

LAO-TZU

Tao Te Ching

Introduced by
BURTON WATSON

Translated,
with Translators' Preface,
Glossary, &
Pronunciation Guide, by
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道可道非常道

Tao k'o tao fei ch'ang tao
TAO called TAO is not TAO.

Names can name no lasting name.

Nameless: the origin of heaven and earth.
Naming: the mother of ten thousand things.

Empty of desire, perceive mystery.
Filled with desire, perceive manifestations.

These have the same source, but different names.
Call them both deep—
Deep and again deep:

The gateway to all mystery.



Recognize beauty and ugliness is born
Recognize good and evil is born.

Ku yu wu hsiang sheng
Is and Isn't produce each other.

Hard depends on easy,
Long is tested by short,
High is determined by low,
Sounds is harmonized by voice,
After is followed by before.

Therefore the Sage is devoted to non-action,
Moves without teaching,
Creates ten thousand things without instruction,
Lives but does not own,
Acts but does not presume,
Accomplishes without taking credit.

When no credit is taken,
Accomplishment endures.

故有無相生

Pu shang hsien
Don't glorify heroes,
And people will not contend.
Don't treasure rare objects,
And no one will steal.
Don't display what people desire,
And their hearts will not be disturbed.

Therefore,
The Sage rules
By emptying hearts and filling bellies,
By weakening ambitions and strengthening bones;
Leads people
Away from knowing and wanting;
Deters those who know too much
From going too far:
Practices non-action
And the natural order is not disrupted.

不尚賢

道冲

Tao ch'ung

TAO is empty—

Its use never exhausted.

Bottomless—

The origin of all things.

It blunts sharp edges,

Unties knots,

Softens glare,

Becomes one with the dusty world.

Deeply subsistent—

I don't know whose child it is.

It is older than the Ancestor.



天地不仁

T'ien ti pu jen
Heaven and Earth are not kind:
The ten thousand things are straw dogs to them.

Sages are not kind:
People are straw dogs to them.

Yet Heaven and Earth
And all the space between
Are like a bellows:
Empty but inexhaustible,
Always producing more.

Longwinded speech is exhausting.
Better to stay centered.



是
謂
玄
牝

The Valley Spirit never dies.
It is called the Mysterious Female.
Shih wei hsüan p'in

The entrance to the Mysterious Female
Is called the root of Heaven and Earth,

Endless flow
Of inexhaustible energy.

天
長
地
久

T'ien ch'ang ti chiu
Heaven is long, Earth enduring.

Long and enduring
Because they do not exist for themselves.

Therefore the Sage
Steps back, but is always in front,
Stays outside, but is always within.

No self-interest?
Self is fulfilled.

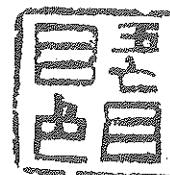
上善若水

Shang shan jo shui

Best to be like water,
Which benefits the ten thousand things
And does not contend.
It pools where humans disdain to dwell,
Close to the TAO.

Live in a good place.
Keep your mind deep.
Treat others well.
Stand by your word.
Make fair rules.
Do the right thing.
Work when it's time.

Only do not contend,
And you will not go wrong.



Hold and fill it —
Not as good as stopping in time.

Measure and pound it—
It will not long survive.

When gold and jade fill the hall,
They cannot be guarded.

Riches and pride
Bequeath error.

Withdrawing when work is done:
Heaven's TAO.
T'ien chih tao

天之道

Can you balance your life force
And embrace the One
Without separation?

Can you control your breath
Gently
Like a baby?

Can you clarify
Your dark vision
Without blemish?

Can you love people
And govern the country
Without knowledge?

Can you open and close
The gate of heaven
Without clinging to earth?

Can you brighten
The four directions
Without action?

Give birth and cultivate.
Give birth and do not possess.
Act without dependence.
Excel but do not rule.
This is called dark TE.
Shih mei hsüan te

是謂玄德

Thirty spokes join one hub.
The wheel's use comes from emptiness.

Clay is fired to make a pot.
The pot's use comes from emptiness.

Windows and doors are cut to make a room.
The room's use comes from emptiness.

Therefore,
Having leads to profit,
Not having leads to use.
Wu chih i wei yung

無之以爲用



五色令人目盲

Wu se ling jen mu mang

Five colors darken the eyes.

Five tones deaden the ears.

Five tastes jade the palate.

Hunting and racing madden the heart.

Exotic goods ensnarl human lives.

Therefore the Sage

Takes care of the belly, not the eye,

Chooses one, rejects the other.

寵辱若驚

Ch'ung ju jo ching

Favor and disgrace are like fear.

Honor and distress are like the self.

What does this mean?

Favor debases us.

Afraid when we get it,

Afraid when we lose it.

The self embodies distress.

No self,

No distress.

Respect the world as your self:

The world can be your lodging.

Love the world as your self:

The world can be your trust.

Searching but not seeing, we call it dim.
 Listening but not hearing, we call it faint.
 Groping but not touching, we call it subtle.

These three cannot be fully grasped.
 Therefore they become one.

Rising it is not bright; setting it is not dark.
 It moves all things back to where there is nothing.

Meeting it there is no front,
 Following it there is no back.

Living in the ancient TAO,
 Master the existing present,
 Understand the source of all things.
 This is called the record of TAO.
Shih wei tao chi

是謂道紀



The ancients who followed TAO:
Dark, wondrous, profound, penetrating,
Wei, miao, hsüan, t'ung,

Deep beyond knowing.

Because they cannot be known,
They can only be described.

Cautious,
Like crossing a winter stream.
Hesitant,
Like respecting one's neighbors.

Polite,
Like a guest.
Yielding,
Like ice about to melt.

Blank,
Like uncarved wood.

Open,
Like a valley.

Mixing freely,
Like muddy water.

Calm the muddy water,
It becomes clear.

Move the inert,
It comes to life.

Those who sustain TAO
Do not wish to be full.

Because they do not wish to be full
They can fade away
Without further effort.

Chih hsü chi
Attain complete emptiness,
Hold fast to stillness.

The ten thousand things stir about;
I only watch for their going back.

Things grow and grow,
But each goes back to its root.
Going back to the root is stillness.
This means returning to what is.
Returning to what is
Means going back to the ordinary.

Understanding the ordinary:
Enlightenment.
Not understanding the ordinary:
Blindness creates evil.

Understanding the ordinary:
Mind opens.

Mind opening leads to compassion,
Compassion to nobility,
Nobility to heavenliness,
Heavenliness to TAO.

TAO endures.
Your body dies.

There is no danger.

太上下

T'ai shang hsia

Great rising and falling—

People only know it exists.

Next they see and praise.

Soon they fear.

Finally they despise.

Without fundamental trust

There is no trust at all.

Be careful in valuing words.

When the work is done,

Everyone says

We just acted naturally.

大道廢

Ta tao fei

Great TAO rejected:

Benevolence and righteousness appear.

Learning and knowledge professed:

Great hypocrites spring up.

Family relations forgotten:

Filial piety and affection arise.

The nation disordered:

Patriots come forth.

絕聖棄智

Chüeh sheng ch'i chih

Banish learning, discard knowledge:
People will gain a hundredfold.

Banish benevolence, discard righteousness:
People will return to duty and compassion.

Banish skill, discard profit:
There will be no more thieves.

These three statements are not enough.
One more step is necessary:

Look at plain silk; hold uncarved wood.
The self dwindles; desires fade.

沌沌兮

Banish learning, no more grief.
Between Yes and No
How much difference?
Between good and evil
How much difference?
What others fear I must fear—
How pointless!

People are wreathed in smiles
As if at a carnival banquet.
I alone am passive, giving no sign,
Like an infant who has not yet smiled.
Forlorn, as if I had no home.

Others have enough and more,
I alone am left out.
I have the mind of a fool,
T'un t'un hsi
Confused, confused.

Others are bright and intelligent,
I alone am dull, dull,
Drifting on the ocean,
Blown about endlessly.

Others have plans,
I alone am wayward and stubborn,
I alone am different from others,
Like a baby in the womb.

Lao Tzu

TAO TE CHING

*A Book about the Way
and the Power of the Way*

A NEW ENGLISH VERSION BY

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SHAMBHALA

BOULDER

1998

I

Taoing

The way you can go
isn't the real way.
The name you can say
isn't the real name.

Heaven and earth
begin in the unnamed:
name's the mother
of the ten thousand things.

So the unwanting soul
sees what's hidden,
and the ever-wanting soul
sees only what it wants.

Two things, one origin,
but different in name,
whose identity is mystery.
Mystery of all mysteries!
The door to the hidden.

A satisfactory translation of this chapter is, I believe, perfectly impossible. It contains the book. I think of it as the Aleph, in Borges's story: if you see it rightly, it contains everything.

Soul food

Everybody on earth knowing
that beauty is beautiful
makes ugliness.

Everybody knowing
that goodness is good
makes wickedness.

For being and nonbeing
arise together;
hard and easy
complete each other;
long and short
shape each other;
high and low
depend on each other;
note and voice
make the music together;
before and after
follow each other.

One of the things I read in this chapter is that values and beliefs are not only culturally constructed but also part of the interplay of yin and yang, the great reversals that maintain the living balance of

That's why the wise soul
does without doing,
teaches without talking.

The things of this world
exist, they are;
you can't refuse them.

To bear and not to own;
to act and not lay claim;
to do the work and let it go:
for just letting it go
is what makes it stay.

the world. To believe that our beliefs are permanent truths which encompass reality is a sad arrogance. To let go of that belief is to find safety.

Hushing

Not praising the praiseworthy
keeps people uncompetitive.

Not prizing rare treasures
keeps people from stealing.

Not looking at the desirable
keeps the mind quiet.

So the wise soul
governing people
would empty their minds,
fill their bellies,
weaken their wishes,
strengthen their bones,

keep people unknowing,
unwanting,
keep the ones who do know
from doing anything.

When you do not-doing,
nothing's out of order.

Over and over Lao Tzu says *wei wu wei*: Do not do. Doing not-doing. To act without acting. Action by inaction. You do nothing yet it gets done. . . .

It's not a statement susceptible to logical interpretation, or even to a syntactical translation into English; but it's a concept that transforms thought radically, that changes minds. The whole book is both an explanation and a demonstration of it.

Sourceless

The way is empty,
used, but not used up.
Deep, yes! ancestral
to the ten thousand things.

Blunting edge,
loosing bond,
dimming light,
the way is the dust of the way.

Quiet,
yes, and likely to endure.
Whose child? born
before the gods.

Everything Lao Tzu says is elusive. The temptation is to grasp at something tangible in the endlessly deceptive simplicity of the words. Even some of his finest scholarly translators focus on positive ethical or political values in the text, as if those were what's important in it. And of course the religion called Taoism is full of gods, saints, miracles, prayers, rules, methods for securing riches, power, longevity, and so forth—all the stuff that Lao Tzu says leads us away from the Way.

In passages such as this one, I think it is the profound modesty of the language that offers what so many people for so many centuries have found in this book: a pure apprehension of the mystery of which we are part.

Useful emptiness

Heaven and earth aren't humane.
To them the ten thousand things
are straw dogs.

Wise souls aren't humane.
To them the hundred families
are straw dogs.

Heaven and earth
act as a bellows:

Empty yet structured,
it moves, inexhaustibly giving.

What is complete

The valley spirit never dies.
Call it the mystery, the woman.

The mystery,
the Door of the Woman,
is the root
of earth and heaven.

Forever this endures, forever.
And all its uses are easy.

The "inhumanity" of the wise soul doesn't mean cruelty. Cruelty is a human characteristic. Heaven and earth—that is, "Nature" and its Way—are not humane, because they are not human. They are not kind; they are not cruel: those are human attributes. You can only be kind or cruel if you have, and cherish, a self. You can't even be indifferent if you aren't different. Altruism is the other side of egoism. Followers of the Way, like the forces of nature, act selflessly.

Dim brightness

Heaven will last,
 earth will endure.
 How can they last so long?
 They don't exist for themselves
 and so can go on and on.

So wise souls
 leaving self behind
 move forward,
 and setting self aside
 stay centered.
 Why let the self go?
 To keep what the soul needs.

Easy by nature

True goodness
 is like water.
 Water's good
 for everything.
 It doesn't compete.

It goes right
 to the low loathsome places,
 and so finds the way.

For a house,
 the good thing is level ground.
 In thinking,
 depth is good.
 The good of giving is magnanimity;
 of speaking, honesty;
 of government, order.
 The good of work is skill,
 and of action, timing.

No competition,
 so no blame.

A clear stream of water runs through this book, from poem to poem,
 wearing down the indestructible, finding the way around everything
 that obstructs the way. Good drinking water.

Being quiet

Brim-fill the bowl,
it'll spill over.
Keep sharpening the blade,
you'll soon blunt it.

Nobody can protect
a house full of gold and jade.

Wealth, status, pride,
are their own ruin.
To do good, work well, and lie low
is the way of the blessing.

Techniques

Can you keep your soul in its body,
hold fast to the one,
and so learn to be whole?
Can you center your energy,
be soft, tender,
and so learn to be a baby?

Can you keep the deep water still and clear,
so it reflects without blurring?
Can you love people and run things,
and do so by not doing?

Opening, closing the Gate of Heaven,
can you be like a bird with her nestlings?
Piercing bright through the cosmos,
can you know by not knowing?

To give birth, to nourish,
to bear and not to own,
to act and not lay claim,
to lead and not to rule:
this is mysterious power.

Most of the scholars think this chapter is about meditation, its techniques and fulfillments. The language is profoundly mystical, the images are charged, rich in implications.

The last verse turns up in nearly the same words in other chapters; there are several such "refrains" throughout the book, identical or similar lines repeated once or twice or three times.

The uses of not

Thirty spokes
meet in the hub.
Where the wheel isn't
is where it's useful.

Hollowed out,
clay makes a pot.
Where the pot's not
is where it's useful.

Cut doors and windows
to make a room.
Where the room isn't,
there's room for you.

So the profit in what is
is in the use of what isn't.

Not wanting

The five colors
blind our eyes.
The five notes
deafen our ears.
The five flavors
dull our taste.

Racing, chasing, hunting,
drives people crazy.
Trying to get rich
ties people in knots.

So the wise soul
watches with the inner
not the outward eye,
letting that go,
keeping this.

One of the things I love about Lao Tzu is he is so funny. He's explaining a profound and difficult truth here, one of those counter-intuitive truths that, when the mind can accept them, suddenly double the size of the universe. He goes about it with this deadpan simplicity, talking about pots.

Shameless

To be in favor or disgrace
is to live in fear.
To take the body seriously
is to admit one can suffer.

What does that mean,
to be in favor or disgrace
is to live in fear?
Favor debases:
we fear to lose it,
fear to win it.
So to be in favor or disgrace
is to live in fear.

What does that mean,
to take the body seriously
is to admit one can suffer?
I suffer because I'm a body;
if I weren't a body,
how could I suffer?

Lao Tzu, a mystic, demystifies political power.

Autocracy and oligarchy foster the beliefs that power is gained magically and retained by sacrifice, and that powerful people are genuinely superior to the powerless.

Lao Tzu does not see political power as magic. He sees rightful power as earned and wrongful power as usurped. He does not see

So people who set their bodily good
before the public good
could be entrusted with the commonwealth,
and people who treated the body politic
as gently as their own body
would be worthy to govern the commonwealth.

power as virtue, but as the result of virtue. The democracies are founded on that view.

He sees sacrifice of self or others as a corruption of power, and power as available to anybody who follows the Way. This is a radically subversive attitude. No wonder anarchists and Taoists make good friends.

Celebrating mystery

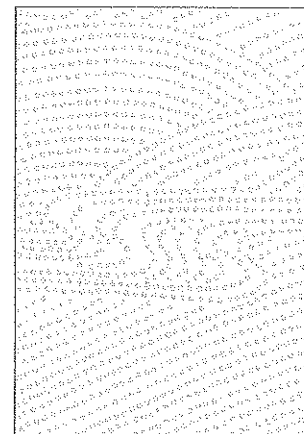
Look at it: nothing to see.
 Call it colorless.
 Listen to it: nothing to hear.
 Call it soundless.
 Reach for it: nothing to hold.
 Call it intangible.

Triply undifferentiated,
 it merges into oneness,
 not bright above,
 not dark below.

Never, oh! never
 can it be named.
 It reverts, it returns
 to unbeing.
 Call it the form of the unformed,
 the image of no image.

Call it unthinkable thought.
 Face it: no face.
 Follow it: no end.

Holding fast to the old Way,
 we can live in the present.
 Mindful of the ancient beginnings,
 we hold the thread of the Tao.



People of power

Once upon a time
people who knew the Way
were subtle, spiritual, mysterious, penetrating,
unfathomable.

Since they're inexplicable
I can only say what they seemed like:
Cautious, oh yes, as if wading through a winter river.
Alert, as if afraid of the neighbors.
Polite and quiet, like houseguests.
Elusive, like melting ice.
Blank, like uncut wood.
Empty, like valleys.
Mysterious, oh yes, they were like troubled water.

Who can by stillness, little by little
make what is troubled grow clear?
Who can by movement, little by little
make what is still grow quick?

In the first stanza we see the followers of the Way in ancient times or *illo tempore*, remote and inaccessible; but the second stanza brings them close and alive in a series of marvelous similes. (I am particu-

To follow the Way
is not to need fulfillment.
Unfulfilled, one may live on
needing no renewal.

larly fond of the polite and quiet houseguests.) The images of the valley and of uncut or uncarved wood will recur again and again.

Returning to the root

Be completely empty.
 Be perfectly serene.
 The ten thousand things arise together;
 in their arising is their return.
 Now they flower,
 and flowering
 sink homeward,
 returning to the root.

The return to the root
 is peace.
 Peace: to accept what must be,
 to know what endures.
 In that knowledge is wisdom.
 Without it, ruin, disorder.

To those who will not admit morality without a deity to validate it,
 or spirituality of which man is not the measure, the firmness of Lao

To know what endures
 is to be openhearted,
 magnanimous,
 regal,
 blessed,
 following the Tao,
 the way that endures forever.
 The body comes to its ending,
 but there is nothing to fear.

Tzu's morality and the sweetness of his spiritual counsel must seem
 incomprehensible, or illegitimate, or very troubling indeed.

Acting simply

True leaders
are hardly known to their followers.
Next after them are the leaders
the people know and admire;
after them, those they fear;
after them, those they despise.

To give no trust
is to get no trust.

When the work's done right,
with no fuss or boasting,
ordinary people say,
Oh, we did it.

This invisible leader, who gets things done in such a way that people think they did it all themselves, isn't one who manipulates others from behind the scenes; just the opposite. Again, it's a matter of "doing without doing": uncompetitive, unworried, trustful accomplishment, power that is not force. An example or analogy might be a very good teacher, or the truest voice in a group of singers.

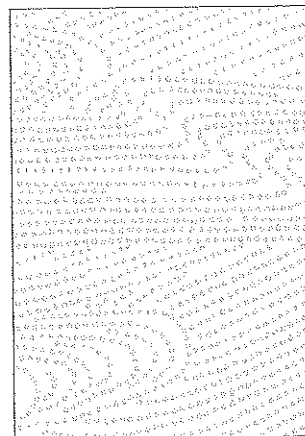
Second bests

In the degradation of the great way
come benevolence and righteousness.
With the exaltation of learning and prudence
comes immense hypocrisy.
The disordered family
is full of dutiful children and parents.
The disordered society
is full of loyal patriots.

Raw silk and uncut wood

Stop being holy, forget being prudent,
 it'll be a hundred times better for everyone.
 Stop being altruistic, forget being righteous,
 people will remember what family feeling is.
 Stop planning, forget making a profit,
 there won't be any thieves and robbers.

But even these three rules
 needn't be followed; what works reliably
 is to know the raw silk,
 hold the uncut wood.
 Need little,
 want less.
 Forget the rules.
 Be untroubled.



This chapter and the two before it may be read as a single movement of thought.

“Raw silk” and “uncut wood” are images traditionally associated with the characters *su* (simple, plain) and *p’u* (natural, honest).

LAO TZU

TAO TE CHING

Translated with an introduction by

D. C. LAU

PENGUIN BOOKS

I

- 1 The way that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way;
The name that can be named
Is not the constant name.
- 2 The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;
The named was the mother of the myriad creatures.
- 3 Hence always rid yourself of desires in order to observe
its* secrets;
But always allow yourself to have desires in order to
observe its manifestations.[†]
- 3a These two are the same
But diverge in name as they issue forth.
Being the same they are called mysteries,
Mystery upon mystery –
The gateway of the manifold secrets.

* In translating from the Chinese it is often impossible to avoid using the pronouns 'it' and 'they' and their derivatives without any clear reference, whether these are expressed in the Chinese or only implied. In the present work 'it' used in this way sometimes refers to 'the way' and 'they' to 'the myriad creatures'.

† Superior arabic figures refer to notes, mainly of a textual nature, placed at the end of the book.

II

- 4 The whole world recognizes the beautiful as the beautiful,
yet this is only the ugly; the whole world recognizes the
good as the good, yet this is only the bad.
- 5 Thus Something and Nothing produce each other;
The difficult and the easy complement each other;
The long and the short offset¹ each other;
The high and the low incline towards each other;
Note and sound* harmonize with each other;
Before and after follow each other.†
- 6 Therefore the sage keeps to the deed that consists in taking
no action and practises the teaching that uses no words.
- 7 The myriad creatures rise from it yet it claims no
authority;²
It gives them life yet claims no possession;
It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude;
It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit.
- 7a It is because it lays claim to no merit
That its merit never deserts it.

* The Chinese terms used here are not precise and it is not clear what the intended contrast is. The translation is, therefore, tentative.

† It may seem strange to say that before and after follow each other, but this refers probably to a ring. Any point on a ring is both before and after any other point, depending on the arbitrary choice of the starting-point.

III

- 8 Not to honour men of worth will keep the people from
contention; not to value goods which are hard to come by
will keep them from theft; not to display what is desirable
will keep them from being unsettled of mind.
- 9 Therefore in governing the people, the sage empties their
minds but fills their bellies, weakens their wills but
strengthens their bones. He always keeps them innocent of
knowledge and free from desire, and ensures that the
clever never dare to act.
- 10 Do that which consists in taking no action, and order will
prevail.

IV

- 11 The way is empty, yet use will not drain*¹ it.
 Deep, it is like the ancestor of the myriad creatures.
- 12 Blunt the sharpness;
 Untangle the knots;
 Soften the glare;
 Let your wheels move only along old ruts.²
- 13 Darkly visible, it only seems as if it were there.
 I know not whose son it is.
 It images the forefather of God.

* The word in the text meaning 'full' has been emended to one meaning 'empty'. Cf. 'Yet use will never drain it' (17); 'Yet it cannot be exhausted by use' (78); 'Yet use will not drain it' (101).

V

- 14 Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs;* the sage is ruthless, and treats the people as straw dogs.
- 15 Is not the space between heaven and earth like a bellows?
 It is empty without being exhausted:
 The more it works the more comes out.
- 16 Much speech leads inevitably to silence.
 Better to hold fast to the void.¹

* In the *T'ien yün* chapter in the *Chuang tzu* it is said that straw dogs were treated with the greatest deference before they were used as an offering, only to be discarded and trampled upon as soon as they had served their purpose.

VI

- 17 The spirit of the valley never dies.
This is called the mysterious female.
The gateway of the mysterious female
Is called the root of heaven and earth.
Dimly visible, it seems as if it were there,
Yet use will never drain it.

VII

- 18 Heaven and earth are enduring. The reason why heaven
and earth can be enduring is that they do not give them-
selves life. Hence they are able to be long-lived.
- 19 Therefore the sage puts his person last and it comes
first,
Treats it as extraneous to himself and it is preserved.
- 19a Is it not because he is without thought of self that he is able
to accomplish his private ends?

VIII

- 20 Highest good is like water. Because water excels in benefit-
ing the myriad creatures without contending with them
and settles where none would like to be, it comes close to
the way.
- 21 In a home it is the site that matters;¹
In quality of mind it is depth that matters;
In an ally it is benevolence that matters;
In speech it is good faith that matters;
In government it is order that matters;
In affairs it is ability that matters;
In action it is timeliness that matters.
- 22 It is because it does not contend that it is never at fault.*

* In sense and, possibly, in rhyme, this line is continuous with 20.

IX

- 23 Rather than fill it to the brim by keeping it upright
Better to have stopped in time;*¹
Hammer it to a point
And the sharpness cannot be preserved for ever;
There may be gold and jade to fill a hall
But there is none who can keep them.
To be overbearing when one has wealth and position
Is to bring calamity upon oneself.
To retire when the task is accomplished
Is the way of heaven.

* This refers to a vessel which is said to have been in the temple of Chou (or Lu). It stands in position when empty but overturns when full. The moral is that humility is a necessary virtue, especially for those in high position.

X

- 24 When carrying on your head¹ your perplexed bodily
soul* can you embrace in your arms the One
And not let go?
In concentrating your breath can you become as supple
As a babe?
Can you polish your mysterious mirror†
And leave no blemish?
Can you love the people and govern the state
Without resorting to action?²
When the gates of heaven‡ open and shut
Are you capable of keeping to the role of the female?³
When your discernment penetrates the four quarters
Are you capable of not knowing anything?⁴
- 25 It gives them life and rears them.
- 26 It gives them life yet claims no possession;
It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude;
It is the steward yet exercises no authority.
Such is called the mysterious virtue.

* Man has two souls, the *p'o* which is the soul of the body and the *hun* which is the soul of the spirit. After death, the *p'o* descends into earth while the *hun* ascends into heaven. 'The myriad creatures carry on their backs the *yin* and embrace in their arms the *yang*' (94).

† i.e. the mind.

‡ The gates of heaven are, according to the *Keng sang ch'u* chapter of the *Chuang tzu*, the invisible gateway through which the myriad creatures come into being and return to nothing.

XI

- 27 Thirty spokes
Share one hub.
Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the cart. Knead clay in order to make a vessel. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the vessel. Cut out doors and windows in order to make a room. Adapt the nothing* therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the room.
- 27a Thus what we gain is Something, yet it is by virtue of Nothing that this can be put to use.

* In all three cases, by 'nothing' is meant the empty spaces.

XII

- 28 The five colours make man's eyes blind;
 The five notes make his ears deaf;
 The five tastes injure his palate;
 Riding and hunting
 Make his mind go wild with excitement;
 Goods hard to come by
 Serve to hinder his progress.
- 29 Hence the sage is
 For the belly
 Not for the eye.
- 29a Therefore he discards the one and takes the other.

XIII

- 30 Favour and disgrace are things that startle;
 High rank* is, like one's body, a source of great trouble.
- 30a What is meant by saying that favour and disgrace are things that startle? Favour when it is bestowed on a subject serves to startle as much as when it is withdrawn. This is what is meant by saying that favour and disgrace are things that startle. What is meant by saying that high rank is, like one's body, a source of great trouble? The reason I have great trouble is that I have a body. When I no longer have a body, what trouble have I?
- 31 Hence he who values his body more than dominion over the empire can be entrusted with the empire. He who loves his body more than dominion over the empire can be given the custody of the empire.

* It is probable that the word *kuei* ('high rank') here has crept in by mistake, since, as it stands, this line has one word more than the first. If this is the case, then the line should be translated: 'Great trouble is like one's body.' This brings it into line with the explanation that follows where 'high rank' is not, in fact, mentioned.

XIV

- 32 What cannot be seen is called evanescent;
 What cannot be heard is called rarefied;
 What cannot be touched is called minute.
- 32a These three cannot be fathomed
 And so they are confused and looked upon as one.
- 33 Its upper part is not dazzling;
 Its lower part is not obscure.
 Dimly visible, it cannot be named
 And returns to that which is without substance.
 This is called the shape that has no shape,
 The image that is without substance.
 This is called indistinct and shadowy.
 Go up to it and you will not see its head;
 Follow behind it and you will not see its rear.
- 34 Hold fast to the way of antiquity
 In order to keep in control the realm of today.
 The ability to know the beginning of antiquity
 Is called the thread running through the way.

XV

- 35 Of old he who was well versed in the way¹
 Was minutely subtle, mysteriously comprehending,
 And too profound to be known.
 It is because he could not be known
 That he can only be given a makeshift description:
 Tentative, as if fording a river in winter,
 Hesitant, as if in fear of his neighbours;
 Formal like a guest;²
 Falling apart like thawing ice;
 Thick like the uncarved block;
 Vacant like a valley;
 Murky like muddy water.
- 36 Who can be muddy and yet, settling, slowly become
 limpid?³
 Who can be at rest and yet, stirring, slowly come to
 life?
 He who holds fast to this way
 Desires not to be full.
 It is because he is not full
 That he can be worn and yet newly made.*

* The present text reads 'That he can be worn and not newly made.' The negative must have crept in by mistake. Cf. 'Worn then new' (50).

XVI

- 37 I do my utmost to attain emptiness;
 I hold firmly to stillness.
 The myriad creatures all rise together
 And I watch their return.
 The teeming creatures
 All return to their separate roots.
 Returning to one's roots is known as stillness.
 This is what is meant by returning to one's destiny.
 Returning to one's destiny is known as the constant.
 Knowledge of the constant is known as discernment.
- 38 Woe to him who wilfully innovates
 While ignorant of the constant,
 But should one act from knowledge of the constant
 One's action will lead to impartiality,
 Impartiality to kingliness,
 Kingliness to heaven,
 Heaven¹ to the way,
 The way to perpetuity,
 And to the end of one's days one will meet with no
 danger.

XVII

- 39 The best of all rulers is but a shadowy presence to his
 subjects.
 Next comes the ruler they love and praise;
 Next comes one they fear;
 Next comes one with whom they take liberties.
- 40 When there is not enough faith, there is lack of good faith.
- 41 Hesitant,¹ he does not utter words lightly.
 When his task is accomplished and his work done
 The people all say, 'It happened to us naturally.'

XVIII

- 42 When the great way falls into disuse
 There are benevolence and rectitude;
 When cleverness emerges
 There is great hypocrisy;
 When the six relations* are at variance
 There are filial children;¹
 When the state is benighted
 There are loyal ministers.

* The six relations, according to Wang Pi, are father and son, elder and younger brother, husband and wife.

XIX

- 43 Exterminate the sage, discard the wise,
 And the people will benefit a hundredfold;
 Exterminate benevolence, discard rectitude,
 And the people will again be filial;¹
 Exterminate ingenuity, discard profit,
 And there will be no more thieves and bandits.
- 43a These three, being false² adornments, are not enough
 And the people must have something to which they can
 attach themselves:
 Exhibit the unadorned and embrace the uncarved block,
 Have little thought of self and as few desires as
 possible.