternal, earth is lasting. The reason why heaven and earth are eternal and lasting is because they do not live for themselves; that is the reason they will ever endure.

Therefore the wise man will keep his personality out of sight and because of so doing he will become notable. He subordinates his personality and therefore it is preserved.

Is it not because he is disinterested, that his own interests are conserved?

# VIII



# THE NATURE OF GOODNESS

True goodness is like water, in that it benefits everything and harms nothing. Like water it ever seeks the lowest place, the place that all others avoid. It is closely kin to the Tao.

For a dwelling it chooses the quiet meadow; for a heart the circling eddy. In generosity it is kind; in speech it is sincere; in authority it is order; in affairs it is ability; in movement it is rhythm.

Inasmuch as it is always peaceable it is never rebuked.

# IX



# MODERATION

Continuing to fill a pail after it is full the water will be wasted. Continuing to grind an axe after it is sharp will soon wear it away.

Who can protect a public hall crowded with gold and jewels? The pride of wealth and position brings about their own misfortune. To win true merit, to preserve just fame, the personality must be retiring. This is the heavenly Tao.

X



# WHAT IS POSSIBLE



By patience the animal spirits can be disciplined. By self-control one can unify the character. By close attention to the will, compelling gentleness, one can become like a little child. By purifying the subconscious desires one may be without fault. In ruling his country, if the wise magistrate loves his people, he can avoid compulsion.

In measuring out rewards, the wise magistrate will act like a mother bird. While sharply penetrating into every corner, he may appear to be unsuspecting. While quickening and feeding his people, he will be producing but without pride of ownership. He will benefit but without claim of reward. He will persuade, but not compel by force. This is teh, the profoundest virtue.