

From the *Tao-te Ching* by *Lao-Tzu* (Circa 500 BC)

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When people see some things as beautiful,
other things become ugly.

When people see some things as good,
other things become bad.

Being and non-being create each other.

Difficult and easy support each other.

Long and short define each other.

High and low depend on each other.

Before and after follow each other.

Therefore the Master

acts without doing anything

and teaches without saying anything.

Things arise and she lets them come;

things disappear and she lets them go.

She has but doesn't possess,

acts but doesn't expect.

When her work is done, she forgets it.

That is why it lasts forever.

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If you overesteem great men,
people become powerless.

If you overvalue possessions,
people begin to steal.

The Master leads

by emptying people's minds
and filling their cores,

by weakening their ambition
and toughening their resolve.

He helps people lose everything
they know, everything they desire,
and creates confusion
in those who think that they know.

Practice not-doing,

and everything will fall into place.

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The supreme good is like water,

which nourishes all things without trying to.

It is content with the low places that people disdain.

Thus it is like the Tao.

In dwelling, live close to the ground.

In thinking, keep to the simple.

In conflict, be fair and generous.

In governing, don't try to control.

In work, do what you enjoy.

In family life, be completely present.

When you are content to be simply yourself
and don't compare or compete,
everybody will respect you.

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When the Master governs, the people
are hardly aware that he exists.
Next best is a leader who is loved.
Next, one who is feared.
The worst is one who is despised.

If you don't trust the people,
you make them untrustworthy.

The Master doesn't talk, he acts.
When his work is done,
the people say, "Amazing: we did it, all by
ourselves!"

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When the great Tao is forgotten,
goodness and piety appear.
When the body's intelligence declines,
cleverness and knowledge step forth.
When there is no peace in the family,
filial piety begins.
When the country falls into chaos,
patriotism is born.

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Throw away holiness and wisdom,
and people will be a hundred times happier.
Throw away morality and justice,
and people will do the right thing.

Throw away industry and profit,
and there won't be any thieves.

If these three aren't enough,
just stay at the center of the circle
and let all things take their course.

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If you want to become whole,
let yourself be partial.
If you want to become straight,
let yourself be crooked.
If you want to become full,
let yourself be empty.
If you want to be reborn,
let yourself die.
If you want to be given everything,
give everything up.

The Master, by residing in the Tao,
sets an example for all beings.
Because he doesn't display himself,
people can see his light.
Because he has nothing to prove,
people can trust his words.
Because he doesn't know who he is,
people recognize themselves in him.
Because he has no goad in mind,
everything he does succeeds.

When the ancient Masters said,
 "If you want to be given everything, give
 everything up,"
 they weren't using empty phrases.
 Only in being lived by the Tao can you be truly
 yourself.

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Do you want to improve the world?
 I don't think it can be done.

The world is sacred.
 It can't be improved.
 If you tamper with it, you'll ruin it.
 If you treat it like an object, you'll lose it.

There is a time for being ahead,
 a time for being behind;
 a time for being in motion,
 a time for being at rest;
 a time for being vigorous,
 a time for being exhausted;
 a time for being safe,
 a time for being in danger.

The Master sees things as they are,
 without trying to control them.
 She lets them go their own way,
 and resides at the center of the circle.

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Whoever relies on the Tao in governing men
 doesn't try to force issues
 or defeat enemies by force of arms.
 For every force there is a counterforce.
 Violence, even well intentioned,
 always rebounds upon oneself.

The Master does his job
 and then stops.
 He understands that the universe
 is forever out of control,
 and that trying to dominate events
 goes against the current of the Tao.
 Because he believes in himself,
 he doesn't try to convince others.
 Because he is content with himself,
 he doesn't need others' approval.
 Because he accepts himself,
 the whole world accepts him.

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The Tao never does anything,
 yet through it all things are done.

If powerful men and women
 could venter themselves in it,
 the whole world would be transformed
 by itself, in its natural rhythms.
 People would be content

with their simple, everyday lives,
in harmony, and free of desire.

When there is no desire,
all things are at peace.

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The Master doesn't try to be powerful;
thus he is truly powerful.
The ordinary man keeps reaching for power;
thus he never has enough.

The Master does nothing,
yet he leaves nothing undone.
The ordinary man is always doing things,
yet many more are left to be done.

The kind man does something,
yet something remains undone.
The just man does something,
and leaves many things to be done.
The moral man does something,
and when no one responds
he rolls up his sleeves and uses force.

When the Tao is lost, there is goodness.
When goodness is lost, there is morality.
When morality is lost, there is ritual.
Ritual is the husk of true faith,
the beginning of chaos.

Therefore the Master concerns himself
with the depths and not the surface,
with the fruit and not the flower.
He has no will of his own.
He dwells in reality,
and lets all illusions go.

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The great Way is easy,
yet people prefer the side paths.
Be aware when things are out of balance.
Stay centered within the Tao.

When rich speculators prosper
While farmers lose their land;
when government officials spend money
on weapons instead of cures;
when the upper class is extravagant and
irresponsible
while the poor have nowhere to turn-
all this is robbery and chaos.
It is not in keeping with the Tao.

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If you want to be a great leader,
you must learn to follow the Tao.
Stop trying to control.
Let go of fixed plans and concepts,
and the world will govern itself.

The more prohibitions you have,
the less virtuous people will be.
The more weapons you have,
the less secure people will be.
The more subsidies you have,
the less self-reliant people will be.

Therefore the Master says:

I let go of the law,
and people become honest.
I let go of economics,
and people become prosperous.
I let go of religion,
and people become serene.
I let go of all desire for the common good,
and the good becomes common as grass.

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If a country is governed with tolerance,
the people are comfortable and honest.
If a country is governed with repression,
the people are depressed and crafty.

When the will to power is in charge,
the higher the ideals, the lower the results.
Try to make people happy,
and you lay the groundwork for misery.
Try to make people moral,
and you lay the groundwork for vice.

Thus the Master is content
to serve as an example
and not to impose her will.
She is pointed, but doesn't pierce.
Straightforward, but supple.
Radiant, but easy on the eyes.

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For governing a country well
there is nothing better than moderation.

The mark of a moderate man
is freedom from his own ideas.
Tolerant like the sky,
all-pervading like sunlight,
firm like a mountain,
supple like a tree in the wind,
he has no destination in view
and makes use of anything
life happens to bring his way.

Nothing is impossible for him.
Because he has let go,
he can care for the people's welfare
as a mother cares for her child.

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Governing a large country
is like frying a small fish.
You spoil it with too much poking.

Center your country in the Tao
and evil will have no power.
Not that it isn't there,
but you'll be able to step out of its way.

Give evil nothing to oppose
and it will disappear by itself.

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When a country obtains great power,
it becomes like the sea:
all streams run downward into it.
The more powerful it grows,
the greater the need for humility.
Humility means trusting the Tao,
thus never needing to be defensive.

A great nation is like a great man:
When he makes a mistake, he realizes it.
Having realized it, he admits it.
Having admitted it, he corrects it.
He considers those who point out his faults
as his most benevolent teachers.
He thinks of his enemy
as the shadow that he himself casts.

If a nation is centered in the Tao,
if it nourishes its own people
and doesn't meddle in the affairs of others,
it will be a light to all nations in the world.

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The ancient Masters
didn't try to educate the people,
but kindly taught them to not-know.

When they think that they know the answers,
people are difficult to guide.
When they know that they don't know,
people can find their own way.

If you want to learn how to govern,
avoid being clever or rich.
The simplest pattern is the clearest.
Content with an ordinary life,
you can show all people the way
back to their own true nature.

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All streams flow to the sea
because it is lower than they are.
Humility gives it its power.

If you want to govern the people,
you must place yourself below them.
If you want to lead the people,
you must learn how to follow them.

The Master is above the people,
and no one feels oppressed.
She goes ahead of the people,
and no one feels manipulated.

The whole world is grateful to her.
Because she competes with no one,
no one can compete with her.

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Some say that my teaching is nonsense.
Others call it lofty but impractical.
But to those who have looked inside themselves,
this nonsense makes perfect sense.
And to those who put it into practice,
this loftiness has roots that go deep.

I have just three things to teach:
simplicity, patience, compassion.
These three are your greatest treasures.
Simple in actions and in thoughts,
you return to the source of being.
Patient with both friends and enemies,
you accord with the way things are.
Compassionate toward yourself,
you reconcile all beings in the world.