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Tao Te Ching

道德經

Laozi

老子 · c. 4th c. BC

Philosophy · Religion

Tao Te Ching

道德經

Laozi

Translated from the Classical Chinese by Ether Library

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Daodejing 道德經, also called the *Laozi*

Laozi (traditionally a keeper of the Zhou archives; his life and dates are uncertain)

Translated from the Classical Chinese by Ether Library

Composed in the fourth century BC or somewhat earlier, and handed down in eighty-one chapters.

A Note on the Translation

This is a complete translation of the eighty-one chapters of the *Daodejing*, made directly from the Classical Chinese. No earlier English version was used as its basis. The source is a public-domain digital transcription of the received text, which belongs to the family of the version annotated by Wang Bi (226–249), the text on which nearly all later readers have relied. In a few places it has readings found in the Heshang Gong text and elsewhere. James Legge's translation of 1891 was opened only to check the sense of doubtful passages, and none of its wording is kept. *Tao Te Ching* is the older English spelling of *Daodejing*, "the classic of the Way and of virtue," and we keep it as the title by which the book is known in English. Every other Chinese word, the author's name Laozi (once spelled Lao Tzu) among them, is given in pinyin.

Each chapter prints the Chinese first, broken into its clauses, one to a line, and then the English, one line for each line of the Chinese, so that the original of any English line can be found by counting. The transcription has some characters wrongly restored from simplified forms, two characters left blank in chapter 20, and two misprints in chapter 64; these are corrected in the Chinese as printed here. Where our source differs from Wang Bi's text in a way that changes the sense, the Chinese is printed as our source has it, the English follows it, and a note gives Wang Bi's reading (chapters 1, 15, 17, 25, 28, and 39). The two parts keep their old names, the Book of the Way (chapters 1 to 37) and the Book of Virtue (38 to 81). The chapters have numbers only.

Laozi speaks briefly and turns his sayings over: great skill seems clumsy, the soft overcomes the hard. The English keeps his clauses short, repeats his parallel frames with the same words, and leaves his paradoxes unresolved. The words the book turns on are rendered the same way throughout. *Dao* is "the Way." *De* is "virtue," in the old sense of the power a thing has by its nature, as when one speaks of the virtue of a healing herb; it is not moral merit, but no other English word keeps the turn of chapter 38, where high virtue does not count itself virtue. *Wuwei* is "non-action" or "doing nothing."

Ziran, literally “self-so,” is “so of itself,” and never “nature.” *Chang* is “the abiding,” *pu* “the uncarved block,” and *xuan*, the color of deep water and the night sky, is “dark,” meaning hidden, never evil. The book never addresses a reader as “you,” and nothing from the commentators has been folded into it.

The seventeen notes are the translator’s. They explain a few old objects and customs and give the readings of Wang Bi where our source departs from them. Spelling and punctuation are American.

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Part One: The Book of the Way

Chapters 1–37 · 道經

Chapter 1

道可道，非常道。
名可名，非常名。
無，名天地之始；
有，名萬物之母。
故常無，欲以觀其妙；
常有，欲以觀其徼。
此兩者，同出而異名，同謂之玄。
玄之又玄，眾妙之門。

A Way that can be told is not the abiding Way.
A name that can be named is not the abiding name.
Nonbeing names the beginning of heaven and earth;[1]
being names the mother of the ten thousand things.
So in abiding nonbeing one would see its wonders;[2]
in abiding being one would see its edges.
These two come out together but differ in name; together they are called dark.
Dark, and darker still: the gate of all wonders.

---

1. We follow the punctuation of our source (無，名天地之始). Wang Bi read 無名 and 有名 together: “The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth; the

named is the mother of the ten thousand things."

2. Again the punctuation of our source (常無，欲以觀其妙). Wang Bi read 常無欲 and 常有欲: "Always without desire, one sees its wonders; always with desire, one sees its edges."

Chapter 2

天下皆知美之為美，斯惡矣；
皆知善之為善，斯不善矣。
故有無相生，難易相成，長短相形，高下相傾，音聲相和，前後相隨。
是以聖人處無為之事，行不言之教。
萬物作焉而不辭，生而不有，為而不恃，功成而弗居。
夫唯弗居，是以不去。

When all the world knows beauty as beauty, there is already ugliness;
when all know good as good, there is already what is not good.
So being and nonbeing give birth to each other, hard and easy complete each other, long and short shape each other, high and low lean on each other, tone and voice answer each other, front and back follow each other.
That is why the sage keeps to the work of non-action and practices the teaching without words.
The ten thousand things rise, and he does not turn them away; he gives life but does not possess, acts but does not presume, finishes the work but does not dwell in it.
Precisely because he does not dwell in it, it does not leave him.

Chapter 3

不尚賢，使民不爭；
不貴難得之貨，使民不為盜；
不見可欲，使民心不亂。
是以聖人之治，虛其心，實其腹，弱其志，強其骨。
常使民無知無欲。
使夫智者不敢為也。
為無為，則無不治。

When the worthy are not exalted, the people do not contend;
when goods hard to come by are not prized, the people do not steal;
when what can be desired is not displayed, the people's hearts are not stirred.
So the sage governs by emptying their hearts and filling their bellies, weakening their wills and strengthening their bones.
He always keeps the people without knowing and without desire, and sees that the clever do not dare to act.
Do what is not doing, and nothing will be left ungoverned.

Chapter 4

道沖，而用之或不盈。
淵兮，似萬物之宗；
挫其銳，解其紛，和其光，同其塵；
湛兮似或存。
吾不知誰之子？
象帝之先。

The Way is empty, and in use it never seems to fill.
Deep, it seems the ancestor of the ten thousand things;
it blunts the sharpness, unties the tangles, softens the light,
becomes one with the dust;
clear and still, it seems almost to be there.
I do not know whose child it is.
It seems to precede the ruler of heaven.

Chapter 5

天地不仁，以萬物為芻狗；
聖人不仁，以百姓為芻狗。
天地之間，其猶橐籥乎？
虛而不屈，動而愈出。
多言數窮，不如守中。

Heaven and earth are not humane; they treat the ten thousand things as straw dogs.[1]
The sage is not humane; he treats the people as straw dogs.
The space between heaven and earth, is it not like a bellows?
Empty, yet never exhausted; the more it moves, the more comes out.
Much talk soon runs dry; better to keep to the center.

---

1. Dogs made of straw for a sacrifice. During the rite they were handled with great care; afterward they were thrown into the road to be trampled.

Chapter 6

谷神不死，是謂玄牝。
玄牝之門，是謂天地根。
綿綿若存，用之不勤。

The valley spirit does not die; it is called the dark female.
The gate of the dark female is called the root of heaven and earth.
Unbroken as a thread, it seems always there; drawn on, it never wears out.

Chapter 7

天長地久。
天地所以能長且久者，以其不自生，故能長久。
是以聖人後其身而身先，外其身而身存。
非以其無私邪？
故能成其私。

Heaven lasts, earth endures.
Heaven and earth can last and endure because they do not live for themselves; so they can last long.
That is why the sage puts himself last and finds himself first, sets himself aside and finds himself preserved.
Is it not because he has no self to serve?
So his self is served.

Chapter 8

上善若水。
水善利萬物而不爭。
處眾人之所惡，故幾於道。
居善地，心善淵，與善仁，言善信，政善治，事善能，動善時。
夫唯不爭，故無尤。

The highest good is like water.
Water is good at benefiting the ten thousand things and does not contend.
It settles in the places all people loathe, and so it is close to the Way.
In dwelling, the ground is good; in the heart, depth is good; in dealings, humaneness is good; in speaking, good faith is good; in governing, order is good; in work, ability is good; in moving, timing is good.
Precisely because it does not contend, it is without blame.

Chapter 9

持而盈之，不如其已；
揣而銳之，不可長保。
金玉滿堂，莫之能守；
富貴而驕，自遺其咎。
功遂身退，天之道。

Holding a thing and filling it to the brim is not as good as stopping;
hammered to a fine edge, a blade cannot keep it long.
A hall full of gold and jade can be guarded by no one;
rich and high and proud, one brings ruin on oneself.
To withdraw when the work is done is the Way of heaven.

Chapter 10

載營魄抱一，能無離乎？
專氣致柔，能嬰兒乎？
滌除玄覽，能無疵乎？
愛國治民，能無為乎？
天門開闔，能為雌乎？
明白四達，能無知乎？
生之畜之，生而不有，為而不恃，長而不宰，是謂玄德。

Bearing the soul and holding to the One, can they be kept from parting?
Gathering the breath until it is soft, can one be like an infant?
Washing and clearing the dark mirror, can it be left without a flaw?
Loving the state and governing the people, can one do it by doing nothing?
As the gates of heaven open and close, can one play the female?
Seeing clearly in all four directions, can one be without knowing?
To give birth and to nurture; to give life but not possess, to act but not presume, to raise but not rule: this is called dark virtue.

Chapter 11

三十輻共一轂，當其無，有車之用。
埏埴以為器，當其無，有器之用。
鑿戶牖以為室，當其無，有室之用。
故有之以為利，無之以為用。

Thirty spokes share one hub; where it is empty, there is the use of the cart.
Clay is shaped into a vessel; where it is empty, there is the use of the vessel.
Doors and windows are cut to make a room; where it is empty, there is the use of the room.
So what is there gives benefit, and what is not there gives use.

Chapter 12

五色令人目盲；
五音令人耳聾；
五味令人口爽；
馳騁畋獵，令人心發狂；
難得之貨，令人行妨。
是以聖人為腹不為目，故去彼取此。

The five colors make the eye blind;
the five notes make the ear deaf;
the five flavors spoil the palate;
racing and hunting drive the heart mad;
goods hard to come by lead conduct astray.
That is why the sage is for the belly, not for the eye. So he discards that and takes this.

Chapter 13

寵辱若驚，貴大患若身。
何謂寵辱若驚？
寵為下，得之若驚，失之若驚，是謂寵辱若驚。
何謂貴大患若身？
吾所以有大患者，為吾有身，及吾無身，吾有何患？
故貴以身為天下，若可寄天下；
愛以身為天下，若可託天下。

Favor and disgrace are received with alarm; great trouble is prized as the body is.
What is meant by “favor and disgrace are received with alarm”?
Favor is lowly: gaining it is alarming, losing it is alarming. This is what is meant by “favor and disgrace are received with alarm.”
What is meant by “great trouble is prized as the body is”?
The reason I have great trouble is that I have a body. If I had no body, what trouble would I have?
So one who values the world as his own body can be entrusted with the world;
one who loves the world as his own body can be given charge of the world.

Chapter 14

視之不見，名曰夷；
聽之不聞，名曰希；
搏之不得，名曰微。
此三者不可致詰，故混而為一。
其上不皦，其下不昧。
繩繩不可名，復歸於無物。
是謂無狀之狀，無物之象，是謂惚恍。
迎之不見其首，隨之不見其後。
執古之道，以御今之有。
能知古始，是謂道紀。

Looked at, it is not seen: it is called the faint;
listened to, it is not heard: it is called the hushed;
grasped at, it is not held: it is called the subtle.
These three cannot be questioned to the end, and so they blend into one.
Its top is not bright, its bottom is not dark.
Endless and unbroken, it cannot be named; it returns again to nothing.
This is called the shape without shape, the image of nothing; it is called blurred and dim.
Go to meet it, and there is no head to see; follow it, and there is no

back to see.
Hold to the Way of old to master what is here now.
To know the ancient beginning: this is called the guiding thread of the Way.

Chapter 15

古之善為士者，微妙玄通，深不可識。
夫唯不可識，故強為之容：豫兮若冬涉川；
猶兮若畏四鄰；
儼兮其若客；
渙兮若冰之釋；
敦兮其若樸；
曠兮其若谷；
混兮其若濁。
孰能晦以理之徐明？
孰能濁以靜之徐清？
孰能安以動之徐生？
保此道者不欲盈。
夫唯不盈，故能蔽而新成。

The good men of old were subtle, wondrous, darkly penetrating, too deep to be known.
Precisely because they cannot be known, I can only force a description: wary, as if crossing a river in winter;
hesitant, as if afraid of the neighbors on all sides;
grave, like a guest;
loosening, like ice about to melt;
solid, like the uncarved block;

open, like a valley;
murky, like muddy water.
Who can take the dark and order it, until slowly it grows light?
Who can take the muddy and still it, until slowly it grows clear?
Who can take the settled and move it, until slowly it comes to life?
One who keeps this Way does not wish to be full.

Precisely because he is not full, he can be worn and made new.[1]

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1. Our source reads 蔽而新成. Wang Bi's text has 蔽不新成: "he stays worn and is not made new."

Chapter 16

致虛極，守靜篤，萬物並作，吾以觀復。
夫物芸芸，各復歸其根。
歸根曰靜，靜曰復命。
復命曰常，知常曰明。
不知常，妄作凶。
知常容，容乃公。
公乃王，王乃天，天乃道，道乃久，沒身不殆。

Reach the utmost emptiness, hold fast to stillness: the ten thousand things rise together, and I watch them return.
Things flourish and flourish, and each returns to its root.
Returning to the root is called stillness; stillness is called returning to one's destiny.
Returning to one's destiny is called the abiding; knowing the abiding is called clarity.
Not to know the abiding is to act recklessly, and disaster follows.
Knowing the abiding, one is all-embracing; all-embracing, one is impartial;
impartial, one is kingly; kingly, one is of heaven; of heaven, one is of the Way; of the Way, one lasts; and to the end of one's days there is no danger.

Chapter 17

太上，下不知有之；
其次，親而譽之；
其次，畏之；
其次，侮之。
信不足焉，有不信焉。
悠兮其貴言。
功成事遂，百姓皆謂：「我自然」。

The highest ruler: those below do not know he is there;[1]
the next: they love him and praise him;
the next: they fear him;
the next: they scorn him.
Where trust is wanting, there is distrust.
Unhurried, he holds his words precious.
The work is done, the task complete, and the people all say, “We are so of ourselves.”

---

1. Our source reads 下不知有之. Wang Bi’s text has 下知有之: “those below know only that he is there.”

Chapter 18

大道廢，有仁義；
智慧出，有大偽；
六親不和，有孝慈；
國家昏亂，有忠臣。

When the great Way is abandoned, there are humaneness and rightness;
when wisdom and cleverness appear, there is great falsehood;
when the six kinds of kin are at odds, there are filial piety and parental love;
when the state is dark and in disorder, there are loyal ministers.

Chapter 19

絕聖棄智，民利百倍；
絕仁棄義，民復孝慈；
絕巧棄利，盜賊無有。
此三者，以為文不足。
故令有所屬：見素抱樸，少私寡欲。

Cut off sageliness, discard cleverness, and the people will gain a hundredfold;
cut off humaneness, discard rightness, and the people will return to filial piety and parental love;
cut off skill, discard profit, and there will be no thieves or robbers.
These three are ornament, and not enough.
So let there be something to hold to: show the undyed silk, hold the uncarved block, make little of self, have few desires.

Chapter 20

絕學無憂。
唯之與阿，相去幾何？
善之與惡，相去若何？
人之所畏，不可不畏。
荒兮其未央哉！
眾人熙熙，如享太牢，如登春臺。
我獨泊兮其未兆，如嬰兒之未孩。
儽儽兮，若無所歸。
眾人皆有餘，而我獨若遺。
我愚人之心也哉！
沌沌兮。
俗人昭昭，我獨昏昏。
俗人察察，我獨悶悶。
澹兮其若海，飉兮若無止。
眾人皆有以，我獨頑且鄙。
我獨異於人，而貴食母。

Cut off learning, and there is no worry.
“Yes, sir” and “uh-huh”: how far apart are they?
Good and evil: how far apart are they?
What others fear, I too must fear.
Vast and wild, with no end in sight!

The crowd is merry, as if at a great feast of oxen, as if climbing a terrace in spring.
I alone am placid and give no sign, like an infant that has not yet learned to smile.
Weary, weary, as if with no home to go back to.
The crowd all have more than enough; I alone seem left with nothing.
Mine is the heart of a fool!
Muddled, so muddled.
Ordinary people are bright; I alone am dim.
Ordinary people are sharp; I alone am dull.
Calm, like the sea; gusting, as if it would never stop.
The crowd all have their uses; I alone am stubborn and uncouth.
I alone am different from others: I prize the nursing mother.

Chapter 21

孔德之容，惟道是從。
道之為物，惟恍惟惚。
惚兮恍兮，其中有象；
恍兮惚兮，其中有物。
窈兮冥兮，其中有精；
其精甚真，其中有信。
自今及古，其名不去，以閱眾甫。
吾何以知眾甫之狀哉？
以此。

The bearing of great virtue follows the Way alone.
The Way, as a thing, is only dim, only blurred.
Blurred, dim, and within it there is an image;
dim, blurred, and within it there is a thing.
Deep, dark, and within it there is an essence;
the essence is utterly real, and within it there is something sure.
From now back to ancient times its name has not left it, and
through it the beginnings of all things are seen.
How do I know the beginnings of all things are so?
By this.

Chapter 22

曲則全，枉則直，窪則盈，敝則新，少則多，多則惑。
是以聖人抱一為天下式。
不自見，故明；
不自是，故彰；
不自伐，故有功；
不自矜，故長。
夫唯不爭，故天下莫能與之爭。
古之所謂曲則全者，豈虛言哉！
誠全而歸之。

Bent, it is whole; crooked, it is straight; hollow, it is full; worn, it is new; with little, there is more; with much, there is confusion.
That is why the sage holds to the One and is a pattern for the world.
He does not display himself, and so he is plain to see;
he does not justify himself, and so he stands out;
he does not boast, and so he has merit;
he does not brag, and so he lasts.
Precisely because he does not contend, no one in the world can contend with him.
What the ancients called “bent, it is whole”: how could those be

empty words!
Be truly whole, and return to it.

Chapter 23

希言自然。
故飄風不終朝，驟雨不終日。
孰為此者？
天地。
天地尚不能久，而況於人乎？
故從事於道者，同於道；
德者，同於德；
失者，同於失。
同於道者，道亦樂得之；
同於德者，德亦樂得之；
於失者，失亦樂得之。
信不足焉，有不信焉。

Sparing speech is what is so of itself.
So a whirlwind does not last the morning, a cloudburst does not last the day.
Who makes these?
Heaven and earth.
If even heaven and earth cannot keep them up for long, how much less can man!
So one who follows the Way in his work is one with the Way;
one who follows virtue is one with virtue;

one who follows loss is one with loss.
The Way too is glad to have one who is one with the Way;
virtue too is glad to have one who is one with virtue;
loss too is glad to have one who is one with loss.
Where trust is wanting, there is distrust.

Chapter 24

企者不立；
跨者不行；
自見者不明；
自是者不彰；
自伐者無功；
自矜者不長。
其在道也，曰：餘食贅形。
物或惡之，故有道者不處。

One on tiptoe does not stand firm;
one who takes long strides does not go far;
one who displays himself is not plain to see;
one who justifies himself does not stand out;
one who boasts has no merit;
one who brags does not last.
In the light of the Way, these are called leftover food and a growth on the body.
Creatures loathe them, and so one who has the Way does not abide with them.

Chapter 25

有物混成，先天地生。
寂兮寥兮，獨立而不改，周行而不殆，可以為天地母。
吾不知其名，強字之曰道，強為之名曰大。
大曰逝，逝曰遠，遠曰反。
故道大，天大，地大，人亦大。
域中有四大，而人居其一焉。
人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。

There is a thing formed in confusion, born before heaven and earth.
Silent and empty, it stands alone and does not change, goes round everywhere and is in no danger; it could be the mother of heaven and earth.
I do not know its name. Forced to style it, I call it the Way; forced to name it, I call it great.
Great, it goes away; going away, it is far; far, it turns back.
So the Way is great, heaven is great, earth is great, and man too is great.[1]
Within the realm there are four great ones, and man is one of them.
Man follows earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows the Way, the Way follows what is so of itself.

1. Our source reads 人, “man,” here and in the next line. Wang Bi’s text has 王, “the king”: “the king too is great,” “the king is one of them.”

Chapter 26

重為輕根，靜為躁君。
是以君子終日行不離輜重。
雖有榮觀，燕處超然。
奈何萬乘之主，而以身輕天下？
輕則失根，躁則失君。

The heavy is the root of the light; the still is the lord of the restless.
That is why the gentleman travels all day without leaving his baggage wagons.
Though there are grand sights, he stays at ease, above them.
How can a lord of ten thousand chariots make light of himself before the world?
Light, one loses the root; restless, one loses the lord.

Chapter 27

善行，無轍跡，善言，無瑕謫；
善數，不用籌策；
善閉，無關楗而不可開，善結，無繩約而不可解。
是以聖人常善救人，故無棄人；
常善救物，故無棄物。
是謂襲明。
故善人者，不善人之師；
不善人者，善人之資。
不貴其師，不愛其資，雖智大迷，是謂要妙。

Good walking leaves no tracks; good speaking leaves no flaw to fault;
good counting needs no counting rods;
good closing needs no bolt, yet cannot be opened; good tying needs no cord, yet cannot be undone.
That is why the sage is always good at saving people, and so no one is cast away;
always good at saving things, and so nothing is cast away.
This is called inheriting clarity.
So the good man is the teacher of the man who is not good;
the man who is not good is the good man's material.

Not to value the teacher, not to care for the material: however clever, one is greatly lost. This is called the essential wonder.

Chapter 28

知其雄，守其雌，為天下谿。
為天下谿，常德不離，復歸於嬰兒。
知其白，守其黑，為天下式，常德不忒，復歸於無極。
知其榮，守其辱，為天下谷。
為天下谷，常德乃足，復歸於樸。
為天下式。
樸散則為器，聖人用之，則為官長，故大制不割。

Know the male, keep to the female, and be the ravine of the world.
Be the ravine of the world, and the abiding virtue will not leave;
one returns to infancy.
Know the white, keep to the black, and be a pattern for the world;
the abiding virtue will not err; one returns to the limitless.
Know glory, keep to disgrace, and be the valley of the world.
Be the valley of the world, and the abiding virtue will be enough;
one returns to the uncarved block.

Be a pattern for the world.[1]
When the uncarved block is split, it becomes vessels; the sage uses them and becomes the chief of officials. So the great shaping does not cut.

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1. This line is found only in our source; it is translated where our source has it. Wang Bi's text has nothing here, and instead says "be a pattern for the world" twice in the third line, as the first and fifth lines repeat their own phrases. The words seem to have strayed from their place.

Chapter 29

將欲取天下而為之，吾見其不得已。
天下神器，不可為也，不可執也。
為者敗之，執者失之。
故物或行或隨，或噓或吹，或強或羸，或載或墮，是以聖人去甚，去奢，去泰。

Those who would take the world and work on it: I see that they will not succeed.
The world is a sacred vessel; it cannot be worked on, it cannot be grasped.
Whoever works on it ruins it; whoever grasps it loses it.
For things now lead and now follow, now breathe warm and now blow cold, now are strong and now are weak, now carry and now fall. That is why the sage discards excess, discards extravagance, discards arrogance.

Chapter 30

以道佐人主者，不以兵強天下。
其事好還。
師之所處，荊棘生焉。
大軍之後，必有凶年。
善者果而已，不敢以取強。
果而勿矜，果而勿伐，果而勿驕。
果而不得已，果而勿強。
物壯則老，是謂不道，不道早已。

One who aids a ruler with the Way does not use troops to force the world.
Such deeds are apt to come back.
Where an army has camped, thorns and brambles grow.
In the wake of a great army there are sure to be lean years.
One who is good at this achieves the result and stops, and does not dare to grasp at strength.
Achieve it, but do not brag; achieve it, but do not boast; achieve it, but do not be proud.
Achieve it because there is no choice; achieve it, but do not force.
Things that peak grow old. This is called contrary to the Way.
What is contrary to the Way ends early.

Chapter 31

夫佳兵者，不祥之器，物或惡之，故有道者不處。
君子居則貴左，用兵則貴右。
兵者不祥之器，非君子之器，不得已而用之，恬淡為上。
勝而不美，而美之者，是樂殺人。
夫樂殺人者，則不可得志於天下矣。
吉事尚左，凶事尚右。
偏將軍居左，上將軍居右，言以喪禮處之。
殺人之眾，以悲哀泣之，戰勝以喪禮處之。

Fine weapons are tools of ill omen; creatures loathe them, and so one who has the Way does not abide with them.
The gentleman at home honors the left; in war he honors the right.[1]
Weapons are tools of ill omen, not the tools of a gentleman; when he has no choice but to use them, calm detachment is best.
He wins but does not think it fine; to think it fine is to delight in killing people.
One who delights in killing people cannot have his way in the world.
In happy affairs the left is honored; in grievous affairs, the right.
The lieutenant general stands on the left, the commanding general on the right: that is to say, they are placed as at a funeral.

When multitudes have been killed, weep for them in grief and sorrow; when a battle is won, observe it with the rites of mourning.

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1. In the old rites the left was the place of life and happy occasions, the right the place of death and mourning.

Chapter 32

道常無名，樸雖小，天下莫能臣。
侯王若能守之，萬物將自賓。
天地相合，以降甘露，民莫之令而自均。
始制有名，名亦既有，夫亦將知止，知止可以不殆。
譬道之在天下，猶川谷之於江海。

The Way is always nameless. The uncarved block, though small, no one in the world can make a servant.
If lords and kings could keep to it, the ten thousand things would come to them of themselves as guests.
Heaven and earth would join to send down sweet dew, and the people, with no one to command them, would share it evenly of themselves.
When shaping begins, there are names. Once there are names, one must know when to stop; knowing when to stop, one is out of danger.
The Way in the world is like the streams and valleys running into the rivers and the sea.

Chapter 33

知人者智，自知者明。
勝人者有力，自勝者強。
知足者富。
強行者有志。
不失其所者久。
死而不亡者壽。

One who knows others is wise; one who knows himself is clear-sighted.
One who overcomes others has force; one who overcomes himself is strong.
One who knows what is enough is rich.
One who presses on has will.
One who does not lose his place endures.
One who dies but does not perish lives long.

Chapter 34

大道氾兮，其可左右。
萬物恃之以生而不辭，功成不名有，衣養萬物而不為主。
常無欲，可名於小；
萬物歸焉而不為主，可名為大。
以其終不自為大，故能成其大。

The great Way overflows! It can go left or right.
The ten thousand things rely on it for life, and it does not turn them away; the work is done, and it does not call it its own; it clothes and feeds the ten thousand things and does not act as their master.
Always without desire, it can be called small;
the ten thousand things return to it and it does not act as their master: it can be called great.
Because it never makes itself great, it can achieve its greatness.

Chapter 35

執大象，天下往。
往而不害，安平太。
樂與餌，過客止。
道之出口，淡乎其無味。
視之不足見，聽之不足聞，用之不足既。

Hold the great image, and all the world comes.
They come and meet no harm, and there is peace, evenness, and ease.
Music and good food make the passing traveler stop.
The Way, when it comes out of the mouth, is bland; it has no flavor.
Looked at, it is not worth seeing; listened to, it is not worth hearing; used, it cannot be used up.

Chapter 36

將欲歙之，必固張之；
將欲弱之，必固強之；
將欲廢之，必固興之；
將欲取之，必固與之。
是謂微明。
柔勝剛，弱勝強。
魚不可脫於淵，國之利器，不可以示人。

To shrink a thing, one must first stretch it;
to weaken it, one must first strengthen it;
to cast it down, one must first raise it up;
to take from it, one must first give to it.
This is called subtle clarity.
The soft overcomes the hard; the weak overcomes the strong.
Fish must not leave the deep water; the sharp tools of the state must not be shown to others.

Chapter 37

道常無為而無不為。
侯王若能守之，萬物將自化。
化而欲作，吾將鎮之以無名之樸。
鎮之以無名之樸，夫亦將不欲。
不欲以靜，天下將自正。

The Way always does nothing, yet nothing is left undone.
If lords and kings could keep to it, the ten thousand things would transform of themselves.
If, as they transform, desire arises, I will hold it down with the nameless uncarved block.
Held down by the nameless uncarved block, they too will be without desire.
Without desire, they will be still, and the world will set itself right.

Part Two: The Book of Virtue

Chapters 38–81 · 德經

Chapter 38

上德不德，是以有德；
下德不失德，是以無德。
上德無為而無以為；
下德無為而有以為。
上仁為之而無以為；
上義為之而有以為。
上禮為之而莫之應，則攘臂而扔之。
故失道而後德，失德而後仁，失仁而後義，失義而後禮。
夫禮者，忠信之薄，而亂之首。
前識者，道之華，而愚之始。
是以大丈夫處其厚，不居其薄；
處其實，不居其華。
故去彼取此。

High virtue does not count itself virtue, and so it has virtue;
low virtue does not let go of virtue, and so it has no virtue.
High virtue does nothing and has no purpose in doing;
low virtue does nothing yet has a purpose in doing.
High humaneness acts yet has no purpose in acting;
high rightness acts and has a purpose in acting.
High ritual acts, and when no one responds, it rolls up its sleeves and drags them to it.

So when the Way is lost, there is virtue; when virtue is lost, there is humaneness; when humaneness is lost, there is rightness; when rightness is lost, there is ritual.
Ritual is the thinning of loyalty and trust, and the head of disorder.
Foreknowledge is the flower of the Way, and the beginning of folly.
That is why the great man keeps to the thick, not the thin;
keeps to the fruit, not the flower.
So he discards that and takes this.

Chapter 39

昔之得一者：天得一以清；
地得一以寧；
神得一以靈；
谷得一以盈；
萬物得一以生；
侯王得一以為天下正。
其致之也，天無以清，將恐裂；
地無以寧，將恐廢；
神無以靈，將恐歇；
谷無以盈，將恐竭；
萬物無以生，將恐滅；
侯王無以貞，將恐蹶。
故貴以賤為本，高以下為基。
是以侯王自稱孤、寡、不穀。
此非以賤為本邪？
非乎？
故致譽無譽。
是故不欲琭琭如玉，珞珞如石。

These are the ones that of old attained the One: heaven, attaining the One, is clear;
earth, attaining the One, is settled;

the spirits, attaining the One, are potent;
the valley, attaining the One, is full;
the ten thousand things, attaining the One, live;
lords and kings, attaining the One, set the world right.
Taken to the end: if heaven could not be clear, it might split;
if earth could not be settled, it might crumble;
if the spirits could not be potent, they might fade;
if the valley could not be full, it might run dry;
if the ten thousand things could not live, they might perish;
if lords and kings could not stand upright, they might fall.
So the noble has the humble as its root; the high has the low as its foundation.
That is why lords and kings call themselves the orphaned, the lacking, the unworthy.[1]
Is this not having the humble as the root?
Is it not?
So praise pursued to the end is no praise.[2]
Therefore one does not wish to glitter like jade, but to be rough as stone.

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1. In Chinese 孤 *gu*, 寡 *gua*, and 不穀 *bugu*: "the orphaned," "the one lacking in virtue," and "the one who is not good." Lords and kings of old used these words of themselves, to make themselves low.

2. Our source reads 致譽無譽. Wang Bi's text has 致數輿無輿: "count up the parts of a carriage, and there is no carriage."

Chapter 40

反者道之動；
弱者道之用。
天下萬物生於有，有生於無。

Turning back is the motion of the Way;
weakness is the use of the Way.
The ten thousand things of the world are born of being, and being is born of nonbeing.

Chapter 41

上士聞道，勤而行之；
中士聞道，若存若亡；
下士聞道，大笑之。
不笑不足以為道。
故建言有之：明道若昧；
進道若退；
夷道若類；
上德若谷；
大白若辱；
廣德若不足；
建德若偷；
質真若渝；
大方無隅；
大器晚成；
大音希聲；
大象無形；
道隱無名。
夫唯道，善貸且成。

When the highest sort of man hears of the Way, he works hard to practice it;
when the middling sort hears of the Way, he half keeps it and half

loses it;
when the lowest sort hears of the Way, he laughs out loud at it.
If he did not laugh, it would not be the Way.
So the established sayings have it: the bright Way seems dark;
the Way forward seems to go back;
the level Way seems rough;
high virtue seems a valley;
the purest white seems soiled;
broad virtue seems lacking;
steadfast virtue seems idle;
true substance seems to change;
the great square has no corners;
the great vessel is finished late;
the great note is hushed;
the great image has no form;
the Way is hidden and has no name.
Only the Way is good at lending and at bringing to completion.

Chapter 42

道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。
萬物負陰而抱陽，沖氣以為和。
人之所惡，唯孤、寡、不穀，而王公以為稱。
故物或損之而益，或益之而損。
人之所教，我亦教之。
強梁者不得其死，吾將以為教父。

The Way gives birth to one, one gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, three gives birth to the ten thousand things.
The ten thousand things carry yin on their backs and hold yang in their arms, and the empty breath brings them into harmony.
What people hate is to be orphaned, lacking, and unworthy, yet kings and dukes take these as their titles.
So things are sometimes added to by being taken from, and sometimes taken from by being added to.
What others teach, I teach too.
“The violent do not die a natural death”: this I take as the father of my teaching.

Chapter 43

天下之至柔，馳騁天下之至堅。
無有入無間。
吾是以知無為之有益，不言之教，無為之益，天下希及之。

The softest in the world gallops through the hardest in the world.
What has no being enters where there is no gap.
By this I know the benefit of non-action. The teaching without words, the benefit of non-action: few in the world attain them.

Chapter 44

名與身孰親？
身與貨孰多？
得與亡孰病？
是故甚愛必大費；
多藏必厚亡。
故知足不辱，知止不殆，可以長久。

Name or body: which is dearer?
Body or goods: which is worth more?
Gain or loss: which does more harm?
So great attachment is sure to cost dearly;
great hoarding is sure to bring heavy loss.
Know what is enough, and there is no disgrace; know when to stop, and there is no danger; and one can last long.

Chapter 45

大成若缺，其用不弊。
大盈若沖，其用不窮。
大直若屈，大巧若拙，大辯若訥。
靜勝躁，寒勝熱。
清靜為天下正。

Great perfection seems flawed, yet its use never wears out.
Great fullness seems empty, yet its use is never exhausted.
Great straightness seems bent, great skill seems clumsy, great eloquence seems tongue-tied.
Stillness overcomes restlessness, cold overcomes heat.
Clear stillness sets the world right.

Chapter 46

天下有道，卻走馬以糞。
天下無道，戎馬生於郊。
禍莫大於不知足；
咎莫大於欲得。
故知足之足，常足矣。

When the world has the Way, the racing horses are sent back to manure the fields.
When the world lacks the Way, warhorses foal in the fields outside the walls.
No disaster is greater than not knowing what is enough;
no fault is greater than the wish to gain.
So the enough of knowing what is enough is always enough.

Chapter 47

不出戶，知天下；
不窺牖，見天道。
其出彌遠，其知彌少。
是以聖人不行而知，不見而明，不為而成。

Without going out of the door, one knows the world;
without looking out of the window, one sees the Way of heaven.
The farther one goes, the less one knows.
That is why the sage knows without traveling, has clarity without looking, achieves without doing.

Chapter 48

為學日益，為道日損。
損之又損，以至於無為。
無為而無不為。
取天下常以無事，及其有事，不足以取天下。

In pursuing learning, one adds every day; in pursuing the Way, one takes away every day.
Take away, and take away again, until one arrives at non-action.
One does nothing, yet nothing is left undone.
The world is always taken by undertaking nothing. Once there is undertaking, one is not fit to take the world.

Chapter 49

聖人常無心，以百姓心為心。
善者，吾善之；
不善者，吾亦善之；
德善。
信者，吾信之；
不信者，吾亦信之；
德信。
聖人在天下，歙歙焉，為天下渾其心，百姓皆注其耳目，聖人皆孩之。

The sage is always without a heart of his own; he takes the people's heart as his heart.
Those who are good, I treat as good;
those who are not good, I also treat as good;
virtue is good.
Those who are trustworthy, I trust;
those who are not trustworthy, I also trust;
virtue is trustworthy.
The sage, living in the world, draws in, and for the world's sake blurs his heart. The people all strain their ears and eyes toward him, and the sage treats them all as children.

Chapter 50

出生入死。
生之徒十有三；
死之徒十有三。
人之生，動之於死地，亦十有三。
夫何故？
以其生生之厚。
蓋聞善攝生者，路行不遇兕虎，入軍不被甲兵。
兕無所投其角，虎無所措其爪，兵無所容其刃。
夫何故？
以其無死地。

Out of life, into death.

The companions of life are three in ten;[1]
the companions of death are three in ten;
and people who live, yet move toward the ground of death, are three in ten as well.
Why is this?
Because they make too much of living.
I have heard that one who is good at guarding life travels by land without meeting rhinoceros or tiger, and enters an army without being struck by weapons.
The rhinoceros finds nowhere to drive its horn, the tiger nowhere

to set its claws, the weapon nowhere to lodge its blade.

Why is this?

Because in him there is no ground of death.

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1. 十有三 is read here as “three in ten.” An old reading takes it as “thirteen,” the four limbs and the nine openings of the body.

Chapter 51

道生之，德畜之，物形之，勢成之。
是以萬物莫不尊道而貴德。
道之尊，德之貴，夫莫之命而常自然。
故道生之，德畜之；
長之育之；
成之熟之；
養之覆之。
生而不有，為而不恃，長而不宰。
是謂玄德。

The Way gives them birth, virtue rears them, things give them shape, circumstance completes them.
So the ten thousand things all revere the Way and honor virtue.
The Way is revered and virtue honored not by anyone's command, but because this is always so of itself.
So the Way gives them birth, virtue rears them;
grows them, nurtures them;
completes them, ripens them;
feeds them, shelters them.
It gives life but does not possess, acts but does not presume, raises but does not rule.
This is called dark virtue.

Chapter 52

天下有始，以為天下母。
既得其母，以知其子，復守其母，沒身不殆。
塞其兌，閉其門，終身不勤。
開其兌，濟其事，終身不救。
見小曰明，守柔曰強。
用其光，復歸其明，無遺身殃；
是為習常。

The world has a beginning, which is the mother of the world.
Having found the mother, one knows the children; knowing the children, one keeps to the mother again, and to the end of one's days there is no danger.
Block the openings, shut the doors, and to the end of life one never wears out.
Unblock the openings, multiply affairs, and to the end of life there is no rescue.
Seeing the small is called clarity; keeping to the soft is called strength.
Use the light, return again to clarity, and leave the body no harm; this is called practicing the abiding.

Chapter 53

使我介然有知，行於大道，唯施是畏。
大道甚夷，而人好徑。
朝甚除，田甚蕪，倉甚虛；
服文采，帶利劍，厭飲食，財貨有餘；
是為盜夸。
非道也哉！

If I had the least bit of knowledge, walking the great Way, I would fear only to stray.
The great Way is very level, yet people love side paths.
The court is spotless, the fields are full of weeds, the granaries are empty;
they wear embroidered clothes, carry sharp swords, gorge on food and drink, have wealth to spare;
this is called the pomp of robbers.
This is not the Way!

Chapter 54

善建者不拔，善抱者不脫，子孫以祭祀不輟。
修之於身，其德乃真；
修之於家，其德乃餘；
修之於鄉，其德乃長；
修之於國，其德乃豐；
修之於天下，其德乃普。
故以身觀身，以家觀家，以鄉觀鄉，以國觀國，以天下觀天下。
吾何以知天下然哉？
以此。

What is well planted is not uprooted, what is well held does not slip away, and sons and grandsons will offer sacrifice without end.
Cultivate it in the self, and its virtue is genuine;
cultivate it in the family, and its virtue is abundant;
cultivate it in the village, and its virtue lasts;
cultivate it in the state, and its virtue flourishes;
cultivate it in the world, and its virtue is everywhere.
So look at the self through the self, at the family through the family, at the village through the village, at the state through the state, at the world through the world.
How do I know the world is so?
By this.

Chapter 55

含德之厚，比於赤子。
毒蟲不螫，猛獸不據，攫鳥不搏。
骨弱筋柔而握固。
未知牝牡之合而朘作，精之至也。
終日號而不嗄，和之至也。
知和曰常，知常曰明。
益生曰祥。
心使氣曰強。
物壯則老，謂之不道，不道早已。

One who holds virtue in fullness is like a newborn child.
Poisonous insects do not sting it, fierce beasts do not seize it, birds of prey do not strike it.
Its bones are weak, its sinews soft, yet its grip is firm.
It knows nothing yet of the joining of female and male, yet its member stands: this is the height of essence.
It cries all day and does not grow hoarse: this is the height of harmony.
Knowing harmony is called the abiding; knowing the abiding is called clarity.
Adding to life is called an ill omen.
The mind driving the breath is called forcing.

Things that peak grow old. This is called contrary to the Way.
What is contrary to the Way ends early.

Chapter 56

知者不言，言者不知。
塞其兌，閉其門，挫其銳，解其紛，和其光，同其塵，是謂玄同。
故不可得而親，不可得而疏；
不可得而利，不可得而害；
不可得而貴，不可得而賤。
故為天下貴。

Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know.
Block the openings, shut the doors; blunt the sharpness, untie the tangles, soften the light, become one with the dust: this is called dark sameness.
So no one can draw near him, and no one can hold him off;
no one can benefit him, and no one can harm him;
no one can honor him, and no one can debase him.
So he is prized by all the world.

Chapter 57

以正治國，以奇用兵，以無事取天下。
吾何以知其然哉？
以此：天下多忌諱，而民彌貧；
人多利器，國家滋昏；
人多伎巧，奇物滋起；
法令滋彰，盜賊多有。
故聖人云：「我無為，而民自化；
我好靜，而民自正；
我無事，而民自富；
我無欲，而民自樸」。

Govern the state by the orthodox, wage war by the unorthodox, take the world by undertaking nothing.
How do I know it is so?
By this: the more taboos and prohibitions in the world, the poorer the people;
the more sharp tools the people have, the more benighted the state;
the more skill and cunning people have, the more strange things appear;
the more laws and orders are made plain, the more thieves and robbers abound.

So the sage says: “I do nothing, and the people transform of themselves;
I love stillness, and the people set themselves right;
I undertake nothing, and the people grow rich of themselves;
I am without desire, and the people become the uncarved block of themselves.”

Chapter 58

其政悶悶，其民淳淳；
其政察察，其民缺缺。
禍兮，福之所倚，福兮，禍之所伏。
孰知其極？
其無正也。
正復為奇，善復為妖。
人之迷，其日固久。
是以聖人方而不割，廉而不劌，直而不肆，光而不耀。

When the government is dull, the people are simple;
when the government is sharp, the people are broken.
Misfortune is what good fortune leans on; good fortune is where misfortune hides.
Who knows where it ends?
There is no fixed norm.
The orthodox turns back into the unorthodox, the good turns back into the uncanny.
People have been lost for a long time now.
That is why the sage is square but does not cut, has edges but does not wound, is straight but does not overreach, shines but does not dazzle.

Chapter 59

治人事天，莫若嗇。
夫為嗇，是謂早服；
早服謂之重積德；
重積德則無不克；
無不克則莫知其極；
莫知其極，可以有國；
有國之母，可以長久；
是謂深根固柢，長生久視之道。

In governing people and serving heaven, nothing is better than sparing.

Being sparing is called early submission;[1]
early submission is called storing up virtue twice over;
storing up virtue twice over, there is nothing one cannot overcome;
with nothing one cannot overcome, no one knows one's limit;
when no one knows one's limit, one can possess a state;
possessing the mother of the state, one can last long;
this is called deep roots and a firm stem, the Way of long life and lasting sight.

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1. 早服 is read here as submitting early, that is, following the Way from the start. Some texts write 服 as 備: “preparing early.”

Chapter 60

治大國，若烹小鮮。
以道蒞天下，其鬼不神；
非其鬼不神，其神不傷人；
非其神不傷人，聖人亦不傷人。
夫兩不相傷，故德交歸焉。

Ruling a large state is like simmering a small fish.
When the Way presides over the world, its ghosts have no power;
it is not that the ghosts have no power, but that their power does not harm people;
and not only does their power not harm people, the sage too does not harm people.
Since the two do not harm each other, their virtue joins and comes home.

Chapter 61

大國者下流，天下之交也，天下之牝。
牝常以靜勝牡，以靜為下。
故大國以下小國，則取小國；
小國以下大國，則取大國。
故或下以取，或下而取。
大國不過欲兼畜人，小國不過欲入事人。
夫兩者各得所欲，大者宜為下。

A great state is the lower reaches of the river, where the world meets; it is the female of the world.
By stillness the female always wins over the male; in stillness she takes the lower place.
So a great state, by putting itself below a small state, takes the small state;
a small state, by putting itself below a great state, is taken in by the great state.
So one puts itself below in order to take, another is below and so is taken in.
The great state wants nothing more than to gather and nourish others; the small state wants nothing more than to come in and serve others.

For each of the two to get what it wants, the great one should take the lower place.

Chapter 62

道者萬物之奧。
善人之寶，不善人之所保。
美言可以市尊，美行可以加人。
人之不善，何棄之有？
故立天子，置三公，雖有拱璧以先駟馬，不如坐進此道。
古之所以貴此道者何？
不曰求以得，有罪以免耶？
故為天下貴。

The Way is the innermost room of the ten thousand things.
It is the treasure of the good man and the safeguard of the man who is not good.
Fine words can buy honor; fine deeds can lift a man above others.
Though people are not good, why cast them away?
So when the Son of Heaven is enthroned and the three ministers are installed, though there be a jade disc that fills both arms, sent ahead of a team of four horses,[1] it is not as good as sitting still and offering this Way.
Why did the ancients prize this Way?
Did they not say that by it one who seeks will find, and one who has done wrong will escape?
So it is prized by all the world.

1. The three ministers (三公) held the highest offices under the Son of Heaven. When precious gifts were presented of old, a great jade disc that took both arms to hold (拱璧) went first, and a carriage with a team of four horses (駟馬) came after.

Chapter 63

為無為，事無事，味無味。
大小多少，報怨以德。
圖難於其易，為大於其細。
天下難事，必作於易，天下大事，必作於細。
是以聖人終不為大，故能成其大。
夫輕諾必寡信，多易必多難。
是以聖人猶難之，故終無難矣。

Do what is not doing, undertake what is no undertaking, taste what has no taste.
Great or small, many or few, repay resentment with virtue.
Plan the hard while it is easy; do the great while it is small.
The hard things of the world must begin in the easy; the great things of the world must begin in the small.
That is why the sage never does great things, and so can achieve his greatness.
Light promises are sure to earn little trust; finding much easy is sure to bring much hardship.
That is why even the sage treats things as hard, and so in the end has no hardship.

Chapter 64

其安易持，其未兆易謀，其脆易泮，其微易散，為之於未有，治之於未亂。
合抱之木，生於毫末；
九層之臺，起於累土；
千里之行，始於足下。
為者敗之，執者失之，是以聖人無為，故無敗，無執，故無失。
民之從事，常於幾成而敗之；
慎終如始，則無敗事。
是以聖人欲不欲，不貴難得之貨；
學不學，復眾人之所過。
以輔萬物之自然，而不敢為。

What is at rest is easy to hold; what has given no sign is easy to plan for; what is brittle is easy to break; what is minute is easy to scatter. Act on it before it exists; put it in order before there is disorder.
A tree that fills the arms grows from a shoot as fine as a hair;
a terrace nine stories high rises from heaped earth;
a journey of a thousand li starts beneath one's feet.[1]
Whoever works on it ruins it; whoever grasps it loses it. That is why the sage does nothing, and so ruins nothing; grasps nothing, and so loses nothing.

When people take on a task, they always ruin it when it is nearly done.
Take as much care at the end as at the start, and nothing will be ruined.
That is why the sage desires not to desire, and does not prize goods hard to come by;
learns not to learn, and goes back to what the crowd has passed by.
So he helps the ten thousand things to be so of themselves, and does not dare to act.

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1. The li was a measure of distance, about a third of a mile.

Chapter 65

古之善為道者，非以明民，將以愚之。
民之難治，以其智多。
故以智治國，國之賊；
不以智治國，國之福。
知此兩者，亦稽式。
常知稽式，是謂玄德，玄德深遠；
與物反矣，然後乃至大順。

The good practitioners of the Way of old did not use it to make the people bright, but to make them foolish.
The people are hard to govern because they have too much cleverness.
So to govern a state by cleverness is to rob the state;
not to govern a state by cleverness is the state's blessing.
To know these two is also to know the pattern.
Always to know the pattern: this is called dark virtue. Dark virtue is deep and far-reaching;
it turns back with things, and only then comes the great accord.

Chapter 66

江海之所以能為百谷王者，以其善下之，故能為百谷王。
是以聖人欲上民，必以言下之；
欲先民，必以身後之。
是以聖人處上而民不重，處前而民不害。
是以天下樂推而不厭。
以其不爭，故天下莫能與之爭。

The rivers and the sea can be kings of the hundred valleys because they are good at staying below them; so they can be kings of the hundred valleys.
So the sage, wishing to be above the people, must put himself below them in his words;
wishing to be ahead of the people, must put himself behind them in his person.
That is why the sage stays above and the people do not find him heavy, stays ahead and the people do not feel harmed.
That is why the world gladly pushes him forward and never tires of him.
Because he does not contend, no one in the world can contend with him.

Chapter 67

天下皆謂我道大，似不肖。
夫唯大，故似不肖；
若肖，久矣其細也夫！
我有三寶，持而保之。
一曰慈，二曰儉，三曰不敢為天下先。
慈故能勇；
儉故能廣；
不敢為天下先，故能成器長。
今舍慈且勇；
舍儉且廣；
舍後且先；
死矣！
夫慈以戰則勝，以守則固。
天將救之，以慈衛之。

All the world says that my Way is great and seems to resemble nothing.
Precisely because it is great, it seems to resemble nothing;
if it resembled anything, it would long ago have become small!
I have three treasures that I hold and keep.
The first is compassion, the second is frugality, the third is not daring to be first in the world.

With compassion, one can be brave;
with frugality, one can be generous;
not daring to be first in the world, one can become the head of all things.
Now to give up compassion and still be brave,
to give up frugality and still be generous,
to give up being last and still be first:
that is death!
Fight with compassion, and one wins; defend with it, and one holds firm.
When heaven would save someone, it guards him with compassion.

Chapter 68

善為士者不武；
善戰者不怒；
善勝敵者不與；
善用人者為之下。
是謂不爭之德，是謂用人之力，是謂配天古之極。

One who is good at being a warrior is not warlike;
one who is good at fighting does not get angry;
one who is good at defeating the enemy does not engage him;
one who is good at using people puts himself below them.
This is called the virtue of not contending; this is called using the strength of others; this is called matching heaven, the summit of old.

Chapter 69

用兵有言：「吾不敢為主而為客；
不敢進寸而退尺。」
是謂行無行；
攘無臂；
扔無敵；
執無兵。
禍莫大於輕敵，輕敵幾喪吾寶。
故抗兵相若，哀者勝矣。

Among those who use troops there is a saying: “I dare not play the host, but play the guest;
I dare not go forward an inch, but fall back a foot.”
This is called marching without a column;
rolling up sleeves with no arms;
dragging forward with no enemy;
holding weapons with no weapons.
No disaster is greater than taking the enemy lightly; to take the enemy lightly is nearly to lose my treasures.
So when matched armies meet, the side that grieves will win.

Chapter 70

吾言甚易知，甚易行。
天下莫能知，莫能行。
言有宗，事有君。
夫唯無知，是以不我知。
知我者希，則我者貴。
是以聖人被褐而懷玉。

My words are very simple to understand and very simple to practice.
Yet no one in the world can understand them, no one can practice them.
Words have an ancestor; deeds have a lord.
Precisely because people do not understand this, they do not understand me.
Those who understand me are few; those who take me as their model are precious.
That is why the sage wears coarse cloth and carries jade inside it.

Chapter 71

知，不知，上矣；
不知，知，病也。
聖人不病，以其病病。
夫唯病病，是以不病。

To know, yet think one does not know, is highest;
not to know, yet think one knows, is a sickness.
The sage is not sick, because he takes the sickness as sickness.
Precisely because he takes the sickness as sickness, he is not sick.

Chapter 72

民不畏威，則大威至。
無狎其所居，無厭其所生。
夫唯不厭，是以不厭。
是以聖人自知不自見；
自愛不自貴。
故去彼取此。

When the people do not fear might, great might descends.
Do not cramp the places where they live; do not crush the lives they live.
Precisely because he does not crush them, they do not tire of him.
That is why the sage knows himself but does not display himself; loves himself but does not exalt himself.
So he discards that and takes this.

Chapter 73

勇於敢則殺，勇於不敢則活。
此兩者，或利或害。
天之所惡，孰知其故？
是以聖人猶難之。
天之道，不爭而善勝，不言而善應，不召而自來，繟然而善謀。
天網恢恢，疏而不失。

Bold in daring, one is killed; bold in not daring, one lives.
Of these two, one brings benefit and the other harm.
What heaven hates, who knows the reason?
That is why even the sage treats it as hard.
The Way of heaven does not contend yet is good at winning, does not speak yet is good at answering, does not summon yet things come of themselves, is unhurried yet good at planning.
Heaven's net is wide, so wide; its mesh is coarse, yet nothing slips through.

Chapter 74

民不畏死，奈何以死懼之？
若使民常畏死，而為奇者，吾得執而殺之，孰敢？
常有司殺者殺。
夫代司殺者殺，是謂代大匠斲，夫代大匠斲者，希有不傷其手矣。

If the people do not fear death, why threaten them with death?
If the people were made always to fear death, and I could seize and kill those who do strange things, who would dare?
There is always the executioner to kill.
To kill in place of the executioner is to carve in place of the master carpenter. Of those who carve in place of the master carpenter, few do not cut their hands.

Chapter 75

民之飢，以其上食稅之多，是以飢。
民之難治，以其上之有為，是以難治。
民之輕死，以其上求生之厚，是以輕死。
夫唯無以生為者，是賢於貴生。

The people are hungry because those above them eat too much in taxes; that is why they are hungry.
The people are hard to govern because those above them are always doing things; that is why they are hard to govern.
The people take death lightly because those above them make too much of living; that is why they take death lightly.
Only one who does nothing for the sake of living is wiser than one who prizes life.

Chapter 76

人之生也柔弱，其死也堅強。
草木之生也柔脆，其死也枯槁。
故堅強者死之徒，柔弱者生之徒。
是以兵強則滅，木強則折。
強大處下，柔弱處上。

People are soft and weak when alive, hard and strong when dead.
Grass and trees are soft and tender when alive, dry and brittle when dead.
So the hard and strong are the companions of death; the soft and weak are the companions of life.
That is why a strong army is destroyed, a strong tree breaks.
The strong and great lie below; the soft and weak rise above.

Chapter 77

天之道，其猶張弓歟？
高者抑之，下者舉之；
有餘者損之，不足者補之。
天之道，損有餘而補不足。
人之道，則不然，損不足以奉有餘。
孰能有餘以奉天下，唯有道者。
是以聖人為而不恃，功成而不處，其不欲見賢。

The Way of heaven: is it not like stringing a bow?
What is high, it presses down; what is low, it lifts up;
what has too much, it takes from; what has too little, it gives to.
The Way of heaven takes from what has too much and gives to what has too little.
The way of man is not so: it takes from those who have too little to offer to those who have too much.
Who can take what he has too much of and offer it to the world?
Only one who has the Way.
That is why the sage acts but does not presume, finishes the work but does not dwell in it, and has no wish to display his worth.

Chapter 78

天下莫柔弱於水，而攻堅強者，莫之能勝，以其無以易之。
弱之勝強，柔之勝剛，天下莫不知，莫能行。
是以聖人云：「受國之垢，是謂社稷主；
受國不祥，是為天下王。」
正言若反。

Nothing in the world is softer and weaker than water, yet for attacking the hard and strong nothing surpasses it, for nothing can take its place.
That the weak overcomes the strong and the soft overcomes the hard, everyone in the world knows, yet no one can practice it.
So the sage says: “One who takes on the filth of the state is called lord of its altars;
one who takes on the ill omens of the state is king of the world.”
Straight words seem to say the reverse.

Chapter 79

和大怨，必有餘怨；
報怨以德，安可以為善？
是以聖人執左契，而不責於人。
有德司契，無德司徹。
天道無親，常與善人。

When a great resentment is settled, some resentment is sure to remain;
if one repays resentment with virtue, how can that be counted good?
That is why the sage holds the left half of the tally and makes no demands on others.[1]
One who has virtue takes charge of the tally; one without virtue takes charge of the tithe.[2]
The Way of heaven has no favorites; it is always with the good man.

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1. In old agreements a strip of wood was notched and split in two. The lender kept the left half and matched it with the other when the debt came due.

2. The Chinese is 徹, the tax of the Zhou dynasty that took a fixed share of the harvest.

Chapter 80

小國寡民。
使有什伯之器而不用；
使民重死而不遠徙。
雖有舟輿，無所乘之，雖有甲兵，無所陳之。
使民復結繩而用之。
甘其食，美其服，安其居，樂其俗。
鄰國相望，雞犬之聲相聞，民至老死，不相往來。

A small state with few people.
Let there be tools that serve for ten or a hundred, and let them lie unused;
let the people take death seriously and not move far away.
Though they have boats and carriages, they have no occasion to ride them; though they have armor and weapons, they have no occasion to display them.

Let the people go back to knotting cords and using them.[1]
They relish their food, think their clothes fine, rest easy in their homes, delight in their customs.
Neighboring states are within sight of each other, the sounds of their chickens and dogs within hearing of each other, and the people grow old and die without ever going back and forth.

1. Before there was writing, it is said, people kept records and accounts by tying knots in cords.

Chapter 81

信言不美，美言不信。
善者不辯，辯者不善。
知者不博，博者不知。
聖人不積，既以為人己愈有，既以與人己愈多。
天之道，利而不害；
聖人之道，為而不爭。

Words to be trusted are not beautiful; beautiful words are not to be trusted.
The good are not eloquent; the eloquent are not good.
The knowing are not learned; the learned do not know.
The sage does not hoard. Having done all for others, he has more; having given all to others, he owns more.
The Way of heaven benefits and does not harm;
the Way of the sage acts and does not contend.

Colophon

Tao Te Ching

Original title · 道德經 *Daodejing*, also called the *Laozi* 老子

Author · Laozi (traditionally of the Zhou court; life and dates uncertain)

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