

Tao Te Ching

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Lao Tzu's Timeless Classic for Today

David Tuffley

To my beloved Nation of Four
Concordia Domi – Foris Pax

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A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves – Lao Tzu

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Knowing the Tao

Lao Tzu often describes the behaviour and mindset of the *enlightened person*, by which he means the standard we should aspire to and follow in order to experience Satori. The enlightened person is wise in the ways of the Tao, and has learned to live in harmony with it. Satori naturally follows.

Below is a faithful rendering into 21st Century language of the original 81 chapters of the Tao Te Ching, which was expressed in a miracle of brevity in just 5,000 Chinese characters. Each paragraph begins with a bold topic sentence or phrase that sums up the essence of each chapter. If you notice repetition, it is because it existed in the original.

What is the Tao? The Tao is analogous to the laws of Physics, which exist only as abstractions. The Tao cannot be seen directly, but its effects can be observed in the world of forms, hence the saying from the Tao Te Ching *the Tao that can be seen is not the real Tao*. The mathematical formula for calculating the area of a circle is π (22 divided by 7) multiplied by the square of the radius of the circle. This formula is an abstraction that can be applied to any circle at any scale of magnitude from an atom up to the universe itself. The formula is an example of the Tao expressed in the language of Physics.

Another example from Physics is Isaac Newton's second law of motion; *the mutual forces of action and reaction between two bodies are equal, opposite and collinear*. In the Tao Te Ching, this principle is discussed many times. Essentially, the enlightened person understands the operation of this law in

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the social sphere and ensures that any action they take is done with full awareness of the likely reactions, or, they refrain from taking action altogether.

In a general sense, the Tao can be understood as the agent by which forms evolve. It is a pervasive, underlying influence that evolves one form into its own opposite and then back again in an on-going cycle of alternating polar opposites.

Alignment with the subtle. An enlightened person works constantly to establish the Tao in their awareness, and to harmonise their mind and body with the Tao. They do not use force to achieve their ends because they know that to do so is likely to cause an equal and opposite reaction. In this way they avoid a problem of their own making. Instead, they work at the level of underlying cause and with little apparent effort are able to bring about the outcome they want. The enlightened person therefore knows that when they are in step with the Tao in worldly affairs, their endeavours can be completed without adverse effects.

Using what is not there. Just as doors and windows cut into a wall are what make a room useful, the enlightened person knows how to use what is not there in a given situation to create a desirable effect. They create a sense of absence or need in a situation that the forces of Nature are compelled to resolve, in the same way that air rushes in to fill a vacuum.

The essence of the Tao is formless, nameless and intangible, therefore it can only be perceived by the intuitive mind, not by the analytical mind. The enlightened person works to integrate both intuitive and analytical aspects of their whole mind to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the Tao. With an intuitive understanding of

the patterns of life, they can subtly influence the outcome of events.

You do not have a life, you *are* life. The millions of life-forms on this planet -- animal and plant -- are all instances of the same life-force. This life-force lives *through* each life-form. We are possessed by the life-force, rather being the possessor of the life-force, which is an expression of the Tao. We are all subject equally to the laws of Nature that govern Life -- we are born, gather strength, reach a peak, go into decline and then die. There are no exceptions, only variations in outer form and the duration of the lifecycle. The same can be said of the weather, politics, relationships and everything else in the observable world.

These laws of Nature -- the Tao -- are also expressed on a higher level in our minds and in the patterns of our social behaviour. Enlightened people gain influence by learning to live in harmony with these underlying laws of Nature. That way, they can predict future trends and take early action, placing them in the right place at the right time.

The origins of creativity. The Tao that underlies and gives shape to space and time in the world of form is the same state that preceded the Big Bang. As such it is a potent creative force. The enlightened person accesses creativity by identifying with the Absolute - the creative state that exists outside of time and space and which preceded the Big Bang. This can be done by regular meditation practice as described in an earlier chapter.

Greatness. The Tao is great because it is cyclic. It causes everything in Nature to behave cyclically. Given enough time, patterns of events repeat themselves, hence the expression 'history repeats'. The power of Taoism lies in perceiving and understanding the patterns of change and aligning oneself with them. Enlightened people intuitively

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perceive the evolution of society. With sufficient patience they are able to guide themselves and others towards harmony and fulfilment. This idea is expressed by T.S. Eliot in his poem *Little Gidding*; *we shall never cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring, will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time.*

An evolutionary force. The Tao is an informing principle that permeates everything in the physical world, giving it structure and prescribing behavioural patterns. Over time, this informing principle interacts dynamically with the environment resulting in evolutionary changes in those life-forms as they become better adapted to their environment.

Enlightened people who express the Tao and allow it to work through them are perceived to have charisma. Others naturally respond to this charisma with a willingness to be influenced by the enlightened person. Lao Tzu believed that to emulate the behaviour of the Tao in one's own behaviour would bring a person into the closest possible alignment with reality. A life that shares, in its aims, the purpose of the universe, will also share in its greatness and significance. The enlightened person's life comes to embody the universe and charismatically demonstrates that the macrocosm (universe) is reflected in the microcosm (person).

Polarity. The Tao operates through polarity, the physical law that governs cause and effect. The law of polarity is similar to Newton's third law of motion in which every action has an equal and opposite reaction that is prescribed by the initiating cause. An initiating event in time morphs into its own opposite. A pendulum swings to one side, then to the other. In human terms this manifests in such cycles as war and peace, economic boom and bust, ignorance and enlightenment. The law of polarity changes and evolves all things by reducing extremes back to a more moderate state

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on its way to the opposite extreme. Extremes are by definition overcharged and must begin moving in their opposite direction. Those who follow the Tao therefore work hard to avoid extremes. They practice moderation and openness to change as a way of life.

Proactive not reactive. The enlightened person looks for the seeds of change, the underlying triggers of change that will tell them what is likely to happen in the future. Guiding them is their awareness that everything in the phenomenal world will be transformed into its own opposite in time. For example birth to death, happy to sad, strong to weak, day to night. In this way, they come to understand the movement of polarity in its countless manifestations, and so gain penetrating insight into worldly affairs. The enlightened person can proactively use this insight to position themselves favourably for when the future arrives.

For example, when we look at European history from the year 1000 to 2000, we see a pattern of aggregation. From a multitude of small states in the 11th Century has emerged a unified Europe in the 21st Century. Through cycles of war and peace, ignorance and enlightenment, plague and prosperity we see the numerous smaller states have become increasingly aggregated, for example the unification of the German States under Bismarck and again in 1990. This movement of the Tao from war to peace to war many times has evolved Europe into a single entity. In the 21st Century this unification process is extending East to the Islamic world and South to the shores of Africa, areas not previously thought of as 'European'. Given this trend towards unification, an enlightened person might reasonably predict that the Europe Union will continue to incorporate non-EU states until it becomes necessary to change the name 'European' or at least redefine what 'Europe' means.

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Another example is the rise and fall of political and commercial empires. History is full of examples going back thousands of years of empires that began modestly, grew very powerful, and then declined when their power became over-extended.

Using the Tao is about understanding the patterns of the past, extrapolating them into the future and using this information to guide our actions in the present. In this way, we can engineer the future.

The ineffable cause. Every culture has some concept of the Ineffable (that which defies logical definition) whose purpose is to describe the underlying cause of the universe and the world as we know it. The Tao *is* that ineffable cause regardless of the name it is given.

The metaphor of a flowing river in which we all swim is often used to describe the Tao, whose movement can be seen at many levels. There is the flow of life from one day to the next, the flow of human history measured in centuries, and the flow of evolution itself, measured in millions of years. The enlightened person seeks detachment by concentrating on the Tao, the underlying cause of the flow, and not on the phenomena that are caused by the Tao.

The patterns of Nature. Enlightened people ceaselessly observe the patterns of Nature and work to bring their own behaviour into alignment with those patterns. Over time, the enlightened person's knowledge of these patterns evolves into an integrated model. This model informs their world-view with a vast network of connections that brings them into close alignment with the ways of Nature, which by definition leads to a condition of least resistance to the world.