

# Tao Te Ching

**Welcome.** This site is dedicated to the exposition and interpretation of the Tao Te Ching, perhaps one of the oldest books still in existence, and perhaps one of the most profound. The original text, written in ancient Chinese has been kindly translated and commented upon by someone I know not who, nor when. Whoever they are, they have the most profound grasp and understanding of the subject matter, and I honour them as a master. Of the many translations of the Tao Te Ching, this one, for me, is the most rewarding.

**How to use this book.** If you want to gradually transform yourself into someone who is in harmony with nature, who is in touch with their intuition to the point where they can see their interconnectedness with all things, then I recommend that you bookmark this URL and read one passage a day, preferably in the morning. But more than just read the passages, reflect upon them during the day, looking persistently for evidence in your own life of how the principles discussed in the passages apply in your world. Over time, a gradual transformation will occur. Your insight into the nature of the world will be honed to the point where you intuitively understand situations and people in ways that conventional school-based learning cannot teach.

For better results, download the book (zipped executable Rich Text Format) and do the above, but annotate each passage with your own observations and insights, as I have done on many passages (my annotation appears in *italics* at the end of each passage)

## Introduction

The Tao Te Ching, the ancient Chinese "Book of the Tao" was written by philosopher Lao Tzu around 2500 BC. Not a religion, Taoism resembles modern Physics in that it describes the nature of the universe, the laws that govern it and the ideal ways that a person might place themselves in harmony with those laws. As the oldest surviving book, it shows that the simpler and more in tune with the laws of Nature something is, the longer it will endure.

Taoism is about seeking the middle path through life; avoiding extremes, threading a surefooted way between opposites so lightly and so reasonably that no act is followed by a reaction. The middle path means there no need to suffer the consequences of an act. In terms of the doctrine of Karma, it means knowing how to avoid bad reactions (bad karma).

The practice of Taoism is basically about discovering who you are, learning to sense the world around you directly. To contemplate your impressions deeply. It advises against relying on ideologies because to do so will rob your life of meaning and cut you off from your intuition. It is intuition that should be cultivated because this is the only way to really know the world. By having an intuitive understanding of the world you are in a position to predict the future and be able to position yourself so as to achieve your goals.

Lao Tzu believed that an awareness of the physical laws as they operate both in the universe as a whole and in the minds of people gives a person the power to direct events without resorting to force. How is this done? Use attitude instead of action and influence others by guiding rather than ruling. The object is to avoid using means that will elicit a counter-reaction. Lao Tzu noticed that in Nature, an excessive force in a particular direction tends to trigger the growth of an opposing force, and therefore the use of force cannot be the basis for establishing a strong and lasting social foundation.

The Tao Te Ching is a challenge. It challenges you to see the world as it actually is by accepting the stark truth of the physical laws that control existence and evolution. It challenges us to discover intellectual independence wherein we have complete trust in our own perceptions and instincts. It challenges you to reject force and rely rather on the steady force of your attitudes to influence others. See the following topics for more detail:

?? What is the Tao?

?? The Tao of Power

?? The Tao of Nature

## What is the Tao

No one actually knows where the Tao Te Ching came from, but this slim book of about five thousand words forms the foundation of classical Chinese philosophy. Simply stated, the book explains an evolving force called Tao that operates throughout the universe; and it describes the personal power that comes from being in step with the Tao, that is known as Te. The word Ching means classic." Throughout the twenty-five-hundred-year history of the Tao Te Ching, hundreds of translations and commentaries have been published--more than fifty in English alone--making it, next to the Bible, the world's most-translated classic. The book has found an audience in each new generation and never seems to lose its provocative intellectual value. In this age, the Tao Te Ching has been rediscovered by physicists, who find in it remarkable correlations with their theories of the universe. The Tao Te Ching, moreover, is being explored by psychologists and business leaders who hope to understand that quality of the oriental mind that makes it so centred and insightful in world affairs and economics. The book casts a spell over those who contemplate it; it is a magnet for minds with the potential to influence society. Indeed, influencing society is what the Tao Te Ching is all about.

According to legend, the book was written by Lao Tzu, a gifted scholar who lived nearly twenty-six centuries ago and worked as the Custodian of the Imperial Archives during the reign of the Chou Dynasty. Lao Tzu experienced a time of political unrest not unlike our own. His world was divided into hundreds of separate provinces, each with its own laws and leaders. He saw a build-up of arms and hostilities as each province competed for political supremacy. Every aggressive act was met with further hostility and aggression, until it seemed to the war-torn people of China that they stood on the threshold of complete destruction and that their world would finish as a wasteland.

## The Tao of Power

The Tao Te Ching explores a remarkable power that is latent in every individual. This power, that Lao Tzu calls Te, emerges when one is aware of and aligned with the forces in nature (Tao). It is essential to Lao Tzu's system that we understand why and how reality functions, and that we come to realise that nature invariably takes its course. We already know that it is rarely worth the effort to swim upstream, but do we know that way the stream is flowing? We realise that it is difficult and unsatisfying to cut across the grain, but can we see that way the grain runs? Lao Tzu believed that a constant awareness of the patterns in nature will bring us insights into the parallel patterns in human behaviour: Just as spring follows winter in nature, growth follows repression in society; just as too much gravity will collapse a star, too much possessiveness will collapse an idea.

Like all matter and energy in the universe, the emotional and intellectual structures that we build are constantly transformed by outside forces. Much of our power is wasted in propping up our beliefs, defending them, and convincing others to believe in them so that they might become "permanent." Once we understand the folly in this, we gain power by using the evolution in nature to our advantage--accepting, incorporating, and supporting change when and where it wants to occur. Our cooperation with the forces in nature makes us a part of those forces. Our decisions become astute because they are based on a dynamic, evolving reality, not on fixed or wishful thinking. We are able to see things that others might not because the reach of our minds is extended through the contemplation of the universe. We develop vision and we help create the future with the power of our vision.

Lao Tzu believed that when people do not have a sense of power they become resentful and uncooperative. Individuals who do not feel personal power feel fear. They fear the unknown because they do not identify with the world outside of themselves; thus their psychic integration is severely damaged and they are a danger to their society. Tyrants do not feel power, they feel frustration and impotency. They wield force, but it is a form of aggression, not authority. On closer inspection, it becomes apparent that individuals who dominate others are, in fact, enslaved by insecurity and are slowly and mysteriously hurt by their own actions. Lao Tzu attributed most of the world's ills to the fact that people do not feel powerful and independent.

## The Tao of Nature

Lao Tzu was perhaps the first theoretical physicist. He devoted all of his intellectual energy to observing nature and its physical laws and to noting the interdependent relationship of all things. He saw a unified field of forces that he called Tao, but because what he saw could not be expressed in a logical, analytical fashion, he conveyed it through paradox. The eighty-one chapters in his small book are riddled with self-contradictory phrases: "The Tao illuminated appears to be obscure. The Tao advancing appears to be retreating. It is the form of the formless; the image of nothingness." Lao Tzu used paradox to provoke an unusual awareness in his readers, and to help explain the patterns and cycles, the parity and complementarity, that he saw superimposed on reality by the physical forces in the universe. The most striking of these patterns, central to the Tao Te Ching, is that of polarity.

Polarity arises from the Taoist view of the cosmological origins of the universe: Before existence there was an idea--an Absolute. The Chinese call it T'ai Chi, the Supreme Ultimate. The Absolute, in a sudden and tremendous desire to know itself, divided itself from non-existence in a cataclysmic event resulting in endless cause and effect--an event that neatly parallels the so-called Big Bang Theory. Instantly, space was formed and time began, and two charged states came into being, yin (negative) and yang (positive). As a result of the complementary polarity of yin and yang, matter and energy, that were at first undifferentiated, separated and regrouped into the physical reality that became our universe.

Lao Tzu believed that everything that exists comes into reality through the polarity of yin and yang. He called the specific physical laws and cycles that control and govern reality the Tao, and suggested that the actions of the Tao reflect the purpose of a larger entity (the Absolute). So if reality came about because the Absolute wanted to know itself, then our evolutionary destiny must be to help it get a good look by investigating, observing, and emulating nature.

In the Taoist view, developing an awareness of the laws of nature, especially as they manifest themselves in human culture, is a major component of personal growth and evolution. Lao Tzu believed that people and their attitudes and actions are inseparable from the physical phenomena surrounding them; and that either might alter the reality of the other. Since the advent of quantum mechanics (the mathematics that describes the interactions that take place at the sub-atomic level), scientists have become intrigued with the link between human awareness and the workings of the universe. Quantum mechanics seems to suggest that the sub-atomic world and even the world beyond the atom--has no independent structure at all until defined by the human intellect. Werner Heisenberg, who transformed physics when he developed this concept in 1927, notes: "Natural science does not simply describe and explain nature; it is a part of the interplay between nature and ourselves.... What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning." A new generation of physicists are now postulating that a universe cannot even come into existence unless it contains the possibility of life. They suggest that we live in a participatory universe where all reality and physical laws are dependent upon an observer to formulate them. Lao Tzu would clearly concur.

Conceiving of a universe where reality is shaped through the force of the intellect (and vice versa) may be somewhat easier for physicists than it is for the rest of us, but it is a concept that is indispensable to anyone seeking powerful insights into the ways of the world. All investigations--whether at the atomic level or at the level of our own cultural behaviour--yield more refined and accurate information when approached from this paradoxical point of view. Fortunately, the structure of the brain and the bilateral processes of the mind can make effective use of this form of thought.

The brain accepts all types of information from all stimuli simultaneously, and the mind processes it in the form of emotional responses, intuitive feelings, and logically formulated analyses. In the West, we rely almost exclusively on logical analysis. We are encouraged to think in a linear fashion, using words and numbers to draw conclusions about our work and our lives. These logical functions, according to neurological research, are performed by the left hemisphere of the brain. At the same time, we learn to discount aesthetic or intuitive information--a right-hemisphere function--because it is considered less valuable to our culture. Thus we find ourselves primarily concerned with measuring events and analysing their meaning,

rather than creating and directing their flow. We are taught to ignore the intuitive or irrational, no matter how strong these "gut feelings" might be. As these right-hemisphere feelings are repressed we lose touch with our intuitive mind and our insights become increasingly rare.

Lao Tzu believed that intuitive knowledge was the purest form of information. For that reason, he expressed his philosophy in the form of thought experiments--mental exercises designed to enhance and evolve the intuitive skills. In the Tao Te Ching, he compels us to use intuition as an equal partner with logic, and encourages us to combine our cognitive understanding of the world around us with a strong personal vision. Neurologically, we might call this a "whole-mind" approach, wherein the spatially and aesthetically astute right hemisphere of the brain is put into use along with the analytically and logically oriented left hemisphere. In this way, we gain a holistic and precise view of reality because we are also perceiving mood, change, and possibility--the mood of the times, the change as society evolves, and the possible future we might create. It is the view of the artist, the philosopher, the visionary--a view that has always carried with it the power to influence the world.

## The Tao in Nature

This group of twelve passages discusses the basic physical laws underlying Taoist philosophy; the cosmology of the Tao and the origins of the universe. It is best understood using a scientific point of view.

The twelve passages are as follows:

?? The Nature of the Tao

?? Perceiving the Subtle

?? Using What Is Not

?? The Essence of the Tao

?? Knowing the Collective Origin

?? The Tao of Greatness

?? The Evolving Tao

?? The Way

?? Mastering the Paradox

?? Knowing Polarity

?? The Power of Impartial Support

?? Nature's Way

## The Nature of the Tao

"The Tao is not the source of the universe - the Absolute - rather it describes the way everything in the universe changes, evolves. It is a distilled representation of a greater reality."

The Tao is a unified field of forces. Like a mathematical formula it is both empty and beautiful; and like a formula it can be used again and again. We can perceive the reality of the Absolute by studying the Tao in the same way that we can understand mathematics by studying its principles. For example if we understand the formula  $\pi r^2$  we can use it to calculate the area of any circle whether the size of an atom, our planet or a galaxy.

The Tao permeates nature. It moves through the world as an omnipresent influence, levelling extremes - smoothing and harmonising - and evolving the universe and all things in it.

We can no more remain unaffected by its influence than a naked person swimming in the ocean can remain dry. Enlightened people learn to recognise it's ways and harmonise their actions with those ways. This is the way to human happiness and success in our endeavours. (1)

## Perceiving the Subtle

"The Tao is like a subtle female in the sense of having archetypal feminine characteristics - it is passive, receptive, tranquil."

"A subtle person does not attempt to use force to achieve their ends because it invites an equal and opposite reaction. Rather they work at the underlying cause and with comparatively little effort bring about the result they want. This is being subtle because to an observer they have apparently not done much.

The key to the mysterious power of the Tao lies in its subtlety."

Our perception of reality is like being in a large valley - we can see the valley and everything in it and it seems like a lot. But the boundaries of the valley obscures what lies beyond. In this metaphor it is the source of creation - the underlying cause of the valley - that lies beyond.

The Tao is like the entrance to the valley; it connects the source of creation beyond with the interior of the valley that we can see. By studying the way the Tao functions we can see a reflection of the source of creation that lies beyond what we see around us.

Enlightened people know that when they are in step with the Tao in worldly affairs, their endeavours can be completed effortlessly. (6)

## Using What Is Not

"In the same way that doors and windows cut into the wall of a room are what makes the room useful, the Tao is that vital component that is 'not there' but that is indispensable to the process of change."

"In the same way that a missing electron causes atomic events, it is the Tao that inspires natural events. It acts as a catalyst; it causes a reaction but remains unchanged during the process."

So like the physicist in the laboratory, Enlightened People know that it's possible to use what is not there to shape events in the outside world.

To manifest an effect, they create a sense of absence that the forces of nature are compelled to resolve. This intellectual integration with the laws of nature is what allows Enlightened People to position themselves effectively in the world.

Take advantage of what is there by using what is not there. (11)

## The Essence of the Tao

"The Tao can be looked at but not seen, listened to but not heard, reached for but not obtained; its name is formless, soundless and intangible. Therefore it is beyond analysis, it can only be known by the intuitive mind."

"Unlike the rising sun, it is not bright; unlike the setting sun, there is no dimming of the light when it sets. Endlessly this nameless essence of the Tao goes on, merging and returning to nothingness."

That is why the ancients called it the form of the formless, the image of nothingness. It is why they called it elusive; when confronted it cannot be grasped.

The nature of Tao can be understood by knowing what it is not. Awareness of it cannot be reached via the senses, only by the intuitive mind and by its observed effects in the environment, on people's ideas, and on society.

World events occur in repeating cycles, over and over again. Enlightened people learn to recognise these recurring patterns and develop the ability to trace events back to their origins. In doing this, the enlightened person comes into closer contact with their own intuitive mind.

With an intuitive understanding of the patterns of life, the outcome of events can be predicted and steps taken to affect the outcome.

The essence of the Tao is that an observer can have an effect on the observed through tactical observation. (14)

## Knowing the Collective Origin

"The power we observe in Nature is expressed through the Tao. But we can't sense the Tao directly, we can only observe it's effects. Like a powerful magnet, we can't directly see the magnetism but we can see the effect it has on ferrous metal."

"The Tao is an informed force. It brings power to those who are aware of it because the collective-unconscious urges and the social trends of our culture directly parallel the physical laws that operate through the Tao."

"Enlightened people contemplate the interdependent cohesiveness of matter and energy; the way it is held together and in a state of constant evolution by the power of this informing principle, this life force that we call the Tao. When looking about at the patterns of nature, we can see that some kind of *informing principle* underlies and permeates nature. This force - the Tao - expresses itself in the diversity of life and in the amazing complexity and cohesiveness of the processes of nature."

The thousands of life-forms around us - both animal and plant - are all expressions of the same life-force. These life forms, ourselves included are all subject to the same laws of nature - we are all born, gather strength, reach a peak, go into decline and then die. There are no exceptions, only variations in outer form and the length of the lifecycle. The same can be said of cyclones and human societies.

These laws of nature - the Tao - are expressed on a higher level, that of our unconscious mind and in the patterns of our social behaviour. Enlightened people gain influence by learning to recognise and identify with these underlying laws of nature. That way, they can predict future trends and take early action, place themselves in the right place at the right time.

The Collective Origin is a way of saying that the informing principle that underlies space and time is the same state that preceded the Big Bang. Reaching further back, before the bang Enlightened People seek to identify with the Absolute - the creative state that exists outside of time and space, ever engaged in creating realities such as this one. (21)

## The Tao of Greatness

"There was something in a state of fusion in the moments before heaven and earth were born. Silent, vast, independent and unchanging; working everywhere, tirelessly; it can be regarded as the mother of the world. This is the Taoist view of the universe moments before the Big Bang that created the universe. The Tao had come into existence but all matter and energy was still a cohesive and undifferentiated mass."

"This view agrees with that of the theoretical physicist searching for the unified field at the heart of the universe. In the first billionth of a second after the bang, four forces appeared; gravity, strong nuclear force, electromagnetism and weak nuclear force. Energy and matter, time and space were now differentiated. Lao Tzu calls the actions of these forces throughout the universe and in the social patterns of humans, the Tao."

"I do not know it's name; the word I say is Tao. Forced to give it a name, I say great. Great means that it goes on forever, so far that it comes back, eventually."

The Tao is great because it is cyclic; given enough time, history repeats itself. The movements of the Tao follows the laws of nature, and the power of Taoism lies in perceiving and understanding the manifestation of those laws in society.

Enlightened people intuitively perceive the evolution of society and so are able to guide themselves and others towards harmony and fulfilment. (25)

## The Evolving Tao

"The Tao is everywhere and in everything. All things depend on it for growth and it always supplies what is needed. It is the life force that evolves all matter and energy. It acts spontaneously and without motive or possessiveness - an automatic process."

"Enlightened people learn to recognise the Tao and allow it to evolve their social environments in the same way as the natural environment. They instinctively and deftly untangle the knots and smooth the fabric of life and allow the need for growth, creativity and independence in those around them to be fulfilled."

People are drawn to inspiring individuals who allow the greatness (the Tao) to work through them. Lao Tzu believed that to emulate the behaviour of the Tao would bring individuals into the closest possible harmony with actual reality and true meaning in life.

A life that shares, in its aims, the purpose of the universe, will also share in its greatness and significance. That life comes to embody the universe and truly demonstrates the fact that the macrocosm (universe) is reflected in the microcosm (person). (34)

## The Way

"Polarity is the movement of the Tao. Receptivity is the way it is used. The world and All Things were produced from its existence. Its existence was produced from non-existence."

"According to Lao Tzu, it was from non-existence - the Absolute - that the Tao was produced. The Tao, in turn, produced the positive and negative states Yin and Yang. These charged states coalesced into all physical reality, with their behavioural and structural characteristics based on a unified field of forces."

These forces, or physical laws reflect the actions of the Tao. The Tao operates through polarity, a physical law that governs cause and effect. Similar to Newton's law that every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

In social realms this manifests in such cycles as easy and difficult, passive and active. The law of polarity changes and evolves all things by acting upon extremes. Extremes are overcharged and begin moving in their opposite direction. Those who follow the Tao avoid extremes and practice moderation and receptivity. In this way they gain power by moving with the prevailing forces. (40)

## Mastering the Paradox

"When enlightened people hear of the Tao, they work hard to practice it. When average people hear of the Tao, they appear both aware and unaware of it. When fools hear of the Tao, they roar with laughter. Without the foolish laughter, the old sayings would not be true: the Tao illuminated appears to be obscured. The Tao advancing appears to be retreating. The Tao levelled appears to be uneven."

"Superior power appears to be low, great clarity appears to be spotted, extensive power appears to be insufficient, established power appears to be stolen and substantial power appears to be spurious."

"The greatest space has no corners, the greatest talents are slowly mastered, the greatest music has the rarest sound and the Great Image has no form. The Tao is hidden and nameless yet it is the Tao that supports and completes."

Those who follow the Tao continually look beyond present reality in an attempt to perceive the seeds of change. They know that all reality is subject to the process of change, the cycle towards the opposite - life to death, positive to negative, energy to matter - and then back again. By recognising and understanding the law of polarity as it is countlessly manifested gives enlightened people great insight into worldly affairs.

Enlightened people know that unintuitive people can be dangerous to work with since they are guided solely by the current appearance of things that are, in reality, changing. Unintuitive

actions and decisions lack dimension and may interfere insensitively with the natural process of change and cause counter-reactions.

Enlightened people seek out others who have intuition and vision - a form of intelligence comes from cultivating the instincts, observing the direction of change and apprehending the evolution of ideas. (41)

*Mastering the paradox means looking past the effect to the underlying cause. Seeing the cause provides insight since it is the underlying pattern that influences past, present and future events. When we look at the last 1,000 years of European history, we see a pattern of unification emerge. From a multitude of small states has come a single European Union via a tortuous process of war and peace that has merged the smaller states into larger. This movement of the Tao from positive to negative and back to positive many times has evolved Europe into a single entity. Given this tendency towards unification, we can expect the trend to continue. In the future, Europe will probably consolidate itself as an integrated entity and look beyond its borders, seeking to become united with its neighbours. This is how we can look beyond present reality of Europe and see the seeds of change at work.*

## Knowing Polarity

"The Tao produced the One, the One produced the Two, the Two produced the Three and the Three produced all things. All things carry Yin and hold to Yang; their blended influence brings harmony. People hate to be alone, lonely and unfavoured; yet leaders take these names."

"So in natural law, some lose and in this way profit; some profit and so lose. Those who are violent do not die naturally."

"This is Lao Tzu's description of the creation of the universe. Before the One there was the Absolute that stands outside of space and time, outside of the Universe it creates."

The Tao produced the One: temporal/spatial reality. The One produced the Two: the opposite charges of positive and negative (yin and yang). The Two produced the Three: matter, energy and the physical laws that bind them together. From these three came the existence of all things in the universe.

All things are interconnected and interdependent, and from this concept comes the behaviour of polarity: when something increases something else decreases. So it is that enlightened people who wish to endure do not put themselves above others, and if they wish to live long, are never violent.(42)

## The Power of Impartial Support

"The Tao produces, it's power supports. It's natural laws give form to the universe, it's influence brings about the completion of all matters. And so it is that all things respect the Tao and value it's power, if they did but know what to call it."

"The Tao therefore advances, cultivates, comforts, matures, nourishes and protects. It produces but does not possess that that it produces. It's subtle power is such that it acts without expectation and advances without dominating.'

The Tao is completely indifferent to that that it produces, but it's movement tends to favour those that follow a spontaneous and natural path. It's power can be used by those who align themselves with it's current influence.

To unenlightened people who do not follow the Tao (i.e. go against the grain of their own natures) the Tao is still indifferent. The only result of this is a difficult life path.

In the East, the universe is generally regarded as an illusion, and the source behind it - the Absolute - is viewed as impersonal. It is an intelligence that creates and supports matter and energy for the sake of it's own manifestation.

Therefore in the Eastern view, people who maintain an attitude of impartiality, in emulation of the laws of nature, are able to use the subtle powers to shape their own destiny. (51)

*The Tao is the indefinable thing spoken of with reverence by every culture as they try to express the underlying cause of the universe and our lives in it. In this picture the Tao is the split arch within the larger arch (the world as we know it). The background is the unified field of natural forces operating throughout the universe.*

*The Tao is like a huge river flowing so very slowly and we are swimming in it. The flow equates to the gradual evolution of the world, measured in millennia. To see the direction of flow, we need to step back far enough to gain perspective. This stepping back is the Taoist perspective.*

## Natures Way

"Those bold in daring will die, those bold in not daring will survive. Of these two, either may benefit or harm. Nature decides that is evil, but who can know why? Even enlightened people regard this as difficult."

"The Tao in nature does not contend, yet skilfully triumphs. Does not speak, yet skilfully responds. Does not summon, yet attracts. Does not hasten, yet skilfully designs. Natures network is vast, so very vast. It's mesh is coarse, yet nothing slips through."

In the Taoist view, the way of nature is considered the ideal in behaviour - we should model our behaviour on the way nature works. It is a pattern to be followed so as to place ourselves on the path of least resistance, in step with the Tao.

Nature is described as an infinitely large network, a unified field of physical laws that influence all actions, all thoughts and all natural phenomena.

Nothing escapes the laws of nature, and nothing escapes nature's notice and reaction. The Tao in nature is intelligent and powerful. It achieves it's plan without effort and it responds to potentially unbalancing extremes with precision and accuracy. (73)

## The Tao in Awareness

This group of 14 passages further explores the physical laws operating in Nature as well as the basic philosophical assumptions in Taoism. The passages are in the form of thought experiments: awareness exercises that can be used to expand the mind and cultivate the powers of intuition.

The passages are as follows:

- ?? Holding to the Centre
- ?? Non-competitive Values
- ?? Controlling the Senses
- ?? Expanding Identification
- ?? Knowing the Absolute
- ?? Losing the Instincts
- ?? Sensing the Insensible
- ?? Power Without Motive
- ?? Using Emptiness
- ?? The Art of Survival
- ?? Returning to Insight
- ?? Establishing a Universal View
- ?? Gaining Oneness
- ?? Knowing the Disease

## Holding to the Centre

"Heaven and earth are impartial, they regard all things as transitory. Enlightened people are also impartial, they regard all people as transitory and as such have no emotional attachment to them. This is seeing people like the leaves on a tree. They are born, flourish, serve a purpose then die to be replaced by another leaf. It is natural that they do this and are beautiful in their way."

"People are not normally sad when a leaf dies; but people and leaves differ in their outward form and not in their inner nature, they are both living creatures that are subject to the laws of nature. Impartial also means not being too involved with the day-to-day concerns of society - the current issues that come and go."

"Between heaven (non-physical aspect of nature) and earth (physical aspect) the space is like a bellows. The shape changes but not the form. The more it moves, the more it produces."

"Too much talk will exhaust itself, it's better to stay centred."

"Heaven and earth reflect the actions of the Tao in worldly affairs. Because the Tao acts impartially in nature, enlightened people do so as well. They know that they must look at human-kind impartially if they are to gain perspective on themselves and their place in the world."

Evolved people are nonetheless compassionate in their intellectual and emotional independence. Because they are centred, they spontaneously react with benevolence. To hold to the centre is to listen to the voice of the inner mind - an extension of the mind of the universe. To follow one is to be in harmony with the other. This is the path to self-discovery. (5)

*The inner mind is an extension of the mind of the universe - listening to it leads to discovery of self and of the universe too. The picture shows a macrocosm (the universe) and a microcosm (a person) - one is a reflection of the other. The best way we can come to understand the world in that we live is to strive to know ourselves. When we know ourselves we become wise. As a bonus, the same knowledge can be then applied to better understand the world around us. We can apply our understanding of self, gained by listening to the inner mind, to the greater world outside since the laws of nature apply equally to everything in the universe.*

## Non-competitive Values

"The highest value is like water. The value in water benefits all things and yet does not contend. It stays in places that others disdain, and therefore is close to the Tao."

"The value in a dwelling is location, the value in a mind is in its depth, the value in relationships is benevolence, the value in words is sincerity, the value in leadership is order, the value in work is competence, the value in effort is timeliness. Since they do not contend, there is no resentment."

Water is a recurring image in the Tao de Ching that is used to describe the action of the Tao and so the behaviour of enlightened people - those who spontaneously bring benefit or progress to situations without causing a backlash of resistance or resentment.

Like water, enlightened people do not aspire and compete to reach high places, rather they are content with a lower place. This Taoist view runs contrary to the popularly held belief that one must contend and struggle in order to achieve success.

The values mentioned in this passage can only be attained with a fully expanded perspective: i.e. to achieve location one must know the whole; to achieve depth, one must realise the full possibilities; to achieve benevolence, one must comprehend human nature; to achieve sincerity, one must know inner truth; to achieve order, one must know the entire structure; to achieve competence, one must know the results of a perfectly executed task; to achieve good timing, one must hold in mind both the past and the future.

With such a breadth of awareness, following conventions is unnecessary since the instincts and intuitions that develop lead unfailingly to fulfilment. (8)

*Enlightened people emulate the Tao by bringing benefit to a situation without incurring a backlash of resistance or resentment.*

## Controlling the Senses

"The five colours will blind one's eye, the five tones will deafen one's ear, the five flavours will jade one's taste. Racing and hunting will derange one's mind, goods that are hard to get will obstruct one's way."

"Therefore, enlightened people regard the centre and not the eye. Hence they discard one and receive the other."

"To follow the Tao, one must carefully control the input to the senses in order to refine their insights and maintain an accurate perspective on the world. A cacophony of sights, sounds and tastes, together with an accelerated, materially oriented life will stand in the way of accelerated character development and inner clarity.

"Enlightened people know that intellectual independence and social freedom come from controlling the senses. Wang Pi, an early commenter said "The centre nourishes by receiving inward material things. The eye enslaves by directing the senses outward to material things. Enlightened people care little for appearances."

In order to reach the centre - to cultivate and hear the intuitive mind - enlightened people limit their desires. When desires are under control, internal growth begins. Being free of desire for superfluous possessions, free of the desire for praise or the fear of blame brings great personal power.

Those who have powerful uncontrolled desires have limited possibilities in life; those who are attached to little are free to experience all. (12)

*People with powerful, uncontrolled desires have limited possibilities in life; those who are attached to very little are free to experience all." It is like the fellow who just can't leave the women alone. He goes from one woman to the next finding no lasting satisfaction with any of them. It's an addiction that keeps him locked in a cycle in that little else matters. On the other hand there is the image of the person who has withdrawn from earthly life to live in a retreat and contemplate his or her place in the universe. They live quietly and simply, with very little sensual stimulation. Every culture has them, just as every culture has their libertines.*

*This concept links with passage 35 'Sensing the Insensible' that says "When there is music together with food, the audience will linger. When the Tao is expressed, it seems without substance or flavour and therefore is not very interesting to people accustomed to gaining satisfaction from the senses." Most people in the world will say the monastic life would be insufferably boring.*

## Expanding Identification

"There is alarm in both favour and disgrace in that to attain either brings alarm, to lose either also brings alarm."

"Esteem and fear are identified with the self. This is because the reason for our fear is the presence of our self. When we are selfless, what is there to fear?"

"Therefore those who esteem the world as self will be committed to the world. Those who love the world as self will be entrusted with the world."

Strong desires that are dependent on outside events or on the whims and judgements of others lead people away from the cultivation of personal power.

Lao Tzu suggests that favour or disgrace (the pursuit of honours/recognition and the fear of losing face) leads people to identify with their own self instead of the world (and so the Tao). By limiting external dependencies and moving towards emotional independence, people reach a state where their intuition is finely honed and the instincts can be trusted. This state leads to self-love and self-understanding. People who have mastered themselves in this way are not ego-centric and their sense of identity reaches out into the world around them.

Once this expanded awareness is attained, enlightened people have a choice: they can identify with the world and its favours and disgraces and become committed to working within it, or they can love and accept it in all its many forms. Those who love and accept the world with compassion have the ability to guide the world and direct its future. (13)

*Expanding identification helps to remove the fear of death. It is the presence of 'self' that causes fear. When we are self-less, there is nothing to fear. To love the world as though it were myself and I will be entrusted with it and be given the ability to direct its future. To achieve this, one must have expanded identification.*

## Knowing the Absolute

"Attain the highest openness; maintain the deepest harmony. Become a part of all things. In this way I perceive the cycles. Indeed, things are numerous; but each cycle merges with the source. Merging with the source is called harmonising; this is known as the cycle of destiny."

"The cycle of destiny is known as the Absolute; knowing the Absolute is called insight. To not know the Absolute is to recklessly become a part of misfortune."

"To know the Absolute is to become tolerant; what is tolerant becomes impartial; what is impartial becomes powerful; what is powerful becomes natural; what is natural becomes Tao. What has Tao becomes everlasting (like the Tao te Ching) and free from harm throughout life."

Lao Tzu describes the Tao - the Absolute - and expresses his belief that one must contemplate the Absolute in order to fully comprehend the patterns of the Tao and the destiny of the universe in that it operates.

This passage is an awareness exercise wherein the mind is encouraged to expand and be placed in intimate identification with the universe and its reach for consciousness. The universal mind will reciprocate efforts made to know it in an attempt to meet halfway. Worldly expectations, desires and fixations slip away and are replaced by receptivity, openness and integration.

Those who follow the Tao touch on the mind of the universe with their own - they merge their consciousness with the emergent consciousness of the universe and so become one with the Tao, gaining insight.

These insights include an understanding of the physical rhythms and cycles of the universe as they are reflected in the ways of society. They are able to predict the resolution of events and step out of the way of danger. (16)

*Merge with the cycles of Nature. There is nothing in the universe that doesn't behave in cycles. Everything in the universe, all living creatures and inanimate things each have their own unique cycle, and they harmonise, each with all the rest. As conscious beings with freedom of choice, many humans have lost the awareness of the harmony that exists all around. As individuals, people have a mind-set that sees itself as being separate from the rest of the world. Enlightened people can restore their sense of harmony and oneness by being in tune with that part of their minds that always knew they are one with all things.*

## Losing the Instincts

"When the great Tao is forgotten, philanthropy and morality appear. Intelligent strategies are produced, and great hypocrisies emerge. (Philanthropy is good in itself, but it can too easily develop selfish motives and lose its value)".

"When the family has no harmony, piety and devotion appear. The nation is confused by chaos and loyal patriots emerge. (Family in this context means the six relationships - parent/child, elder sibling/younger sibling, husband/wife and refers metaphorically to all relationships)"

Taoists believe that human instincts are basically good. When people lose touch with their instincts righteousness and loyalty are created by the intellect to remedy the ensuing social deterioration. Only when a society is corrupt does morality become an issue. Only when relationships are false-hearted do people speak of piety and devotion. Only when a nation is divided does the patriotic spirit arise.

According to Lao Tzu, the enforcement of the virtues mentioned above does violence to the human instincts; they deaden spontaneity and rob people of their emotional independence and their sense of personal power. Those who preach morality have lost the Way; those who rely on external systems to interpret their experiences are also adrift.

*Being philanthropic is good in itself, if it is done because one truly wants to do it. Often though it is done for the sake of appearances, and that is not good. The same applies to any activity I might undertake. If I do it because I truly want to do it, that's good - I'm going to be in touch with my feelings and intuition while doing the act. If, on the other hand I do something out of a sense of obligation, the doing of the act is unsatisfying, I'm not in touch with my true feelings because it was someone else's feelings that gave rise to the act.*

## Sensing the Insensible

"Hold fast to the Great Image, and the world will come. Yet its coming brings no harm, only peace and order."

"When there is music together with food, the audience will linger. When the Tao is expressed, it seems without substance or flavour and therefore is not very interesting to people accustomed to gaining satisfaction from the senses."

"We observe and there is nothing to see. We listen and there is nothing to hear. We use it and it is without end."

This passage describes a state of mind that leads to an awareness of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things. Lao Tzu warns us that the contemplation of the Tao may seem dull or difficult since it is not apprehensible via the senses.

Yet he promises that an awareness of the cohesiveness of the universe - the Great Image - leads the beholder to a rich and powerful understanding.

The key to the Taoist perspective is to experience the complete cohesiveness and integration of one's environment while functioning effectively in the outside world.

Such lives take on extraordinary meaning.(35)

*Making the effort to constantly look for the ways in that the world around us is one big interconnected system pays dividends to the observer. Since people generally look for sensual gratification, are addicted to it, contemplation of the Tao seems boring since there is no sensual gratification in it. It is like studying a very abstract subject at university.*

*Contemplating the interconnectedness of all things brings a powerful understanding of life. It make it possible to intuitively know what is happening in society, how to act in given situations and where events are likely to lead.*

*For example, since the laws of nature have brought forth life on this planet it seems almost certain that there is life on other planets. The same laws of nature operate everywhere in the universe. so if those laws have caused life to evolve here, then why not elsewhere?*

## Power Without Motive

"Superior Power is never Powerful, thus it has Power. Inferior Power is always Powerful, thus it has no Power. Superior Power takes no action and acts without motive. Inferior Power takes action and acts with motive."

"Superior philanthropy takes action and acts without motive. Superior morality takes action and acts with motive. Superior propriety takes action and there is no response; so it raises it's arm to project itself."

"Therefore, lose the Tao and Power follows, lose the Power and philanthropy follows, lose the philanthropy and morality follows, lose the morality and propriety follows,"

"One who has propriety has the veneer of truth and yet is the leader of confusion. One who knows the future has the lustre of the Tao and yet is ignorant of it's origins. Therefore those with

the greatest endurance can enter the substantial, not occupy the veneer; can enter reality, not occupy its lustre. Hence they discard one and receive the other."

Evolved power is irresistible because it is based on substance and reality and is free of motive. Power that has degenerated into force involves complex strategies and social manipulations because it is based on appearance and illusion.

Lao Tzu believed that morality is the invention of leaders who cannot find truth in themselves and thus are unable to trust others to conduct themselves appropriately.

But even more dangerous to the independently-minded Lao Tzu was propriety - conduct that requires study, memory and occasional hypocrisy to follow. He believed that propriety would contaminate with motive the inherently good and truthful instincts of humans. (Propriety refers to ceremonies, rituals and social forms of culture; the current standards of social behaviour) (38)

*Don't be tempted to chase the kind of power that means control over society through force and cunning. The best kind of power is that that appears like no power at all due to its subtlety. Overt power causes one to become superficial, concerned with appearance and protocol. Real power derives from being in close identification with the deeper reality of the world. On the surface, this seems like no power at all.*

## Using Emptiness

"If the greatest achievement is incomplete, then its usefulness is unimpaired. If the greatest fullness is empty, then its usefulness is inexhaustible."

"The greatest directness is to be flexible, the greatest skilfulness is to be awkward, the greatest eloquence is hesitant."

"Agitation triumphs over the cold, stillness triumphs over the heated. Clarity and stillness bring order to the world."

Enlightened people never push anything to an extreme state - not even positive achievements - because they know that when things are too full they are difficult to use effectively. Only when a cup is empty is it most useful, only when an accomplishment is open-ended does it continue to grow.

Lao Tzu believed that the world would become naturally organised and useful if extremes are avoided and insights cultivated into the laws of nature.

The "cold" mentioned in this passage refers to inanimate things that need vigorous action in order to transform them into useful tools for people.

The "heated" that is overcome by stillness refers to humans who require centredness and clarity to evolve into useful contributors to the collective awareness of the world. (45)

*If leaving the world a better place for having lived in it is the measure of a useful life, then one of the best ways is to contribute to the collective awareness of the world. I am not defining the subsequent actions that people might perform, I am defining the intellectual motivation - the blueprint - for the action. The form that the action takes will be suited to the time and place in that it is performed.*

*An enlightened person can contribute by becoming still and centred - tranquil. Tranquillity is achieved by avoiding extremes and cultivating insights into the laws of nature. Avoiding extremes allows you to avoid counterreactions - the karma of your original action. Taking a middle path avoids extremes allows you to thread your way between opposites so lightly and so reasonably that no act is followed by a reaction, and so there is no need for you to suffer the consequences of the act.*

## The Art of Survival

"As life goes out, death comes in. Life has thirteen paths. Human life arrives at the realm of death also in thirteen moves. Why is this so? Because life is lived lavishly. (People who live life in the fast lane spend their life force more quickly and so die younger)."

"Now, as it is well-known, those skilled in attracting life can travel across the land without meeting a rhinoceros or tiger. When the military come in, their defence cannot be attacked."

"The rhinoceros is without a place to thrust its horn, the tiger finds no place to fix its claw, the military have no place to admit its blade. Why? They are without the realm of death."

The thirteen paths mentioned here refer to the human senses and their apertures. Enlightened people carefully control and monitor what goes into and out of their senses, practising moderation to limit output to be less than input. They know that the life force grows stronger when the energy received from the senses is used for internal growth.

A strong life force creates certain invulnerabilities in life. Lao Tzu believed that people are protected from harm not because they are lucky but because they do not cultivate weakness (the realm of death).

Therefore, enlightened people don't put themselves into a position where they are vulnerable to attack or misfortune. They are aware that as life goes out, death comes in, so they preserve their energy and engage in life-enhancing pursuits.(50)

*The flame that burns twice as bright burns half as long (thank you BladeRunner). The key to a long life is to do the following. Practice moderation in consumption and activity. Harmonise with the cycles of nature Limit output to be less than the input of one's senses. To know oneself to be one with a fully integrated universe in that everything is connected with everything else. Taoist monks routinely live well into their second century by practising these principles.*

## Returning to Insight

"The beginning of the world may be regarded as the mother of the world. To apprehend the mother, know the off-spring; to know the off-spring is to remain close to the mother and free from harm throughout life."

"Block the passages, close the doors; in the end, life is idle. Open the passages, increase the undertakings; in the end life is hopeless. To perceive the small is called insight. To remain yielding is called strength. If, in using brightness, one returns to insight, life will be free of misfortune. This is called learning the Absolute."

Mother is another word for Tao. Her offspring is everything in the universe. This passage suggests observing the physical laws governing matter as a way of perceiving the Tao. When one perceives the Tao, life holds no fear, for the mind expands and becomes familiar with the unknown.

In this passage, two ways of approaching the outside world are described. In one, people shut down their senses and cut off external influences; in the other they open wide their senses and lose themselves in earthly endeavours. Both approaches have unfortunate consequences: one lacks meaningful undertakings, the other is hopelessly entangled.

Instead, Lao Tzu suggests a strategy to lend stability to worldly perceptions and avoid difficulties. One should continually augment one's external view of the world with information from one's intuitive mind. This develops a sense of the continuous processes and patterns of life. The cultivation of instinct and intuition is indispensable to the development of an evolved mind. (52)

*Live life fully aware of the world around, but practice using intuition to interpret the world. Make using intuition a habit so that the way I understand the world is based on intuition and not on theories and ideologies originating from outside myself. Intuition can be cultivated by learning to recognise the laws of nature as they apply to the world around.*

*For example, one day I went to a topless bar and had a powerful urge to have sex with the barmaid because I could see her breasts. This information from my senses and my reaction to the 'stimulus' could be interpreted as nature giving all living creatures the desire to reproduce. It's a simple 'knee-jerk' reaction from a healthy male. Because I then understood that it was a natural reaction I knew there was nothing to feel guilty about, as a religion might have me believe. If I had then cheated on my wife, that would be bad and be cause for guilt. But since I dismissed the whole thing, my conscience was clear. If I'd been religious, there would have*

*been guilt, simply for having had a natural feeling. So it's better to understand things using your intuition and not someone else's idea of what is 'right' or 'wrong'.*

## Establishing a Universal View

"What is skilfully established will not be uprooted. What is skilfully grasped will not slip away. Thus it is honoured for generations."

"Cultivate the inner self; it's power becomes real. Cultivate the home; it's power becomes abundant. Cultivate the community; it's power becomes greater. Cultivate the organisation; it's power becomes prolific. Cultivate the world; it's power becomes universal."

"Therefore, through the inner self, the inner self is conceived. Through the home, the home is conceived. Through the community, the community is conceived. Through the organization, the organisation is conceived. Through the world, the world is conceived."

"How do I know the world? Through this."

This passage describes the global perspective used to gain insight into the interdependent relationship between the individual and the outside world. Beginning with the smallest social unit - the self - and continuing on through the family, the community, it's governing body and world society, wherever Taoist concepts are applied, intelligent energy is enhanced.

In order to align those social units with the Tao, their underlying patterns must be perceived by constructing in the mind a vision of an ideally operating social unit, one that functions in a non-contentious, appropriately supportive and socially aesthetic manner.

In order to conceive of an ideally functioning world, enlightened people cultivate the inner mind. The power of a world vision in an evolved mind helps to draw that ideal into reality. (54)

*A Taoist perspective can be achieved by recognising the interdependence of and similarities between the microcosm (the self) and the macrocosm (the universe). What is within ourselves is a reflection of the larger reality outside of ourselves. The major difference being the scale. The ancient Greeks believed that to "know thyself" was the key to wisdom and the way to understand the workings of the universe. In the same way, we can understand ourselves by observing the way in that the world behaves.*

*This passage says that one can create a better world by first creating within ourselves an image of an ideally functioning world, made up of self-realised people living in happy groups that are organised into well-founded communities etc. all the way up to a enlightened world.*

## Gaining Oneness

"Those who know, don't speak; those who speak, don't know."

"Block the passages, close the door, blunt the sharpness, untie the tangles, harmonise the brightness, identify with the ways of the world. This is called Profound Identification."

"It cannot be gained through attachment, detachment, advantage, disadvantage, esteem or humility. Hence it is the treasure of the world."

The first line of this passage is perhaps the most quoted from the Tao Te Ching. Lao Tzu maintains that if one's understanding of the world is based primarily on a teaching or source that comes from outside the inner mind, then it is not a natural structure of the universe but rather the temporary structure of a culture. As such, it is no use to those who follow the Tao since they rely on impressions from the intuitive mind that evolves and changes with the universe.

To cultivate the inner mind, enlightened people who follow the Tao engage in thought experiments that unleash the intuitive powers and promote intellectual independence.

Enlightened people control external input, neutralise aggression, simplify their plans and strategies, and put their awareness into harmony with the social and environmental patterns.

In other words they achieve oneness with the evolving universe - that is, Profound Identification. Because this state of mind cannot be reached through social or intellectual strategies, people

who achieve this state cannot be used or coerced. They have achieved personal power through incorruptible simplicity and inner truth. (56)

*Intellectual independence, or not relying on external ideologies to understand the world is essential for people wanting to know the world directly. Independence allows the intuitive mind to develop.*

## Knowing the Disease

"To know that you don't know is best. To not know of knowing is a disease."

"Indeed, to be sick of the disease is the way to be free of the disease. Enlightened people are free of the disease because they are sick of the disease. This is the way to be free of the disease."

Enlightened people are always aware that there is something they don't know. In the Taoist view, it's considered a great misfortune to be unaware of one's ignorance, whether in interpersonal matters, worldly affairs or within the self.

Those who are developing personal power learn to recognise an ever-evolving universe of information they are yet to experience.

This attitude is paramount to the personal development of the enlightened person. It frees them from the decline that comes from being too full and too complete to grow further. (71)

*It is vital to have an open mind to remain aware of an evolving intellectual environment. New ideas emerge - some worthy some not. By a combination of openness and intuition, one can decide for oneself if a new idea has merit.*

*For example, the 'green' movement is gathering strength around the world. Their agenda is to place the long-term health of the environment ahead of short-term economic gain. Those people who are vehemently opposed to 'green' ideas have closed their minds to these new ideas about preserving the environment. They are unaware of their own ignorance.*

## The Tao in Projection

A group of sixteen passages that are a set of thought experiments that help people to use attitude and conduct to cultivate personal power and influence within their environment.

The sixteen passages are as follows:

- ?? The Beginning of Power
- ?? Using Polarity
- ?? Transcending Decline
- ?? Inner Harmony
- ?? The Power in Subtle Force
- ?? Developing Independence
- ?? Following the Pattern
- ?? The Steady Force of Attitude
- ?? Self Mastery
- ?? The Power in Needing Less
- ?? Opening the Mind
- ?? Knowing the Tao
- ?? The Power in Flexibility
- ?? Directing the Power
- ?? The Power in Not Taking Advantage

## The Beginning of Power

"The Tao that can be expressed is not the Tao of the Absolute. The name that can be named is not the name of the Absolute. The nameless originated Heaven and Earth. The named is the Mother of all things."

"Thus, without expectation, one will always perceive the subtlety; and with expectation, one will always perceive the boundary."

"The source of these two is identical, yet their names are different. Together they are called profound, profound and mysterious. The gateway to the collective subtlety."

Lao Tzu is at his most mysterious in this passage, and though it embodies many of the major elements of the philosophy of the Tao Te Ching, these elements are presented in more depth in other passages.

In the Taoist cosmology, the Absolute (nameless) created a universe composed of matter and energy. The Tao (named) is the behaviour of the physical laws that coalesce matter and energy in all things in the universe and direct their evolution.

Lao Tzu urges people to drop their expectations, discard their preconceived ideas and abandon any system of knowing that might limit their horizons. When expectations are dropped, the mind expands and reality expands along with the mind. Rather than merely perceiving where things are and where they have been (boundary) a person can begin to perceive the direction in that things are going (the subtlety).

There is obvious power in apprehending the probabilities of the future, but moreover, a subtler power develops - one that brings insight and centredness.

People begin to sense their potential ability to direct events with the force of their minds. They have located the path to personal power - the "Gateway to the Collective Subtlety". (1)]

*When after careful consideration of the way in that Nature works, a person is able to anticipate likely future events and in some cases influence the course of those events by carefully directing the flow of energy, then that person has reached the gateway to the 'collective subtlety' - they are able to harmonise their own actions with nature.*

## Using Polarity

"When the world knows beauty as beauty, there is ugliness. When they know good as good, then there is evil. In this way, existence and non-existence produce each other, difficult and easy complete each other, long and short contrast each other, high and low attract each other, pitch and tone harmonise each other, future and past follow each other."

"Therefore, enlightened people hold their position without effort, practice their philosophy without words, are a part of all things and overlook nothing, they produce but do not possess, act without expectation, succeed without taking credit."

The underlying principle of Taoism - as in the physical sciences - is that of complementarity or polarity. Every action has a complementary reaction. Every pole is matched by one of opposite charge. The intellectual goal of the Taoist, then, is to find the correlation between the way matter and energy behave in Nature and the way that humans behave in society.

Enlightened people use their awareness and understanding of the physical laws to shape events in their world. They know that nothing exists without the presence of its own opposite. Therefore they control their environment by avoiding extremes, even in a direction that might be considered "good".

They do not preach their philosophy, they overlook nothing in their environment and don't try to possess things, not even their own ideas and work. They don't shoulder the burden of great expectations and especially don't take credit for their achievements. As a result, Nature and society are forced to balance towards them by bestowing credit. (2)

*The constant ebb and flow as energy becomes matter then back to energy, as positive becomes negative then back to positive is what we need to recognize in the world around us. The sum remains the same, but the proportion of the parts is constantly changing. At one instant, a situation might involve one third positive, two thirds negative, the next instant it might contain equal measures of positive and negative, then in the next instant it might contain one third negative and two thirds positive. It may not be possible to always predict the exact proportion of positive and negative in a situation at a precise moment, but we can estimate it by looking at what it was like before and be certain that whatever the proportion, the sum will always be exactly one.*

## Transcending Decline

"Holding to fullness is not as good as stopping in time. Sharpness that probes cannot protect for long. A house filled with riches cannot be defended."

"Pride in wealth and position is overlooking one's collapse. Withdrawing when success is achieved is the Tao in Nature."

After developing situations and achieving success, enlightened people don't linger to experience the inevitable decline. They know that if they stop to identify with their accomplishments their inner growth ends and their decline begins. They don't "rest on their laurels" unless they want to stagnate.

Nothing in Nature is static; all things that reach their maturity - whether plants and animals or planets and stars must necessarily decline.

Therefore enlightened people never stop growing and never accumulate social or material burdens to slow their progress. When their work is done they move on to the next task. In this way they develop greatness and power. (9)

*Resting on one's laurels is a sure way to go into decline since this involves achieving fullness then holding to it. Better to move on to the next challenge, even though this involves descending from the peak that was so laboriously attained, down into the valley that lies before the next peak of one's chosen career.*

*Another way of looking at the idea is to recognise that we must keep moving forward if we are not to go into decline. Like a shark that has stopped swimming will sink. The world and everything in it is moving forward. If we try to go slower than the pace of our environment, then we hurt and/or exhaust ourselves. If we try to go faster then we similarly have trouble.*

*Sometimes we don't even realise that we are moving at all, so big and majestic it is. It's like being on a raft in the middle of a very wide river. So wide, we can't even see the banks. The raft is moving, but because the surrounding water is moving at the same pace it doesn't seem like we are moving at all.*

*So by not resting on our laurels, by moving with the world, we stay in harmony. To do otherwise is to die by inches.*

## Inner harmony

"In managing your instincts and embracing Oneness, can you be undivided? In focusing your influence can you yield as a new-born child? In clearing your insight, can you become free of error? In loving people and leading the organisation, can you take no action? In opening and closing the gateway to nature, can you not weaken? In seeing clearly in all directions, can you be without knowledge?"

"Produce things, cultivate things; produce but do not possess. Act without expectation, advance without dominating. These are called the Subtle Powers."

Taoists strive to recognise and reconcile the extremes in human nature. On one side is aggressiveness and conscious motive; on the other is spontaneity and the need for social integration.

They know that the power they develop through work on the inner mind can only be maintained by resolving this inner polarity. Enlightened people know that all of their experiences are a reflection of their level of cultivation, so they work deeply. They learn to achieve their purpose and master their environment by remaining objective and open to all forms of information.

They avoid aggressive action and transcend unworthy desires. Instead they shape their environment and direct the future with the influence of their intellectual gravity. These are the Subtle Powers. (10)

*Resolving the inner polarity leads to spiritual growth. There is a tendency for people to undo the work of the spirit. The key is to recognise the action of the spirit in all affairs and to act accordingly. For example the libido is a force that cannot go around copulating. The consequences would be disastrous. The desire to copulate must be transformed into wanting to improve oneself and others.*

*Enlightened people realise that their progress through life can be gauged by the experiences that befall them. They know that what happens externally is caused by what is going on inside them. They develop their intuition that allows a person to reconcile their outer experiences with their inner experiences and to resolve the polarity that would otherwise cause them to swing back and forth like a pendulum.*

## The Tao in Subtle Force

"Those skilful in the ancient Tao are subtly ingenious and profoundly intuitive. They are so deep they cannot be recognised. Since, indeed, they cannot be recognised their force can be contained."

"So careful, as if wading in a stream in winter. So hesitant, as if respecting all sides in the community. So reserved, as if acting as a guest. So yielding, as if ice about to melt. So candid, as if acting with simplicity. So open, as if acting as a valley. So integrated, as if acting as muddy water."

"Who can harmonise with muddy water and gradually arrive at clarity? Who can move with stability, and gradually bring endurance to life?"

"Those who maintain the Tao do not desire to become full. Indeed, since they are not full, they can be used up and also renewed."

In this passage, Lao Tzu refers to reality as muddy water and suggests that in order to gain insight into it's unfolding pattern, one must be able to harmonise with it's implicit unity and simplicity. Moreover, in order to use those insights to guide reality one must move with a stability that causes no outside resistance.

Enlightened people know that the less obvious they make their advantage, the more effective their power becomes. Thus, when using their power, enlightened people are hesitant and reserved. They spend their power to bring clarity and cooperation into their world. They are candid, open and integrated with their environment. They act as conduits not accumulators for energy and matter.

In this way, enlightened people are always replenished with the new and vital as they continue to develop insight and power. (15)

*There is power in subtlety in that the power, being subtle, is not recognised by people. Not being recognised, it attracts no reaction. For example, if a dictator grabs power in a bloody coup, the country rises up in resistance and the dictator must spend a prolonged period dealing with the reaction to his initial action. If, on the other hand, he were to work quietly, from within the existing government to bring about a revolution, it would barely be recognised by the people and the change of government would seem like a natural progression, a kind of evolution. The people are unlikely to oppose evolution. A naked grab for power lacks subtlety. A lack of subtlety is the trademark of people who are either ignorant or impatient or both.*

## Developing Independence

"Discard the academic; have no anxiety. How much difference is there between agreement and servility? How much difference between good and evil? That one should revere what others revere - how absurd!"

"The Collective Mind is expansive and flourishing, as if receiving a great gift. As if ascending a living observatory. I alone remain uncommitted, like an infant who has not yet smiled, unattached, without a place to merge. The collective mind is all-encompassing. I alone seem to be over-looked. I am unknowing to the core, and unclear, unclear!"

"Ordinary people are bright and obvious; I alone am dark and obscure. Ordinary people are exacting and sharp; I alone am subdued and dull. "

"Indifferent like the sea, ceaseless like a penetrating wind, the Collective mind is everpresent, and yet I alone am unruly and remote. I alone am different from the others in treasuring nourishment from the Mother."

Lao Tzu urges people to step out of the crowd - to discard dogma and explore the universe with an open, independent mind; a mind not bound by preconceived ideas. To achieve independence, to become centred and evolved, one must be unattached and uncommitted to any ideology, since the truth about reality can only come through direct experience. Whether seeking the reality in a relationship, society or in the universe, it can only be done via the intuitive mind.

Enlightened people not only contribute to the collective awareness of human-kind, they also use their global perspective (living observatory) to know the Tao (mother) and ascertain the direction of evolution.

They are never obvious or exacting because they know that such extremes lead to the collapse of systems and individuals; and they never fall completely into step with the current society because they also hear the voice of the future. (20)

*It is important to make a deliberate effort at keeping an open mind, in whatever situation you find yourself. Even if you think you know what is happening, what the underlying causes of a situation are, avoid the assumption that they are the actual causes. Evaluate the situation without preconceived ideas and you will be much more likely to perceive the real situation and so be in a position to react appropriately. Many a parent has disgusted and disappointed their adolescent children by reacting as though they, the parent, know all there is to know, including how the younger person feels. It is painfully evident to the younger person that the older one has a bunch of smugly-held preconceived ideas. So we see the "generation gap".*

## Following the Pattern

"What is curved becomes whole; what is crooked becomes straight. What is deep becomes full; what is exhausted is refreshed. What is small becomes attainable; what is excessive becomes confused. Thus enlightened people hold to the One and regard the world as their pattern."

"They do not display themselves and so they are illuminated. They do not define themselves, so they are distinguished. They do not make claims, therefore they are given credit. They don't boast, so it is they advance."

"Since they don't compete, the world does not, cannot compete with them. The ancient saying 'What is curved becomes whole' - are these empty words? To become whole, turn within."

Lao Tzu realised that many of the physical laws of nature are reflected in the affairs of society. He saw a pattern of change that is independent of the movements of the solar system; i.e. not governed by the passage of time but instead governed by cause and effect.

The Taoist goal is to transcend cause and effect (thus gaining control over it) by coming into harmony and balance with the environment. Enlightened people regard an obvious attempt to gain power and position as a dangerous cause that may result in an uncontrolled effect.

They achieve their aims by consolidating their personal power - drawing within themselves the energy that derives from the universal perspective and awareness - i.e. the awareness that the

universe is integrated and interconnected. Enlightened people use this power to enrich their inner selves rather than spend it on external appearances that only serve to draw a person into competition and possibly conflict with society.

Thus they develop intellectual gravity that is a powerful influence in the shaping of society. In society, as in the universe at large, events are inextricably linked to the distribution of gravity among the participants. (22)

*It is better to hide your light under a bushel than it is to display it like a beacon. Why is this true when the conventional wisdom of our society encourages people to display themselves? Because such a display in Nature is excessive, and excess is reduced through natural attrition. Once we realise that there is no good reason to seek prominence, that it is better to exert subtle influence behind the scenes, we are able to achieve stability and longevity. So long as we work behind the scenes the laws of Nature will not act to reduce our position. An example of the folly of fame is the young pop artist who becomes famous overnight but who nevertheless kills himself when the pressure becomes too much. Like Kurt Cobain of Nirvana fame, wealth and popularity do not necessarily bring happiness or enlightenment.*

## The Steady Force of Attitude

"Nature rarely speaks, hence the whirlwind does not last all morning, nor the sudden rainstorm last the whole day. What causes these - Heaven and Earth. If Heaven and Earth can't make them long-lasting, how much less so can humans?"

"Thus, those who cultivate the Tao identify with the Tao and so are welcomed by the Tao. Those who cultivate Power identify with Power and are likewise welcomed by Power. Those who cultivate failure identify with failure are welcomed by failure."

"Those who lack belief will not in turn be believed."

Aggressive movements towards one's aims, like whirlwinds and downpours have no lasting effect. Violent actions cannot be sustained because they inevitably generate a counteraction that neutralises the original force.

So nature rarely speaks, and when it does it expresses the exception that proves the rule - that is, *the principal force in nature is one of steady, harmonious transformation*. Enlightened people know that heated confrontations do not yield long-term results. Only attitudes that can be sustained have the power to alter reality.

The "Power" mentioned in this passage and elsewhere throughout the Tao Te Ching is the power over one's continuing reality. Personal power brings independence and freedom into the life of the individual and it is continuously cultivated through attitude and projection.

What one believes, one becomes. The more of a "mind" one has to believe with, the more profound the transformation.

Power over others, on the other hand, is a subtle form of enslavement. (23)

*Steady harmonious transformation - if you want to change yourself, begin by changing the way you think. Picture yourself the way you want to be and maintain the picture. The thought becomes a reality when it begins to manifest in your actions. Your actions become habits, your habits are what defines your character, and it is your character that defines your destiny. None of this happens quickly. Only by steady harmonious transformation can you do it.*

*By being aware of the natural processes of change, you can employ them to transform yourself into an insightful master of your own environment. The power that is derived from being master of your destiny should not be displayed and wasted, rather it should be ploughed back into your own mind to further enrich it.*

## Self Mastery

Those who know others are intelligent.

Those who know themselves have insight.

Those who master others have force.

Those who master themselves have strength.  
Those who know how much is enough are wealthy.  
Those who persevere have direction.  
Those who maintain their position endure.  
And those who die but do not perish, live on.

Self-knowledge and self-mastery are the primary Taoist accomplishments. They are achieved when individuals cultivate their inner mind, refine their instincts and intuitive responses to the world.

The result is insight; the ability to perceive the larger influences behind specific social phenomena. To know the inner mind and perceive it's connection with the evolving mind of the universe is the foundation for foresight and lasting influence.

Through inner knowledge, one develops the ability to alter the world through small, effortless actions at the beginning of events. It's essential to discriminate between clever force and insightful strength, since only the latter will not meet with resistance or cause counter-reactions.

Those who die and do not perish are those who leave the affairs of the world in a more evolved state than they found them. (33)

*It is far better to know yourself than it is to know others. Better to have mastery over yourself than mastery over others. It is better to know how much is enough than it is have too much. Better to persevere in a cause that will leave the world a better place than it is to switch quickly between self-seeking endeavours.*

*To know yourself is to develop an awareness that your mind is a reflection of a much larger mind - that of the evolving universe. It creates a sense of oneness with all things. With that sense of oneness comes deep intuition into the nature of the universe - what we call insight. To know others is to only see a collection of small, apparently independent minds. To have mastery over yourself is to be able to look into your own mind and have insight into the universe.*

*As I drove to work today I had an insight. After looking deeply into my own mind I realised that the shape and form and practices of our mundane world and it's societies is actually a shared illusion, a collective hallucination, a collaborative effort of many minds. The way humans think and behave has a high degree of uniformity. Apparent differences are relatively small when compared with the many things we all share in common. We are all driven by the same basic motives, we are all wired according to the same basic blueprint. Therefore it's logical that our uniform thoughts and behaviour is capable of creating a uniform environment. The world around us that we perceive and react to is a collective thoughtform, generated by our uniform thoughts. Our collective thoughts create a reality that seems outside of us and to be larger than us. It all seems so real that most of us never realise that it is an illusion or that there might be any other kind of reality.*

*I had a lot more to say on this, but I was interrupted by a colleague and now I can't remember any more of what I wanted to say. For a few minutes I had existed both in and out of our everyday world. I had glimpses at the truth. A fifteen second conversation brought me firmly back into the mundane world exclusively.*

## The Power in Needing Less

"That is dearer, name or life? That means more, life or wealth? That is worse, gain or loss? The stronger the attachments, the greater the cost. The more that is hoarded, the deeper the loss."

"Know what is enough, be without disgrace. Know when to stop, be without danger. In this way, one lasts for a very long time."

People who are materially oriented - those who identify and define themselves in terms of their possessions - have no real purpose other than to shuffle matter from place to place and to reproduce life-forms who have the potential for intellectual evolution.

Materially-minded people can't evolve intellectually because their attachment to and hoarding of matter trains the mind to view reality as fixed and unfolding. This view is in harmony with dying, not growth and so they cannot connect with the larger meaning behind consciousness.

Taoists know they are in a more powerful position when they are mobile, unburdened and independent. For them, excessive possessions are seen as ballast; something to be released in order to achieve greater buoyancy.

Just as air rushes in to fill a vacuum, more things will come into and out of such lives. Most importantly, the capacity to need less and pass things on brings enlightened people closer to themselves and to the continuous unfolding of reality. (44)

*The power in needing less - the less you have, the less you will be blinded to the subtle existence of the Tao by the material possessions you do have. And the more possessions you have, the harder you have to work to maintain them and guard them against those who want to take them from you. All of that leaves you less time and inclination to work at being in harmony with the Tao. Material possessions are not of themselves bad, it is that they have the potential to blind people to the reality of the Tao unless that person takes positive steps to avoid being blinded.*

*Animals and plants show the power in needing less. They have little except their lives and the environment in that they live. They are in harmony with the Tao and usually need nothing more for their survival. Humans, with our highly developed conscious minds, have the ability to change our environment, to craft things that increase our chances of survival. The tendency to avoid is when those survival accessories become an end in themselves. As long as we see them as a means to an end (our continued survival with a degree of comfort) and not an end in themselves, we can avoid being blinded by materialism.*

## Opening the Mind

"Enlightened people have no fixed mind; they make the group mind their mind. To those who are good, I am good, to those who are bad, I am also good - goodness is Power."

"Of those who trust, I am trusting; of those who do not trust, I am also trusting. Trust is Power."

"Enlightened people attract the world and merge with it's mind. The people all focus their eyes and ears; enlightened people all act as infants."

Enlightened people keep their minds open and impartial because fixed opinions or belief systems distort the flow of pure information coming in from the outside world. They enhance their understanding of the outside world and their position in it by merging with *the collective mind of humanity* - what Carl Jung called the group subconscious. They don't rely solely on information gained through their eyes and ears but look beyond with an open heart and mind.

In this way, infantlike they can act upon the world without unbalancing it. By trusting those who cannot find trust in themselves, and showing goodness to those who are not good people, enlightened people are emulating the Tao. They are using an opposing force to neutralise an extreme thus altering the internal reality of untrusting, mean people. This response runs contrary to the common one where aggression is met with aggression, hate with hate, anger with anger.

In observing the laws of Nature, enlightened people realise that acid is not neutralised by acid, it is neutralised by infusing it's opposite - alkali. Lao Tzu believed that the ability to alter reality by neutralising extremes is the ultimate power that will bring peace to the world. (49)

*The mind of humanity, the group mind, is an intermediate step between our individual minds and the universal mind. The group mind is a stepping stone that we can use to perceive the larger universal mind. It allows us to go beyond ourselves and see ourselves in relation to the universe. We can merge our individual minds with the group mind by **opening** our minds, allowing our sense of identity, our ego, to be diminished. The difficulty is that the ego is surrounded by many defence mechanisms and has the ability to defend itself against perceived threats. In fact, the death of the ego, the dissolution of the personal self is said to be the way in that we achieve ultimate enlightenment and liberation from this world of suffering. It is perhaps*

*the biggest challenge we have and it may take hundreds of lifetimes to raise one's awareness to the point of recognising this fact. It's worth doing because then we can merge our minds with the larger mind of humanity and the universe and by setting aside selfish thoughts, open the mind to unlimited wisdom.*

*Another aspect of opening the mind is to avoid adopting fixed, unyielding ideas. People often develop fixed ideas as they grow older. They adopt a belief system early in life and guard it against change thereafter. It is seen to be a virtue to "stick by your principles". To be a virtue, the principle has to be an ultimate, unchanging truth and there are very few if any truths that can be said to be ultimate and unchanging. Something may have been true once, but times change and everything in the world changes with it. To try and fix one's ideas in time is folly. It's far better to remain open-minded and change with the world as it changes. An example of this is where people in their adolescence identify with the current pop music and fixate upon it. As they grow older they can be heard to decry the current pop music. They only listen to their old music and claim that it is better than anything that's been along since. This is certainly a symptom of fixed ideas. People should listen to the current pop music and appreciate it in its own right as being a good or bad as any previous or future pop music.*

*Changing with the times, "going with the flow" is also an excellent way to live long since one is conserving energy by moving with the flow rather than spending energy trying to go against it. It is like a swimmer caught in a rip. He may have enough energy to swim for an hour. By going with the rip he will very likely be able to swim ashore within an hour, even if he's several kilometres down the beach by then. By swimming against the rip he probably won't be a strong enough swimmer to make progress against it so even if he swam for five hours he still wouldn't reach the shore. After an hour he's exhausted and no closer to saving himself. The current, representing the Tao, is completely indifferent to the plight of the swimmer. It is an accurate metaphor of a human life. We have a certain time to live, a certain amount of energy to spend. "The flame that burns twice as bright burns half as long."*

*We can spend it quickly, in a furious sprinting burst, or we can pace ourselves like a marathon swimmer. When I go swimming at the pool I always begin with a steady 1000 metre warm up. There are often other swimmers there who sprint up and down, but they are long gone by the time I finish my kilometre.*

## Knowing the Tao

"My words are very easy to know, very easy to follow. Yet the world is unable to know them, unable to follow them."

"My words have a source, my efforts have mastery. Indeed, since none know this they do not know me. The rare ones who know me must treasure me."

"Therefore, enlightened people wear a coarse cloth covering with precious jade at the centre."

Lao Tzu's philosophy is remarkable since it defies logical analysis, yet readily submits to intuitive understanding. In this passage he speaks directly to us using the voice of the Tao.

In early China, only the ruling classes could read, so Lao Tzu was quite certain of his audience. He seems to assume that the reader wouldn't have the Tao Te Ching in their hands had they not been selected to influence the world.

He hoped to instil in the minds of leaders an intuitive knowing that would allow them to peer into the future and allow them to perceive the evolution of society. He believed this would give the enlightened person the power to become more compassionately understanding of themselves and their people.

To the enlightened person, Lao Tzu says - surround your advantages with simplicity (a coarse cloth covering). Those who follow the Tao introduce simplicity to their lives by releasing themselves from the bondage of materialism and the discipline of elaborate social strategies. They experience high levels of intellectual independence and personal freedom and so continually renew their intuitive advantage. (70)

*Enlightened people are in a position to influence society in many ways, ranging from direct to the subtle. The determining factor is whether the person has a clear idea of the direction society is moving. The clearer the perceived direction, the more effectively they will be able to position themselves to achieve a particular effect. For example, society is moving in a direction in that individuals are becoming increasingly isolated. People "cocoon" themselves behind closed doors because almost everything they need can be delivered and because the world is becoming an apparently more violent place where people run the risk of being the victim of random acts of violence. While cocooning can satisfy an individual's need for comfort and security it neglects their need for meaningful social interaction. They become more withdrawn and unable to communicate. A growing sense of something important being missing from their lives makes itself felt. An enlightened person could meet this situation by catering to the needs of cocooned people wanting to emerge and have more social contact in a pleasant, non-threatening way.*

## The Power in Flexibility

"A living person is yielding and receptive. Dying, they are rigid and inflexible. All things, the grass and the trees; living, they are yielding and fragile. Dying, they are dry and withered."

"Thus, those who are firm and inflexible are in harmony with dying. Those who are yielding and receptive are in harmony with living."

"Therefore, an inflexible strategy will not succeed; an inflexible tree will be attacked. The position of the highly inflexible will descend; the position of the yielding and receptive will ascend."

Through their observations of Nature, Taoists know that what survives on earth is that that quickly adapts to changing circumstances in the environment. It is because the universe is evolving and that everything in it is developing and changing. Therefore any inflexibility in systems of belief, in patterns of behaviour or in habits of physical or intellectual nourishment can cause one to respond to external stimuli in a way that leads to extinction.

Similar situations should not necessarily elicit the same reaction over time - because in time everything changes. Fixed and unintuitive responses stops personal growth and puts one in harmony with dying.

Cultivating flexibility, on the other hand, will fine tune the instinctive responses so that one might, indeed, inherit the earth. (76)

*It seems so obvious yet it is so very difficult for people to see how they have become inflexible as they grow older. A new born baby is flexible in the sense that he adapts to whatever situation he finds himself in. That same person, fifty years later has very firm ideas about the circumstances in that they live. It's hardly surprising - people love habit. It gives us a sense of security - something that we aren't born with. We develop habits to fill just about every moment of our waking lives.*

## Directing the Power

"The Tao in Nature is like a bow that is stretched. The top is pulled down, the bottom is pulled up. What is excessive is reduced. What is insufficient is supplemented."

"The Tao in Nature reduces the excessive and supplements the insufficient. The Tao in mankind is not so; he reduces the insufficient because he serves the excessive."

"Who then can use excess to serve the world? Those who possess the Tao. Therefore enlightened people act without expectation, succeed without taking credit, and have no desire to display their excellence."

Taoists are aware of Nature's tendency to balance extremes in the environment. On the ecological plane, Nature is adept at reducing a species that has grown too dominant and carefully supporting those that are most fragile. On the atomic level, this balancing can be observed in the way that overcharged particles seek out their opposite to stabilise their existence.

So too in society; people who try to dominate others trigger a natural psychological response from their society; a collective urge to neutralise the effect of excessive members. The complement of this response, in society, is the urge to direct help towards people with insufficient means.

Because enlightened people understand this pattern of energy in the universe, they are able to use it to protect their position while they bring progress to their world. So that energy will flow in their direction, they reduce their position by maintaining an atmosphere of moderation and humility in their relations with others.

They use this attitude to alter reality through the focus of their attitudes and convictions. (77)

*By positioning yourself to benefit others without taking credit, the power is directed towards you. In other words - good karma. For example, if someone with sufficient means were to donate \$1,000 a month to an international welfare agency like World Vision (for \$35 per month, a whole community in a developing country gets clean water, sanitation, education etc) that person would be bringing direct benefit to thousands of people (\$1,000 equals around 30 sponsorships. Alternately, \$1,000 is about how much someone might spend per month to lease say a BMW 5 series car that they use for self-agrandisement. That \$1,000 does not bring the same degree of benefit as that that was donated to World Vision.*

*Money therefore is not bad in itself, it's what people have to do to get it and what they do with it once they have it that can make money evil. A rich person has the potential to bring great benefit to the world - or great harm. The more money someone has, the more modest they need to be if the money is not to corrupt them. A person could remind themselves that they can't take it with them when they shuffle-off their mortal coil. For their own sakes and the sakes of their fellow man, it's better to use money to bring benefit to the world while living. They will be a better person when they do die.*

## The Power in Not Taking Advantage

"Even when a great resentment is reconciled, some resentment must linger. How can this be made good?"

"That is why enlightened people hold the left side of the contract\* and do not censure others. Those with power are in charge of the contract, those without power are in charge of resolving it. The Tao in Nature has no favourites. It always acts through the good person."

Whenever there is an obligation between two individuals, it is the responsibility of the more powerful person to avert the possibility of lingering resentment; resentment that could cloud future events. When enlightened people hold the "left side" of the contract, they know that they can attract power through compassionate and generous behaviour. They also know that if, on the other hand, they use their advantage to demand fulfilment from the other party they will engender a resentment that one day might harm their endeavours.

Instead, through their magnanimity they use their advantage to create appreciation and harmony. Thus they pave the way to a future more aligned to their needs. Should the other party not fulfil their obligation, enlightened people gain a deep understanding of when and with whom to enter agreements. Such an understanding will protect them throughout life.

\* The word contract derives from the ancient term describing the bamboo tallies that were inscribed with the details of an agreement, then split into two. The right side was held by the debtor, the left side by the creditor. (79)

*In relationships, I've noticed how conflicts can be resolved by one side simply removing the "pride" element from their position in a dispute. Pride seems to be the enemy of a harmonious relationship. Pride also seems to be a quality that is opposite to the Tao that assumes the lowest position.*

## The Evolved Way

"Sincere words are not embellished; embellished words are not sincere. Those who are good are not defensive; those who are defensive are not good. Those who know are not erudite; those who are erudite do not know."

"Enlightened people do not accumulate. The more they do for others, the more they gain; the more they give to others, the more they possess."

"The Tao of Nature is to serve without spoiling. The Tao of enlightened people is to act without contending."

Reality, integrity, insight - characteristics cultivated by Taoists must not be allowed to become distorted. If the truth is not enhanced and embellished, it has less chance of becoming an illusion. If actions are not quickly justified by words, then good works can shine through; if knowledge goes deeper than worldly matters and runs deep into the Self, then Wisdom will grow.

Enlightened people know that hoarding goods (matter), services (energy) or information runs contrary to the laws of Nature, and such actions will create a dangerous personal imbalance.

In order to continually align themselves with the Tao and stabilise their position within the flow of people and events, they dispense with what they have so that more might flow freely through their hands. They avoid acting in a way that suggests aggressiveness or contention - thus they don't invite counter-reactions that might deflect them from the Way. (81)

*The evolved way of living one's life revolves around doing the maximum amount of good in the most unobtrusive way. The reward is not honour and recognition from society but the deep satisfaction of knowing that one is emulating the Tao and is thereby in harmony with it. It might be quite difficult for people to do good for others, much less do it in an unobtrusive way, and that is because the ego gets in the way, asserting its pre-eminence. It whispers alarming doubts and fears that make a person fearful of losing what they have. It slyly suggests that the best thing to do is to be selfish.*

## The Tao in Leadership

The 16 passages of this chapter are aimed directly at those in positions of leadership and influence. Each passage describes the ideal relationship between the leader and those that follow. They reveal the most effective methods of managing others and achieving goals.

The sixteen passages are as follows:

- ?? Keeping Peace
- ?? The Way of Subtle Influence
- ?? Return to Simplicity
- ?? The Gravity of Power
- ?? Uniting the Forces
- ?? The Power in Desirelessness
- ?? Oneness in Leadership
- ?? The Power in Effortlessness
- ?? Cultivating the Centre
- ?? Holding the Position
- ?? The Tao in Leaders
- ?? The Danger in Cleverness
- ?? The Power in Staying Low
- ?? The Power in Compassion

?? Non Aggressive Strength

?? The Appropriate Perspective

## Keeping Peace

"Do not exalt the very gifted, and people will not contend. Do not treasure goods that are hard to get, and people will not become thieves. Do not focus on desires, and people's minds will not be confused."

"Therefore, enlightened people lead others by opening their minds, reinforcing their centres, relaxing their desires and strengthening their characters."

"Let the people always act without strategy or desire; let the clever not venture to act. Act without action and nothing is without order."

Enlightened people know that their attitudes have greater influence than their actions. They know that the things they respect and value soon become the motivating force behind their people. Therefore they openly value worthwhile qualities that others can achieve - integrity, flexibility, spontaneity.

They don't emphasise extraordinary achievements or impressive possessions because they know these things will undermine the harmony and accord among the people. Enlightened people bring peace and progress to their organisation through the force of correct attitude. They practice non-interference and shape events with the power of their attitudes (3).

*Lead by example, lead by having an open, enlightened mind, lead by remaining true to ourselves, lead by being free of desire and having strength of character. Such a person is a natural leader, one who is respected and whose example is followed. It is the opposite of the tyrant who is closed-minded and ignorant, who uses force to make people cooperate and who is full of base desires.*

## The Way of Subtle Influence

"Superior leaders are those whose existence is merely known; the next best are loved and honoured; the next are respected and the next are ridiculed."

"Those who lack belief will not in turn be believed. But when the command comes from afar and the work is done, the goal is achieved, the people say 'We did it naturally.'"

Subtle authority is particularly suited to the temperaments of those who would be led. When leaders become overbearing and interfere with the lives of their people, the task of leading becomes unnatural. But when leaders hold back and establish goals indirectly - through trusting and carefully worded commands - people find satisfaction with their work and become more productive.

By not interfering, enlightened leaders are able to remain unobtrusive. As a result, they gain power from the people's sense of self-government. The more they conceal their power, the more effectively it can be used.

Enlightened leaders are impartial, intuitive and aware. Their influence and power comes from using their energy to guide rather than to rule. (17)

*The superior leader whose existence is merely known is an intriguing figure. Their influence is great but is not recognised by the people generally. People don't realise how much influence they have. It is more difficult to be this kind of leader than the higher profile type since to remain hidden calls for more subtlety than the average leader has. Because people like to exercise their sense of self-government, the subtle leader gains power by allowing **them** to feel empowered.*

## Return to Simplicity

"Discard the sacred, abandon strategies; the people will benefit a hundred-fold. Discard philanthropy, abandon morality; the people will return to natural love. Discard acquisitiveness, abandon cleverness; the thieves will exist no longer."

"However, if these three passages are inadequate, adhere to these principles: perceive purity, embrace simplicity, reduce self-interest, limit desires."

Taoists don't rely on social techniques that must be learned. Even philanthropy and morality are externally imposed ways of civilised behaviour that emerge in societies where useful instincts are lost and people no longer trust themselves.

Enlightened leaders strive to be intuitive, spontaneous and simple. From this base they travel lighter, journey farther and survive longer.

In this passage, leaders are urged to use attitude as a form of influence in order to transform their subjects. How? Perceive and acknowledge integrity whenever it appears; attach less emphasis to self-interest and limit desires by learning to recognise that the greatest happiness in life comes in moments of the purest simplicity (that is plain, like a piece of uncarved wood).  
(19)

*The advice here is to free oneself from the restraints of tradition - the so-called "wisdom of the ages" that is a straightjacket for the mind. A leader who brings this approach to leadership allows the organisation to function naturally, in proper response to the conditions in that it finds itself. A tradition-bound leader will base his decisions on precedent "what did my predecessors do in this situation" or "in 1793, our illustrious leader did this in response to a similar situation". These prefabricated responses lack insight and run a high risk of not being appropriate for the situation at hand.*

*There is a tendency to assume that philanthropy is an absolute good. If it is done with the wrong motives it is not an absolute good. By discarding philanthropy, a well-intentioned person will naturally perform actions that benefit the world - there is no need to rely on the pre-packaged formula for doing good that has been handed down to us by the religious leaders of the past.*

**Perceive purity, embrace simplicity, reduce self-interest, limit desires** - by doing these, one becomes more intuitive and thus more in tune with the Tao.

## The Gravity of Power

"Gravity is the foundation of levity. Stillness is the master of agitation. Thus enlightened people can travel the whole day without leaving behind their baggage."

"However arresting the views, they can remain calm and unattached. How can leaders with ten thousand chariots have a light-hearted position in the world?"

"If they are light-hearted, they lose their foundation, if they are agitated, they lose their mastery."

It's the responsibility of enlightened leaders to create a calm centre that will serve as the foundation for their organisation. Regardless of the stimulating diversions in their path, they must retain their composure and sense of purpose.

They don't let themselves be separated from their "baggage" (i.e. their gravity) and thus they maintain their position through serious-mindedness. The concept of "ten thousand chariots" is one of unimaginable power, on the scale of nuclear power today.

Lao Tzu believed that leaders with such power have an awesome responsibility and can be neither light-hearted nor agitated. (26)

*A leader must remain calm and be in control of themselves if people are to have confidence in them.*

## Uniting the Forces

"Know the male, hold to the female. Become the world's stream by being the world's stream. The Power will never leave; this is returning to infancy."

"Know the white, hold to the black. Become the world's pattern by being the world's pattern. The Power will never falter. This is returning to limitlessness."

"Know the glory, hold to obscurity. Become the world's valley by being the world's valley. The Power will be sufficient. This is returning to Simplicity. "

"When Simplicity is broken up it is made into instruments. Enlightened people who employ them are made into leaders. In this way the Great System is united."

Unwavering Power is bestowed on enlightened people who are able to direct the talents of otherwise unconnected individuals into a collective endeavour. Just as reservoirs collect water, leaders become low spots for the exchange of power and information. They are aware of the instability in aggression and obviousness. To hold their position, they are receptive, subtle and modest.

In Physics the four forces in the universe are those engaged in holding matter together (gravity, strong and weak nuclear force and electromagnetism). Enlightened leaders emulate the Tao by imitating those forces by connecting individuals with the evolving society. In this way they have the Power to alter reality.

In this passage, Lao Tzu uses the images of Infancy, Limitlessness and Simplicity to describe the intuitive understanding of the Great System: the united field of matter and energy as it existed prior to the beginnings of the known universe.

To know this is to perceive the Tao. (28)

*Intuitive leaders have the ability to unite people with diverse backgrounds into a single enterprise. This creates a direct connection between people whose only previous connection was to be part of a single unified field of forces that we call the Universe, a place in that everything is interconnected. The universal connection is often hard to perceive though. The leader who unites people is making that connection clear.*

*The more people they thus unite, the more like the universal Tao they become.*

## The Power in Desirelessness

"The Tao never acts and yet is never inactive. If leaders can hold onto it, all things will be naturally influenced. Influenced and yet desiring to act, I would calm them with Nameless Simplicity. Nameless simplicity is likewise without desire - and without desire there is harmony."

"The world will then be naturally stabilised."

Lao Tzu believed that the best leaders are those with the intellectual and emotional strength to guide rather than rule. Enlightened leaders put all their strength into leading the way and into not interfering in the lives of those they lead. Thus their followers are influenced naturally, without resistance, resentment or reaction.

When people don't follow, it's because the leader is moving against the grain of human nature and against the direction of social evolution. Such leaders bring chaos to the world.

Enlightened leaders hold to the Tao when leading and are always active in their own internal growth. In order to align themselves to the emerging trends in society and the movements of Nature (Tao), they practice simplicity in their lives and work. In this way they avoid the distorted intellectual and emotional growth that comes with any fixation upon material possessions or self-aggrandising social systems.

Because the enlightened leaders free themselves from irrelevant or misleading desires, they receive insights that bring harmony and stability to everything they touch. (37)

*Good leaders guide rather than rule - they perceive purity, embrace simplicity, reduce self-interest and limit their desires. Thus they "avoid the distorted intellectual and emotional growth that comes from fixation upon material possessions and/or self-aggrandising social systems".*

## Oneness in Leadership

"From old, these may have harmony with the One: Heaven in harmony with the One becomes clear. Earth in harmony with the One becomes stable. Mind in harmony with the One becomes

inspired. Valleys in harmony with the One become full. All things in harmony with the One become creative. Leaders in harmony with the One become incorruptible in the world. These were attained through Oneness."

"Heaven without clarity would probably crack. Earth without stability would probably quake. Mind without inspiration would probably sleep. Valleys without fullness would probably dry up. All things without creativity would probably die off. Leaders without incorruptible ways would probably stumble and fall."

"Indeed, the high-placed stem from the humble, the elevated are based on the lowly. This is why leaders call themselves alone, lonely and unfavoured. Isn't this because they stem from the humble and common? Therefore attain honour without being honoured. Do not desire to shine like jade; wear ornaments as though they were stone."

The state of oneness mentioned here is a state of harmony between the one and the many. This is a principle Taoist thought exercise - the ability to sense the interdependence and rhythmic interactions between all matter and energy in the universe, whether that matter and energy have coalesced into a solar system, a family, spawning salmon or decaying plutonium. If they are existing simultaneously, they are interdependent. It is in the connections between universal phenomena that the truth of existence can be known.

On the level of leadership, this means that a leader must create a sense of identification with those whom they lead, who in turn must sense this. Enlightened leaders realise that their position rests on those below them. They preserve their position and remain connected to those below them by practising simplicity. They don't aspire to the trappings of honour and prestige because such things only serve to block their sense of Oneness with the people.

They are incorruptible because they are in complete identification with those whom they serve and believe the needs of the people to be their own. (39)

*The best way to lead is to act from a sense of oneness with those being led. This sense of oneness is cultivated in a general sense by learning to recognise the complete interdependence and connectedness of all things in the universe.*

## The Power in Effortlessness

"Lead the organisation with correctness. Direct the military with surprise tactics. Take hold of the world with effortlessness. How is it so? Through this:"

"Too many prohibitions in the world and people become insufficient. Too many sharp weapons among people and the nation grows confused. Too much cunning strategy among people and strange things start to happen. Too many laws and regulations and too many criminals emerge."

"Thus enlightened people say: look to inaction and people will be naturally influenced. Look to refined tranquillity and people will be naturally correct, look to effortlessness and people will be naturally affluent, look to non-desire and people will be naturally simple."

In this passage, Lao Tzu suggests that leaders might unite the world if they could lead without interference and govern without restrictive social structures. Too many controls and regulations are a form of aggression against the natural processes of the refinement in people.

Taoists believe that people's instincts are basically fair and correct and become aggressive only in reaction to excessive force from restrictive laws and imposed morality. Leaders who try to repress people ultimately achieve the opposite. Such a force is self-defeating and in the process leads an individual or organisation into chaos.

Enlightened leaders reverse this process. They do not interfere when they can avoid it. They are a model of intelligent calm. They undertake projects where they are non-competitive and subdue in their hearts any desires for status and prestige. As a result the people they lead are favourably impressed and motivated and do not engage in cunning strategies.

In this way they are naturally united. (57)

*History recalls how fascist regimes are always, in the end, brought undone by the actions of those who react against the extreme restrictions imposed upon them.*

## Cultivating the Centre

"If the administration is subdued, the people are sincere. If the administration is exacting, the people are deficient."

"Misfortune! Good fortune supports it. Good fortune! Misfortune hides within it."

"Order can revert to the unusual; good can revert to the abnormal; and people are indeed bewildered for a long, long time."

"Thus enlightened leaders are square without dividing, honest without offending, straightforward without straining, bright without being dazzling."

Severe controls and regulations characterise a detailed and exacting administration. Such an administration conceives of an ideal and then attempts to regulate the people into this ideal. Since human nature naturally resists oppression, resentment and discontent begin to grow within the organisation. As the administration pushes, the resistance of the people grows even stronger.

Enlightened leaders understand the action of polarity in nature and therefore avoid such extremes. They know that good fortune and misfortune don't respond to direct control and that excessive action towards 'good order' will lead to a counter-reaction.

Instead they use their intelligence to shape the world without direct confrontation or excessive strategy or control.

Stable, subtle and sincere, they cultivate themselves and become models for the people they lead. (58)

*It is a mistake to over-regulate people, it runs counter to basic human nature. By nature people are not made to be over-regulated. The human species and indeed all other living creatures have evolved in a chaotic environment where conditions vary from one day to the next and survival depends on adapting to change. Too many rules and regulations restrict a person's ability to adapt to change, therefore people react against attempts to place them in a straightjacket and so reduce their ability to react spontaneously.*

*Some leaders assume that because some regulation is good, therefore a lot of regulation is better. There is a tendency in people to take things to the extreme. We see this tendency in every aspect of people's lives. One whisky might be good for a person's heart, therefore ten must be really good. Reducing dietary fat intake is good for a person's arteries, therefore no dietary fat will let a person live forever. The tendency towards extremes ignores the basic Taoist principle of moderation - the middle path.*

## Holding the Position

"Leading a large organisation is like cooking a small fish."

"If the Tao is present in the world, the cunning are not mysterious. Not only are the cunning not mysterious, their mystery does not harm others."

"Not only does their mystery not harm others, the Evolved also do not harm others. Since together they do no harm, the Power returns and accumulates."

In order to support the organisation in an uncertain atmosphere, a leader must emulate the Tao by "cooking a small fish" appropriately. Just as too much stirring will cause the delicate fish to fall apart, too much interference during a difficult period will unbalance the situation and one's place within it.

When there are no elegant, effortless solutions the best thing to do is allow the natural forces, the Tao, to evolve problems and point the way to their resolution.

Therefore, the first concern of evolved leaders is to cultivate the Tao in organisational affairs. Once the Tao is enlisted, through sensitive, observant non-interference - many things will become clear to everyone involved.

Those who would plan cunning strategies for personal gain become obvious and thus ineffective. Once the organisation needs no longer to fear internal manipulation, productivity will prevail. (60)

*Leaders who insist on over-regulating the activities of those they lead have the inevitable effect of destabilising the organisation. People resent meddling and will react against it in different ways, seeking to either change their leaders behaviour or have the leader removed.*

## The Tao in Leaders

"The Tao is the refuge of all things, the treasure of the good, the protector of the not good."

"Honour can be bought with fine words; others can be joined with fine conduct. So, if some are not good, why waste them?"

"In this way the Emperor is established; the three officials are installed. And although the large jade disc is preceded by a team of horses, this is not as good as sitting, advancing in the Tao."

"Why did those of old treasure the Tao? Did they not say, 'seek and it is attained, possess faults and they are released'? Thus it is the treasure of the world."

In organisations, the leader's role is to help all members to find their place and direct them together into progress and fulfilment. Even though some people may be insufficient or unrefined, Lao Tzu asks 'Why waste them?' An enlightened leader makes certain to provide for the education of everyone in the organisation. In this way, all members become integrated with the organisation and the leader's position is established.

To maintain that position, the enlightened leader does not put emphasis on the material advantages and outwardly grand appearance of leadership, for these will only serve to separate the world of the leader from the world of those they lead. The people's needs cannot be met by such a leader.

Instead, the enlightened leader looks within him or herself to sense the direction of social evolution (the Tao). In this way, they guide the people on the appropriate path and make no mistakes. (62)

*The principle outlined in this passage is as fresh today as it was 3000 years ago. It could have come from one of the many 'how to be a better manager' books found in any bookstore. It says, don't place yourself above your employees, they'll resent you for it because they instinctively know that under the skin, the manager is just like everyone else.*

*It advocates leadership of the people for the people. The result is a more harmonious organisation.*

## The Danger in Cleverness

"Those skilful in the ancient Tao are not obvious to people. They appear to be simple-minded."

"People are difficult to lead because they are too clever. Therefore to lead the organisation with cleverness will bring harm to the organisation. Conversely, to lead without cleverness brings benefit to the organisation."

"Those who know these two things have investigated the patterns of the Absolute. To know and investigate the patterns is called the Subtle Power. The Subtle Power is profound and pervasive. Together with the natural law of polarity it leads to the Great Harmony."

Leaders who impose elaborate strategies cause social reactions that undermine the structure of the organisation because clever strategies strike a resonant chord in people and trigger their own cunning responses.

An enlightened leader guides the organisation with simplicity and directness and in this way the inherent cleverness of the people is neutralised.

Simple and direct leadership is highly effective when it is intelligently aligned with the general trends in the environment and society. Enlightened leaders therefore constantly examine both the current patterns of society and the constant laws of Nature. (65)

*Enlightened leaders emulate Nature's patterns when controlling people's activities. They manage by simple, direct acts that don't cause speculation nor contain obvious ruses. People are in no doubt as to what is happening. They do not think, "Well it would seem this is happening, but maybe it is that not this that is happening."*

*By being enlightened, a leader is being an extension of Nature, an agent of Nature, is working in harmony with Nature - how can he/she go wrong?*

## The Power in Staying Low

"The rivers and seas lead the hundred streams because they are skilful at staying low. Thus they are able to lead the hundred streams."

"Therefore, to rise above people, one must, in speaking, stay below them. To remain in front of people, one must put oneself behind them."

"So it is that enlightened people remain above and yet the people are not weighted down. They remain in front and the people are not held back."

"Therefore the world willingly elects them and yet it does not reject them. Because they do not compete, the world cannot compete with them."

Enlightened leaders win the trust of the people by their complete identification with the people. The interests of the people are naturally promoted because they are the interests of the leader as well.

When it is clear in their words and actions that the leader does not feel superior to those whom they lead, the people see themselves in the leader and never tire of them. (66)

*It is a feature of human nature that overbearing leaders are resisted and reviled - it seems to be a universal human reaction. The most effective leaders are those who actively avoid creating a perception of distance between themselves and those they lead. The "me boss, you underling" attitude.*

*It may be argued by some that conservative hierarchical societies, such as we see in England, are stable and effective and therefore good. Everyone knows their place in the pecking order, from the Queen down to the lowliest street-sweeper. Each class feels it is their birthright to command those classes below, and those below accept the authority of their "betters". Unfortunately this cosy arrangement contains the seeds of its own destruction. Sooner or later, those below throw off the yolk. It might take hundreds of years, but ultimately it will happen because Nature will always bring affairs into harmony with itself.*

## The Power in Compassion

"All the world thinks that my Tao is great; and yet it seems inconceivable. Only its greatness makes it seem inconceivable. If it could be conceived of it would have become insignificant long ago."

"I have three Treasures that I support and protect: the first is compassion, the second is moderation, the third is not to be the first in the world."

"With compassion, one becomes courageous. With moderation, one becomes expansive. In daring not to be the first in the world, one becomes the instrument of leadership."

"Now if one is courageous without compassion, or expansive without moderation or first without holding back, one is doomed!"

"Compassion always triumphs when attacked; it brings security when maintained. Nature aids its leaders, by arming them with compassion."

The three treasures - compassion, moderation and the courage not to be first - are the emotional foundations of Lao Tzu's whole approach. Enduring leaders are those with the most

compassion. They are enduring because compassion is a mysterious intellectual force that allows reality to act on the mind in a deeply affecting way, and in return endows the mind with the power to act on reality. Compassionate leaders are able to make decisions with foresight and vision - this is how they endure and triumph.

Lao Tzu opens this passage with a paradox - the idea that something can be so large, so ever-present and so profound that it becomes inconceivable. He suggests that anything that can be fully conceived of and comprehended by the mind becomes small and manageable. Yet true power does not come from controlling the small and manageable, but from the mind-expanding exercise of conceiving of the inconceivable. (67)

*Compassion is a transforming force of nature - through a mysterious process, those who practice compassion transform themselves and in the process transform those around them to be more in harmony with nature. Witness the deeds of Jesus Christ when he healed the sick. These acts of compassion made such an impression on people that it helped to establish a religion that has endured for two thousand years.*

## Non Aggressive Strength

"A skilful leader does not use force. A skilful fighter does not feel anger. A skilful master does not engage the opponent, a skilful employer remains low."

"This is called the power in not contending. This is called the strength to employ others. This is called the highest emulation of nature."

Lao Tzu believed that the most capable and ultimately the most powerful leaders are those who practice humility, subtlety and composure. They are not aggressive and do not feel the need to prove themselves again and again.

The power in composure and the strength in compassion allows skilful leaders to organise others and achieve a collective end without resorting to overt means. Therefore events unfold naturally, without disruptive counter-reactions. (68)

## The Appropriate Perspective

"If the people do not fear authority, then authority will expand. Do not disrespect their position; do not reject their lives. Since indeed they are not rejected, they do not reject."

"Therefore, enlightened people know themselves, but do not display themselves. They love themselves but do not treasure themselves."

"Hence they discard one and receive the other."

Lao Tzu encourages enlightened leaders to minimise the distance between their sense of their own position and the position of those they lead. In this way, by identifying with the people the leader can better understand the psychological needs of the people. Thus their decisions are more aligned with those needs.

Lao Tzu believed that the less people fear or focus upon the outward embodiment of authority, the more effective that authority becomes. To cultivate and preserve the appropriate attitude, leaders should identify closely with those whom they lead.

When a leader does not exhibit and enhance their high position, they will discover self-knowledge. Moreover, by discarding any sense of self-importance they may have, they will find self-love and inner-peace. (72)

## The Tao in Organisations

The twelve passages in this group look at the behaviour of people engaged in group endeavours, as well as the conduct of organisations involved in worldly endeavours. These passages look at the Taoist principles that lead to the harmonious achievement of group objectives.

The twelve passages are as follows:

- ?? The Danger in Excess
- ?? The Skilful Exchange of Information
- ?? Leading the Leader
- ?? The Use of Force
- ?? Concealing the Advantage
- ?? Knowing Enough
- ?? The Undivided Path
- ?? The Way of Moderation
- ?? The Power in Modesty
- ?? Neutralising Escalation
- ?? Accepting the Blame
- ?? Fulfilling Independence

## The Danger in Excess

"Those who stand on tiptoe cannot stand firm; those who straddle cannot walk; those who display themselves cannot illuminate; those who define themselves cannot be distinguished; those who make claims can have no credit; and those who boast cannot advance."

"To those who stay with the Tao, these are like excess food and redundant action - since they are contrary to the laws of Nature they turn away."

People who try to become visible (stand on tiptoe), who are hypocritical (straddle), or who boast of their achievements will be overwhelmed by negative counter-reactions. This comes about through a natural group psychology that seeks to balance itself against individuals who seek to manipulate events.

Enlightened people recognise the danger of self-serving, self-indulgent behaviour within groups. They regard excess and redundancy as the signs of an unstable situation. Because they understand the laws of Nature, they know that the outcome of any excess is decline. Therefore they quietly remove themselves. They discard social fixations because they have discovered the richness of simplicity. (24)

## The Skilful Exchange of Information

"A good path has no ruts, a good speech has no flaws, a good analysis uses no schemes."

"A good lock has no bar or bolt, and yet it cannot be opened. A good knot does not restrain, and yet it cannot be unfastened."

"Thus it is that enlightened people are always good at saving others, hence no one is wasted. They are always good at saving things, hence nothing is wasted. This is called doubling the light."

"Therefore a good person is the teacher of an inferior person, and the inferior person is the resource of a good person. One who does not cherish a teacher or a good resource, although intelligent, is deluding themselves. This is called Significant Subtlety."

When people use force or cunning to shape events, they are walking a path that is already rutted, using logic that is inherently flawed and basing their calculations on schemes and guesses. Just as the most skilful knots hold things in place without excessive force, certain ends are best accomplished without the use of obvious means.

In worldly undertakings, the most effective and far-reaching systems rely on spontaneity, creativity and an intuitive understanding of human nature and social needs.

Enlightened people skilfully employ other people and things and thus spread the Light - the information that helps steer the course of evolution. In this way, the skilful person becomes the

teacher. Herein lies the symbolic relationship that reflects the interdependence between all states in the universe - energy and matter, proton and electron, time and space. Uninformed people need a model after that to model themselves.

Teachers derive energy and penetrating insight from acting as that model. Thus, with the proper values and attitudes towards each other, they are both transformed and come into harmony with the Tao. (27)

## Leading the Leader

"Those who use the Tao to guide leaders do not use forceful strategies in the world. Such methods tend to recoil. Where armies are positioned, thorny brambles are produced. A great military always brings years of hunger."

"Those who are skilful succeed and then stop. They dare not hold on with force. They succeed and do not boast, do not make claims, are not proud, do not acquire in excess and do not use force."

"Things overgrown will always decline. This is not the Tao. What is not the Tao will soon end."

Organisations that confuse offence with defence, aggression with protection invariably deplete their resources and lead their people into times of hunger. Organisations have great momentum and do not know how to stop their forward motion - their inertia keeps them moving in the current direction until another force acts to change it's course.

Therefore those whose job it is to advise the leaders of organisations are responsible for holding the organisation back from the excesses that lead to collapse.. Those who devise cunning or forceful strategies to use against other organisations are not fit to advise the leaders, because the nature of the work - as necessary as it might be - limits their ability to apprehend the Tao and so the evolution of society.

Enlightened people know it is possible to succeed without planting the seeds of self-destruction. Therefore they are not aggressive and they are not acquisitive. Only enlightened people with these characteristics are fit to guide the leader of an organisation. (30)

## The Use of Force

"The finest weapons can be the instrument of misfortune, and so contrary to natural law. Those who possess the Tao turn away from their use. Enlightened people occupy and honour the left (i.e. the left hand is less likely to act) whereas those who use weapons honour the right (the right hand is usually the one to act). In other words, enlightened people do not resort to force unless it is unavoidable and practice non-interference in order to avoid unfortunate counteractions."

"Weapons are instruments of misfortune that are used by the unevolved. When their use is unavoidable, the enlightened act with calm restraint."

"Even when victorious, let there be no joy, for such joy leads to contentment with slaughter. Those who are content with slaughter cannot find contentment in the world."

The use of force to alter worldly events is regarded here as a sometimes necessary evil. The "finest weapon" may be a powerful army or may be as subtle as a sharp intellect or a clever strategy - yet when it is used to exert force over another, it is "contrary to natural law" (the Tao) and will result in unfortunate counteractions.

When force is unavoidable, enlightened people act with restraint. Furthermore, they know that the use of force enhances personal power only to the extent of being regrettable. When victorious, they do not allow themselves to feel joy; instead they express regret. Their attitude strongly affects their organisation and so internal conflicts are regrettable as well.

Therefore a regretful attitude among a leader during times of external pressure can have a calming effect on the internal affairs of the organisation.(31)

## Concealing the Advantage

"In order to deplete it, it must be thoroughly extended. In order to weaken it, it must be thoroughly strengthened. In order to reject it, it must be thoroughly promoted. In order to take away from it, it must be thoroughly endowed."

This is called a subtle insight. The yielding can triumph over the inflexible; the weak can triumph over the strong. Fish should not be taken from deep waters, nor should organisations make obvious their advantages.

Organisations with the greatest strategic advantage are those with the greatest potential for loss. When an organisation becomes overextended, when it complacently accepts praise and promotion, gifts and abundant profits, when it believes itself to be growing stronger - it is then that it is at its most vulnerable. It has become unstable in the natural cycle of polarity and is on its way to its own opposite.

Because "fish" taken from the watery depths cannot survive, organisations should keep their advantages out of sight and action. Advantages that are restrained are more effective and long-lasting than those that are displayed because concealed advantages do not cause resistance or counter-reactions.

Inherent in this passage are instructions to smaller organisations that would overcome a larger one. The principle behind Subtle Insight is one that is frequently repeated in the Tao Te Ching - the weak can overcome the strong by yielding and contributing to the excessiveness of the strong. Excessiveness germinates the seed that forces things to grow into their opposite. (36)

## Knowing Enough

"When the world possesses the Tao, even fast horses are used for their dung. When the world is without the Tao, war-horses are raised in the suburbs."

"There is no greater misfortune than not knowing how much is enough, no greater fault than desiring to acquire."

"Therefore, knowing that enough is enough means that there will always be enough."

Lao Tzu believed that the greatest character flaw, particularly in leaders since they influence the attitudes of the people they lead, is acquisitiveness. Leaders who are acquisitive are looking for the meaning of life outside of themselves. Therefore their inner life develops no purpose or substance.

When an organisation is led according to the Tao, when it does not act in an acquisitive way towards other organisations, then even its greatest advantages are used for cultivating the internal quality of the organisation (fast horses being used for their dung).

Conversely, when an organisation is not led according to the Tao - that is, when it acts in an acquisitive way towards other organisations, then its advantages are used aggressively outside of the organisation and the people must pay for this (war-horses are raised in the suburbs).

Organisations in accord with the Tao know how much is enough. For this reason, they attain freedom, power and independence. (46)

## The Undivided Path

"Using only a little knowledge, I would travel the Great Way and fear only of letting go. The Great Way is very even, yet people favour the by-ways."

"When an organisation is divided, fields are overgrown, stores are empty, sharp swords are worn, food and drink are excessive, wealth and treasure are hoarded."

"This is called stealing and exaggeration and certainly not the way."

Following the Great Way - the Tao - requires no special knowledge or learning; it is merely listening to the inner voice, taking note of the current social and environmental patterns and holding to the line of least resistance.

The path of least resistance is level and easy but for many the byways are tempting. Byways in the social sense are excessive ambitions and desires that separate people from their inner nature and from each other.

When people indulge in extremes it serves only to block their own personal development. When organisations go to extremes, it not only endangers itself but the people involved in it. A divided organisation is one that acts ambitiously or aggressively towards its own people or towards other organisations. Such organisations economise when they should spend and vice versa. That is, they spend on appearance and weapons and economise on nurturing and support.

Unbalanced organisations act against the laws of nature and so do not last. (53)

## The Way of Moderation

"In leading people and serving Nature, there is nothing better than moderation. Since, indeed, moderation means yielding early, yielding early means accumulating power."

"When Power is accumulated, nothing is impossible. When nothing is impossible, one knows no limits. One who knows no limits can possess the organisation."

"An organisation that possesses the Tao can endure and advance. This means deep roots and firm foundations: durability and longevity through observation of the Tao."

The responsibility of enlightened leaders is to guide their people effectively while remaining centred and self-aware - this is what is meant by "serving Nature".

To achieve moderation, leaders scrupulously avoid extremes and adopt non-confrontative postures. With moderation comes endurance, personal power and unlimited possibilities.

Centred leaders tend to experience an ever-expanding influence. When enlightened leaders, in turn, structure their organisation in accord with the moderate, centred path of the Tao, it will not be eroded by the turbulence of the extremes and will therefore enjoy a long and prosperous existence. (59)

## The Power in Modesty

"A large organisation should flow downwards to intersect with the world. It is the female of the world. The female always overcomes the male by stillness; through stillness she makes herself low."

"Thus if a large organisation is lower (more humble) than a smaller organisation, it can receive the small organisation. If a small organisation stays lower than a larger one, it can receive the large organisation."

"Therefore one receives by becoming low; another receives by being low."

"Yet what a large organisation desires is to unite and support others. What a small organisation desires is to join and serve others. Therefore, for both to gain the position they desire, the larger should place itself low."

A non-aggressive, non-interfering stance is the natural diplomatic position for a large organisation to take towards a smaller, weaker one. This yielding position gives the impression of submission but has the advantage of generosity. When this position is held, the smaller organisation will not resent the power and position of the larger. The larger organisation, in turn, will engender the trust and cooperation of the smaller by not aggressively promoting its own interests.

Such a position on the part of the larger organisation satisfies the psychological needs of both, since large organisations benefit by uniting and supporting others, and smaller organisations benefit by addressing a wider audience.

The power in serving others occurs in all possible relationships - from the interpersonal to the international. The Chinese say that "to rule is to serve", a Taoist would say "to serve is to rule". (61)

## Neutralising Escalation

"Strategists have a saying: I dare not act as a host, yet I act as a guest. I dare not advance an inch, yet I retreat a foot."

"This is called travelling without moving, rising up without arms, projecting without resistance, capturing without strategies."

"No misfortune is greater than underestimating resistance; underestimating resistance will destroy my treasures. Thus when mutually opposing strategies escalate, the one who feels sorrow will triumph."

Lao Tzu believed that the clash of ideologies was inevitable in social evolution. He observed however that some ideologies make inroads into the hearts and minds of people while others create disastrous counter-reactions. He realised that resistance to ideas can be overcome - but only when indirect methods are used will there be a lasting effect.

He called this capturing without strategies - this is why his strategist would rather retreat a foot than advance an inch.. Conversely, when aggression is used to impose an idea on others, the effect is also a direct one: strategy is met with strategy, weapon is matched against weapon, tensions escalate and escalate again.

Lao Tzu lamented this familiar pattern, saying 'underestimating resistance will destroy my treasures' (the three treasures - compassion, moderation and the courage not to be first). How can escalation be neutralised? Lao Tzu thought that the side that is socially evolved enough to feel sorrow and experience grief at the situation would be the side whose ideology would ultimately triumph. (69)

## Accepting the Blame

"Nothing in the world is as yielding and receptive as water yet in attacking the firm and inflexible nothing triumphs so well. Because of what it is not, this becomes easy."

"The receptive triumphs over the inflexible, the yielding triumphs over the rigid. None in the world do not know this, none have the ability to practice it."

"Therefore, evolved people say: one who accepts the disgrace of the organisation can be called the leader of the grain shrine (traditional shrines dedicated to crop fertility), one who accepts the misfortunes of the organisation can be called the leader of the world."

"Right words appear to reverse themselves."

This passage opens with the familiar Taoist image of water triumphing over the hard and inflexible. Because it is yielding and receptive, because it has no edge, no shape and no limits (what is not), it can absorb and erode firmness and structure.

In accepting blame, enlightened leaders willingly take on the soft, receptive qualities of water that lead to ultimate triumph. They know that accepting responsibility for all problems within the organisation will stabilise their position and extend their influence. It is this paradox, perhaps, that prompted Lao Tzu to note that "Right words appear to reverse themselves".

Two forms of blame are mentioned in this passage. One is blame for disgrace - those mistakes made within the organisation. Leaders who accept this responsibility are fit to guide the organisation. The other blame is for misfortunes that befall the organisation from outside. Leaders who accept this responsibility believe that they have the capacity to foresee and avert such problems. These leaders are fit to guide the world. (78)

## Fulfilling Independence

"In a small organisation with few people, let there be ten or a hundred times more tools than they can use. Let the people value their lives and yet not move far away. Even though there are

boats and carriages, there is no occasion to use them. Even though there are armour and weapons, there is no occasion to brandish them."

"Let the people again knot cords and use them: their food will be pleasing, their clothes will be fine, their homes will be secure, their customs will be joyful."

"Nearby organisations may watch each other, their crowing and barking may be heard. Yet the people may grow old and die without coming or going between them."

In this passage, Lao Tzu describes his view of the ideal independent social organisation - whether families, businesses, states or nations. The ideal organisation creates an atmosphere that complements and enhances the development of every member, by providing, within the organisation, the tools of personal growth: health, education and recreation.

Because people value their lives, they must be given what they need to fulfil their potential and find themselves. When people are encouraged to observe and monitor their own progress (Lao Tzu calls this "knotting cords") they develop a strong sense of personal power and independence.

They find joy and completion in the basics of life - food, clothing shelter and culture. When they are independent and satisfied, they will not stray from their work, their relationships or from their loyalties.

The idea of knotting cords comes from an ancient Chinese system of mathematics and memory storage. The knotted ropes can be thought of as a crude circuit board with the knots acting as switches. The abacus derived from this system. (80)

## The Tao in Non-interference

The eleven passages in this group discuss the principle of tactical non-interference (or non action). They were selected for this group by virtue of each being concerned with some aspect of the "hands off" technique for achieving lasting influence in worldly affairs.

The eleven passages are as follows:

- ?? The Power of Selflessness
- ?? The Way of Non-interference
- ?? The Limits of Specialisation
- ?? Subtle Powers
- ?? Cultivating Inner Knowledge
- ?? The Art of Non-action
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## The Power of Selflessness

"Heaven is eternal, the Earth everlasting. They can be eternal and everlasting because they do not exist for themselves. For that reason they can exist eternally."

"Therefore, enlightened people put themselves last, and yet they are first. Put themselves outside and yet they remain."

"Is it not that they are without self-interest that their interests succeed?"

The path followed by Taoists seems contrary to common sense and ordinary expectation. Enlightened people know that the cyclic action of the Tao will ultimately bring into the foreground that which is currently in the background.

This natural change occurs without force or resistance and therefore endures. Thus, careful positioning is the strategy of enlightened people. By putting themselves last and outside, they are employing subtlety and tactical inertness to compel the social environment to counterbalance and bring them forward naturally.

Although it is true that in acting without self-interest one's interests are fulfilled, people who put their interests last discover that their desires are transformed. As their awareness expands they develop priorities that are aligned intelligently with both the current situation and with larger influences in the world.

For this reason, as their aims are fulfilled, their environment evolves. (7)

## The Way of Non-interference

"Those who would take hold of the world and act on it never, I notice, succeed (in the long term). The world is a mysterious instrument, not made to be handled. Those who act on it, spoil it. Those who seize it, lose it."

"So, in Natural Law some lead, some follow; some agitate, some remain silent; some are firm, some are weak; some carry on, some lose heart."

"Thus it is enlightened people avoid extremes, avoid extravagance, avoid stress."

All systems have hidden in them a natural geometry. Crystals form and cells replicate within a strict mathematical organisation, a template. Thus to interfere with the natural state of people and organisations is a futile and often dangerous endeavour.

In society, enlightened people observe and understand this natural state and then position themselves appropriately. They are always in harmony with the deeper trends in the evolution of society. They exert the force of their convictions via a state of focused inner awareness, while externally they practice strategic non-interference.

Those who follow the Tao are reluctant to push anything to the extreme, even to extremes of complacency, and they know that this can lead to undesirable counteractions.

Instead they strive to maintain their intellectual balance by experiencing the rhythms of natural events with emotional independence. (29)

## The Limits of Specialisation

"The Tao of the Absolute has no name. Although infinitesimal in its Simplicity, the world cannot master it."

"If leaders would hold onto it, all things would naturally follow. Heaven and Earth would unite to rain sweet dew (indicative of a kingdom at peace) and people would naturally co-operate without commands."

"Names emerge when institutions begin. When names emerge, know likewise to stop. To know when to stop is to be free of danger."

"The presence of the Tao in the world is like the valley stream joining rivers and seas."

Lao Tzu advises enlightened leaders to move towards simplicity and away from complexity - towards universality rather than differentiation. As always he advises leaders to know when to stop and to practice non-interference.

Leaders who insist on exacting systems and roles in their organisations cannot create a natural, effortless atmosphere for the completion of projects, because the structure they conceive of is suited for machines not humans.

When people are forced into roles and every aspect of their work defined, their possibilities become limited, they no longer create and they do not evolve.

When leaders systematise every detail in their organisation, they close it off from all possibility of evolution. Just as life-forms that are highly specialised move in the direction of extinction, this path leads to the extinction of the organisation.

On the other hand, with open-ended management, the people have nothing to resist or resent. They become spontaneously co-operative because their attention shifts to the end rather than the means. (32)

## Subtle Powers

"The most yielding parts of the world overtake the most rigid parts of the world. The insubstantial can penetrate continually."

"Therefore I know that without action there is advantage."

"This philosophy without words, this advantage without action - it is rare in the world to attain them."

Lao Tzu believed that most difficulties in life are born out of reactions to larger effects, and that problems tend to resolve themselves when they are not met with aggression and invited to remain.

Just as large ships are steered with small rudders, Lao Tzu felt that when action was necessary, the most subtle effort would yield the most effective result - a result that would not bring a whole new set of problems.

In the most personal sense, non-interference is a form of freedom - one that can bring power to individuals who have the courage to practice it. (43)

## Cultivating Inner Knowledge

"Without going out of doors, know the world. Without looking out the window, see the Tao in Nature. One may travel very far and know very little."

"Therefore, enlightened people know without going about, recognise without looking. Achieve without acting."

The most valuable knowledge one can acquire comes through the cultivation of intuition and the practice of non-interference. This knowledge addresses a deeper level of awareness than that gained through action, for knowledge that comes through action is obscured by situation specific reactions.

Taoists use strategic non-interference to cultivate exceptional awareness. In this way, enlightened people can align themselves so that their inner world reflects the world around them.

They are using tactical inertness to ensure that their current instincts and impressions are in harmony with the larger forces at work in the world. With this knowledge they can position themselves appropriately and effectively in order to achieve their aims. (47)

## The Art of Non-action

"To pursue the academic, add to it daily. To pursue the Tao, subtract from it daily. Subtract and subtract again, to arrive at the art of non-action. Through non-action, nothing is left undone."

"The world is always held without effort. The moment there is effort, the world is beyond holding."

This passage is a thought experiment that explores the practice of calculated non-action as the means of gaining powerful insights into worldly affairs. Taoists strive to remove fixed ideas from their minds so as to open the way for impressions based on the transformation and evolution of their environment. Static information limits the mind's ability to "read" impressions that are coming to it in the language of possibility and change.

Lao Tzu believed that using action or effort to elicit information would yield a contaminated form of reality - one based on the world's reactions to one's own actions.

The Taoist ideal is to gain pure information by observing the world that is not reacting to one's interference.

Enlightened people use pure information to refine their intuitive and instinctive knowledge. (48)

## The Power in not Contending

"To possess power that runs deep is to be like a newborn child. Poisonous insects do not sting it, fierce beasts do not seize it, birds of prey do not strike it."

"It's bones are yielding, it's muscles are relaxed, it's grip is strong. It does not yet know the union of male and female, yet its virility is active. Its life force is at it's greatest."

"It can scream all day, yet it does not become hoarse. It's harmony is at it's greatest."

"To know Harmony is called the Absolute. To know the Absolute is called Insight. To enhance life is called propitious. To be conscious of influence is called strength."

"Things overgrown must decline. This is not the Tao. What is not the Tao will soon die."

The infant is a frequent metaphor in the Tao Te Ching. To be infant-like is to be in touch with one's original nature and the current reality in the environment. Infants act and react appropriately and spontaneously and do not attack or contend; thus they are protected.

Enlightened people therefore use spontaneity and non-contention as a spiritual martial art to transcend social dangers. When they pushed they yield, and the pushers are thrown off their balance by their own inappropriate efforts.

Enlightened people focus solely on maintaining their stability and balance - a position that yields power.

The physical laws of the universe reflect the fact that unbalanced energies are not stable and their time as such quickly passes. (55)

## The Path of Least Resistance

"Act without action; work without effort. Taste without savouring. Magnify the small; increase the few, repay ill-will with kindness."

"Plan the difficult when it is easy. Handle the big where it is small. The worlds hardest work begins when it is easy. The worlds largest effort begins where it is small. Enlightened people, finally, take no great action, and in that way, great is achieved."

"Those who commit easily inspire little trust. How easy to inspire hardness! Therefore, enlightened people view all as difficult. Finally they have no difficulty!"

When enlightened people find that they must influence an ongoing process they will direct their energy towards it's weakest and most receptive area. Once their influence is absorbed, they know that the weakness will move to another location. They follow. Never do they find themselves in direct confrontation with a formidable problem.

Just as a river finds it's way through a valley of boulders, enlightened people work their way around areas of resistance, knowing that they will ultimately wear them down.

Thus an entire process can be influenced and controlled with small, non-confrontational actions. Because enlightened people are serious-minded, they inspire trust and break down resistance. Because they are subtle, their actions are appropriately restrained and do not interfere with the natural cycle of events. In this way they avoid counter-reactions and achieve their aims. (63)

## The Power at the Beginning

"What is at rest is easy to hold. What is not yet begun is easy to plan. What is thin is easy to melt. What is minute is easy to disperse. Deal with many things before they emerge. Put them in order before there is disorder."

"A tree of many arm-spans grows from a single sprout. A tower of nine stories is raised from a pile of earth. A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

Those who act on things spoil them. Those who seize things lose them. Therefore, enlightened people do nothing, hence they spoil nothing. They seize nothing therefore they lose nothing."

People often spoil their work at it's point of completion. With care at the end as well as the beginning, no work will ever be spoiled."

"Thus enlightened people desire to be desireless and do not treasure goods that are hard to get. They learn without learning by returning to the place where the collective mind passes. In this way they assist all things naturally without venturing to act."

This passage explores the possibilities for the control that a person might gain in worldly events through the use of strategic non-interference. Every action produces an equal and opposite reaction. Strong force applied in any direction has the effect of engendering an equal force back towards the original force.

Enlightened people guide events by developing a sense of where and how events originate. Thus they can act on the event when it is in its most unentrenched and least reactive state. At the same time they can position themselves to guide the situation through to completion.

The instinct that signals the origin of events can be cultivated by minimising one's desires and avoiding the crippling effects of dogmatic thinking. (64)

## Unnatural Authority

"When people do not fear death, how can they be threatened with death? Suppose people fear death and still do not conform. Who would then dare to seize them and put them to death?"

"There is always the master executioner who kills. To substitute for the master executioner in killing is like substituting for the master carpenter who carves. Whoever thus substitutes rarely escapes injury to his hands."

Lao Tzu believed that people are inherently good-hearted, and to maintain this state they need personal freedom, intellectual independence, and most importantly, a life that is free from interference from authority. When authority becomes oppressive, people will no longer fear death as they reach for freedom.

Oppressive leaders inevitably hurt themselves in the end. (74)

## Self Destructive Leadership

"People are hungry because those above consume too much in taxes. So it is that people are hungry."

"People are difficult to lead because those above interfere with them. So it is that people are difficult to lead."

"People make light of death because those above crave survival. So it is that people make light of death."

Lao Tzu wrote the Tao Te Ching during a period of great political instability. Observing the rulers of the various states and the lives of their subjects, he concluded that when leaders are insecure in their position they develop a deep fear of losing their position that they then identify with the interests of the organisation.

As a result they become very defensive, taking desperate measures to protect the organisation. They impose oppressive regulations to restrict the livelihood of the people.

The people, paying for their leaders fear, do not get enough to eat. They become inured to the killing of human beings and develop a growing contempt for their leader. Such an organisation cannot endure for long. (75)