

Who was Lao Tzu?

According to legend Lao Tzu lived in China 500 years before Christ. He was a contemporary of the Buddha and the reformer, Confucius. The story goes that Lao Tzu became disenchanted with the rules and regulations promulgated by Confucius and decided to leave China and find a place to live peacefully. He followed a trail that led to a pass in the mountains. There he came to the cabin of “the keeper of the pass,” who invited him to stay and rest. Sometime during his stay the keeper of the pass must have recognized Lao Tzu for he asked the sage to write down his understanding of life. Lao Tzu agreed. What resulted is now known as the “Tao Te Ching.” It is considered one of the great spiritual classics of all time.

Foreward

The wise man hears of Advaita, and at once becomes its embodiment; the ordinary man hears of Advaita, and half believes and half doubts; a foolish man hears of Advaita, and bursts out laughing.

Thus it is that in daily living, the path home seems to lead away from home; the short-cut seems too long; real strength appears weak; the easy way appears difficult; real happiness seems empty; true clarity seems obscure; genuine beauty goes unnoticed; the greatest love seems indifferent, and the greatest wisdom appears foolish.

The ultimate understanding means acceptance of what – IS, including what might appear as a mistake or something half finished. Being permanently connected to the source, honour and dishonour have no meaning for the man of understanding.

Strange it is, but the fact of life is that one seeks the Source—God, and That is all there IS, anywhere and everywhere.

Through Colin has come forth with great ease, a beautiful version of an old favourite.

This is a book that will always be welcomed as a guide to peace and harmony in daily living.

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Introduction

Forty years ago I came across the “*Tao Te Ching*.” I felt an immediate affinity for it. What the sage had to say was simple, straightforward and self-evident—which to me is the hallmark of truth. Since then the teachings have been engraved in my heart, particularly over the years I was privileged to sit at the feet of the Advaita Master, Ramesh S. Balsekar. As the rising sun illuminates all it touches, so Ramesh’s teaching illuminated Lao Tzu’s words.

This is not a new translation from the Chinese as I’m not familiar with the language. It came about as follows. From time to time I found myself reading the words of Lao Tzu, sometimes months would pass between readings. Each time I paid a visit, however, I invariably read aloud. Listening to what Lao Tzu had to say was like being in his presence. The utter simplicity of his teaching touched me deeply and a sense of peacefulness always accompanied each visit.

Lao Tzu is known as the father of Taoism. Although it is peculiar to China, the same basic teaching is found in India and is known as Advaita Vedanta, in Japan it is known as Zen and in the West as the Perennial Philosophy.

Three primary sources were used, a translation by D.C. Lau; Robert G. Henricks, of the Ma-wang-tui texts, and the translation of Gia Fu Feng. I also drew on the free flowing rendition of Stephen Mitchell and the translation of Witter Bynner.

The “*Tao Te Ching*,” was written some twenty five hundred years ago and from a context, with one important exception, of a culture quite different from our own. The exception? In Lao Tzu’s time, as in ours,

there was an emphasis upon rules and regulations that governed just about every aspect of daily life and thus inhibited one's freedom and the natural spontaneity of things.

With more literal translations the teachings can appear somewhat archaic and obscure to those unfamiliar with the basic concepts of Taoism. The teachings are, however, both timeless and universal, and when removed from the trappings of time and culture they point to a profound understanding of life, the utter simplicity of which enables one to live in effortless harmony.

In formulating this version of Lao Tzu's great spiritual classic I used the aforementioned translations to highlight and corroborate key points the master was making.

What follows are Lao Tzu's gems as I have understood them. May you find them as illuminating as I have.

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November, 2005

The “*Tao Te Ching*,” can be loosely translated as, “*The way of life*,” “*The way of Tao*,” “*The way of wisdom*,” or simply, “*The way*.”

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A note on the title. I once shared an office with a psychiatrist where the counseling rooms opened onto a common waiting room. At the time I was putting the finishing touches to this book. On the table amongst the magazines I made a point of leaving the most recent copy of the manuscript. Appropriately enough, it bore the working title, *Something To Ponder While You Wait*.

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A note on the layout of “*Something To Ponder*.” It seems that over the years several writers contributed to the texts that make up Lao Tzu’s, “*Tao Te Ching*.” Some verses seem unrelated to others under the same grouping. The verses that follow are separated so that each page represents a coherent aspect of the master’s teaching. In place of the traditional numbering small headings have been added.

In addition, the masculine tense is used but should be understood to represent both men and women.

Throughout the book certain words appear lighter than others. The purpose is to draw attention to a particular word, to give it a kind of subtle emphasis, in the hope it might cause the reader to approach it from a slightly different perspective than the one generally used.

What is the meaning of the word, “Tao?”

A number of people have asked as to the meaning of the word, “Tao.” (the T is pronounced like a D) As Lao Tzu states, “The Tao that is spoken is not the eternal Tao.” I would suggest that the reader approach this term slowly without knowing what it means and allow it to reveal itself.

Some have suggested the idea of the Tao refers to God. The idea of God, however, tends to create certain problems, not the least of which is to personalize God by creating an anthropomorphic projection. Another is to set up different definitions couched in theology and culture which have traditionally given rise to conflict, and in extreme cases, even war.

In the tradition of Judaism, the term “Yahweh” is used to denote or point to the idea of God. Hebrew scholars understood, however, that God could not be defined or captured by language. With that in mind they removed the vowels from the term “Yahweh” thereby preventing It from being voiced, and allowing It to remain the great mystery that It is.

A similar idea exists in Buddhism in that the whole concept of God is absent except perhaps in the idea of the “Void.”

From the perspective of Advaita Vedanta the idea of “Consciousness” is used. When one thinks about it, Consciousness is not an object of perception, it cannot be pointed to or defined, It is instead, pure subjectivity, essential to life—It is life— for without it no perception of the manifestation is possible.

Lao Tzu, had a disciple by the name of Chiang Tzu. I like his approach to language. What he had to say was this:

*Nets are to catch fish
When fish are caught
Nets are forgotten.*

*Traps are to catch rabbits
When rabbits are caught
Traps are forgotten.*

*Words are to communicate
That which lies behind them
When that is done
Words are forgotten.*

*In profound appreciation for the
mystery that is the guru.*

*To the beloved Master
Ramesh S. Balsekar*

Welcome!
What follows is...

Something to Ponder

*The Tao that is spoken
Is not the eternal Tao.
The named
Is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the source of all names
And the named the source of the ten thousand things.*

*When free of desire the mystery is revealed.
When subject to desire
Only the manifestation is seen.
Yet mystery and manifestation arise from the same Source
Differing only in name.*

*Mystery wrapped in mystery
The great Tao dreams
And life takes form.*



*When beauty is considered
Ugliness comes into being.
When good arises, bad is present as well.*

*Being and non-being arise together
Difficult and easy are a pair
Long and short define each other
That which is high rests on that which is low
Sound arises from silence
And afterward always follows before.*

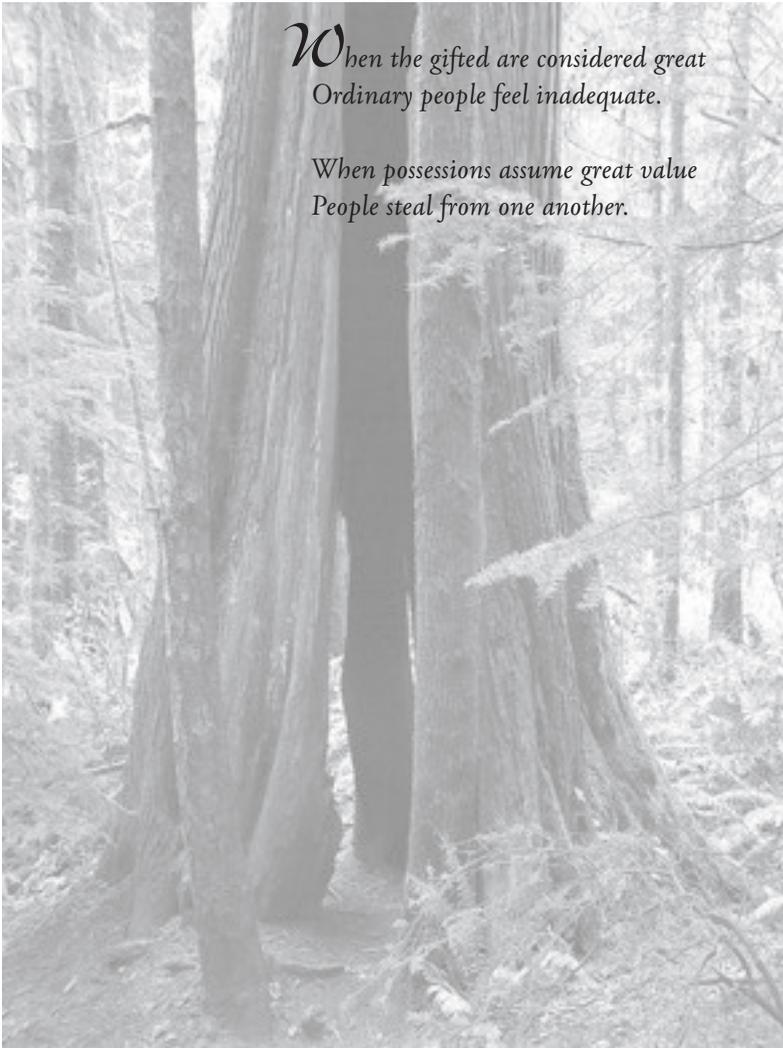
*These are complimentary opposites
And one cannot exist without the other
Such is the nature of life.*

*The master, understanding this
Acts without doing
And teaches without teaching.*

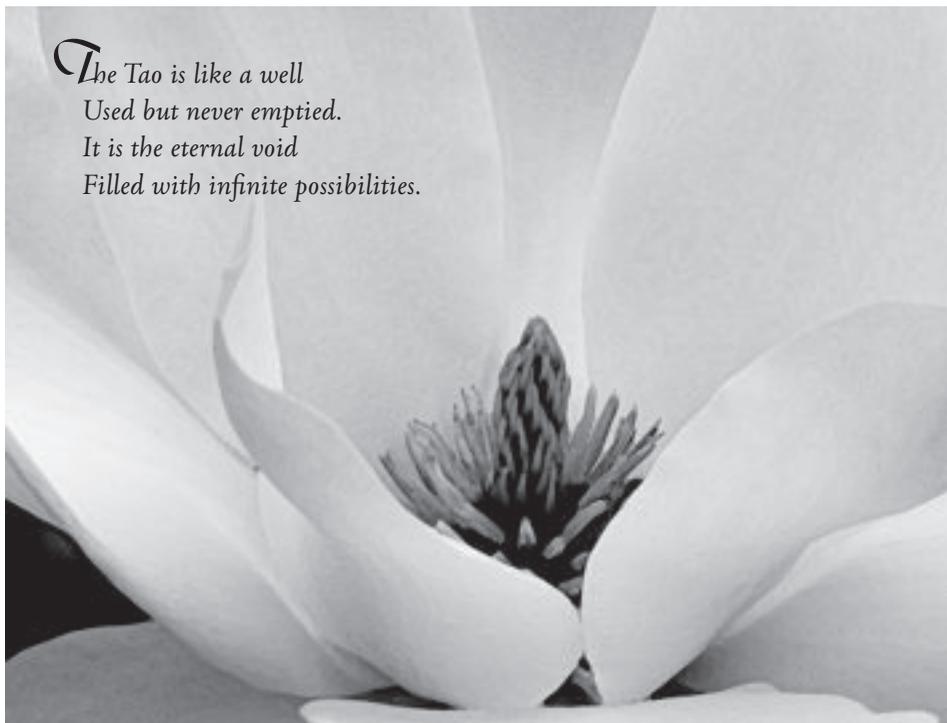


*When the gifted are considered great
Ordinary people feel inadequate.*

*When possessions assume great value
People steal from one another.*



*The Tao is like a well
Used but never emptied.
It is the eternal void
Filled with infinite possibilities.*



*The heavens and the earth are unreal
The ten thousand things an illusion.
To the sage, life's but a dream
And all mankind
Characters dreamed by the Tao.*



*The valley spirit never dies
She is the Primal Mother
The conduit of the eternal
Empty and inexhaustible.*

*Taken for granted
She remains unnoticed.
Ever present and always used
She is never exhausted.*



The Tao is eternal and infinite.

*What do you mean
“Eternal and infinite?”*

*Since it was never born
How can it ever die?*



The ultimate good is like water.

*Nourishing all things without effort
It flows to the low places
Rejected by many.*

That is why it is likened to the way.



*A bowl filled to the brim soon spills
An over sharpened knife soon dulls.*

*When money and security are sought
The heart is ill at ease.*

*When wealth and strength are flaunted
Disaster soon follows.*

*Care for the approval of others
And you become their prisoner.*

*When work is done without concern for results
Peace of mind is at hand.*

