



# TAO TE CHING

A BOOK OF THE WAY

The map is not the territory.

道可道非常道  
名可名非常名  
無名天地之始  
有名萬物之母  
故  
常無欲也以觀其妙  
常有欲也以觀其徼  
此兩者同出而異名  
同謂之玄  
玄之又玄  
眾妙之門

# 1

The Way that can be told is not the Way.  
No definition we can hold could have its name.

It begins without a name or definition.  
Ten thousand things mapped out is not the same.

Now...  
With our desire to have it named  
the off-map fades.

With no desire to have it named  
the off-map stays.

So...  
Wave after wave.  
Ongoing exchange.

You re-make your map.  
It remains unexplained.

Continue to explore  
what goes before  
your definitions.

Walk through  
door after door  
towards mastery.

天下  
皆知美之為美斯惡已  
皆知善之為善斯不善已  
故  
有無之相生  
難易之相成  
長短之相形  
高下之相傾  
音聲之相和  
前後之相隨  
是以聖人  
處無為之事  
行不言之教  
萬物  
作而不始  
焉而不辭  
生而不有  
為而不恃  
功成而不居  
夫唯弗居  
是以不去

## 2

Without exception...

When a good is decided, bad is compared.  
When a right is established, wrong is declared.

Likewise...

A something makes nothings.  
A difficult explains easies.  
A long describes shorts.  
A high arranges lows.

And vice versa.

Thus...

The Master thinks in not-so-split distinctions.  
Skill consists in not-so-strict instructions.

He always keeps the  
bigger picture.

Lets it go.

Ten thousand names  
and definitions.

Not imposed.

He creates but doesn't possess.  
He enacts but doesn't expect.  
He achieves but doesn't profess.

What succeeds is  
not a fixture.

On it flows.

不尚賢使民不爭  
不貴難得之貨使民不為盜  
不見可欲使民心不亂  
是以聖人之治  
虛其心  
實其腹  
弱其志  
強其骨  
常使民無知無欲  
使夫知者不敢為  
為無為則無不治

### 3

Without high positions  
there's no rivalry.

Without treasures to protect  
there are no thieves.

Without hoped-for preconceptions  
there's no problem disagreeing.

Thus...

The Master keeps the mind  
not-so-preoccupied.

The belly then  
stays filled.

No belief prized.  
All ideals set aside.

With unforced thought  
a natural order builds.

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

## 4

The Way gets poured away and yet remains.  
Like a river gets drawn upon and yet sustains.

The ten thousand things that come forth...  
As each of them follows its course...

It goes on in all ways.

The pointed smooths over.  
The tangled unwinds.  
The glaring fades.  
The dust settles.

The mystery stays.

I see no way  
we'd ever say  
this nature.

It's like a picture  
with no edge to frame.

天地不仁  
以萬物為芻狗  
聖人不仁  
以百姓為芻狗  
天地之間  
其猶橐籥乎  
虛而不屈  
動而愈出  
多聞數窮  
不如守中

## 5

The earth and heavens are impartial.

They discard all things in life  
without a passion.

The Master is impartial.

He discards all things in mind  
with that detachment.

See...

This living space of ours  
between the earth and heavens...

Is it not like a bellows?

An empty centre that gets filled  
by two-sided action...

A middle motion never stilled;  
in constant change...

Now...

Too much said here  
only breeds distraction.

But the void within  
is best if kept that way.

谷神不死  
是謂玄牝  
玄牝之門  
是謂天地根  
綿綿若存  
用之不勤

6

The Valley Spirit never ends;  
non-presence forever extended.

Background to figure;  
female in essence.

The doorway to knowing  
the whole earth and heavens?

Another one opens  
the moment you enter.

天長  
地久  
天地所  
以能長且久者  
以其不自生  
故能長生  
是以聖人  
后其身而身先  
外其身而身存  
不以其無私邪  
故能成其私

## 7

The heavens are endless.  
The earth lasts ages.

How can this be explained?

They're not products of themselves.  
That's how their growth is so sustained.

Thus...  
The Master puts himself back  
and it brings him forward.

By so much growth  
that's not his own  
he gets supported.

Odd how by this silence  
of himself so much is gained.

上善若水  
水善利萬物而不爭  
居眾人之所惡  
故几于道  
居善地  
心善淵  
與善仁  
言善信  
政善治  
事善能  
動善時  
夫唯不爭  
故無尤

## 8

The highest skill is like water.

Water fits all its  
conditions.

It's unforced.

It flows in the  
low places where  
others change course.

It finds alignment with the Way.

So...

A good house is shaped to its grounds.

A good mind is shaped to its doubts.

A good speech seeks truth.

A good strategy adapts.

A good action is  
well-timed.

So it lasts.

No course  
that we enforce  
secures things down.

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

9

Keep filling a bowl and it spills.

Good timing and distance;  
efficient and sufficient.

It's a practice with  
no end of skill.

See...

Overprized treasures are never secure.  
Oversharpened blades are quick to blunt.

Watch those who try  
to highlight their  
own worth...

They only ever  
undermine their work.

Move on from work that's over.  
Don't stray from the Way.

載營魄抱一  
能無離乎  
專氣致柔  
能如嬰兒乎  
修除玄覽  
能無疵乎  
愛民治國  
能無智乎  
天門開闔  
能為雌乎  
明白四達  
能無知乎  
生之畜之  
生而不有  
長而不宰  
是為玄德

## 10

Who can find the Quiet Mind  
and walk the path it creates?

Concentration held for days  
yet like a baby, soft-of-shape...

Preconceptions cleared away  
as the circumstances change...

Cooperation that sustains  
without needing to be made...

Opportunities and constraints;  
no rigid system put in place...

Unknowns and unexplaineds;  
they're allowed to remain...

You could call this  
'Hidden Practice'.

It creates without possessing.  
It enacts without expecting.  
It inspires without directing.

Untold Character.

三十輻共一轂  
當其無有車之用  
埴埴以為器  
當其無有器之用  
鑿戶牖以為室  
當其無有室之用  
故  
有之以為利  
無之以為用

## 11

We join thirty spokes at a wheel's hub.  
The hole in the middle moves the cart.

We mould clay into a pot.  
The emptiness inside makes it useful.

We build walls to make a house.  
The space is where we live.

Adapt what is.  
Use what is not.

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

## 12

The Five Colours blind people.  
The Five Tones deafen people.  
The Five Feelings numb people.

See...

Search replaces sensing.  
The Idea rides over the mind.

Thus...

Mastery begins  
with the actual things.

Not thoughts of  
What You Will Find.

寵辱若驚  
貴大患若身  
何謂寵辱若驚  
寵為下  
得之若驚  
失之若驚  
是謂寵辱若驚  
何謂貴大患若身  
吾所以有大患者  
為吾有身  
及吾無身  
吾有何患  
故  
貴以身為天下  
若可寄天下  
愛以身為天下  
若可托天下

# 13

Disgraced or praised.  
Same concern both ways.

What does that mean,  
"Same concern both ways"?

Status.

Our current place  
in others' estimations.

One fears for its loss.  
Another hopes for its gain.

Two different faces  
of the same preoccupation.

Passing phases  
in the oldest of games.

It's a shame  
there's no way  
to not play it.

Now...  
Align with the world  
or with how they portray it?

All portrayals fade.  
The world is what stays.

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

Look for it, you won't find it—it's not hidden.  
 Listen for it, you won't hear it—it's not faint.  
 Grasp for it, you won't catch it—it's not there.

None of those three  
could succeed...

Your attempts  
to make sense  
are all part of it.

You're not separate  
and it's not elsewhere.

---

So...  
It's neither bright nor dull;  
you can't push it or pull.

It refuses definition.

It's like trying  
to pull a thread  
of endless length.

So they give it odd names:

'The Unformed Form'.  
'The Elusive Truth'.

Void.

Inimitable.  
Un-image-able.

No face to meet.  
No back to follow.

The ancient Way...  
Still going today...

Only footprints.

古之善為道者微妙  
 玄達深不可識  
 夫唯不可識  
 故  
 強為之容  
 豫兮若冬涉川  
 猶兮若畏四鄰  
 儼兮其若客  
 渙兮若冰之將釋  
 敦兮其若樸  
 曠兮其若谷  
 渾兮其若濁  
 孰能濁以靜之徐清  
 孰能安以動之徐生  
 保此道不欲盈  
 夫唯不盈  
 故能蔽而新成

The wise men of old  
 were skilled in not being told.

They could learn on their own  
 in ways they weren't shown.

Profoundly aware of  
 the boundaries of  
 the unknown.

So...

What can we say of the way  
 they would face the unknown?

Stay ready.  
 Move through it like a winter river.

Stay uncertain.  
 Keep the possibilities alive.

Stay attentive.  
 Be its humble guest.

Stay smooth.  
 Turn the frozen wet.

---

Stay unfinished.  
 Don't carve the block early.

Stay undefined.  
 Let some things be murky.

Stay mixed.  
 Accept unsettled.

Whose muddy waters never settle  
 yet continuously clear?

Whose balance never centres  
 yet continuously appears?

Who walks this way?

Gaps not filled  
 yet not swayed.

The Incomplete Path.  
 The Enduring Frontier.

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

## 16

Nothing has a standalone existence.  
All things start from and end up in stillness.

So...

Ten thousand things have their beginnings;  
now it's their returns which we consider.

Each of them returns to the stillness  
it begins with—that's consistent.

When you live within  
what's consistent  
that's wisdom.

Ignoring it  
is dissonance.

Within what's consistent lies vision;  
the real picture unhidden.

The wise acceptance of conditions;  
clear judgement of limits.

In this your death  
if it's well met  
is no threat.

No source of resistance.

太上下知有之  
其次親譽之  
其次畏之  
其次侮之  
信不足焉  
有不信焉  
悠兮其貴言  
功成事遂  
百姓皆謂  
我自然

## 17

The highest leadership builds understanding.

Other leadership builds admiration.

Other leadership builds fear.

The lowest builds hate.

See...

Straight instruction isn't enough;  
it's never straightforward.

The Master gives  
this maximum  
importance.

He succeeds  
when other people say  
"We do it on our own, our way."

大道廢  
有仁義  
智慧出  
有大偽  
六親不和  
有孝慈  
國家昏亂  
有忠臣

18

Where the Way doesn't flow,  
'Correct' sets in stone.

Where wisdom is routine,  
deception succeeds.

Where families misalign,  
children honour and obey.

Where peoples divide,  
their Saints are ordained.

絕聖棄智  
民利百倍  
絕仁棄義  
民復孝慈  
絕巧棄利  
盜賊無有  
此三者以  
為文不足  
故  
令有所屬  
見素抱朴  
少思寡欲  
絕學無憂

## 19

Throw away 'Wise' and 'Adept'  
and people gain them times a hundred.

Throw away 'Proper' and 'Correct'  
and what's right can be discovered.

Throw away the polished success  
and advance unencumbered.

The three  
written here  
aren't sufficient.

So as a pair of  
more general  
conditions:

What's real is not ideal.  
Walk a path that isn't rutted.

絕學無憂  
 唯之與阿相去幾何  
 善之與惡相去何若  
 人之所畏不可不畏  
 荒兮其未央哉  
 眾人熙熙  
 如享太牢  
 如登春臺  
 我獨泊兮其未兆  
 若嬰兒之未孩  
 乘乘兮若無所歸  
 眾人皆有餘  
 而我獨若遺  
 我愚人之心也哉  
 沌沌兮  
 俗人昭昭  
 我獨昏昏  
 俗人察察  
 我獨悶悶  
 忽兮其若晦  
 寂兮似無所止  
 眾人皆有以  
 我獨頑且鄙  
 我獨異於人  
 而貴求食於母

Scrap the guidebooks.  
Save your worries.

What's the difference between  
"Good day Sir" and "Hello"?

Does it matter?

Must we all walk  
'The Single Course'?

Nonsense.

People fill up on that  
like starving guests at a feast.

I say keep listening  
like a baby figuring out speech.

They're good at their  
daily increase.

But what about the  
daily decrease?

Hack away at the unessential.

I must be a fool  
my mind is so empty!

---

People like light;  
but there's dark and unseen.

People seem sure;  
things seem doubtful to me.

People get fixed;  
they think everything stays.

I say...  
While they're trying to trap  
The Mother's tides...

Bring on Her waves.

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

## 21

Where character is real  
nothing is adhered to but the Way.

As in...

The Way you can't be told  
and no-one can say.

The words we read don't secure it.  
The images we see just obscure it.

The definitions are endless  
and constantly change.

Still...

All of those definitions  
share a lower description.

In ancient times  
and still today.

The specifics: all different.  
The pattern: the same.

How can that  
pattern be ours?

Keep going.

曲則全  
枉則直  
窪則盈  
敝則新  
少則得  
多則惑  
是以聖人  
抱一為  
天下式  
不自見故明  
不自是故彰  
不自伐故有功  
不自矜故長  
夫唯不爭  
故天下莫  
能與之爭

## 22

Before complete, there's unfinished.  
Before straightening, the path bends.

Before full, there's empty.  
Before renewal, expense.

Before opportunity, limitation.  
Before bewilderment, excess.

Thus...

The Master combines the two faces;  
not separate things but stages.

He looks for neither  
and sees clearly.

He clings to neither  
and moves free.

He targets neither  
and succeeds.

He lifts up neither  
without need.

The less he strives for one side  
the less unwelcome strife he meets.

希言自然  
故  
飄風不終朝  
驟雨不終日  
孰為此者天地  
天地尚不能久  
而況于人乎  
故  
從事于  
道者同于道  
德者同于德  
失者同于失  
同于道者  
道亦樂得之  
同于德者  
德亦樂得之  
同于失者  
失亦樂得之  
信不足焉  
有不信焉

## 23

The natural is succinct.

Strong winds aren't always blowing;  
heavy rains don't fall every day.

These are both natural movements;  
neither one too long sustained.

Why on earth  
should a person  
be different?

Watch those who make their great  
proclamations of the Way:

Notice...  
They deliberate over the Way  
as part of their Way.

They deliberate over its character  
as part of their character.

They deliberate over losing it  
as part of losing it.

Recall...  
Straight instruction isn't enough;  
it's never straightforward.

企者不立  
跨者不行  
自見者不明  
自是者不彰  
自伐者無功  
自矜者不長  
其在道也  
曰餘食贅形  
物或惡之

## 24

The tallest stance is not the firmest.  
The longest stride is not the fastest.

Those who try to seem brightest don't shine.  
Those who try to seem faultless make problems.

Only unapparent virtues need proclaiming.  
Only doubtful truths need defence.

The Way needs no overstatement.  
The Master needs no pretense.

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

All things go together  
in ways our concepts only seek.

Something like a 'silence'  
that stands alone and complete.

One whole course of action – no other aim.  
Continuous flow – nothing in the way.

Could we get this  
into everything?

There's no way to define it as technique.  
I call it the Way – a path walked, so to speak.

Don't dwell on its definition.  
Short form beats long description.

Walk the Way  
as your natural condition.

That's to say...

---

The Way is greater-than,  
and that matters.

The source of  
all great actions.

In step with the heavens'  
and the earth's greater patterns.

That's how all great leaders are fashioned,  
and great rule-making – if it happens.

See...  
In great rule-making  
all the greater domains enter.

The Way remains  
as the centre.

People in between the earth's  
and heaven's ways.

The Way each walks is theirs,  
but walked the same.

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

## 26

The heavy lays the roots  
under the light.

The steady sets the rules  
over the frantic.

Thus...

The Master keeps the heavy  
in everyday life.

He stays on course through  
flash and panic.

Now...

A leader with ten thousand  
wheels in motion...

Deep-laid roots  
under light-touch rules.

How it all  
remains unbroken.

善行無轍跡  
善言無瑕謫  
善數不用籌策  
善閉無關楗而不可開  
善結無繩約而不可解  
是以聖人  
常善救人  
故無棄人  
常善救物  
故無棄物  
是謂神明  
故  
善人者不善人之師  
不善人者善人之資  
不貴其師  
不愛其資  
雖智大迷  
是謂要妙

## 27

Expert steps are well-taken, not followed.  
Expert words are well-chosen, not echoed.  
Expert values well-reckoned, not shadowed.

It's not just tricks and locks;  
if you gather up keys, it won't open.

It's not like tying a knot;  
if you fasten it down, it's broken.

Thus...  
The Master discerns the experts  
then he always returns.

Back to his own course of practice  
with new ways to learn.

You could call this  
'Keeping The Lights On'.

The expert wasn't made by being expert.  
The expert was made by being not-expert.

So...  
Respect every good lesson;  
follow no-one without question.

No matter how clever,  
that's a fundamental error.

Doubt is essential.

知其雄守其雌  
為天下溪  
常德不離  
復歸于嬰兒  
知其榮守其辱  
為天下谷  
常德乃足  
復歸于朴  
知其白守其黑  
為天下式  
常德不忒  
復歸于無極  
朴散則為器  
聖人用之  
則為官長  
故大制無割

## 28

Knowing the masculine  
keep the feminine.

Go beneath.

The two are never separate;  
each brings the other into being.

Knowing the light  
keep the dark.

There's no seam.

The two are never distant;  
each holds the other's meaning.

Knowing the lofty  
keep the lowly.

Like a ravine.

The two are cut together;  
for each the other is needed.

See...

They're like bits of plain wood  
we split apart to make tools.

The Master makes use of  
the longest-lived rules.

But...

The Great System  
is not in pieces.

將欲取天下而為之  
吾見其不得  
天下神器  
不可為也  
為者敗之  
執者失之  
物  
或行或隨  
或噓或吹  
或強或羸  
或挫或隳  
是以聖人  
去甚去奢去泰

## 29

They try to force the world towards  
their liking—that won't happen.

The world itself has its own wealth  
of timings—can't combat them.

See...

It's those who wish  
the world were fixed  
who break it.

It's those who keep  
the tightest grip  
who lose it.

So...

Sometimes leading means you follow.  
Sometimes better means things worsen.

Sometimes strong means being weak.  
Sometimes victory means defeat.

Thus...

The Master knows  
you never know for certain.

He avoids  
excessive actions  
and extremes.

以道佐人主者  
不以兵強天下  
其事好還  
師之所居  
荆棘生焉  
大軍之後  
必有凶年  
善有果而已  
不以取強  
果而勿矜  
果而勿伐  
果而勿驕  
果而不得已  
果而勿強  
物壯則老  
是謂不道  
不道早已

30

Good rule-making  
makes room for the Way.

Forcing isn't how  
it's all maintained.

Force means opposition.

The path our army walks  
has many thorns.

The field after the war  
produces slower  
than before.

Thus...

The Master moves to action  
as trees give rise to fruit.

He doesn't go further.

He prevails  
but not for glory.

He succeeds  
but not for show.

He achieves  
not for distinction.

He guides  
not for control.

Overgrown means frail.  
What's not the Way

is not sustained.

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

Military excellence  
 means discipline  
 and hesitance.

There isn't joy in its deployment.  
 But there is in its development.

Those who walk the Way  
 are not untrained.

It's ever-present.

How they find success?  
 Two sides are kept.

Warrior right.  
 Civilian left.

Military excellence  
 means discipline  
 and hesitance.

They know warfare;  
 not the way it's dressed.

The task is adopted  
 if there's no better option.

The feeling is neutral at best.

The joy of victory isn't attractive;  
 it depends on others' deaths.

If you delight in requiring  
 that others are dying...

That's the highest  
 of dysfunctions.

Nothing less.

So...

For good times, the left side.  
 For bad times, the right.

The enemy gets a vote, as they say;  
 you don't always get to decide.

The two sides of life.  
 Can't leave either behind.

Develop them both.  
 Keep the funerals in mind.

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

## 32

The Way won't be defined.

That's a small and simple rule  
that will not be outsized.

Not by anyone.

When a rule-maker knows how to not-define well,  
ten thousand things can align by themselves.

The whole takes on a shape...  
It's like a sweetness-catching lattice.

There's no-one who controls it  
yet continuous rebalance.

The rules you make  
define a shape.

It's automatic.

The skill in this  
to minimise risk?

Remember to abandon.

Our ordered paths are to the Way  
as tiny streams are to the sea.

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

## 33

It's clever to know another's path.  
The truly able know their own.

It's impressive to compare to others.  
The truly great compare to none.

Some know sufficiency.  
They're the wealthy.

Some improve relentlessly.  
They work the belly.

There are those for whom  
those two cohere.

They go the furthest.

There are those who've died  
yet haven't disappeared.

They're not finished.

大道泛兮  
其可左右  
萬物恃之  
而生不辭  
功成而不名有  
衣養萬物而不為主  
可名于小  
萬物歸焉  
而不為主  
可名為大  
以其終  
不自為大  
故能成其大

## 34

Great actions are expansions of the Way;  
a mastering of the back and forth exchange.

See...

Ten thousand things' beginnings  
which it gives no opposition.

There's much achieved  
it gives no definition.

Ten thousand things it's fed  
without ruling their conditions.

Ten thousand things it's led  
without need of high position.

Ten thousand goals  
the future holds.

A high position?  
That's not in them.

Great actions can be made  
when being great is not the aim.

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

35

We're all drawn towards great stories;  
away from harms to guarantees.

Rich and blissful visions  
take their prisoners.

The Way?

It's far too bland  
compared to these.

Looked for, it's invisible.  
Listened for, it's inaudible.  
Worked for, it's inexhaustible.

將欲歛之  
必故張之  
將欲弱之  
必故強之  
將欲廢之  
必故興之  
將欲取之  
必故與之  
是謂微明  
柔弱勝剛強  
魚不可脫于淵  
國之利器  
不可以示人

## 36

Try to shorten it, that lengthens it.  
Try to weaken it, that strengthens it.

Try to undermine it, that reinforces it.  
Try to reduce it, that adds more of it.

It's subtle.

Flexible beats firm.  
Adaptive beats unyielding.

Just like the fish  
which can't live  
without water:

It's an active current  
that we must swim in.

It takes living skills  
which only build  
with practice.

It can't be given.

道常無為  
而無不為  
侯王若能守之  
萬物將自化  
化而欲作  
吾將鎮之  
以無名之朴  
無名之朴  
夫亦將不欲  
不欲以靜  
天地將自正

## 37

The Way has no set path of action;  
it's never just do this and don't do that.

If a great rule-maker stays on the Path,  
ten thousand things don't get told.

They adapt.

We fix desires  
on what worked prior.

These I'd say  
are hazardous to have.

Re-undefine.

Don't carve the block  
until it's time.

Outside your  
hoped-for notions  
all is not-so-misaligned.

上德不德是以有德  
 下德不失德是以無德  
 上德無為而無以為  
 下德無為而有以為  
 上仁為之而無以為  
 上義為之而有以為  
 上禮為之而莫之應  
 則攘臂而扔之

故

失道而后德  
 失德而后仁  
 失仁而后義  
 失義而后禮

夫禮者  
 忠信之薄  
 而亂之首  
 前識者  
 道之華  
 而愚之始  
 是以大丈

夫

居其厚  
 不居其薄  
 居其實  
 不居其華

故

去彼取此

Real character isn't a character.  
 That's why it has character.

Low character is only a character.  
 That's why it lacks character.

Real character can't be enacted.  
 There's no way to make it.

Low character can be enacted.  
 It's traits emulated.

See...

The most well-made actions  
 have no defined shape.

And the most 'Correct' actions  
 are shapes we must make.

Strict-order actions  
 that all of us hate.

You just obey  
 and imitate.

So...

You lose the Way through a character.  
 You lose character through 'Well-made'.  
 You lose well-made through 'Correctness'.

And past 'Correct' there's nothing left...  
 Just orders followed more or less.

Empty meditations aimed  
 at traces of the Way.

The source of  
 all sorts of  
 disorder.

Thus...

The Master takes care of the depths  
 and lets the surface sort itself.

Not gathered leaves  
 but rooted tree.

He builds upon  
 the way things are.

Not on 'What Should Be'.

昔之得一者  
 天得一以清  
 地得一以寧  
 神得一以靈  
 谷得一以盈  
 侯得一以為天下正  
 其致之  
 天無以清將恐裂  
 地無以寧將恐廢  
 神無以靈將恐歇  
 谷無以盈將恐竭  
 侯王無以貴高將恐蹶  
 故  
 貴以賤為本  
 高以下為基  
 是以侯王  
 自謂孤寡不谷  
 此非以賤為本耶  
 非乎  
 故致數與無與  
 不欲祿祿如玉  
 珞珞如石

The soul gets old and fades  
where it holds 'The One True Way'.

Only one idea is clear;  
one course of action must appear.

Only one belief in mind  
that blocks out all that's undefined.

Everything developing...  
all must be made to fit its shape.

Every king and rule-maker...  
they must enforce it with the state.

But...  
Ideas must fall to pieces  
in order to get clearer.

Actions must be adapted  
to match the arena.

The mind must keep still  
with gaps it can't fill.

These rules are learned  
by any leader.

---

So...  
Overvaluing is costly.  
Exalting too highly brings decline.

Thus...  
Below the most skilled leaders  
the ground is recognised.

They say, "Alone we  
have no value."

And so pay  
no such price.

See...  
The path of any chariot  
must be trodden.

The shining jewel  
stands high and bright.

Let the rocks not be forgotten.

反者道之動  
弱者道之用  
天下  
萬物生於有  
有生於無

40

When you enact 'The Way'  
you've gone against it.

When you apply 'The Way'  
you've lessened it.

Always...

These are bits of what it is  
turned into what it isn't.

上士聞道  
勤而行之  
中士聞道  
若存若亡  
下士聞道  
大笑之  
不笑不足  
以為道  
故

建言有之  
明道若昧  
進道若退  
夷道若類  
上德若谷  
大白若辱  
廣德若不足  
建德若偷  
質真若渝  
大方無隅  
大器晚成  
大音希聲  
大象無形  
道隱無名  
夫唯  
道善始  
且善成

High academics hear 'The Way'  
and they begin strict practice.

Half-academics hear 'The Way'  
and they go in and back out.

Non-academics hear 'The Way'  
and they joke and laugh loud.

Those who can't laugh  
have not left a path  
for the Way.

So...

You might say...

The 'Way Of Light' conceals.  
The 'Way Of Progress' sets back.

Their 'Path Of Equality' discriminates.  
Their 'High Character' is a low track.

Ways of 'Purity' are stains.  
Ways of 'Riches' create lack.

The intention does not  
match the impact.

See...

Great discipline is outside the boundaries.  
Great practice is not-so-complete.

There are sounds  
no-one hears.

There are things  
no-one sees.

The Way can't be made  
carved and concrete.

No definition, beginning or finish.  
No other way it's achieved.

They name 'The Way'  
and claim to have it framed.

With one, two, three,  
ten thousand separate things.

So many yangs  
wrapped up with yins.

Is it 'Harmony'?

Off-path: 'Grave Sin'.  
You must follow 'The Script'.

"Fear going on your own!"  
"Stick to the known!"

Yet all real acts of leadership  
require that we don't.

道生一  
一生二  
二生三  
三生萬物  
萬物負陰而抱陽  
沖氣以為和  
人之所惡唯  
孤寡不谷  
而王公以為稱  
故  
物或損之而益  
或益之而損  
人之所教  
我亦教之  
強梁者  
不得其死  
吾將以為教父

---

Notice...  
Things we think disastrous  
turn out as blessings.

Things we think blessings  
turn out disastrous.

I learned this  
same as others.

So...  
For those who force their  
'One True Course' of action:

No assurance.

Wisdom is in knowing  
things aren't certain.

That I'm sure of.

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

## 43

The softest things  
overcome the hardest.

The things with no set shape  
need pass through no set gate.

That's why there's such value  
in the No Set Path action.

But it can't be learned  
by studying words.

So many people  
never get its pattern.

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

## 44

Who you are, how you're known;  
which of them stays closer?

The way you act, what you own;  
which of them goes further?

What you have, what you don't;  
which is more disturbance?

Any extreme of these  
can have its cost.

A point at which  
more creates loss.

Recall...  
Good timing and distance;  
efficient and sufficient.

Deep roots and fertile soil  
make healthy crops.

大成若缺  
其用不弊  
大盈若沖  
其用不窮  
大直若屈  
大巧若拙  
大辯若訥  
躁勝寒  
靜勝熱  
清靜為  
天下正

## 45

Great achievements may seem incomplete.  
Great fulfillments may seem to deplete.

These aren't useless.

The straightest path may sometimes turn.  
The highest skill may seem unlearned.

The strongest part of speech  
may be the stammers  
not the words.

What goes frozen  
needs action.

What gets heated  
needs calm.

Steady progress on the Way  
may shape the world.

天下有道卻走馬以糞  
天下無道戎馬生於郊  
禍莫大於不知足  
咎莫大於欲得  
故  
知足之足  
常足矣

## 46

The world's horses are  
forces for cycling manure.

They weren't bred to fight  
on the frontlines of war.

See...

We can want things.

It's both our best  
and worst factor.

We don't know  
what enough is.

That's what makes  
our worst disasters.

The worst of our flaws  
is to just pursue 'More'.

When enough know enough  
the worst has a master.

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

## 47

You don't go through 'The Door'  
and then know everything for sure.

You don't look through 'The Window'  
and see the Way once and for all.

The further these grow  
the more they limit  
what you know.

Thus...  
The Master doesn't stay  
at what he knows.

He doesn't stop  
at what he's shown.

He doesn't aim  
at what he's done.

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

## 48

Deliberateness builds up in learning;  
the Way is in shaving it down.

More and more goes  
until free from The Known.

No do or don't  
to be found.

If The Known is your goal  
you make it unwhole.

Watch the Way be dethroned  
where The Known gets kept around.

聖人常無心  
以百姓心為心  
善者吾善之  
不善者吾亦善之  
得善  
信者吾信之  
不信者吾亦信之  
得信  
聖人在天下  
歛歛焉  
為天下渾其心  
聖人皆孩之

## 49

The Master's mind is not persistent;  
it's shapes to fit with its conditions.

Good in the good times;  
and good in the bad.

That's what good is.

Integrity when others show integrity;  
and when others show none back.

That's what integrity is.

Wisdom lives within the world;  
always part of larger actions.

All that we've caught  
in our structures  
of thought?

Temporary fractions.

出生入死  
生之徒  
十有三死之徒  
十有三人之生  
動之死地  
亦十有三  
夫何故  
以其生之厚  
蓋聞善攝生者  
陵行不遇兕虎  
入軍不被甲兵  
兕無所投其角  
虎無所措其爪  
兵無所容其刃  
夫何故  
以其無死地

## 50

Living is dying.

So...

One third for your living.  
One third for your death.

And one third for those  
alive after you've left.

These three each  
feed meaning.

Now...

Odd things are written  
on these three acts of living.

Some say, "The right mix  
brings a magic condition."

"You can face down wild beasts  
without fear you'd be bitten."

"No armour yet nowhere  
for spears to go into."

In what way  
is it true?

Those alive after you.

Any 'Way' that we make  
takes a charactered shape.

We separate things  
by their valuable traits.

That is:

Take anybody's world  
of separate things.

'The Way' and its character  
are embedded within.

---

Now...  
"Uphold the Way!"  
"Embody its character!"

It's never what's been named.  
It doesn't have any comparator.

So...  
Take all of the 'Ways' you make  
with their charactered shapes.

Find the ways they break  
then re-make them.

Less wrong.  
Less mistaken.

Let the unnameable  
be always reawakened.

Recall...  
It creates without possessing.  
It enacts without expecting.  
It inspires without directing.

Untold Character.

道生之  
德畜之  
物形之  
器成之  
是以萬物  
莫不尊道而貴德  
道之尊  
德之貴  
夫  
莫之命而常自然  
故  
道生之  
德畜之  
長之育之  
亭之毒之  
養之覆之  
生而不有  
為而不恃  
長而不宰  
是謂玄德

Without exception...

Everything has something else it started in.  
That's to say: a mother it's arisen with.

This mother isn't different  
from its children—it's included.

A complete picture of one  
gives you the other—disprove it?

Recall...  
In this your death  
if it's well met  
is no threat.

No source of resistance.

Now...

There's an opening in this non-difference;  
a door always there—it's consistent.

We might see it closed;  
as if things were that simple.

But really it's open;  
an uncertain existence.

Great wisdom is in that small distinction;  
great strength is softened to its state.

It lights the way;  
seeing with clear vision.

No self-induced  
disasters and mistakes.

You could call this 'Practicing  
Within What's Consistent'.

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

使我介然有知  
行於大道  
唯施是畏  
大道甚夷  
而民好徑  
朝甚除  
田甚蕪  
倉甚虛  
服文采  
帶利劍  
厭飲食  
財貨有餘  
是為盜竽  
非道也哉

## 53

People make Great Ways.  
Systems of adherence.

The cost is lots of pedantry  
and pointless interference.

They say 'The Great Way'  
for the narrowest lanes.

I see very tidy courts  
but fields of weeds  
and empty stores.

Fancy clothes  
and sharpened sword.

Sought-after things  
and life engorged.

It leads us to  
thieves and  
deceivers.

Not the Way.

善建者不拔  
善抱者不脫  
子孫以祭祀不輟  
修之於身其德乃真  
修之於家其德乃餘  
修之於鄉其德乃長  
修之於邦其德乃丰  
修之於天下  
其德乃普  
故  
以身觀身  
以家觀家  
以鄉觀鄉  
以邦觀邦  
以天下觀天下  
吾何以知  
天下然哉  
以此

## 54

Good grounding comes through  
what we can't uproot.

Good keeping comes through  
what can't be removed.

This practice leads to  
sacrificed ideals.

And to truths.

It leads you to real character.  
It leads your family to strong roots.

It leads a village to shared fruits.  
It leads a culture to fair rules.

It leads the world to ways  
that all together move.

Why do I think  
that's true?

I've applied this practice.

Real character has fathomless potential;  
infant-like and pre-developmental.

A venomous snake yet to bite.  
A crouching beast yet to fight.  
A predatory bird yet to strike.

It's soft-of-shape yet sure-of-grip;  
all male and female elements in sync.

Unlimited possibilities...

It shouts full-lung all day and then  
it rests its voice and goes again.

Endless poise...

There's always surface difference  
but the character is consistent.

Recall...

When you live within  
what's consistent  
that's wisdom.

The more we accord with it  
the more good we're delivered.

Those who try to force their  
hoped-for things into fruition?

Overgrown means frail.

What's not the Way  
is not sustained.

含德之厚  
比于赤子  
毒虫不螫  
猛兽不據  
攫鳥不搏  
骨弱筋柔而握固  
未知牝牡之合而全作  
精之至也  
終日號而不嗷  
和之至也  
知和曰常  
知常曰明  
益生曰祥  
心使氣曰強  
物壯則老  
謂之不道  
不道早已

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

## 56

Those who know don't say.  
Those who say don't know.

It can't be put in words  
and can't be told.

Recall...  
The pointed smooths over.  
The tangled unwinds.  
The glaring fades.  
The dust settles.

You could call it a  
'Never-defined Whole'.

It's not about attaching words.  
It's not about not attaching words.

They can't be fit to it.  
They can't not be fit to it.

It's not distinctive  
nor indistinctive.

What's really  
distinctive?

All of it.

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

We formalise a state  
by laws and their infraction.

We utilise an army  
by surprise and distraction.

We control the world  
by neither course of action.

Why do I think  
that's true?

Because:

---

The more you build  
that system of restrictions...

The more you stifle  
people's decisions.

As you force people to fit...

It means they don't  
use their own vision.

Over-specialise technique...

The more you find  
surprise conditions.

Just prohibit everything...

That makes more  
criminal positions.

Thus...  
The Master knows:

For people to adapt themselves  
you have to not do it.

For people to order themselves  
they must be left to it.

For people to stand for a value  
they have to choose it.

For people to handle untruth  
they must remove it.

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

## 58

In governing...

Handling great doubt is how to serve us.  
Pretending certainty does everyone disservice.

There's never fortune  
without bad circumstances.

There's never disaster  
without good circumstances.

Who thinks  
there's a list of  
finished answers?

Or rules?

A rigid set of rules begets surprise.  
Skill consists in not-predestined eyes.

Be sure  
this endures  
through your life.

Thus...  
The Master seeks:

To see wholes, not divides.  
To understand, not join a side.

To speak straight, not to deny.  
To shine a light, not to blind.

There's no course towards  
the highest accord.

It follows from real character  
which nobody can force.

So to order it:

Throw away restrictions;  
keep the least we can afford.

That's a condition  
for real character to form.

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

---

See...

It's ruled out by strict instructions.  
It's not some fixed construction.

The path to it is fathomless...

No end of recorections.  
Countless rebalances.

We can't say any  
more than this.

Likewise...  
Nations are created  
destinationless.

Unforeseen new changes  
keep sustaining us.

Lose this guarantee and  
we're foundationless.

To remain  
never stray  
from the Way.

The deepest roots  
are laid like this.

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

60

When you govern a big country  
as you'd fry a small fish...

And you allow the Way to permeate  
through everything there is...

So-called 'Sinful' and 'Unsacred' Ways?  
Not entirely sinful and unsacred.

So-called 'Sacred', 'Harmless-natured' Ways?  
Not entirely sacred or harmless-natured.

The craft must be re-mastered.  
Constraint may lead us wayward.

See...  
All things meet limits.  
Everything collides.

Real character.

The only way the  
harms are minimised.

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

## 61

Great nations are systems of lowest positions.  
The bottom-most places the world flows down into.

See...

Things collide in everything.  
Great means space for all of it.

You could say it's the feminine.  
Receptive to the masculine.

The main thing is  
the lowering.

Now...

The big picture lives downstream of the specifics.  
The specifics downstream of the big picture.

The back and forth exchange  
keeps them consistent.

In a great system:

The big picture  
doesn't hinge  
on individuals.

The specifics  
don't infringe  
on individuals.

Hope tries to find  
a 'Perfect Balance'.

Great goes lower down  
and not-so-static.

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

A map of separate things can't fit the Way.  
The moment it begins is when it's failed.

The skilled say:  
"I'll never reveal it."

The unskilled:  
"Protect and conceal it."

Well-placed words might be acclaimed.  
Well-praised acts might be ingrained.

They cannot guarantee  
a person wields it.

So...  
With no way for one  
to perceive it:

It's best to gather three  
to disagree with.

Each approach in part succeeds;  
all four is more strategic.

There's no comparison to progress  
on the Way when all four lead it.

Historically...  
Those who know don't say  
'The Way To Seek It'.

Any path like that  
gets superseded.

Welcome the adjustments  
as they're needed.

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

63

Move without thoughts about action.  
Do without thoughts about work.  
Taste without thoughts about flavour.

Thin them out  
and slim them down.

They're in the way  
of the behaviour.

They make complex out of simple.  
They make large out of small.

Take simple steps,  
things grow complex.

And out of this  
what's larger falls.

Recall...  
Great actions can be made  
when being great is not the aim.

So...  
Light preconceptions;  
less disturbance.

Simple things;  
complex emerges.

Thus...  
The Master walks his path  
without a complicated purpose.

其安易持  
 其未兆易謀  
 其脆易泮  
 其微易散  
 為之於未有  
 治之於未亂  
 合抱之木生於毫末  
 九層之台起於累土  
 千里之行始於足下  
 為者敗之  
 持者失之  
 是以聖人  
 無為故無敗  
 無持故無失  
 民之從事  
 常於几成  
 而敗之  
 慎終如始  
 則無敗事  
 是以聖人  
 欲不欲  
 不貴難得之貨  
 學不學  
 復眾人之所過  
 以輔  
 萬物自然  
 而不敢為

The idle path stagnates.  
 The risk-free path retraces.

The unchanged path is fragile.  
 The unwalked path is wasted.

These are ways of ease  
 by which disorder  
 gets created.

Great trees were once tiny seeds.  
 Great cities began as dirt heaps.

The thousand-mile journey  
 with all its uncertainty  
 begins at the feet.

---

Recall...  
 It's those who wish  
 the world were fixed  
 who break it.

It's those who keep  
 the tightest grip  
 who lose it.

Thus...  
 The Master doesn't.

---

As people cling to rigid ways  
 that all fix and break...

Beginning, middle, and end...  
 in mastery risk remains.

So he prefers No-Preference  
 and lets go of treasures.

He learns what's not a lesson  
 and knows human errors.

The world of separate things  
 will bring what it brings.

He adapts himself to that  
 and does so forever.

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

## 65

Skill is not a system  
of other people's wisdom.

Masters in the past  
fit their techniques  
to the conditions.

All clever things  
are symptoms.

Now...  
Nations get misled by what's clever.  
Their fortunes get fed by what isn't.

Learn to see both things  
and tell the difference.

You could call this  
'Seeing The Hidden'.

The Hidden isn't hidden  
but it isn't taught or given.

Each must walk their own path  
to this more comprehensive vision.

江海所  
以能為百谷王者  
以其善下之  
故  
能為百谷王  
是以聖人  
欲上民  
必以言下之  
欲先民  
必以身后之  
是以聖人  
居上而民不重  
居前而民不害  
是以天下  
樂推而不厭  
以其不爭  
故天下  
莫能與之爭

66

Watch the great rivers lead.

They're like the kings  
of many streams.

How can it be  
explained?

Because they go lower.

Thus...

When people elevate the Master  
he makes known his low path.

When people place him ahead  
he places himself back.

When he goes above  
it adds no weight.

When he goes in front  
it's no constraint.

Everyone moves free  
in their own way.

It means less striving overall  
and less unwelcome strife faced.

天下皆謂  
 我道大似不肖  
 夫唯大故  
 似不肖若肖  
 久矣其細也  
 夫  
 我有三寶  
 持而保之  
 一曰慈  
 二曰儉  
 三曰不敢為天下先  
 慈故能勇  
 儉故能廣  
 不敢為天下先  
 故能成器長  
 今  
 舍慈且勇  
 舍儉且廣  
 舍后且先  
 死矣  
 夫慈  
 以戰則勝  
 以守則固  
 天將救之  
 以慈衛之

Everyone says...

"The Way sounds very important  
but it doesn't make sense!"

If the Way were straightforward  
it would matter much less.

So...

If the great course of action  
can never be patterned...

Can we speak of three  
signature factors?

First: understanding.  
Second: efficiency.

Third: a map that knows  
it won't match the territory.

Understanding—the unknown;  
the walked path; the risk.

Efficiency—of action;  
always more done with less.

Map and territory—beliefs;  
never final; endless tests.

There are no guarantees;  
remove all false ideals.

Keep whatever is left.

Timeless principles  
will always manifest.

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

68

Good commanders can win without war.  
Good warriors are neither angry nor bored.

Good victories need not much accord.  
Good leaders go lower than it all.

See...

It's not about the conflict  
and confrontation.

It's strength of leadership  
and coordination.

Up to heaven.  
Down in history.

Extreme considerations.

用兵有言  
吾  
不敢為主而為客  
不敢進寸而退尺  
是謂行無行  
攘無臂  
執無兵  
乃無敵矣  
禍莫大于輕敵  
輕敵几喪吾寶  
故  
抗兵相若  
哀者勝矣

69

There's a military saying:

Beware to give orders but end up the guest.  
Beware to gain inches but end up with less.

You could call this  
'Advancing Without Advancing'.

Enforcement and less than nothing achieved.  
Hostility and less than nothing it yields.  
War and less than nothing seized.

Few threats are worse  
than when this cost  
is not perceived.

A weight that's  
underestimated.

A compounding leak.

It's imperative to prevent it  
for the real victory that we seek.

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

70

Speech simplifies.

We could never say the knowledge  
nor convey the course of action.

Specific words are just precursors;  
it's the task they do that matters.

See...

If we don't unlearn known patterns  
our own knowing can't happen.

To know on your own is uncommon  
yet nothing replaces that value.

Thus...

The Way laid down in words?  
That's for the showmen.

Some may say its  
substance has  
been spoken.

Know it hasn't.

知不知上  
不知知病  
夫唯病病  
是以不病  
聖人不病  
以其病病  
是以不病

71

To know what you don't know  
is knowing at its best.

To not know but think you know  
is a knowing defect.

Now...  
By defecting from a defect  
we stop its effects.

Thus...  
Mastery defects...  
and defects...  
and defects...

And the defects grow less.

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

72

When people don't fear force  
a greater force then flows.

Unrestrict their conditions of living.  
Unburden their patterns of growth.

Not burdening them removes  
a burden from you both.

Thus...

The Master doesn't see  
and yet he knows.

His will is not enforced  
yet it's composed.

Understood beats controlled.

When you engage in a way  
that's all preordained...

That will kill it.

When you engage in a way  
that's not preordained...

Then it lives.

It may bring you good or bad.  
Heaven gives no guarantee of which.

Thus...

The Master avoids overcomplicating  
and he avoids becoming fixed.

He moves in his way  
as Heaven moves in its.

---

So...

It can't be contended?  
Good: find the victory that fits.

It can't be dictated?  
Good: be responsive to this.

It can't be designed?  
Good: practice off script.

It's hard to predict?  
Then the strategy is...

Give some weight  
to every possibility.

There are many ways  
that everything may shift.

Don't carve the block too early;  
Heaven's doorways may be missed.

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

民常且不畏死  
奈何以死懼之  
若使民常畏死  
而為奇者  
吾得執而殺之  
孰敢  
常有司殺者殺  
夫代司殺者殺  
是謂代大匠斫  
夫代大匠斫者  
希有不傷其手矣

## 74

People can't be controlled by  
fear and threats of death.

For those who would try that  
what do you expect?

"All who transgress know what they'll get!"  
"So who would ever dare to overstep?"

But...

Now others are responsible  
for the penalty being met.

Reporting on someone else  
is the act of killing itself.

You could call it 'Displacing  
The Great Carver's Edge'.

In the end what you intend  
is not the lasting effect.

民之飢以其  
上食稅之多  
是以飢  
民之不治以其  
上之有為  
是以不治  
民之輕死以其  
上求生之厚  
是以輕死  
夫唯無以生為者  
是賢于貴生

## 75

When leaders feed on  
leaving people hungry...

That's how both get starved.

When leaders sort out  
all of people's difficulties...

That's how both lose charge.

When leaders decide  
the purpose of lives...

That's how light deaths start.

The exemplary  
do none of these...

That's what sets them apart.

人之生也柔弱  
其死也堅強  
草木之生也柔脆  
其死也枯槁  
故  
堅強者死之徒  
柔弱者生之徒  
是以兵強則滅  
木強則折  
強大居下  
柔弱居上

## 76

People are born soft and adaptive.  
They reach death hard and inflexible.

While alive they make their  
map of separate things.

Just like the trees  
make their green limbs.

Soft-of-shape in the beginning;  
at death all withered up and crisp.

So...  
The dying pattern: harden until fixed.  
The living pattern: soften at the tips.

Thus...  
Only force, never yield?  
Successes missed.

Same way branches  
snap if they won't give.

Strong towards the bottom,  
soft at the top, is how trees live.

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

77

The Great Way Of Nature  
is made of behaviours  
that act like a bow.

Pull-downs from highs; and lift-ups from lows.  
What's too much reduces; what's not enough grows.

Now...  
While the too-much reduces  
and the too-little grows...

People can walk  
off that road.

Reducing the already-too-little  
so the already-too-much overflows.

Who can use their too-much  
so it adds to the whole?

That's those who  
walk the Way.

Recall...  
He creates but doesn't possess.  
He enacts but doesn't expect.  
He achieves but doesn't profess.

The road will never  
reach 'The End'.

On it goes.

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

Nothing does soft-and-adaptive  
better than water.

Many hard things cross its path  
and each is thwarted.

See...

No simple method  
explains its way  
of succeeding.

Recall...

Flexible beats firm.  
Adaptive beats unyielding.

It's there for everyone to see  
yet no-one brings it into being.

Thus...

Amongst the things any  
Master could say...

Amidst a stream  
of constant change...

---

The way a nation tolerates  
mistake-making and failures...

You could call that  
its greatest cultivation.

The way disorder is absorbed  
and the misfortunes it affords...

What makes it great  
is reconfiguration.

Writing more strict laws  
may be an adverse adaptation.

和大怨必有餘怨  
安可以為善  
是以聖人  
執左契而不責於人  
有德司契  
無德司徹  
天道無親  
恆與善人

## 79

### A Great Injustice

If the way you'd set it straight  
is by an injustice you create...

How does that lead  
to a good place?

Thus...

The Master possesses debt  
which he never collects.

See...

With this character he handles  
a progressing interaction.

Without this character he adds  
to a perpetual imbalance.

Heaven's Way is never made  
by straightening history.

It's made by those who find  
the wiser action.

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

80

Back in the days of small nations  
and tribe populations...

The people would train militarily  
but not so they'd use it.

Every death was valued heavily  
but all remained rooted.

They had wagons;  
they wouldn't be ridden.

They had weapons;  
they wouldn't be shown.

They kept records of their trades  
using fine-knotted rope.

They exchanged food.  
They exchanged clothes.

They built their homes.  
They upheld their oaths.

Their neighbours would be close;  
their dogs heard barking.

People died by aging.

Not by wars of revenge  
that were never worth starting.

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

## 81

There are true words that aren't pretty.  
There are pretty words that aren't true.

There are those with good views  
who aren't convincing.

There are those who convince  
without good views.

There are those who know  
with no great learning.

There are those well-learned  
who never really knew.

See...

Mastery is not-so-acquired.  
The Way is not-so-pursued.

Each has their own course of action.  
Their real character and false truths.

Heaven's Way is not opposed to any.  
Always present in all that we do.

Thus...

The Master walks his path  
as one among many.

All rivalry removed.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

by Joe Kelly

Please write to  
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