

THE TRANSMUTED TAO

THE
TRANSMUTED
TAO

A CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHER
REVISITS THE SPIRITUAL CLASSIC

NICK JAMESON



© 2023 Infinite of One Publishing

I have zero doubt that studying the Tao Te Ching makes me a better, wiser, more peaceful, faithful, accepting human being.

There's no freedom without self-mastery. The more that you depend upon, the more that you believe that you need in order to be complete, the closer to a captive you are.

The most important question may be:
How does one cease from asking questions?

All that which is most true requires the space of the most expansive, vacuous vessel in which to pour itself.

Only the silent stillness possesses perfect potentiality.

You'll arrive at your destination
when you stop trying to reach it.



The Tao Te Ching is the greatest guiding treatise for living by divine, natural providence, born of an inherent spiritual wisdom lost by a human race that has buried that wisdom beneath the pretenses of knowledge, power, covetousness and control.

Taoism predates all the major religions, and promulgates ideas principles which those religions pretend to be their own. Indeed, those from later faiths shall here, if reading with open heart and mind, find the roots of their own faith. The Way of the Tao Te Ching is as the sacred seed buried in the soil, forever regenerating the existence trodden upon and taken for granted by a human race that now dishonors nature, believing that it has the right to dominate it. Lao Tzu and his foremost disciple, Chuang Tzu, tell of a time when the sacred seed was effortlessly cultivated, its produce and the human race that came to cultivate it within themselves growing big and bold by ordained, natural divinity, simply by following and loving the unknowable Tao; The Way. They speak of a stillness that precedes and supersedes all ego, and which egos continue to grasp at, like

attempting to hold water in one's hands while moving through life, all while it passes through one's fingers with every step.

Before Buddha, before Christ, before Confucius, who met Lao Tzu and acknowledged his ethereal transcendence, the sprout of Taoism shot up from the eternal seed; a seed which Lao Tzu traced back to before man laid claim to knowledge, and to any need to control the world and claim superiority over other men, and other creatures of the Earth. Confucius said of Lao Tzu: "I know how birds can fly, fishes swim, and animals run. But the runner may be snared, the swimmer hooked, and the flyer shot by the arrow. But there is the dragon – I cannot tell how he mounts on the wind through the clouds, and rises to Heaven. Today I have seen Lao Tzu, and can only compare him to the dragon." He referred to Lao simply as "The Old Philosopher."

All the great religions followed in Lao Tzu's footsteps, tracing a path which The Old Philosopher himself speaks of coming from eons long past; a trail as ancient as humankind itself, which The Old Philosopher knew of himself to be but a traveler of. I have, here, set upon the path myself, being a long-running student of spirituality. As part of my practice I'm enriched by performing 'active reading exercises' in order to improve my understanding of my reading, in which I gather the insights and principles of the original text and word them as they make the most sense to me, and hopefully to other readers as well. To this point I've done the same with *The Gnostic Gospels*, *Siddhartha* and Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*. I do this not, in this case, as a foolish attempt to 'one-up' the master metaphysician, but, again, to expand upon my own understanding, hopefully do a service to modern readers, and as a means to more actively consider and pay homage to his wisdom. I do this also to honor that fact that sacred wisdom is both ineffable and, at the same time, by the

same nature, may be limitlessly expressed and reworded, like a glorious white light shining through an infinitely-faceted prism.

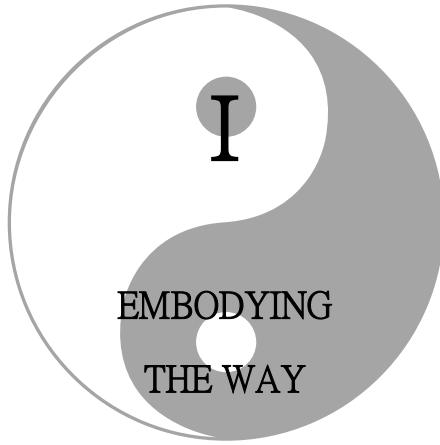
For a philosopher who so often feels consumed by thoughts, questions and a quest for knowledge, I must admit a great irony in so powerfully identifying with the wisdom promulgated in this great work, for it so skillfully compels me to relieve my mind of this quest. In its place, it invites me to seek the still, quiet solitude of my innermost self, from which wisdom, benevolence and righteousness arise naturally and without end, growing from the eternal seed in doses far superseding any such qualities derived from my mental seeking, which Lao Tzu bids me *not* to follow, for the mind leads me away from The Way.

I've been at this crossroads before, many times, I sense; between the paths of the learned, clutching, egotistical quest and the purposefully unlearned, all-naturally-led-and-knowing.

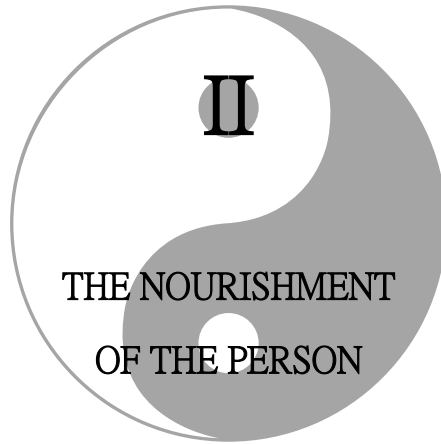
It is Taoism that best reminds me of this cycle, one that goes beyond and transcends all individualistic birth and death; that reminds me of my inseparability from all. Thus, were I foolish enough to restrict myself to one religion, Taoism would be it.

Note: This work was inspired by reading *The Art of War And Other Classics of Eastern Thought*, published by Barnes & Noble, Inc., with the version of the *Tao Te Ching* therein based upon James Legge's translation in *The Texts of Taoism, Part 1*, itself published by Oxford University Press in London, England, 1891.

All but the poetry of the Tao Te Ching has been rewritten here.



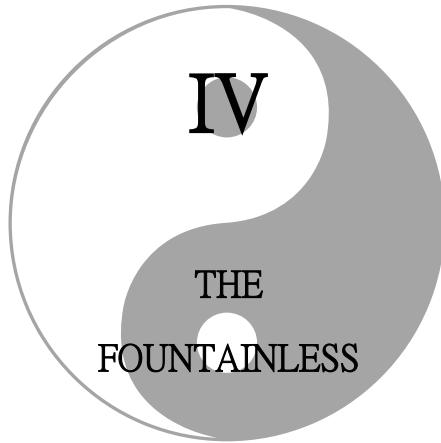
1. Words may never be accurately ascribed to the nameless; they are but invented designations.
2. Only when we assign ideas and characteristics to The Source is The Source multiplied into its innumerable manifestations. Before such an assignment they are but potential facets of The Source, yet to be formed.
3. *Always without desire we must be found,
If its deep mystery we should sound;
But if desire always within us be,
Its outer fringe is all that we see.*
4. The Everything is seeded in The Nothing, and branches out from it through manifestations made relative to our awareness of it, which is limitless in its potential.



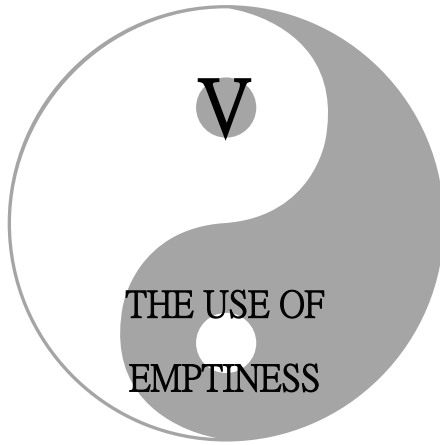
1. All appearance of knowledge is created by contrast.
2. All knowledge is relative to the possessor, and to the subject into which one inquires. There is no possessing an idea of something without possessing its opposite.
3. Everything that needs to be done is done without effort, propelled by its own innate will.
4. What must be done is naturally done, without ownership, and without the need for reward or recognition. It is only the ego that seeks such things.
5. *The work is done, but no one can see;
'Tis this that makes the power not cease to be.*



1. Superiority creates hostility. Non-ownership creates thievery by comparison to ownership. Desire creates disorder by demonstration of what is lacking.
2. Grounded and content with anything willed by The Way, as conducted through the sage, is how the good citizen is made.
3. Being compelled to fill a hole comes from the awareness of an imaginary hole. To believe that one need know, possess or act is how disorder comes to be.



1. In the perfect emptiness of the void the fullness is felt. Wholly within may one find freedom from without.
2. In stillness and perfect inclusion is the shared Source of all things. Only in disquiet and exclusion is humanity divided from itself, and thereby thrown into discord.
3. Up from the bottomless void do all things come to be. From the timelessness are all clocks fashioned. To none and to everyone does everything and nothing belong.



1. It is not from the desire to do good that goodness is done, but as the nature of drawing breath for the sake of breathing; as the heart pumping for the sake of life.
2. The space between The Everything and The Nothing is like a bellows:

*'Tis emptied, yet it loses not its power;
'Tis moved again, and sends forth air the more.
Much speech to swift exhaustion lead we see;
Your inner being guard, and keep it free.*



1. *The valley spirit dies not, aye the same;
The female mystery thus do we name.
Its gate, from which at first they issued forth,
Is called the root from which grew The Everything
Long and unbroken does its power remain,
Used gently, and without the touch of pain.*



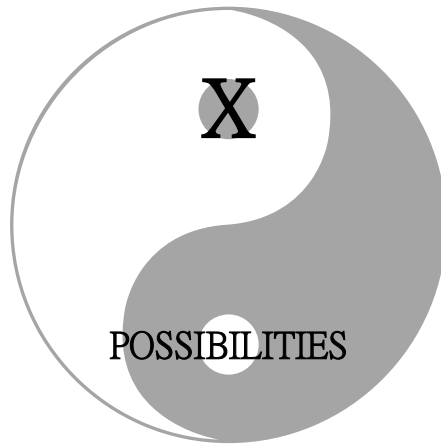
1. Existence comes from cause; form is made from function. By such a natural compulsion do all things continue to be, as natural as not to strive.
2. When one makes oneself last, The Way makes him first. When one knows that he doesn't know himself, he finds himself. When he cares not for the 'personal' and the 'private,' everything comes fully and privately into his person.



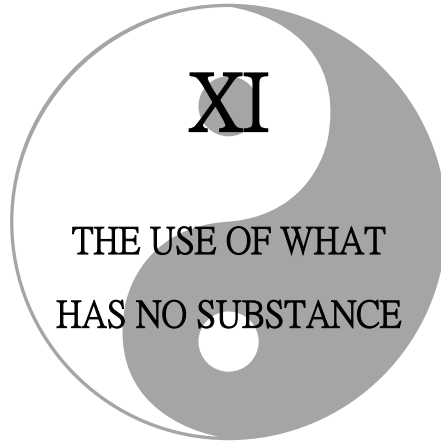
1. Be as water: of benefit to all, moving effortlessly through all things, and content to be in even the lowest of places.
2. The excellence of a dwelling is in its usefulness; of a mind in its stillest depths; of friendships in their virtue; of government in its cultivation of order and equality of opportunity; of government agents in their consideration; of action in its effortless naturalness.
3. The most excellent cultivate and spread the most value, regardless of any lowliness of their official position.



1. One cannot fill a vessel that is already full. Pour it out, and let nature refill it. One cannot cut oneself upon a sharpened blade without hastening its dulling.
2. Possessions own the possessor, who must guard them in body and mind. A mind thus owned may only own the ways of evil. True wealth comes from work that adds to others, and requires no recognition.



1. Become as simple as an animal, and thereby know your unity with the entire animal kingdom. Focus upon and control your breath, and set upon the path to peace. Relieve yourself of worry and responsibility, and welcome the perfect lightness of the purified present.
2. If you love those whom you rule, you will rule well. If you are as natural as the animal kingdom begot you, nature will reveal its paradise to you. If your mind is as far-reaching as the wind, you will know all that you need to know, even whilst appearing to know nothing.
3. That which made everything of itself lays claim to no one and nothing. It makes for everything, yet requires no recognition, nor worship. It guides all things, yet pushes no one and nothing. This is the great mystery: to be everything whilst needing nothing.



1. The usefulness of anything depends upon its weakest facet. The value of the vessel is in its emptiness. The dwelling needs walls and windows, but needs the space within and between them much more. The nothingness is of the most value, for it can be filled with anything, and anything may occur within it.



1. *Color's five hues from th' eyes their sight will take;
Music's five notes the ears as deaf can make;
The flavors five deprive the mouth of taste;
The chariot course, and the wild hunting waste
Make mad the mind, and objects rare and strange,
Sought for, men's conduct will to evil change.*
2. The sage satisfies that which is granted to every person, rather than satisfying the desires which are coveted at the expense of others, and are known only in exchange for that which is granted to every person.



1. Favor and disgrace, honor and shame, these are considered to be opposites by most, yet to the bloating, or deflating, ever beleaguered ego, act much the same.
2. Each of these things invites the other, as the ego fears losing the one for the other, with the mind thereby owned by its festering fear. Therefore, only in the absence of ideas of self may one be free from fear.
3. When one loves all else precisely as one loves oneself, as facets of the one indivisible Self, one is ready to rule.



1. That which is essential to all things cannot be seen, held or touched. The Source of which everyone and everything is, is as the appearance of nothing, but to the heart, which is the only thing that sees rightly.
2. The Source is the same in all of its parts, even as it takes infinite form. Always is it acting, even as witnessed only in and by its forms. For it is the formlessness within every form; the sight within the invisible; the endlessness within the ephemeral.
3. We meet The Source face to face, and yet we don't acknowledge it. We follow it, yet it leaves no footsteps. When we harness that which can only be sensed in the utmost subtlety of sense, and become one with that which is beyond beginning and ending, we've turned the key in the lock of The Great Mystery.



1. Before man laid claim to knowledge, he knew only what truly was, and shall forever be. Since then, he attempts to lay claim to this, the unclaimable, yet remains no nearer to it than the ancients who laid no claim.
2. To those who lay claim, these ancients appeared as the weak and timid, and yet they drew their power and boldness from needing nothing but the essential.
3. The ancients did not force the idea of knowledge into their minds, but allowed any sense of knowing to arise of its own volition by making for it a great, inviting, vacuous expanse. They did not work for the sake of securing something without, but for satisfying their essential-most nature within.
4. The ancients were unaware of the artificial import of appearance, which man later imposed upon itself. They knew not what it was to strive, but only to be grateful for being. From this did everything good come to them, as the budding of flowers fertilized by The Way.



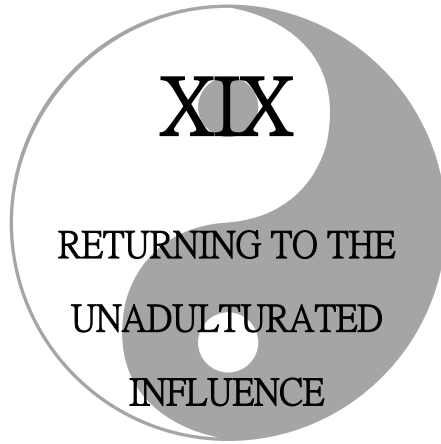
1. Empty stillness is as godliness, The Source from which everything sprung, and from which anything may spring. Everything returns to this sacred state. Everything flowers for the sake of its own demise, so as to renew everything else. Nature's providence is simply to be, for the sake of being; to grow for the sake of produce before returning to the limitless stillness at The Source.
2. Embracing the eternal cycle is to be empowered; to rage against it is but to *appear* more powerful. To embrace the cycle is to be peacefully restrained against all compulsive need to act, which compels those caught by appearance and ego. To embrace the cycle is to acknowledge what needs to be, on into eternity. Thus, embracing The Way of The Source is to feed one's character and kindness, and one's generosity, knowing giving can't reduce those of the ever-regrowing root.



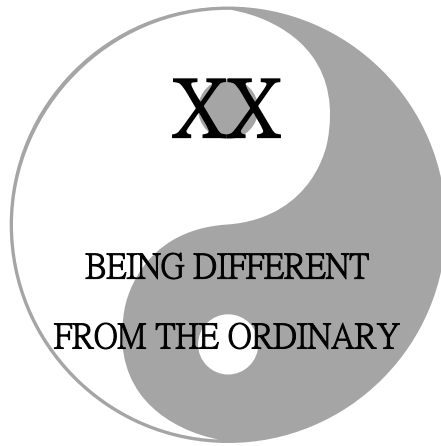
1. The ancients whom lived according to The Way had rulers whom they did not know were rulers. Later, the rulers came to be known, loved and praised, then feared and despised, as The Way was lost, and so then the rulers were lost, and so then the people.
2. The rulers of The Way walked amongst the people unseen, and spoke without need of being heard, so that the harmonious people proclaimed: "We are happy only for the sake of ourselves!"



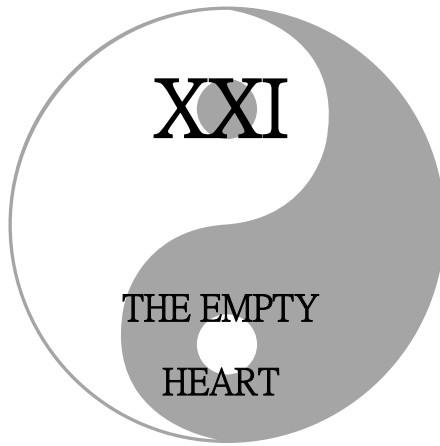
1. In the harnessing of The Way, benevolence and righteousness arose naturally, of their own accord. Only when man thought to reach for wisdom and shrewdness did hypocrisy become the way of man.
2. Without the natural harmony of The Way, bloodlines became systems of management. Disorder then fell upon the forming clans, where loyalty became currency.



1. The people would be far better off were there no need for sages and their wisdom. If we knew no benevolence and kindness, the filial nature and natural kindness would again come into the people. And without contrivances and coveting, thievery would disappear.
2. *Those three methods of government
Thought olden ways in elegance did fail
And made these names their want of worth to veil;
But simple views, and courses plain and true
Would selfish ends and many lusts eschew.*



1. When we become educated, we educate ourselves on how and why to have trouble. When we ask questions, we are on the path of learning, inviting an endlessness of ever more branching questions, and trouble sprouting at every branch, growing without end.
2. The multitude of men seem satisfied, as if set upon some high place, and partaking of a great banquet, whilst the sage sits alone, still and listless, without desire. He feels as directionless as a newborn who knows not what to want. He knows not what and where to call home. Everyone has something in their lives; more than enough; whereas he seems to be without possession; the loser of all things. His mind is simple; lost in the vacuum of unknowing. Those around him think and discuss, their eyes bright with understanding, whilst his mind sits idle and undecided. He drifts across existence, as if borne by the sea, whilst those around him paddle towards some promised shore, full of purpose. He is different from the ordinary, feeding from the nursing mother only; feeding only from The Way.



1. *The grandest forms of active force
From The Way come, their only source.
Who can of The Way nature tell?
Our sight it flies, our touch as well.
Eluding sight, eluding touch,
The forms of things all in it crouch;
Eluding touch, eluding sight,
There are their semblances, all right.
Profound it is, dark and obscure;
Things' essences all there endure.
Those essences the truth enfold
Of what, when seen, shall then be told.
Now it is so; 'twas so of old.
Its name – what passes not away;
So, in their beautiful array,
Things form and never know decay.*
2. All that is beautiful in the world is so by the nature of beauty, which was so before the world was so.



1. Whatever is unwhole, is made whole. Whatever is crooked, becomes straight. The empty is filled. The worn out is made new. The fewer one's desires, the more fulfilled one becomes.
2. The sage thus sits in this simple, humble state of knowing, of all becoming as it wills itself to be, and thereby ushers it forth in the world. He is free from self-display, and thus he shines; he is free from assertion, and thus he stands apart; he is free from boasting, and thus his merit is acknowledged; he is free from self-esteem, and thus becomes superior. Because he is free from striving, none can strive alongside him.
3. In this way what is partial is made complete, as completion is free from force.



1. It is the ego that needs to speak, and to be heard. Its emissions do not last, for neither does that from which they are emitted. As capricious as are the changes of the weather, man is much the more.
2. Whereas, when The Way is one's business, all others sense their agreement, even when they are too weak to acknowledge it in their minds, or speak of their accord.
3. Thus do those most in agreement sense their unity, and seek happiness without striving for it, and need not one fixed form of it, or manifestation of it, over another, knowing that even without taking form or manifesting itself, it is of The Way. But when one loses faith in this, so too is it delivered upon those around him, such that the links which once strengthened become unbound.



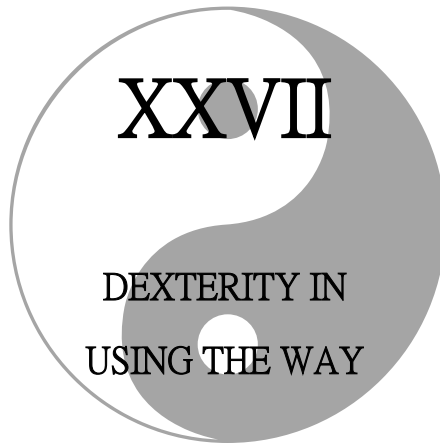
1. Stay set upon the ground, unreaching, so as not to falter by being unstably stretched. Make not a show of yourself, for the need to self-display is dulling, and cannot shine. He who cries "Look at me!" remains unseen. He who says he is first fears to be last. The Way knows without needing to know; feeds upon that which most men discard; heals the dis-ease which most men unwittingly make; sits in the unnoticed, noticing all.



1. The Completion existed before the form. Alone, perfectly still, formless and changeless, its reach was entire, and it was beyond all danger and risk. It is the mother of all things.
2. I do not know its name, for any designation would limit its limitlessness. Only with artifice, and unwise effort, and to help others to find it, do I call it The Way.
3. Constantly does it flow, becoming the most remote before returning to the center. Thus is it great, as is the nature of all things which come from its nature. Only those who follow it may know relative greatness in turn. These are the ruling sages; the philosopher kings.
4. Man is subject to the laws of the Earth; Earth is subject to the laws of the Ever After; the Ever After is subject to the laws of The Way; The Way is subject only to itself.



1. To be light on one's feet, one must first be grounded. To know right movement, one must first know stillness.
2. Thus, a wise ruler sets himself nearest to what's most valuable and stable. Even as sights and sensations seek to draw him away, he remains where he should be, his feet on the ground. If he moves too eagerly, he loses his footing. If easily drawn into action, he loses his throne.



1. Skill in movement is to leave no trace. Skill in speaking is to speak without fault. Skill in counting is to count without tools or machines. Skill in containment is to make irremovable, without the contained knowing that it's contained. Skill in binding is to make impossible to unbind, without cord or knot. In the same way the sage saves all men, casting none away, whilst showing no means, nor needing any recognition for his salvations.
2. Therefore, the skilled are the masters of the unskilled apprentices, who give the masters their reputation through their lack of skill. And the apprentice must honor the master, and the master must treasure his apprentice, else mislead those who come to take heed.



1. *Who knows his manhood's strength,
Yet still his female gentleness maintains;
As to one channel flow the many drains,
All come to him, yea, all beneath the sky.
Thus he the constant excellence retains;
The simple child again, free from all stains.*

*Who knows how white attracts,
Yet always keeps himself within black's shade,
The pattern of humility displayed,
Displayed in view of all beneath the sky;
He in the unchanging excellence arrayed,
Endless return to man's first state has made.*

*Who knows how glory shines,
Yet loves disgrace, nor e'er for it is pale;
Behold his presence in a spacious vale,
To which men come from all beneath the sky.
The unchanging excellent completes its tale;
The simple man in him we hail.*

2. Raw material, when divided and distributed, forms vessels. The sage, when properly employed, forms the head of the state, from which only peaceful regulations empowering *all* of the people he seeks to employ.



1. None who attempt to capture the kingdom shall succeed, for the kingdom is like a spirit, and cannot be captured and controlled by force. To conquer it this way is to destroy what it was. To clutch at it this way is to have what made it valuable slip through one's fingers.
2. The natural course is such that:

*What was in front is now behind;
What warmed anon we freezing find.
Strength is of weakness oft the spoil;
The store in ruins mocks our toil.*

Therefore, the sage relieves himself of over-work, of overindulgence, and of dissolute gratifications.



1. The Way does not act by force of arms, all acts of which shall be delivered upon their actors in time.
2. Where one places one's army, trouble arises. By its very nature, there cannot long be an army that knows peace.
3. A skilled commander stops after delivering the decisive blow. He strikes only as a matter of necessity, not from the wish of being recognized as the victor. To assert himself thereafter is not to be masterful, and to invite defeat. Vanity, boastfulness and arrogance belong to the unskilled, who can only ever be false masters.
4. When the course has been completed, those completing it mature and grow old, and lose The Way, and both they and their course must come to an end.



1. The bearing of arms is a last resort, as it is not of The Way, and must only occur in the preservation of life.
2. The most dangerous weapons are of evil auspice. Thus, superior men feel defeated by their use. For victory by slaughter is shameful, and is, itself, a form of defeat. The superior man, therefore, finds another way.
3. Let those who kill others in battle grieve for the fallen, regardless of sides, for the taking of any life is an evil, and can only be accepted when not to take such life results in the ending of more lives than those taken.



1. The Way is eternal, changeless, and has no right name.
2. While The Way is the smallest and simplest of all things, none dare to embody it. If a ruler could claim it, all would submit to him.
3. The Way is of the most essential nature, and spreads to all corners of existence equally and without effort, and without the need for the slightest input from humanity.
4. When The Way acts, it is given a name. With a name, people can assign themselves to it, and thereby free themselves from the sense of risk.
5. The Way is to the world what the seas are to the great rivers, and the great rivers to the streams and valleys.



1. There is discernment in the knowledge of others, wisdom in the knowledge of self. There is strength in overcoming others, might in overcoming oneself. There is wealth in being satisfied with one's possessions. There is strength of will in one who guards his energy.
2. To fulfill the requirements of one's position is to be lasting. To die and yet not perish is to possess longevity.



1. The Way pervades all things, and sits equally within the right hand as within the left.
2. The Way is within the production of all things which act upon it, and which richly rewards its actors. It accomplishes everything without need of recognition. It wraps around everything, even the smallest of things, without commanding anything. All are bound to it, and return to it, without knowing it. It is the seed from which springs all the greatest growth.
3. Thus it is that, by not making himself great, the sage accomplishes the greatest of all things.



1. He who holds the invisible Way in his mind may repair the entire world. All people come to him, and are relieved, pacified, recuperated and healed.
2. Guests come for the satisfaction of their senses, for a time, as such satisfaction is fleeting, whilst The Way, tasteless to those who have come to gorge themselves, satisfies inexhaustibly.



1. Every inspiration comes from expiration. To weaken another, he will first be made stronger. To overcome another, he will first be raised up. To befoul another, offerings are first made. This is called “hiding the light.”
2. Softness overcomes hardness. Weakness overcomes strength.
3. That which is most valuable to the state should not be displayed before the people.



1. The Way does nothing for the sake of itself, and is thereby able to do everything.
2. If rulers could maintain The Way, all things would of themselves be transformed by them.
3. If such transformation were to be desired, it would be expressed through the nameless simplicity.
4. *Simplicity without a name
Is free from all external aim.
With no desire, at rest and still,
All things go right as of their own will.*



1. The fullest measure of The Way is possessed by those who do not seek to show it. The lower possession of The Way is possessed by those who fear to lose it, and who act to retain it.
2. Those possessing the fullest measure of The Way act upon it without a purpose, nor a need to do anything with it. Those possessing its lower degree are always acting, and needing to act.
3. The most benevolent are always seeking to carry out The Way, yet possess no need to do so. The most righteous are always seeking to carry out The Way, and had need to do so.
4. Those who possess the greatest sense of propriety always seek to show it, and when others fail to recognize this greatness of propriety, the most proper force them to do so.

5. So it was that when The Way was lost, its attributes appeared. When its attributes were lost, benevolence appeared. When benevolence was lost, righteousness appeared. When righteousness was lost, propriety appeared.
6. Propriety is the reduced form of pure-heartedness and good faith, as well as the onset of disorder. Quick understanding is but the offspring of The Way, and the onset of stupidity.
7. Thus it is that the great abide by what is most solid, and eschew its unstable offspring; dwell within the seed, not the flower; meditate upon the cause, not the effects.



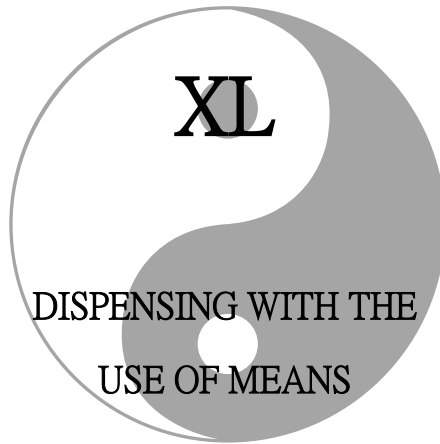
1. Those primordial things of The Way are:

*The Source, which by it is bright and pure;
Earth rendered thereby firm and sure;
Spirits with powers by it supplied;
Valleys kept full throughout their void;
All creatures which through it do live;
Princes and kings who from it get;
The model which to all they give.*

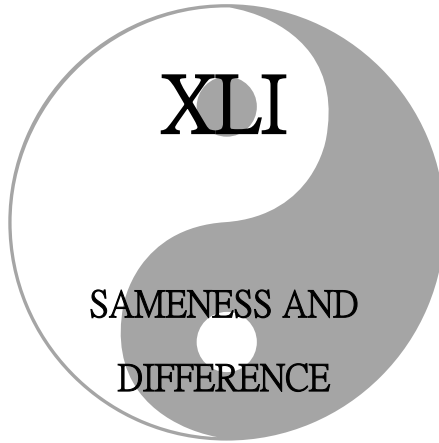
2. All of this is the result of The Way:

*If The Source were not thus pure, it soon would rend;
If Earth were not thus sure, 'twould break and bend;
Without these powers, the spirits soon would fail;
If not so filled, the drought would parch each vale;
Without that life, creatures would pass away;
Princes and kings, without that moral sway;
However grand and high, would all decay.*

3. Thus it is that what is dignified is rooted in what is base, and what is lofty is only so because it is stabilized by the lowest point from which it rises. Therefore, rulers following The Way refer to themselves in the simplest, base ways, knowing this as the root depended upon for the growth to their heights. One cannot be only one part of oneself, nor ignore even one's basest parts. Thus, brilliance is born by every facet of form, as even that which most brilliantly shines was made so by being long ground against the dullest, grittiest of its facets.



1. *The movement of The Way
By contraries proceeds;
And weakness marks the course
Of The Way's mighty deeds.*
2. All that which may be identified and named sprung
from the unidentifiable and unnamable.



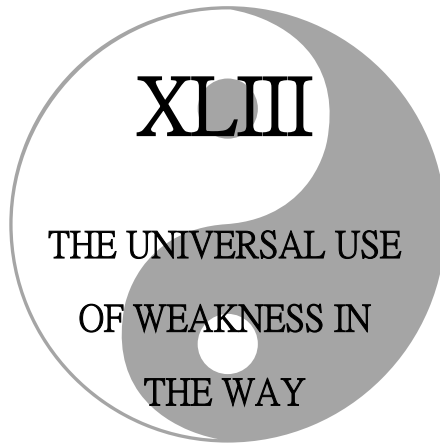
1. The greatest learners, when learning of The Way, turn it into daily practice. The middling learners, when learning of The Way, practice it sporadically. The poor learners, when learning of The Way, laugh at it. If it were not laughed at by them, it would not be fit to be The Way.
2. Thus have the scribes said:

*The Way, when brightest seen, seems light to lack;
Who progress in it makes, seems drawing back;
Its even way is like a rugged track.
Its highest virtue from the vale doth rise;
Its greatest beauty seems to offend the eyes;
And he has most whose lot the least supplies.
Its firmest virtue seems but poor and low;
Its solid truth seems change to undergo;
Its largest square doth yet no corner show;
A vessel great, it is the slowest made;
Loud is its sound, but never word it said;
A semblance great, the shadow of a shade.*

-
-
3. The Way is hidden and nameless, yet it is the gift by which all named things are granted what they need in order to complete themselves.



1. The Way produced The One. The One produced The Two. The Two produced The Three. The Three produced all things. All things emerge from the unseeable, proceed into the visible, and find harmony through the breath that enters their vacancies. Thus, be vacant.
2. People wish to belong, to possess virtue, and to live with purpose. And yet those who rule seek to separate themselves from these things. So it is that some are made greater by receiving what they seek, and some are made greater by being denied what they seek.
3. Violence and strength precipitate an unnatural demise. This is the basis of the sage's teaching.



1. The softest overcomes the hardest. That which is the least substantial enters where there is no crevice. Therefore, great advantage is gained through inaction.
2. Very few attain this teaching, and the advantage of inaction, without the use of words.



1. *Of fame or life,
Which do you hold more dear?
Of life or wealth,
To which would you adhere?
Keep life and lose those other things;
Keep them and lose your life: which brings
Sorrow and pain more near?*

2. *Thus we may see,
Who cleaves to fame
Rejects what is more great;
Who loves large stores
Gives up the richer state.*

3. *Who is content
Needs fear no shame.
Who knows to stop
Incurs no blame.
From danger free
Long live shall he.*



1. *Who thinks his great achievements poor
Shall find his vigor long endure.
Of greatest fullness, deemed a void,
Exhaustion ne'er shall stem the tide.
Do thou what's straight still crooked deem;
Thy greatest art still stupid seem,
And eloquence a stammering scream.*
2. Constancy of movement beats the cold. Stillness beats the heat. Pure stillness invites The Way to enter all.



1. When The Way prevails, industry serves life. When The Way is disregarded, industry makes weapons, and compels conflicts for the sake of profitable destruction.
2. The greatest guilt comes from approving of ambition. The greatest calamity comes from not appreciating what one has. The greatest fault comes from covetousness. Thus is self-sufficient contentment enduring and unchanging.



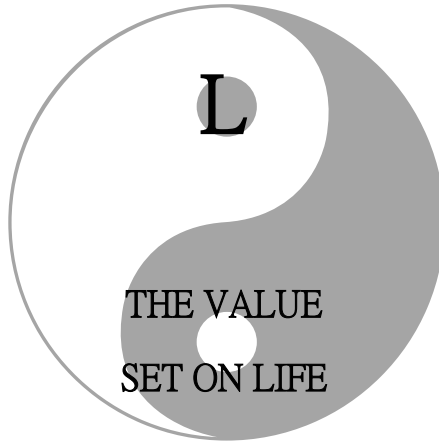
1. The Way tells us all that occurs without, without stepping outside; shows everything there is to see, without looking out the window. The further one ventures outside oneself, the less one knows.
2. Thus are sages recipients of knowledge without needing to travel; do they name things correctly without seeing them; do they accomplish everything without trying.



1. The student seeks to increase his knowledge. The follower of The Way seeks to diminish his doing.
2. The follower of The Way seeks by diminishment, and the doing of nothing. And by arriving at the point of inaction, there's nothing that he doesn't do.
3. Receiving everything comes without trouble. If you take trouble to receive something, you've yet to earn it.



1. The sage makes nothing of his mind; the contents of his mind are made from the minds around him.
2. To those who are good to the sage, he is good. To those who are bad to the sage, he is good. Thus, through the sage do all become better, as true goodness requires no condition.
3. The sage appears indecisive, for his mind is of absolute indifference. Everything is of and for the same. The people watch and listen to him, for he treats them all as his children.



1. The cost of life is death.
2. Of every ten people, three administer life, three administer death.
3. Three more administer the land and places of death, for they are resolved to perpetuate life.
4. And yet, there is one who knows skill in managing the life bequeathed to him, such that fear cannot find him, and he may enter all places and persons at will, without resistance. He is free from all risk, because there is no death in the life that he lives.



1. The Way produces and naturally nourishes all things by its energetic flow. All things receive their form according to their nature, and are completed by the circumstances of their placement. Thus do all things pay homage to The Way, even when they are resistant to it, or exist in total ignorance of it.
2. This honoring of The Way is not a matter of command, but of natural compulsion.
3. Thus it is that The Way of all things is to be produced, nourished, grown, nursed, completed, matured, maintained and spread by The Way.
4. Yet, while The Way produces all things, it lays claim to none of them. It guides them through the processes of their existence without calling attention to itself. It fosters their maturity without exercising control. This is called “the mysterious operation.”



1. The Way is the birthing mother of all things.
2. When one finds his mother, he knows what he should be. When one knows that he is the child of his mother, and guards the qualities of his mother with which she has endowed him, he will live without danger all his life.
3. With mouth closed and vital breath maintained, one knows no exertion. With mouth open and breath spent upon all that seems important, one knows only trouble.
4. To perceive the small is to see clearly. To guard what is soft and fragile is the secret of strength.
5. *He who uses well his light,
Reverting to its source so bright,
Will from his body ward off all blight,
And hide the unchanging from men's sight.*



1. Were the sage to be known and granted governance according to The Way, what he would most fear would be making a show of himself.
2. The Way is always level and easy, yet people are enamored of the other ways.
3. They shall keep their properties, yet fail to cultivate their fields, and thus possess no produce. They shall dress in finery, and carry a big stick, and know every manner of indulgence, only to make of their aristocracy a practice in thievery, destruction and vain showmanship, in rejection of The Way.



1. *What The Way's skillful planter plants
Can never be uptorn;
What his skillful arms enfold,
From him can ne'er be borne.
Sons shall bring in lengthening line,
Sacrifices to his shrine.*
2. *The Way, when nursed within one's self,
His vigor will make true;
And where the family it rules
What riches will accrue!
The neighborhood where it prevails
In thriving will abound;
And when 'tis seen throughout the state,
Good fortune will be found.
Employ it the kingdom o'er,
And men thrive all around.*

3. When The Way is cultivated, the effects bear fruit within the cultivator, and within all with whom he shares his fruit.
4. It is by unwavering observation of these effects that they are known to the sage.



1. When the attributes of The Way reign within one, he is like a newborn; one whom others know not to strike.
2. Though vulnerable, the newborn possesses a firm grasp. Though knowing nothing of procreation, the procreative capacity dwells within him. He may wail all day long without his voice going astray.
3. *To him by whom this harmony is known,
The secret of The Way unchanging is shown,
And in the knowledge wisdom finds its throne.
All life-increasing arts to evil turn;
Where the mind makes the vital breath to burn,
False is the strength, and o'er it we should mourn.*
4. That which gains strength must thereafter mature into old age, lose The Way, and come to an end.



1. He who knows The Way has no need to speak of it. He who has a need to speak of The Way does not know it.
2. He who knows The Way quiets himself and retains his breath. He blunts his weapons and unravels all complication. He tempers his brightness and blends with the obscurity of others. This is called “the mysterious agreement.”
3. Such a one cannot be treated as either familiar, or as an alien. He is beyond profit or degradation, nobility or commonality. In this way only *he* may know true nobility, and thereby become truly noble.



1. One may rule by discipline and violence, and the enforcement of obedience. And yet the only genuine rulers need not force others to follow their rule.
2. The greater the enforced prohibitions, the greater the poverty of the people. The more modes of profit provided, the greater the disorder. The greater the craftiness of control, the more rebellious the people's contrivances. The more the rule of law, the more the people move towards unlawfulness.
3. Thus does the ruling sage say: "I will not force their transformation, and they will be self-transformed. I will sit still, and the people will sense what is correct, and embody it. I will contrive no means for profit, and the people will produce their own enrichment. I will demonstrate no ambition, and the people will attain simplicity and peace."



1. *The government that seems the most unwise,
Oft goodness to the people best supplies;
That which is meddling, touching everything,
Will work but ill, and disappointment bring.*
2. The one thing works to bring its opposite, and so does misery bestride happiness, and happiness hide behind misery. Who can know the straightest path to a thing?, which more often requires a circuitous path to reach.
3. Dispense with your corrections, which may easily become twisted, the good in them turning towards evil. The people have long deluded themselves into believing otherwise.
4. Thus is the sage like the sharpest of swords that cuts no one; like the finest of points that never penetrates. He deals honestly, but takes no advantage. He shines, but not to the point of blinding those around him.



1. Everything in moderation, including moderation, tends to bring about the best in human beings.
2. Through moderation may humankind return to its nature, and remember The Way, and regain its bequeathing attributes. Over time this remembrance brings about obstacles to humankind's purification. No one knows the limits to such emergence and setting of obstacles, and only one who is aware of this limitlessness should be granted rulership of the state.
3. He who possesses The Way possesses longevity, and may long rule, for he is like the deepest-rooted, longest-flowering of plants, and all people and things are thereby attracted to his natural nourishment.



1. Governing a state is like slowly simmering a sauce.
2. When governing according to The Way, the heat of the kingdom is contained within the vital forces of the people, not overacted upon so as to boil over. When the sage is set before the simmering sauce, all may stand beside him, knowing they will not be burned.
3. Thus with temperance of action and unhurried patience is The Way taken into the nourishment of the people, just as it nourishes the ruling sage.



1. The greatest states are like the lowest-lying of rivers: they become the natural center through which all the smaller streams flow.
2. In a similar manner are men overcome by women, through their stillness; by seeming small and unmoved, they make men move to them, who are swept away.
3. Thus, a great state becomes great by bowing before smaller states, which it thereafter naturally absorbs. And small states, by staying low and being absorbed, thereafter become great. Abasement is the adherent in the first case, and the means of favor in the second.
4. The great state seeks to nourish and unite the people. The small state seeks to be accepted, and of service. Each thereby gets what it wishes. But this is only so when the great state remains the low-lying river, allowing all else to naturally flow into it.



1. *The Way has, of all things, the most honored place.
No treasures give good men so rich a grace;
Bad men it guards, and doth their ill efface.*
2. The words formed from The Way bring honor. The deeds done by The Way raise men up. Even evil men are protected and patiently molded by it.
3. A lesson offered by The Way on one's knees is far greater than one offered through the greatest show of pomp and circumstance.
4. The ancients knew The Way as the most valuable of all things because it is made freely available to all whom seek it, and offers absolution to even the most evil of men who are able to find and follow it.



1. It is The Way to act without thinking of acting; to do one's duty without feeling responsibility; to be indifferent to all forms of favor; to treat the smallest as great, the few as many; to return cruelty with kindness.
2. The master of The Way senses difficulty approaching, and acts before it can arise. He waters what shall become great while it's still small. He does this knowing that all that is small came from the great, and that everything that is difficult was once easy. It is by this method that the sage accomplishes the greatest of things without trouble, and without appearing to have done anything great.
3. He who makes promises easily is sure to be unreliable. He who always thinks upon a thing makes it difficult. Thus, the sage sees the difficulty within the easy, and is thereby able to avoid difficulty.

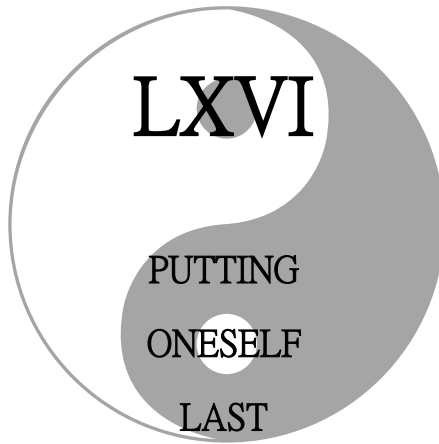


1. That which is at rest is easy to keep still. Before a thing has announced its presence, it is easy to act against. Brittle things are easily broken. Small things are easily divided. Thus, act before the announcement is made, and secure order before disorder may descend.
2. The mightiest trees grow from the smallest sprouts. The tallest of towers is set upon a small heap of earth. The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.
3. He who conceals his purpose does harm by his actions. He who grasps at a thing loses his grip. The sage conceals no purpose, and so does no harm; he grasps at nothing, and so possesses the firmest of grips. And yet, the people are notorious for creating their own defeat, even whilst verging upon success, forgetting that as much care must be taken at the end as at the beginning.

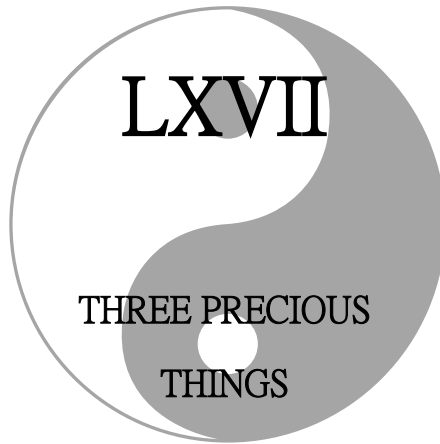
4. Thus does the sage desire what is unpopular, and seeks not that which is difficult to attain. He learns the lessons prized not by the multitude, and passes by what the multitude seeks. In this way does he encourage the development of all things, without hiding his purpose.



1. The ancient skilled practitioners of The Way did not aim to enlighten the people, but to reduce them to their simplest of forms.
2. A knowledgeable people cannot be easily governed, nor can a knowledgeable ruler govern well. Governing according to one's wisdom only creates difficulty.
3. Reducing the people to simplicity and ruling without knowledge are the two keys to good governance. One who rules in this way stands apart as the opposite of most rulers, and so the people flock to him and naturally wish to emulate him.



1. It is not by making oneself higher than others, but lower than others, that they may naturally flow into and be received by him. Thus it is that the sage ruler puts himself below and behind those over whom he rules, and this places him above and in front of them.
2. In this way the sage ruler is set above the people whom he rules without their feeling his weight, and set in front of them without incurring their resentment.
3. Thus may the sage ruler be happily praised without others feeling lessened and threatened by comparison. Because he doesn't strive, no one can strive with him, or resent the ambition which he doesn't possess.



1. The greatest of things hide in plain sight, unseen. So it is with the teaching of The Way, which is great whilst seeming small and inferior to other teachings.
2. The sage's three most precious things are gentleness, economy, and the shrinking from taking precedence over others.
3. So it is that the sage may be bold by way of his gentleness, liberal by means of his economy, and the vessel of the highest honor by not taking precedence over others. Whereas, today, gentleness is discarded for boldness, economy is discarded for liberality, and everyone strives to be first, with the result being degradation, resentment and death.
4. Gentleness is victorious even when used against one's enemies. For The Way is gentle, and by its gentleness protects the gentle in turn.

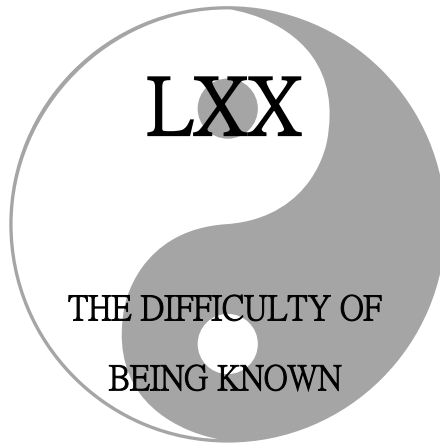


1. *He who in The Way's wars has skill
Assumes no martial port;
He who fights with most goodwill
To rage makes no resort.
He who vanquishes yet still
Keeps from his foes apart;
He whose behests men most fulfill
Yet humbly plies his art.*

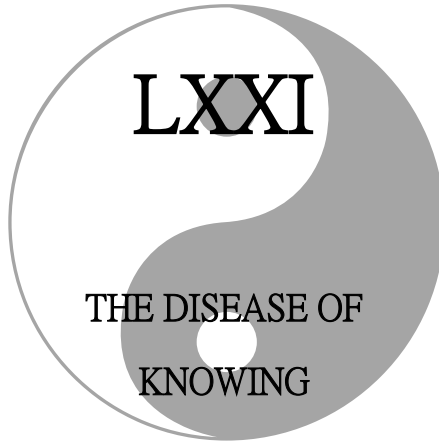
*Thus we say: "He ne'er contends,
And therein is his might."
Thus we say: "Men's wills he bends,
That they with him unite."
Thus we say: "Like Heaven's his ends,
No sage of old more bright."*



1. A master of war has said: “I don’t dare to be the commencer of war, but the defender. I dare not advance an inch, but would rather retreat a foot.” This is the preparing for war when there is no war; the moving to fight when no fight need be; the making of enemies where there is no enemy but oneself.
2. The greatest possible calamity is to easily go to war. This is near to losing the most precious thing: gentleness. Thus, when war does come, he who deplores the fight finds the victory.



1. The words of the sage are simple, and their practice is easy, yet none know or are able to practice them.
2. The words of the sage possess the original principle and foremost law. Because others don't know them, they cannot know him.
3. Those who know the sage are few, and because of this he is prized by those few. He thereby adorns the simplest of garments, appearing to be of poverty whilst carrying what is most valuable within his breast.



1. To know while thinking oneself ignorant is the greatest of achievements. To not know and yet think one knows is a disease.
2. It is in the thought of being pained by the possession of this disease that one is able to avoid it. This is how the sage avoids contracting it: by knowing the pain inseparable from its possession.



1. Some fear is invaluable: that fear which forestalls being befallen by dread.
2. Let the people not indulge without thought; let them not grow weary of what life depends upon.
3. It is by avoiding thoughtless indulgence that such weariness is avoided in turn.
4. The sage knows these things of himself, but makes no show of this knowledge. He loves whilst appearing to place no value upon himself. It is in this way that he may love fully, and without condition.



1. Those who dare to defy the law face dire consequences, while those who don't defy it face no such consequence, and thereby appear to possess the advantage. Yet, only The Way can know the long term effects of taking either course, and measure the relative advantage or disadvantage to the people as a whole thereby taken. Thus, the sage finds difficulty in judging such circumstances, and so withholds his judgment.
2. The followers of The Way do not strive, yet they skillfully overcome; they do not speak, yet they skillfully receive replies; they do not call, yet others come to them as if called. Their demonstrations are quiet, and yet their plans are effective. They permit great spaces between themselves and others, yet nothing passes between those spaces that is unfelt, or unknown.



1. A people rightly ruled shall not fear death or suffering, for if death and suffering were measures taken in order to control them, they may know no right or wrong, only obedience.
2. The carpenter molds the wood to its best use, whilst he who wields the saw tears it free through force. Without the carpenter there is only death, but with him comes new life.



1. Starvation is the result of over-harvesting and hoarding.
2. The people suffer for the sake of those ruling over them. Only in the failure of their rulers do they despair.
3. Life is most valuable to those whom live it without, through depredations and exploitations of their disadvantages, being forced to fight for it. When one lives for the sake of living, without thinking of and being forced to fight for the right to live, one lives rightly.



1. All things, including all people, are supple and weak at birth, firmly set at death. At its death the tree has lost its pliancy; it is dry and stoutly set.
2. Thus, being set is an accompaniment of death, while being supple and weak are accompaniments of life.
3. Thus, he who attempts to overpower with strength fails to conquer, and the stoutly outstretched tree invites the wielder of the saw.
4. Therefore, firmness, dryness and strength are beneath what is supple, soft and wet.



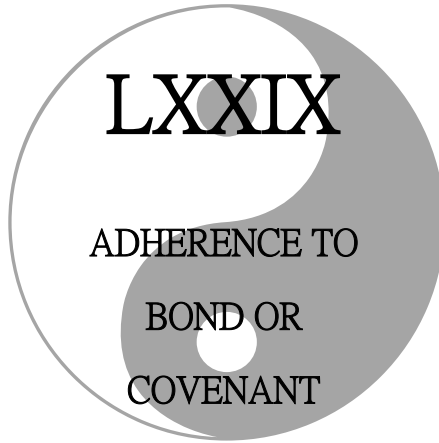
1. The Way is like a bow; that which is high is brought low, and that which is low is brought high. The Way naturally diminishes overabundance, and reinforces deficiency.
2. This is not the way of most men, who take from those suffering from deficiency so as to add to their own overabundance.
3. Only those whom possess The Way may serve everyone from their own overabundance!
4. Thus does the ruling sage act without claiming success; does he garner merit without resting arrogantly upon his laurels; does he attain superiority without the slightest of shows.



1. Water is the softest and most supple of all things, yet is the most effective thing for attacking the strong and firm.
2. All the people sense that the soft overcomes the hard, and that the supple overcomes the strong, and yet none are able to put this into practice.
3. Thus has the sage said:

*He who accepts his state's reproach,
Is hailed therefore its altars' lord;
To him who bears men's direful woes
They all the name of King accord.*

4. All truth is of a paradoxical nature.



1. When reconciliation comes after great animosity, a grudge is sure to be held by the one who was wrong.
2. Thus does the mediating sage insist upon patience for the fulfillment of all resulting accords, whilst those lacking sagacity seek only their own advantage, to be attained as quickly as possible.
3. The Way loves according to goodness.



1. Those who are most capable should be left to their own devices, whilst the people should be set to live without fear of their rulers.
2. Whilst the people have their transports, they should have no occasion to flee; whilst they have their protections and weapons, they should have no occasion to use them.
3. The sage encourages the people to reinvent the wheel so as to understand and appreciate it, instead of taking it for granted.
4. The people should love what they have, and thereby find wealth and gratitude in the simplest of possessions.
5. All people should love their neighbors, and their explorations of neighboring lands, and yet remain entirely free from depending upon either of them.



1. Sincerity is not eloquence; eloquence is not sincerity. Those skilled in The Way don't debate it; the debate belongs to the unskilled. Those who know The Way are not learned; the more learned the scholar, the less they know The Way.
2. The sage isn't accumulative or acquisitional. He accumulates through passing his possessions to others. The more that he gives to others, the more he possesses himself.
3. The Way is the sharpest of all things, yet doesn't cut. The sage who wields The Way does everything without trying to do anything.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR, BY THE AUTHOR

Born in the redwoods of coastal Northern California in the blue collar town of Fort Bragg, my early years were trouble-free times of active, youthful exuberance. I was very much a rural kid, playing sports with friends, catching critters, exploring the forest, shooting bb guns, swimming in the river and ocean and eating blackberries off the bush until my hands were stained purplish-black and my stomach ached. At the age of six my father was transferred to the rapidly urbanizing town of Santa Rosa, CA, in the heart of the Sonoma County Wine Country, an hour north of San Francisco. There, I gradually transformed into a video gamer with a strong creative streak. In my adolescence I concocted elaborate games for friends that captured their attention for hours on end, often during school hours. Some of these games were centered around toys, but the more popular were produced on paper, which I called “paper games.”

As I matured I came to the same conclusion that most young, observant people come to: money is the root of freedom, for freedom is *purchased*, not freely given. I knew that I had to do everything possible to accrue as much cash as possible, so that I could do what and be who I pleased. This culturally-pervasive mindset continued through most of college, during which I attended the University of California at Santa Barbara and studied Business Economics, entering the real estate business post-graduation. I was highly motivated by the orthodox ambitions inculcated into western youth by way of our aristocratically-hailing conservative culture and, through them, decidedly driven to pursue what most consider the hallmarks of ‘success:’ a lucrative career, the socioeconomic rank and all the trappings. This was before I realized the subjectivity of ‘success,’ and the fact that the greater form is that which Einstein alluded to: “Try not to

become a person of success but, rather, try to become a person of *value*.”

Thus, I'd begun developing doubts during my last couple collegiate years that following the traditional path was what I was meant to do; that it was the best use of my abilities. Upon inspection, and in tracing the full causality, I realized that this path produces parasitism and suffering. The more you're said to 'make,' the more you *take*. Nothing materializes from nothing, and capitalism unbalanced by socialistic principles and equity sharing is less about freedom and hard work than exploiting disadvantage.

My heart and conscience thereby began to coalesce around the greater concept of success: defining it in terms of the *creation* rather than the *extraction* of value. Later, as my spiritual awareness grew and I began to sense that 'listening to your heart' is more than mere fleeting emotion, but a tapping into a truer, fuller form of universal Self, my earlier doubts began to crystalize along with my ideology and convictions, and everything changed for me.

Though I continued to struggle with some serious health issues at the time, much of which continues to plague me, on another level I came into myself and began to harness a deep sense of purpose. I realized that I'm meant to translate the spiritual messages I receive which, combined with my intellectual inspection of the world, have led me to some profound conclusions about the nature of existence and the greedy heart of western culture compromising our collective potential. My innate creativity found a grander outlet in conjunction with my naturally-philosophical mindset, and I began seeking the underlying nature of reality, formulating my own ideologies and envisioning the type of societal systems that might someday steer humankind away from a 'greed is good' attitude that necessarily short-sells total quality of life.