

LAO TZU
(6th Century BC?)

*DAO DE JING*¹

*DAO*²

1. The *Dao* that can be defined is not the real *Dao*. The name that can be named is not the real Name. The unnamable [*Dao*] is the source of Heaven and Earth. Naming is the mother of all particular things. Free from desire, you experience reality. Trapped in desire, you see only appearances. Reality and appearance have different names, but they emerge from the same source [that is, the *Dao*]. This source is called darkness, deep darkness; and yet it is the way to all wisdom. [1]
2. The *Dao* is empty — used, but never used up. It is the bottomless source of all things. It blunts sharp edges, unties knots, softens glare, clears dust. It is hidden, but always present. I don't know its mother. It is older than the gods [if there are any gods]. [4]
3. The *Dao* is impartial; it sees all things as straw [fake] dogs. The *Dao*-Master is also impartial; he regards people as straw dogs. The *Dao* is like a bellows — it is empty yet infinitely available. It is always producing. Speak of it, fail to grasp it. Hold on to the center. [5]
4. Look, but you can't see it. Listen, but you can't hear it. Reach out, but you can't touch it. Invisible, inaudible, intangible. Elusive. The One. When it rises, no light. When it sets, no darkness. It calls all things back into nothingness [No-Thing-Ness]. Formless form, imageless image. No front, no back. Live in the *Dao* of old; master the present. Know the Source: The essence of *Dao*. [14]
5. *De* flows from *Dao*. *Dao* is elusive and evasive. Evasive and elusive, yet within it there are ideas. Elusive and evasive, yet within it are entities. Dark and obscure, yet within it there is life. The life of the *Dao* is so real; it gives rise to

¹Rendition and editing by George Cronk. © 1999. The *Dao De Jing (DDJ)* (pronounced, roughly, "Dow Duh Jing") is an ancient Chinese classic, one of the two basic books of Philosophical Daoism ("Dowism"), the other being *The Book of Chuang Tzu* (by Chuang Tzu, c. 369-286 BC). The *DDJ* is a collection of 81 philosophical poems traditionally attributed to Lao Tzu ("the Old Boy"), also known as Lao Tan or Li Erh, who lived in the 6th century BC. *Dao* means "Way," *De* means "the power of the Way," and *Jing* means "book." The *DDJ* is "The Book of the Way and Its Power."

Some notable English-language versions of the *DDJ* are *Tao Te Ching* [traditional English spelling], trans. Stephen Addis & Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993); *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1989); *Tao Te Ching: A Book about the Way and the Power of the Way*, a rendition (not a translation) by Ursula K. Le Guin in collaboration with J.P. Seaton (Boston: Shambala, 1997); *Tao Te Ching: A New English Version*, trans. and ed. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Arthur Waley, in Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Dao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), pp. 141-243; and *Te-Tao Ching*, trans. and ed. Robert G. Henricks (based on the recently discovered [in 1973] Ma-Wang-Tui texts) (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989). See especially the recent *Daodejing, "Making Life Significant," A Philosophical Translation*, trans. with commentary by Roger T. Ames & David L. Hall (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003).

²The *DDJ* is traditionally laid out in eighty-one "chapters," which are not organized on a topic-by-topic basis. For the sake of clarity, the version contained in this anthology is set forth topically. The bracketed numbers following each stanza in this chapter are the chapter numbers in the traditional version of the *DDJ*.

certainty. From the beginning until now, it has appeared in countless forms; it has been given countless names. How do I know this? Like this! [21]

6. The valley spirit, the Great Mother: Her doorway is the channel from which Heaven and Earth came forth.¹ She is always present and inexhaustible. [6]
7. Before the birth of Heaven and Earth, there was something without form but complete. Silent. Empty. Independent. Unchanging. Infinite. Eternal. It is the Mother of all things. I cannot classify it, but I call it *Dao*. Powerful, it creates all things, is present in all things, returns all things to their origin. The *Dao* is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great. Humanity is great. These are the four great things. Humanity follows Earth. Earth follows Heaven. Heaven follows *Dao*. *Dao* follows its own nature. [25]
8. The *Dao* is like an overflowing river. It rises to the left and to the right. The ten thousand things arise from it, but do not depart from it. The *Dao* acts, but cannot be defined. It clothes and nourishes all beings, but does not rule over them. It endures without desire and without seeming "big." The ten thousand things find their home in it, and yet it does not exercise lordship over them. The *Dao* is very great, but it does not show its greatness. Therefore, it is truly great. [34]
9. *Dao* gives birth to the ten thousand things. *De* nurtures them. They are formed from matter and completed by environment. Therefore, the ten thousand things honor *Dao* and respect *De*, not in response to commandments, but just naturally. *Dao* gives birth to the ten thousand things, and *De* nurtures, rears, develops, shelters, and protects them. But *Dao* and *De* do not try to own or rule the ten thousand things, nor do they seek to make them dependent. This is true power. [51]
10. The *Dao* is the source of all things, the good man's treasure, the bad man's refuge. You can buy beautiful words. You can build your reputation with good deeds. But even bad people can use beautiful words and perform good deeds. So when the new emperor is crowned (and the three ministers of state are installed), do not send gifts of jade and four-horse chariots. Instead, be still, and offer the *Dao*. The ancients treasured the *Dao* because, when you seek it, you find it. Through the *Dao*, even sinners receive forgiveness. That is why everybody loves the *Dao*. [62]
11. A man of daring courage will kill or be killed. A man of cautious courage seeks to save lives. Each of these may be either beneficial or harmful. Heaven hates what it hates. Who knows why? Even the *Dao*-Master can't figure it out. The *Dao* does not contend, but it prevails. It does not speak, but it answers. It is not called, but it responds. It has no purpose, but it achieves all of its aims. Heaven's net is wide; nothing slips through. [73]
12. Thirty spokes are joined in the hub of the wheel, but it is the center hole, where it is empty, that makes the wheel useful. We make a clay pot, but it is the emptiness inside that makes the pot useful. We cut windows and doors to make a room, but it is the inner emptiness that makes the room useful. We seek to take advantage of what is, but we also find much use for what is not. [11]

About Daoism

13. My teachings are very easy to understand and even easier to put into practice. And yet, no one understands or practices them. My teachings are derived from an ancient system of principles. People who do not realize this do not really know me. Few know me, but that is my value. Therefore, the *Dao*-Master wears rough clothing, but has a jewel for a heart. [70]
14. Many consider my teaching to be nonsense. But the profound is a lot like nonsense. If a teaching does not seem nonsensical, then it must be trivial. [67a]

¹But v. 7a states, "Heaven and Earth are everlasting. Since they were never born, they will never die. They do not exist for themselves and thus go on forever." When a chapter-number of the *DDJ* is marked with a lower-case "a," "b," or "c," the lower-case letter refers to the first ("a"), second ("b"), or third ("c") section of the chapter in question.

Yin/Yang and the Principle of Reversal

15. No beauty without ugliness. No good without evil. Being and non-being are two aspects of the same reality. Difficult and easy, long and short, high and low, before and after: With each pair, two sides of the same coin. [2a]
16. To be whole, let yourself break. To be straight, let yourself bend. To be full, let yourself be empty. To be new, let yourself wear out. To have everything, give everything up. The *Dao*-Master clings to the *Dao* and becomes a model for all. He doesn't put on a show, but his light shines forth. He doesn't justify himself, but he is known for his integrity. He doesn't boast, but he is recognized as accomplished. He doesn't contend with others, and thus no one contends with him. The old saying, "Surrender and conquer," is not an empty slogan. Surrender to the *Dao* and find yourself completed. [22]
17. Know the male, maintain the female — become the channel of all things. Become the channel of all things, and true power [*De*] will endure. You will be reborn. Know the white, maintain the black — become the form of all things. Become the form of all things, and true power [*De*] will endure. You will return to the Infinite. Know honor, maintain humility — become the valley of all things. Become the valley of all things, and true power [*De*] will endure. You will find the simplicity of nature. [28a]
18. To shrink, you must first expand. To weaken, you must first strengthen. To knock down, you must first raise up. To receive, you must first give. This is the way things are. Soft overcomes hard. Slow overcomes fast. Fish cannot live out of the water. A nation's best weapons should not be displayed. [36]
19. Reversal is the motion of the *Dao*. Yielding is the way of the *Dao*. All things emerge from being. Being emerges from non-being. [40]
20. Out of *Dao*, One. Out of One, Two. Out of Two, Three. Out of Three, all things. All things carry *Yin* and face *Yang*. Out of the union of *Yin* and *Yang*, harmony. No one wants to be "orphaned," "widowed," or "unworthy." But kings and princes use these words as titles for themselves. You win by losing. You lose by winning. It has been said, and I agree, "A violent man dies violently." [42]

Non-Ado (*Wu-Wei*)

21. Therefore, the *Dao*-Master acts with non-ado [*wu-wei*]¹ and teaches without speaking. Things come and go. He lets them come and go. He creates, but he does not own. He achieves, but he takes no credit. He completes his work and then forgets about it. Practice non-ado, and your accomplishments endure. [2b]
22. Can you love the people and govern the country without ado? Can you, like a woman, open and close the gates of Heaven? Can you understand all things and take no action? [10b]
23. Giving birth and nourishing, having but not owning, acting without seeking praise, leading but not dominating — this is the highest virtue [*De*]. [10c]
24. Do you think you can control the world? I don't think so. The world belongs to the *Dao*. It can't be controlled. If you mess with it, you'll ruin it. If you try to grab it, you'll lose it. Some things move on; others remain behind; some things are hot; others are cold; some things are strong; others are weak; some things are up; others are down. The *Dao*-Master renounces extremes, excess, and extravagance. [29]

¹As in "much ado about nothing." Those who follow the *Dao* try to avoid acting with "much ado;" they seek to act with "non-ado" (*wu-wei*), to "go with the flow," to "be cool."

25. The softest thing overcomes the hardest thing. That which has no substance can enter where there is no space. This shows the value of non-*ado*. Teaching without words; doing without *ado* — hard to accomplish. [43]
26. Fame or self — which matters more? Self or possessions — which is more valuable? Loss or gain — which is worse? Attachment to things brings suffering. Much hoarded, much to be lost. Know when enough is enough. Avoid disgrace. Know when to stop. Avoid danger. This is how to endure. [44]
27. Pursue learning, gain daily. Follow the *Dao*, lose daily. By losing day-by-day, you arrive at non-*ado*. Nothing done, nothing left undone. Master the world by letting things be, by letting them take their own course. The world can't be conquered. [48]
28. People are born soft and flexible; when they are dead, they are hard and stiff. Living plants are tender and pliant; when they are dead, they are brittle and dried out. Therefore, whatever is hard and stiff is a sign of death. Whatever is soft and flexible is a sign of life. An army without flexibility never wins. An unbending tree is easily brought down by the wind. The hard and stiff fall. The soft and flexible rise. [76]

The *Dao*-Master

29. The *Dao*-Master stays behind and is thus ahead. He is detached and is thus one with all things. He is selfless and is thus fulfilled. [7b]
30. The *Dao*-Masters of old had profound wisdom and deep understanding. They were unfathomable. We cannot comprehend them; all we can do is describe them: Cautious, like someone crossing an icy stream; alert, like someone sensing danger; courteous, like a houseguest; yielding, like melting ice; undefined, like a piece of uncarved wood; open, like a valley; murky, like muddy water. We must wait for the water to settle; then it will be clear. Can you keep still until what is needed becomes clear? Those who follow the *Dao* are not full of themselves. They are like durable garments that need no renewal. [15]
31. He who stands on tiptoe does not stand firm. He who walks fast cannot walk far. He who shows off does not shine forth. He who pushes will not succeed. He who boasts will not achieve. He who praises his own work creates nothing that endures. These things inspire disgust. Followers of the *Dao* spurn them. [24]
32. Heavy is the foundation of light. Stillness is the source of movement. Thus, the *Dao*-Master travels all day without losing sight of the baggage-cart. He is not swept away by splendid scenery. He remains quiet and unperturbed. Why should the lord of the land allow himself to be swept away? Allow yourself to be swept away, and you lose your foundation. Allow yourself to be moved, and you lose self-mastery. [26]
33. Following the *Dao*, the *Dao*-Master leaves no tracks, speaks without error, counts without markers. No locks on his door, and yet no one can open it. No rope used, and yet his knots cannot be untied. Thus, the *Dao*-Master cares for all beings and neglects none. Thus, he follows the light. The *Dao*-Master teaches the fool; and thus the fool learns. But teaching and learning will not take place unless the student values the teacher and the teacher loves the student. This is the subtle secret of teaching and learning. [27]
34. The perfect seems flawed, but its usefulness is unlimited. Full seems empty, but it is inexhaustible. Straight seems bent. Intelligent seems stupid. Eloquent seems tongue-tied. Motion defeats the cold. Stillness defeats the heat. The *Dao*-Master remains calm as a guide for all things. [45]
35. You can know the whole world without going out the door; you can know the Way of Heaven without looking out the window. The further afield you go, the less you know. The *Dao*-Master knows without going out; understands without looking; achieves without *ado*. [47]
36. The *Dao*-Master does not have his heart set on anything in particular. He wants to understand the hearts of the people. He is good to people who are good. He is also good to people who aren't good. This is true goodness. He trusts people who are trustworthy. He also trusts people who aren't trustworthy. This is true trust. The *Dao*-Master radiates peace

and harmony. Through him, the hearts of the people are made one. Are the people his children, or is he their child? [49]

37. Come into life, go into death. Three out of ten have a lust for life. Three out of ten have a lust for death. Three out of ten just pass from birth to death without appreciating either life or death. Why is this? Because none of them appreciates both life and death. But there are those [one out of ten?] who appreciate both life and death. When they travel the country, they are not attacked by rhinos and tigers. When they go into battle, they are not wounded. The rhino finds nothing to gore. The tiger finds nothing to claw. Weapons find nothing to pierce. Why? Because such people have gone beyond death. [50]
38. Filled with the power of Dao, he is like an infant – protected against stinging insects, ravaging beasts, birds of prey. Like an infant: bones soft, muscles weak, but grip firm. No knowledge, no experience, of sexual intercourse, but his penis stands hard and erect because the vital force is so powerful within him. He can cry all day, but he does not lose his voice, because he exists in harmony with the totality of being. Existing in harmony, he is in the eternity of the Dao. Being in the Dao, he finds wisdom. He sees no point in breath-control or mind-control techniques aimed at prolonging his life. Trying to live on and on is contrary to the Dao. To live contrary to the Dao is to die. [55]
39. Act without ado; work without effort. Taste the tasteless; treat the small as large and the few as many. Reward evil with goodness. Take on the difficult while it is still easy, the large while it is still small. Difficult always begins as easy; large always begins as small. Therefore, the *Dao*-Master never tries to be great. As a result, he accomplishes great things. Big promises produce little trust. Treating something as quite easy makes it very difficult. The *Dao*-Master regards everything as difficult, which means that, for him, everything is easy. [63]
40. That which is lying still is easy to pick up. That which has not yet happened is easy to prevent. That which is brittle is easily shattered. That which is small is easily scattered. Deal with things before they become problems. Straighten things out before they become confused. A huge tree begins as a tiny sprout. A terrace nine storeys high begins as a small pile of dirt. The giant pine tree grows from a tiny sprout. A thousand-mile journey begins with a single step. Intrude and ruin. Grasp and lose. Therefore, the *Dao*-Master practices non-ado and so does not ruin; he is not grasping and so does not lose. People often fail just when they are about to succeed. Be as careful at the end as you are at the beginning, and you will not fail. Therefore, the *Dao*-Master desires no-desire, treasures no treasures, studies no studies. He pays attention to what others have ignored. He helps all things find their center, all without ado. [64]
41. I have three treasures to guard and preserve: The first is compassion. The second is self-restraint. The third is not wanting to be ahead of others. Compassion breeds fortitude. Self-restraint breeds generosity. Not wanting to be ahead of others breeds leadership. These days, people want courage without compassion, generosity without self-restraint, and leadership without the willingness to be led. This is death. Compassion rules! On the attack, it wins. On the defense, it holds the fort. It is Heaven's means of aid and protection. [67b]
42. To know that you do not know is strength. Not knowing that you do not know is a sickness. The cure begins with the recognition of the sickness. The *Dao*-Master is not sick, but he is sick of sickness. Thus, he is well. [71]
43. Great resentment, even when appeased, does not go away. How can this be good? Therefore, the *Dao*-Master keeps his promises, but he does not look into whether others are keeping theirs. The man of virtue (*De*) monitors himself; the man without virtue monitors others. The *Dao* of Heaven plays no favorites, but it is always manifest in the good man. [79]
44. True words aren't pretty; pretty words aren't true. The good do not contend; those who contend aren't good. The wise are not learned; the learned are not wise. The *Dao*-Master is not greedy. The more he does for others, the more he has. The more he gives to others, the richer he becomes. The *Dao* sharpens without cutting. The *Dao*-Master acts with non-ado. [81]

Thoughts of a *Dao*-Master

45. No more learning, no more trouble. Is there any real difference between "Ahhh!" and "Yuk!?" What about "good" and "evil"? Must I fear what others fear? Ridiculous! Everybody else is smiling, having fun as if at a festival or carnival. I alone am drifting, not knowing whether I'm coming or going, like a baby before it has learned to smile. Others have what they need; I have nothing. I might as well be homeless. I'm a fool. Very confused. Others are bright; I am dim. Others are sharp; I am dull, lost at sea, without direction. Others have plans; I am aimless. I am different from others. I am nourished by the Great Mother. [20]

Seeking the *Dao*

46. When a thoughtful man hears of the *Dao*, he tries to follow it. When an average man hears of the *Dao*, he wonders about it, but then tends to forget it. When a fool hears of the *Dao*, he makes fun of it. If someone didn't make fun of it, it wouldn't be the *Dao*. Therefore, when seeking the *Dao*, light seems dark, advancing feels like retreating, the simple appears difficult, power is like weakness, purity seems tarnished, true virtue seems deficient and unsteady, and the clear seems obscure. The true square has no corners. The true vessel never sails. The true sound is hard to hear. The true form has no shape. The *Dao* is hidden, beyond definition; but it alone fulfills. [41]

Living in the *Dao*

47. Much talk is contrary to nature. The wind doesn't blow all morning. The rain doesn't fall all day. Wind and rain are caused by nature. If nature restrains herself, shouldn't people do the same? He who follows the *Dao* is one with the *Dao*. He who is virtuous is one with Virtue [*De*]. He who loses the *Dao* becomes a loss. Surrender to the *Dao*, and it will be your home. Practice virtue [*De*], and it will be your abode. Lose the *Dao*, and you will then reside in loss. No trust given, no trust received. [23]
48. The *Dao* never acts, yet through it everything gets done. If rulers could reside in the *Dao*, everything would fall into place all by itself. Action is restrained by the *Dao*. Action restrained, no desire. No desire — tranquility. All things at peace. [37]

How to Live

49. It is good to be like water. It nourishes without effort. It flows without contention into low places that people scorn. Thus, it is like the *Dao*. In dwelling, live close to the land. In thinking, go deep. In relating to others, be gentle. In governing, seek good order and justice. In acting, be skillful. In working, do all things at the right time. No contention, no strife. [8]
50. Fill your bowl all the way — it overflows. Keep sharpening your sword — it gets dull. Pile up gold and jade — it cannot be protected. Increase your wealth, status, and power — you suffer ruin. Do your work, then withdraw: That's the Way! [9]
51. The five colors can make us blind. The five sounds can make us deaf. The five flavors can deaden our taste. Racing, chasing, and hunting can drive us mad. The pursuit of treasure knocks us off the path. Therefore, the *Dao*-Master follows his inner vision rather than his outer vision. He chooses this [*Dao*], but not that [non-*Dao*]. [12]
52. Knowing others is a kind of knowledge; knowing yourself is wisdom. Conquering others requires strength; conquering yourself is true power [*De*]. To realize that you have enough is true wealth. Pushing ahead may succeed, but staying put brings endurance. Die without perishing, and find the eternal. [33]
53. In archaic times, by attaining the One, Heaven became clear; Earth became stable; spirit became transcendent; valleys became full; the ten thousand things became alive; rulers made the country ordered and secure. This implies that if Heaven lacked clarity, it would be divided; if the Earth lacked stability, it would be shaky; if spirit lacked transcendence, it would be used up; if valleys lacked fullness, they would be depleted; if the ten thousand things lacked life, they would fade away; and if rulers lacked nobility, they would fall, and the country would collapse into

chaos. Therefore, the humble is the root of the noble; the lowly is the foundation of the high. Rulers call themselves "orphans," "widows," and "worthless." This is taking the humble and the lowly as the root and foundation, is it not? You can have all the parts of a chariot without having a chariot. Better to rumble like rocks than to tinkle like jade. [39]

54. The world's Source, the Mother of all things. Knowing the Mother, we know her children. Knowing the children, but holding on to the Mother, we are free from the fear of death. Stop talking, withdraw from the rat-race, and life is full. Blab on, lose yourself in busy-ness, and life is lost. Seeing the small requires good vision. Yielding is strength. Turn to the Inner Light, and find the eternal. [52]
55. Those who know do not tell. Those who tell do not know. Stop talking, withdraw from the rat-race, calm your spirit, untangle yourself, soften your glare. Be one with the dust of the earth. This is primal union. Achieving union with the *Dao* places one beyond attraction and repulsion, benefit and harm, honor and disgrace. This is the highest state of being. [56]

Meditation

56. Can you keep body and soul together and find your wholeness in the One? Can you make your breathing as soft as a newborn child's? Can you cleanse your inner vision until you see with perfect clarity? [10a]
57. Empty yourself. Be calm. The ten thousand things come and go. Just watch them. All things return to the Source, where there is stillness. To return to the Source is to recover what is permanent. Knowing what is permanent — enlightenment. Not knowing what is permanent — disaster. Knowing what is permanent opens the mind. Open mind, open heart. Open heart, magnanimity. Magnanimity, a virtue of queens and kings. A true queen or king lives in accord with Nature. To live in accord with Nature is to find the *Dao*. Following the *Dao* makes death harmless. [16]

Self

58. Being in favor or being in disgrace — either way, trouble. It is all within the Self. What does this mean? Being in favor, we fear falling out of favor. Being out of favor, we fear remaining there. This fear is within the Self. No Self, no fear. Do you value the world as you value yourself? You may be trusted to rule. Do you love the world as you love yourself? The world may be entrusted to your care. [13]

Anti-Confucianism

59. When the *Dao* is not followed, kindness and morality appear. When intelligence and learning are exalted, pretentiousness emerges. When there is no peace and order in the family, then we get all kinds of talk about "family values." When the country is badly governed and in chaos, we then glorify patriotism. [18]
60. Discard learning and knowledge, and the people will be a hundred times happier. Banish kindness and morality, and the people will rediscover love and duty. Forget about industry and profit, and there won't be any thieves. When these three things are done, more will be required: Look at plain silk; hold uncarved wood; let self dwindle; let desire fade. [19]
61. The *Dao*-Master does not cling to power and is therefore truly powerful. The lesser man clings to power and thus has none. The truly powerful man does nothing¹ and thus leaves nothing undone. The lesser man is awl with activity and thus gets nothing accomplished. The virtuous man does what is good as an end in itself. The moral man has a need to do what is good. The man of propriety (*li*) makes doing good into a ritual, and if people do not follow him willingly, he forces them into line. Thus, when the *Dao* is lost, virtue arises. When virtue is lost, morality arises. When morality is lost, justice arises. When justice is lost, propriety arises. Propriety is merely a shadow of justice, morality, and virtue; it

¹That is, he practices non-*do* (*wu-wei*).

is the beginning of chaos Therefore, the *Dao*-Master stays with the *Dao*. He does not live on the surface of things. He looks to the fruit, not to the flower. He accepts this [*Dao*] and rejects that [non-*Dao*]. [38]

Political Philosophy

62. Glorify the superior, hatch jealousy and competition. Value possessions, provoke stealing. Stimulate desire, enflame the passions. Therefore, the *Dao*-Master would rule by emptying minds and filling bellies, by weakening desire and strengthening bodies. He would lead the people away from knowing and wanting and would try to prevent those with knowledge from interfering. Practice non-*dao*, and everything will fall into place. [3]
63. The best ruler — hardly known to exist. Next best — known and loved. Next best — feared. The worst — despised. No trust given, no trust received. The best ruler rules without fanfare. When his work is successful, the people say, "Fantastic! We've done it!" [17]
64. Uncarved wood, when carved by the *Dao*-Master, becomes a well-governed state. The best carving is that which is not carved at all. [28b]
65. How to govern in accordance with the *Dao*: No conquest by force of arms. Weapons always turn back against themselves. Encamp an army today — the campground is all thorns and brambles tomorrow. Make war for a month — there will be famine for years. Do what needs to be done, but do not rejoice in victory. Make war, if necessary, and win, but without arrogance, without hostility, without pride, without needless violence. War, victory, and the rest do not last. They are contrary to *Dao*. What is contrary to *Dao* perishes quickly. [30]
66. Weapons generate fear; all creatures hate them. Therefore, the *Dao*-Master tries not to use them He uses them only when there is no alternative, and then without joy, in a calm and restrained way. Enjoy weapons, enjoy killing. Enjoy killing, lose yourself The killing of many people should create sorrow and grief. A great victory is a funeral ceremony. [31]
67. The *Dao* cannot be named or defined. It is invisible, but it contains all things. If rulers could master it, then everything would fall into place. Heaven and Earth would be united. A sweet rain would fall. People would be just without regulation. However, when people seek to rule, they divide the whole and begin assigning names to things. And now, there are names upon names. Too many! The naming must stop. Knowing when to stop saves us from danger. *Dao* in the world is like rivers flowing into the sea. [32]
68. When the kingdom is in harmony with the *Dao*, the horses haul manure. When the kingdom departs from the *Dao*, war-horses are bred in the land. There is no greater curse than wanting more than enough. There is no greater sin than greed. He who knows when enough is enough always has enough. [46]
69. If I had any sense, I would walk on the main road [the *Dao*], and I would fear leaving it. Keeping to the main road [the *Dao*] is so easy, and yet people love to stray from it as they seek shortcuts. Look! The royal palace is magnificent, but the fields are full of weeds, and the granaries are empty. Some are beautifully dressed and bejeweled, wearing flashy weapons on their belts, eating and drinking until they burst. These people — these state-sanctioned crooks — have far more than they need. Surely, this isn't the *Dao*! [53]
70. In governing, employ no surprises. In waging war, employ only surprises. Win the world with non-*dao*. How do I know this? Like this! The more rules and regulations there are, the poorer the people become. The more experts there are, the more confusion there is. The more skillful and clever technicians there are, the more horrifying inventions are produced. The more "law and order" there is, the higher the crime-rate. Therefore, the *Dao*-Master says, "I do nothing, and the people govern themselves. I practice keeping quiet, and the people find justice. I seek emptiness, and the people prosper. I have no desires, and the people return to a natural and simple life." [57]
71. When the government is restrained, the people are happy and satisfied. When the government meddles in everything, the people are disgruntled and miserable. Happiness eclipses misery. Misery eclipses happiness. Which will it be? The

- straight becomes crooked. Good becomes evil. The people remain bewildered. Thus, the *Dao*-Master is sharp but not cutting, incisive but not biting, straight but not controlling, bright but not glaring. [58]
72. In governing the country and serving Heaven, show restraint. Showing restraint is submission to the *Dao*. Submission to the *Dao* will fill you with *De*. Being filled with *De*, there will be no limit to your power, and there will be nothing you cannot overcome. When there is nothing you cannot overcome, you will be a true ruler indeed. You will be one with the country. You will be the Mother of the country. Being the Mother of the country, you will have deep roots and a firm base. Your reign will be long-lasting. This is the *Dao* of long life and eternal vision. [59]
 73. Rule a large country as you would cook a small fish. Follow the *Dao*, and evil will be subdued. Evil will still be there, but it won't be able to do much harm. The *Dao*-Master does no harm. If no harm is done, then the power of the *Dao* can flow on. [60]
 74. A great country is like a sea into which all streams flow, the Female of the world. The Female overcomes the Male with stillness. The woman overcomes the man by lying underneath him. Therefore, a great country dominates a small country by submitting to it; and a small country can dominate a great country by submitting to it. Yield and conquer. A great country wants to unite and shelter people. A small country wants to come in and be sheltered. Each gets what it wants. Thus, the great country should yield. [61]
 75. The ancient rulers who followed the *Dao* did not try to enlighten the people, but rather aimed at making them dull. People are hard to govern because they are so clever. Rulers who seek to enlighten the people are like bandits who prey upon the land. Rulers who forget about enlightening the people are a real blessing to the nation. Remember these two enduring principles. They represent the power [*De*] of the *Dao*. *De* goes deep and far. All things turn back and reach original harmony. [65]
 76. Great rivers and seas are kings to hundreds of lesser streams because they lie lower than the lesser streams. To stand above, you must speak from below. To lead, you must follow behind. This is how the ruler who follows the *Dao* stands above and leads the people. And in this way, the people are neither overburdened nor oppressed. The whole nation supports such a ruler. He contends with no one, and no one contends with him. [66]
 77. The best soldier does not rush into battle. The best fighter does not display his anger. The best conqueror does not take vengeance on his enemy. The best leader is the best follower. This is known as the power [*De*] of not contending. This is known as true leadership. This is known as following Heaven's lead. [68]
 78. There is a saying among military strategists: "Instead of advancing, I'll be advanced upon; it is better to retreat a foot than to advance an inch." This is known as advancing without advancing, getting ready without showing your muscles, capturing without attacking, being well-armed without weapons. There is nothing worse than underestimating your enemy. That leads to total defeat. Therefore, when armies clash, it is the side that does not rejoice in war-making that wins. [69]
 79. When the people do not fear your power, then your power has become truly great. Do not intrude into their homes. Do not interfere with their work. If you do not oppress them, then they will not become sick of you. Thus, the *Dao*-Master knows himself, but does not show himself. He loves himself, but is not arrogant. Therefore, he lets go of that and chooses this. [72]
 80. If people do not fear death, then you cannot threaten them with it. If they are afraid of death, we could make death the penalty for breaking the law. But do we dare to do so? Consider the role of the official executioner: Are you ready to play that role? When amateurs try to play the master carpenter, they usually cut and bruise themselves in the process. [74]
 81. When taxes are too high, people starve. When the government is too intrusive, it makes life no longer worth living, and the people lose their love of life and their fear of death. To promote the value of life, do not interfere with it. [75]

82. The *Dao* is like the bending of a bow. The top is bent downward; the bottom is bent up. If the cord is too long, it is shortened; if it is too short, it is lengthened. The policy of the *Dao* is to take from those who have too much and give to those who have too little. But that is not the human practice. We take from those who have too little and give to those who have too much. Who is it that has more than enough and gives his surplus to those in need? Only the follower of the *Dao*. The follower of the *Dao* acts without hope of gain, accomplishes but takes no credit, does not wish to lord it over others. [77]
83. Water is soft and yielding, but nothing can more effectively dissolve the hard and inflexible. Weak defeats strong. Soft defeats hard. This is well-known, but not easy to put into practice. Therefore, the *Dao*-Master says: He who takes upon himself the dirt of the nation becomes the master of its sacred soil; he who takes upon himself the evils of the land becomes a true king under Heaven. Straight words seem crooked. [78]

The Ideal Community (A Daoist Utopia)

84. Imagine a small country with a small population. They have lots of technology, but they use none of it. They take the prospect of death seriously and thus do not travel far from home. They have boats and carriages, but no one takes them out. They have weapons and armor, but no one takes them out of the armory. Instead of writing, they have gone back to the old system of cord-knotting. They enjoy their plain but good food, their simple but fine clothing, their humble but secure homes. They are happy with their way of life. The next country is so close that the crowing of the cocks and the barking of the dogs over there can be easily heard over here; and yet the people over here grow old and die without ever having been over there. [80]