



The Tao Teh King for Awakening

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1. On the Absolute Tao

The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name.

(Conceived of as) having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth; (conceived of as) having a name, it is the Mother of all things.

Always without desire we must be found,
If its deep mystery we would sound;
But if desire always within us be,
Its outer fringe is all that we shall see.

Under these two aspects, it is really the same; but as development takes place, it receives the different names. Together we call them the Mystery. Where the Mystery is the deepest is the gate of all that is subtle and wonderful.

(Tao Teh King 1)

Introductory remarks

One of the accusations made about the Essenes by the “regular” adherents of the Mosaic Law was that they “kept alien scriptures.” According to the *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* this was so. The Essenes had copies of the scriptures of Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism, which they considered valid and from which they taught in their communities and schools along with the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. According to the *Aquarian Gospel* Jesus was brought up as conversant with those religions as with Judaism.

It is said that the *Tao Teh King* is the work of the great Chinese sage Lao Tze. Disgusted with the degeneration of Chinese society, he decided to leave and vanish forever—which he did. But as he was leaving the capital, the warden of the gate asked him to set down his realizations since he would no longer be accessible to truth seekers. He did so, and then went out the gate into the lost pages of human history.

If a person wishes he can immerse himself in the stewpot of scholarly speculation as to who Lao Tze “really” was, whether he ever existed, and whether he wrote the *Tao Teh King*, or who did. None of this means anything. Taoist masters through the centuries have proved the truth of the *Tao Teh King*, and that is all that matters. For truth seekers it stands as a monument to Truth. Even those who understand it imperfectly will reap great gain from its study.

The text on which this commentary is based for the first eighteen sections is that of James Legge, but from then on that of Lin Yutang. The sections are according to those traditional in the ancient texts of the *Tao Teh King*.

The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name.

Like so many of the terms of virtually prehistoric Ancient Wisdom, “Tao” is not easy to translate—it may even be impossible to translate. The best we can do is say that “Tao” means Way. In fact, until the West started talking of “Buddhism” the path outlined by Sakyamuni Buddha was called “the Buddha Way” (Buddha Tao) in the orient. Because of the inseparability of Taoism and Chinese culture (which included philosophy and religion), Taoism flowed in the veins of Chinese Buddhism however much Buddhist purists might have wished it otherwise. The existence of many Buddhist-Taoist temples in China and abroad make this clear.

What is the Way—the Tao? This opening verse might literally be rendered: “The Way that can be ‘wayed’ is not the Way.” That is, the way that can be traversed or travelled is not THE Way that is the subject of this treatise. This may seem hopeless, but it is not that difficult to unravel. The Way is beyond any concept or experience of space and time. Therefore It cannot be thought of in those terms. In The Way we do not go from one point to another—not even one step can be take on The Way because It does not exist in space. Similarly, we cannot think of “entering” the Way, because we are always “in” It. Nor can we think of time being spent experiencing or establishing ourselves in The Way, for It transcends time. The Way being utterly transcendent, nothing can be spoken that can convey Its nature—or even Its existence.

Having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth; having a name, it is the Mother of all things.

To say the Tao is One is not really accurate, for to our earthbound minds “one” means a single object; and the Tao can never be an object. We can speak of one apple, but not of one Tao. Yet here we see that a kind of duality or difference can be attributed to the Tao. Actually the duality is only in our own mind, but since we are attempting to at least hint at the truth about the Tao we have to “suspend belief” to do so. So from now on in this section the Tao will be spoken of inaccurately so we can get a somewhat accurate idea of It.

The Tao is both transcendent and immanent. In Its transcendent aspect—“having no name”—beyond all attributes, forms, or conditionings, It is the Source of heaven and earth, “of all things visible and invisible” as the Nicene Creed says. But in Its immanent aspect—“having a name”—It is the nurturing Mother of all things. That is, in Its active, dynamic side which produces the cosmos and evolves it to perfection, along with all those intelligences inhabiting forms within it, It is Mother of All. The symbolic expression “Mother” is used because the child receives its body substance from the mother and is nourished by the mother through her own body in the womb and after birth through breast-feeding. The mother sustains the infant by imparting her own body and life-force to it. In the same way we are inextricably bound up with the Tao as our Eternal Mother. Beginning as an atom of hydrogen, we evolve through all the forms of life and ultimately transcend them—all through the agency of the Mother Tao. Nothing is done except through—and essentially by—the Tao. We are the Tao and the Tao is us. As the agent for our Christhood, it is the Tao that is the Mother of Christ.

**Always without desire we must be found,
If its deep mystery we would sound;
But if desire always within us be,
Its outer fringe is all that we shall see.**

The Tao does all things, yet our interior disposition determines our success or failure in coming to knowledge of the unknowable Tao.

In every system that seriously intends for its practitioners to attain the highest knowledge, desire is considered the Great Satan. The Bhagavad Gita gives a great deal of time to the devastations of desire (*kama*) and the need for absolute desirelessness. Buddha spoke vigorously of the need to eradicate desire (*tanha*). The official “New Testament” is glaringly silent on the subject since Churchianity’s major draw is the promise of the fulfillment of all desires—and the more you have the more God will be pleased to honor them. (This is called “a precious promise.”) “Happy as pigs in mud” seems to be the ideal.

But in the Aquarian Gospel the view is quite different—in consonance with the

wisdom of Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Jesus had this to say: “The lower self, the carnal self, the body of desires, is...distorted by the murky ethers of the flesh. The lower self is an illusion, and will pass away;.... The lower self is the embodiment of truth reversed, and so is falsehood manifest” (Aquarian Gospel 8:7-9). “Now spirit loves the pure, the good, the true; the body of desires extols the selfish self; the soul becomes the battle ground between the two” (Aquarian Gospel 9:28). This ninth chapter of the Aquarian Gospel is all about the Tao as presented in Taoist scriptures.) Jesus puts a sharper point on the matter when he says: “The sin lies in the wish, in the desire, not in the act” (Aquarian Gospel 27:16). And: “He who would follow me must give up all cravings” (Aquarian Gospel 66:19).

The Tao Teh King, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Aquarian Gospel are speaking of all desires, not just “naughty ones,” for desire is bondage.

Desire is also blinding, so we must become desireless if we would perceive the Tao to any meaningful degree and come to some experience of It. If the condition of desire—that state in which desire can arise—remains within us, within our consciousness, however buried it might be, we can see only the outward manifestations of the Tao: the material and illusive world.

Charles Muller renders the verse this way:

“Therefore, always desireless, you see the mystery;

“Ever desiring, you see the manifestations.”

The point he brings out here is that desire and desirelessness cannot be incidental, just phases—sometimes being in one and sometimes in the other. We must be *always desireless*. If so, then we shall perceive the Tao. If we are always desiring, we shall only see Its manifestations, only see the foam of the sea but never the water. There is an implication here that it is a matter of either/or. We are either always desireless or always desiring. No in between. This is important, for most people, even though they know it is otherwise, look upon the conscious mind as the totality; and if they are not experiencing something on the conscious level they think it is not taking place. But the subconscious is the incubator of all desires. Even if the stage of the mind-theater is empty, that does not mean there are not plenty of desire-actors in the wings just waiting to emerge. In addition, it is implied that desire and desirelessness are *conditions*, not just action or inaction. So even if we have no desires formed in either the conscious or subconscious minds, if we are *capable* of desire—not having transcended the conditions of desire—we are in the state of desire and so “ever desiring.”

Under these two aspects, it is really the same; but as development takes place, it receives the different names.

The Tao is always one, whether we think of It as manifest or unmanifest. And the same is true of ourselves: whether we desire or not, we, too, are always one. “As development takes place, it receives the different names.” Before we begin the process of evolution we are in the state of unity, but only dimly, subliminally. When we enter the realm of evolution we experience duality—become lost in it. After the attainment of Christhood we re-enter the Tao-Unity fully able to experience It and function within It. Then if we should descend to the world of duality we shall know it as the Unity and be untouched by its illusions. We shall function as One in the world of Two.

Together we call them the Mystery.

The transcendent and the immanent, the One and the Two, the unconditioned and the conditioned—known in the Upanishads as Nirguna and Saguna Brahman: God

without attributes and with attributes—should be “taken” together, for “together we call them the Mystery,” meaning that we do not accept one and reject the other, claiming that alone to be the Tao.

Where the Mystery is the deepest is the gate of all that is subtle and wonderful.

Gates are natural symbols for those points at which we pass from one state of awareness to another, plateaus of our evolution. Jesus spoke more than once of the gateway to the kingdom, which He called “the gate of consciousness” (Aquarian Gospel 143:42). “If you would find the spirit life, the life of man in God, then you must walk a narrow way and enter through a narrow gate. The way is Christ, the gate is Christ, and you must come up by the way of Christ. No man comes unto God but by the Christ,” (Aquarian Gospel 129:7, 8) the Consciousness that *is* Christ.

In the depths, in the heart, of the Tao, there is the “gate” from which all things have emanated and to which all things return. At that gate, however, all “thingness” has vanished and only the thinnest of veils remains between us and the Tao. And when we pass through the gate, that veil, too, dissolves and is no more. That is why Jesus said: “The nearer to the kingdom gate you come, more spacious is the room; the multitudes have gone” (Aquarian Gospel 67:8). The kingdom gate cannot be approached except through meditation, through the mediation of the Holy Breath.

2. The Rise of Relative Opposites

All in the world know the beauty of the beautiful, and in doing this they have (the idea of) what ugliness is; they all know the skill of the skillful, and in doing this they have (the idea of) what the want of skill is.

So it is that existence and non-existence give birth the one to (the idea of) the other; that difficulty and ease produce the one (the idea of) the other; that length and shortness fashion out the one the figure of the other; that (the ideas of) height and lowness arise from the contrast of the one with the other; that the musical notes and tones become harmonious through the relation of one with another; and that being before and behind give the idea of one following another.

Therefore the sage manages affairs without doing anything, and conveys his instructions without the use of speech.

All things spring up, and there is not one which declines to show itself; they grow, and there is no claim made for their ownership; they go through their processes, and there is no expectation (of a reward for the results). The work is accomplished, and there is no resting in it (as an achievement).

The work is done, but how no one can see; 'Tis this that makes the power not cease to be.

(Tao Teh King 2)

All in the world know the beauty of the beautiful, and in doing this they have [knowledge of] what ugliness is; they all know the skill of the skilful, and in doing this they have [knowledge of] what the want of skill is.

Thank you, thank you, Lao Tzu! As a right-brainer growing up in a left-brain society I was often stunned by the absolute stupidity of universally-accepted “truisms” that were as silly as they were erroneous. One of them that chafed me the most was the imbecilic statement that if we were never unhappy we would not know happiness—and variations on that. That is like saying that if we were never hungry we would not know what it was to be well-fed. Or that if we did not know everybody else in the world we would not know our own mother! In religion this foolishness runs amok in the words and writings of those who think that the way to know the truth is to first know untruth, and consequently grind out volume after volume of analysis and denunciation of “heresy” in the delusion that by this way they are expounding “orthodoxy.” Since very intelligent people accept and engage in this, the phenomenon is bewildering until we understand that right-brain/left-brain is a very real factor in human thought and behavior.

In relation to spiritual life we must realize that we do not need to go through all kinds of delusions to eventually come to the truth. Nor do we need to first suffer, wander, rebel, deny, and go down dead-end byways before turning to God and going to God. Those who assert that we do are simply trying to cover up their own vagaries as being necessary and therefore somehow acceptable and even worthy. When Jesus said: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,” (Matthew 6:33) He was speaking the simple facts. If we seek God first then everything we need will come to us automatically. Long before Jesus’ counsel, the upanishad referred to God as “That Which, when known, *everything* is known.” For it is God that is “the one thing needful” (Luke 10:42). As the Veda says: “He shining, everything shines.” Knowing Him, all is known. And knowing Him we

become one with Him.

In Indian philosophy we inevitably come across the idea that everything is dual in relative existence, manifesting as the *dwandwas*—the pairs of opposites such as heat/cold, wet/dry, light/darkness, and so forth.

So it is that existence and non-existence give birth the one to (the idea of) the other; that difficulty and ease produce the one (the idea of) the other; that length and shortness fashion out of the one the figure of the other; that (the ideas of) height and lowness arise from the contrast of the one with the other; that the musical notes and tones become harmonious through the relation of one with another; and that being before and behind give the idea of one following another.

The meaning here is that one *dwandwa* instructs us in the existence of the other. The presence gives rise to the concept of the absence of an object or a quality. But the fundamental truth being aimed at is the fact that relative existence teaches us all about itself—that we need only observe it to learn the truth about everything. Buddha speaks of this in the *Dhammapada*, as well. Life is not just the best teacher, it is the only teacher.

Therefore the sage manages affairs without doing anything, and conveys his instructions without the use of speech.

This is an incredible insight, and is beautifully expounded in the *Bhagavad Gita* under the subject of the *gunas*—the modes of energy behavior inherent in the creation. (In the following citations, think of “energy patterns” when you read “*gunas*.”)

“The Vedas teach us about the three *gunas* and their functions. You, Arjuna, must overcome the three *gunas*. You must be free from the pairs of opposites. Poise your mind in tranquility. Take care neither to acquire nor to hoard. Be established in the consciousness of the *Atman*, always” (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:45).

“Every action is really performed by the *gunas*. Man, deluded by his egoism, thinks: “I am the doer” (*Bhagavad Gita* 3:27).

“He who has the true insight into the operations of the *gunas* and their various functions, knows that when senses attach themselves to objects, *gunas* are merely attaching themselves to *gunas*. Knowing this, he does not become attached to his actions” (*Bhagavad Gita* 3:28).

“Let the wise man know these *gunas* alone as the doers of every action; let him learn to know That Which is beyond them, also: thus he will reach my oneness” (*Bhagavad Gita* 14:19).

“When the dweller in the body has overcome the *gunas* that cause this body, then he is made free from birth and death, from pain and decay: he becomes immortal” (*Bhagavad Gita* 14:20).

The wise realize that they are watching movies—movies that originate in the mind and are combinations of light and sound. The Cosmic Movie originates in the Divine Mind (the *Tao*) and moves along of itself. Our task is to realize this and learn to the fullest extent through calm observation. In this state of Perfect Silence he acts without acting and speaks without speaking. This is not gobbledygook, but is comprehensible only to those who become proficient in meditation. The great non-dualist philosopher Shankara spoke of it this way in his Hymn to *Dakshinamurti* (The Divine Teacher):

“Strange,...he taught them by keeping silence, and the doubts of the disciples were all cleared up.” This has been the experience of many who came, burdened with doubts and questions into the presence of the Illumined. With a glance those liberated

souls dispelled all doubt and lack of understanding. It is not the glib but the (truly) silent who are wise and impart wisdom. It is the Tao alone that teaches through those who have united themselves with It.

No secrets to the wise

One of the major ploys of manipulative religion and esotericism is to insist that there are great secrets, major arcana, that cannot be known without the secret teachings and secret practices given only to the few that make themselves worthy through being completely subjugated to the dispenser(s) of the “hidden wisdom.” Secret initiations (a long series of these, preferably) are especially favored means of keeping the attention and allegiance of the duped. And indeed there are such secret things—but only because the spiritual merchandisers make them so. For Lao Tzu assures us that:

All things spring up, and there is not one which declines to show itself; they grow, and there is no claim made for their ownership; they go through their processes, and there is no expectation (of a reward for the results). The work is accomplished, and there is no resting in it (as an achievement).

This is worth a close scrutiny.

All things spring up, and there is not one which declines to show itself. Jesus expressed it this way: “For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad” (Luke 8:17). It is a matter of evolution. As the consciousness of the individual unfolds, so does the inner and outer universe unfold itself to his inner eye in proportion to his own degree of unfoldment. The cosmos—most particularly the inner world—teaches him as he advances. And ALL things arise before his awareness in time, “and there is not one which declines to show itself.” So there is no need for an external revealer of secrets without whom they would not be known. Everything is self-revealing.

What about teachers, then? They are very important when they are real teachers of truth—that is, when they clearly and directly impart to the student the knowledge of the way to open his own consciousness. For that opening itself then becomes his teacher. This was demonstrated in the life of my dear friend Swami Rama of Hardwar. At the age of nine he was idly playing in the streets of his birthplace—a tiny village of Kashmir. An elderly yogi came walking down the street, and as he passed by said: “Come with me!” The boy walked along beside him until they had passed a little distance beyond the village. Then the yogi stopped and right there instructed him in a yogic practice, telling him to do it always. Then the yogi walked on and was never seen by him again. The child applied what the yogi had taught him and became a great saint. What is more, he openly taught to everyone the practice his teacher had given him, saying that there was no need for initiation or personal instruction in it. He declined to become a guru in the contemporary sense of becoming the presiding deity of the disciple’s life. Rather, he just told what he had been told, and those who applied it also attained higher consciousness. His teacher had known that everything would reveal itself to him in time if he persevered—that he needed nothing more than the simple knowledge he gave him. And Swami Rama proved that to be true. So let me repeat: a true teacher shows how to be taught by God and His creation. The rest is up to the seeker. “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children” (Isaiah 54:13). We should read and listen to the words of worthy spiritual teachers, but only those such as I have outlined are worthy.

They grow... The teachings of God to the questing soul are not external

formulations or concepts, neither are they artificial implants. Rather, they are the spontaneous developments of the aspirant's inmost awareness. They are a matter of evolution—*inevitable* evolution. We need not seek here and there: only within. As we grow, so shall we know.

There is no claim made for their ownership. That statement throws a wrench into the workings of most religions and teachers. Every religion claims that it alone knows the truth—even when it is evident that many (and sometimes all) religions say the same thing. For example, Christians try to claim a patent on the Trinity. It may be true that their muddled way of presenting the Trinitarian concept as a mystifying mystery may be unique to them, but every true religion knows about the Trinity and teaches accordingly. It is astounding too see how there are religions claiming that they alone teach the existence of God! When challenged they just shrug off reality by saying that the other religions are teaching a misperception, a superstition, and not the real Theism. And of course some even insist that everybody else is worshiping the Devil, not God.

There are many signs of false or foolish teachers, but a fundamental one is the teacher's claim to enlightenment. They say "I am enlightened...I attained my enlightenment..." and so forth. The Kena Upanishad says to such—and to us: "If you think that you know well the truth of Brahman, know that you know little. What you think to be Brahman in your self, or what you think to be Brahman in the gods—that is not Brahman. What is indeed the truth of Brahman you must therefore learn. I cannot say that I know Brahman fully. Nor can I say that I know him not. He among us knows him best who understands the spirit of the words: 'Nor do I know that I know him not.' He truly knows Brahman who knows him as beyond knowledge; he who thinks that he knows, knows not. The ignorant think that Brahman is known, but the wise know him to be beyond knowledge" (Kena Upanishad 2:1-3).

A truly illumined person knows that God alone is the source of enlightenment, that it can never be *my* enlightenment, only *His*. "He shining, everything shines" (Katha Upanishad 2:2:15; Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.10); so say the truly wise. No one can rightly claim enlightenment for himself. It is the Light of God alone that lightens our darkness. This is not hairsplitting. These self-proclaimed illuminati may not have the cosmic consciousness they claim, but they do approach the level of cosmic egotism.

Another favorite ruse of a false teacher is to claim that he has received a new understanding never before given to anyone else. "Now the world is ready," they crow. And cash in. A variation on this is the claim that they have now been authorized to publicly teach what has been kept in secret by and for the few throughout the ages. "Now humanity has evolved enough," they announce. But truth is never the property of any one individual. And of course there are the "only one world teacher at a time" charlatans, who claim to be that only one.

Religions and spiritual institutions like to claim that they alone possess special knowledge, and even label their teachings accordingly. Here in America we have a yoga group that blatantly puts their organization's name on the practices to make their members think that they are unknown outside their initiatic circle. I once read some of their "secret communications" that contained this nonsense. I had to laugh, because "their" techniques are referred to in many readily accessible yoga treatises, and one "secret technique" they tout was written down long ago as the subject of an entire upanishad.

Another shameful deception is the pretence that a teaching will be "without power" or effect unless it is imparted in the "authorized" way by the "authorized" teacher. This

is especially done in relation to yoga methods. The fact is this: if a yoga method cannot “work” by its inherent nature, then it is artificial and cannot lead to higher consciousness or spiritual liberation. It may produce a lot of chills and thrills and wow the crowd, but it will begin and end in this world. In contrast, a true method of spiritual development will work for anyone who applies it because it is based on the fundamental laws of existence—not on the whim of a teacher or group. One group I know of was started by an honest yogi who wrote down in black and white that his methods could be learned from anyone who practiced them. His words are now altered to say the opposite: that only those approved as teachers by the organization can teach the practice. Fortunately the truth is otherwise. (I was present when one of the yogi’s senior students was asked by a relative newcomer if he could teach the yoga to others. “Why not?” responded the senior, “you know the methods, don’t you?” Nothing more was required.)

I am making such a point of this because one of the Sanskrit terms for spiritual liberation is *Kaivalya*, which means, according to the *Yoga-Vedanta Dictionary*: “the transcendental state of Absolute Independence.” Another dictionary defines it as: “spiritual independence.” *Kaivalya*-independence thus is the purpose of true religion and true spiritual teachers. Dependency is never their desire. That is why Swami Vivekananda once asked a disciple: “If you find a better teacher than me, will you leave me and follow him?” When the disciple answered: “Yes, I will.” Vivekananda embraced him fervently and said: “Now I know you are truly my disciple!” For a true teacher wants only the freedom of the disciple—and instructs him accordingly.

They go through their processes, and there is no expectation (of a reward for the results). The creation is really an enlightenment machine, however much human beings try to subvert it and make it otherwise. When an aspirant enters into the stream of cosmic evolution everything unfolds and proceeds without any need for interference or direction. He need only keep himself in the stream by his practice. Consequently he does not hold “expectations” in the sense of wanting things to proceed in a particular direction or desiring a particular result. For he knows that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,” (I Corinthians 2:9) and he keeps himself in readiness for their revelation.

The work is accomplished, and there is no resting in it (as an achievement). Once we have finished the course, completed the race, we leave the racetrack and go home. The purpose of the spiritual race is to transcend it, to pass beyond it. It is like tag: once we touch home base we are free and out of the game. So we do not come to rest at the top of the evolutionary current and become a deity for “the lesser,” but we move on out of the stream altogether. Some freed souls do return to lower realms to point the way to freedom for those still moving upwards, but they first step out of the river to “the other shore.”

Lao Tzu completes this section with a couplet:

**The work is done, but how no one can see;
’Tis this that makes the power not cease to be.**

By this he means that the entire work of spiritual liberation is done without the observation of the ego—that is left far behind alone with the mind and the intellect. Therefore no one sees its progress and completion, though the individual certainly experiences and manifests it. Jesus had this in mind when He said: “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation” (Luke 17:20). Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean, but when it entered the ocean it was

dissolved—so who was left to tell of its depth? God being “that from which the mind and the senses turn back” according to the upanishad, He cannot be spoken of, and neither can the ascent to divinity. Like the Tao itself, union with the Tao cannot be spoken about. (“The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name” (Tao Teh King 1:1).

How is it that Lao Tzu claims: “Tis this [unseeable character of the liberation process] that makes the power not cease to be”? He is indicating that the moment something comes under the sway of the mind and the intellect it becomes enfeebled and stagnated. Oh, yes, we may play with it and delight in it like an infant with its toes, but the evolutionary flow will be stopped, for we shall have gotten out of the Stream. This again is why “teachers of enlightenment” are just not possible and why authentic spiritual development cannot be institutionalized.

To keep the power going we have to get out of the way—and into The Way.

3. Action Without Deeds

Exalt not the wise, so that the people shall not scheme and contend; prize not rare objects, so that the people shall not steal; shut out from sight the things of desire, so that the people's hearts shall not be disturbed.

Therefore in the government of the Sage: he keeps empty their hearts makes full their bellies, discourages their ambitions, strengthens their frames; so that the people may be innocent of knowledge and desires. And the cunning ones shall not presume to interfere.

By action without deeds may all live in peace.

(Tao Teh King 3:1)

Exalt not the wise, so that the people shall not scheme and contend; prize not rare objects, so that the people shall not steal; shut out from sight the things of desire, so that the people's hearts shall not be disturbed.

Exalt not the wise, so that the people shall not scheme and contend. "Wise" here means those that are wise in the eyes of those with small understanding. Such people are usually only clever or cunning, not truly intelligent, much less really wise. Many of those that have "great personalities" are really manipulative sociopaths and not particularly bright. (Remember the "class officers" when you were in school?) It is incredible how shrewd mediocrities make their way to the top in so many aspects of life, particularly in religion, politics, and education. This morning I came across the broadcast of a class in one of America's most prestigious universities. The professor's whole approach was not as serious or challenging as my grade school teachers' had been. It was obvious he expected next to nothing from the students, and his whole manner of speaking implied that they were about six years of age intellectually. It reminded me of preschool Sunday School class. Then I realized that his entire approach was that of Captain Kangaroo! Evidently a generation of educators have modeled themselves on Bob Keeshan. I once worked with a graduate of that university who had learned absolutely nothing about anything, so I was not surprised at what I saw, but still I was appalled.

So if polished mediocrities are not exalted, others like them will not scheme and contend to also be exalted.

Prize not rare objects, so that the people shall not steal. It is strange how people value things that are rare or very expensive, paying no attention at all to their intrinsic value. What people need is a sensible perspective on what is of actual value to them as worthy human beings. During the days of Saint Edward the Confessor in England theft was virtually unknown. Historians assure us that if a traveler's purse dropped on the road it would still be there weeks later. How was this? England at that time was a genuinely religious country and the people valued the eternal over the temporal.

Shut out from sight the things of desire, so that the people's hearts shall not be disturbed. "Thinking about sense-objects will attach you to sense-objects; grow attached, and you become addicted; thwart your addiction, it turns to anger; be angry, and you confuse your mind; confuse your mind, you forget the lesson of experience; forget experience, you lose discrimination; lose discrimination, and you miss life's only purpose" (Bhagavad Gita 2:62, 63). Therefore it is only good sense to avoid all things that can so addict and destroy us. This is way to peace.

Therefore in the government of the Sage: he keeps empty their hearts, makes full their bellies, discourages their ambitions, strengthens their frames; so that the people may be innocent of knowledge and desires. And the cunning ones shall not presume to interfere.

As pointed out previously, there is no use in thinking that philosophers can reform government, but each one of us can apply Lao Tzu's principles to ourselves as a micro-kingdom. So here is what we are being advised:

- 1) Keep our heart empty of all that clutters or corrodes it.
- 2) Nourish ourselves abundantly on that which is ennobling and satisfy our higher self.
- 3) Curb our aspirations for that which is worthless, meaningless, and contrary to the revealing of the Tao—our true Self.
- 4) Establish ourselves in the correct frame of reference or perspective regarding our life and ourselves, as well as others. This includes very defined and positive morality.

If we do this we shall be free of delusions thought to be knowledge and free of desires for that which countermands our true nature—the Tao. Living in such harmony within ourselves we shall have discovered the secret of life and transcended all that is lesser and unworthy of us. Illusions will then no longer cloud or distort our clear sight. As the Gita further says: “When he has no lust, no hatred, a man walks safely among the things of lust and hatred. To obey the Atman is his peaceful joy; sorrow melts into that clear peace: his quiet mind is soon established in peace” (Bhagavad Gita 2:64, 65).

By action without deeds may all live in peace.

To understand this I recommend that you read the Bhagavad Gita, for that is one of its main themes. Here is a section from its fourth chapter.

“Action does not contaminate me. I have no desire at all for the fruits of action. A man who understands my nature in this respect will never become the slave of his own activity.

“Because they understood this, the ancient seekers for liberation could safely engage in action. You, too, must do your work in the spirit of those early seers.

“What is action? What is inaction? Even the wise are puzzled by this question. Therefore, I will tell you what action is. When you know that, you will be free from all impurity.

“You must learn what kind of work to do, what kind of work to avoid, and how to reach a state of calm detachment from your work. The real nature of action is hard to understand.

“He who sees the inaction that is in action, and the action that is in inaction, is wise indeed. Even when he is engaged in action he remains poised in the tranquility of the Atman.

“The seers say truly that he is wise who acts without lust or scheming for the fruit of the act: his act falls from him, its chain is broken, melted in the flame of my knowledge.

“Turning his face from the fruit, he needs nothing: the Atman is enough. He acts, and is beyond action.

“Not hoping, not lusting, bridling body and mind, he calls nothing his own: he acts, and earns no evil.

“What God's Will gives he takes, and is contented. Pain follows pleasure, he is not troubled: gain follows loss, he is indifferent: of whom should he be jealous? He acts, and is not bound by his action.

“When the bonds are broken his illumined heart beats in Brahman: his every action is worship of Brahman: can such acts bring evil?” (Bhagavad Gita 4:14-23).

4. The Character of Tao

The Tao is (like) the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fulness. How deep and unfathomable it is, as if it were the Honoured Ancestor of all things!

We should blunt our sharp points, and unravel the complications of things; we should attemper our brightness, and bring ourselves into agreement with the obscurity of others. How pure and still the Tao is, as if it would ever so continue!

I do not know whose son it is. It might appear to have been before God.

(Tao Teh King 4:1)

The Tao is (like) the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fulness. How deep and unfathomable it is, as if it were the Honoured Ancestor of all things!

There is something inexpressibly thrilling about the Eastern expositions of the Absolute Reality. How far these words are from the Western fawning and flattering matter-and-power-oriented effusions of those who seek to placate a testy and haywire deity made in the image of their own flawed egos. Even though no words can really approach the Tao's essence, yet Its glory flows in superabundance into throughout the worlds of relative existence. Actually those worlds *are* Its superabundance. And when the sages who are united with It speak of Its wonder, those who have evolved to the point of conscious seeking respond with joy and acclamation.

The Tao is (like) the emptiness of a vessel. It is not easy for Western students to understand what is meant in Taoist and Buddhist philosophy by "emptiness." (Especially if they are used to Indian philosophy which refers to the same thing as "fulness.") Just as the No Thing of both Western and Eastern philosophers is in no way "nothing," so also Emptiness does not mean nothingness. It is not a lack of something but rather The Thing Itself.

The little bit we know about the nature of matter can help us comprehend this. "Things" are made of identical components: protons, electrons, and neutrons. Only when these components are set in specific patterns or quantities do they form the elements and their countless combinations. So the Power fundamental to all things is Itself free from "thingness." It is devoid—"empty"—of all form or attribute. It is the Primal Being without which none of the superimpositions we experience as objects or qualities could exist (or appear to exist). Unconditioned and "Empty" are the same thing. The Tao is Unconditioned and Transcendent. The moment there is even the shadow of the shadow of a quality or relativity we are no longer in touch with—or in—the Tao.

Yet we—and somehow the Tao—have a capacity for conditioning, for quality and thingness. And that capacity is the vessel, the "shell" that can either be empty or with some degree of content. The Tao embraces this shell, and the shell contains the Tao, but does not confine It. It may be "empty space," but It is *conscious* space (*chidakasha*).

And in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fulness. There is nothing but the Tao; therefore to "live" and evolve we have to "employ" the Tao in Its conditioned and relative mode. But if the Tao is to free rather than bind us through our "using" of It, we must be on guard against allowing any kind of "content" to touch our inner being. We must preserve our consciousness free from conditioning or "containingness" to any degree. Certainly our body, feelings, senses, intellect, will, and

so forth will indeed be “full” and conditioned, composed of myriads of “things.” But if we will keep (know) them separate from our true self we will ourselves be within the Tao and *be* the Tao.

How to keep the heart from being defiled by “fulness” is no simple thing. But why should it be, when Infinity is our ultimate goal? The fact that it is realizable should be enough for us and make us ready to tread the path that the Katha Upanishad says is “like the sharp edge of a razor.... Narrow it is, and difficult to tread!” (Katha Upanishad 1:3:14). But again, so what? Is it easy to fly high into the sky? But what else will eagles do?

Lao Tzu is assuring us in these words that we need not fall into the mistaken idea that the only way to manage spiritually is to withdraw from all things and shun all contact with material things, to bury ourselves in inactivity, denying all existence as much as possible. No; rather we should be using our body, mind, intellect, and our life in this world to transcend them. “And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations” (Luke 16:9). On the battlefield of Kurukshetra, when Arjuna quailed at the sight of the prospective carnage, Krishna told him: “Perform your obligatory duty, because action is indeed better than inaction. Even the maintenance of your body would not be possible by inaction” (Bhagavad Gita 3.08). And: “Attached action is selfish work that produces Karmic bondage, detached action is unselfish work or Seva that leads to nirvana.... The one who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is a wise person. Such a person is a yogi and has accomplished everything” (Bhagavad Gita 4.18). The wise, whether Lao Tzu, Jesus, or Krishna, give us the same message. The rest is up to us.

Meditation is the key here, just as it is in all things pertinent to the spirit and its liberation.

How deep and unfathomable it is, as if it were the Honored Ancestor of all things! The Tao is beyond measure—Its height, Its depth, and Its breadth are impossible to define. It is so far beyond all we know as “existence” that It really does not “exist” in our limited and illusory experience. It is the Source (“Honored Ancestor”) and yet It is not. Here again Krishna gives us a hint when he says of the Gunas, the modes of material existence: “Know that the three Gunas, Sattvika, Rajasika, and Tamasika, also emanate from Me. I am not in the Gunas, but the Gunas are in Me” (Bhagavad Gita 7.12). And regarding the cosmos: “This entire universe is pervaded by Me, the unmanifest Brahman. All beings depend on [or remain in] Me [like a chain depends on gold]. I do not depend on them. And yet beings, in reality, do not remain in Me. Look at the power of My divine mystery. Though the sustainer and creator of all beings, I do not remain in them. Consider that all beings remain in Me [without any contact or without producing any effect] as the mighty wind, moving everywhere, eternally remains in space” (Bhagavad Gita 9:4-6).

The Tao has “given birth” to all things, yet at no time do those things “touch” the Tao. For “the Tao is like the emptiness of a vessel.” We must bear in mind the relation of the Tao to us, even though we cannot “relate” to the Tao in our present status. As long as we are in the Here we cannot have anything to do with the There. This is confusing—what shall we do?

We should blunt our sharp points, and unravel the complications of things; we should attemper our brightness, and bring ourselves into agreement with the obscurity of others. How pure and still the Tao is, as if it would ever so continue!

This is not easy to comment on—not because it is hard to understand, but because it is most difficult to apply correctly. All we need do is look at the mess and tangle in the thinking and society of the East to see the truth of this. What we see is wisdom gone awry in misapplication. As Vivekananda said, the problem is not the religion but the fact that it has not really (i.e., correctly) been practiced. Frankly, not just the East but a great deal of the world is content to passively sit in the dirt and do nothing, avoiding all conflict or ambition that might result in discontent. (Though they have no objection to being virulently jealous of those who get out of the dirt and succeed in material life.) This is a serious charge, but it is a much more serious fact. Vast numbers of people do prefer accepted misery to discontent arising from a determination to better things. As you read what follows, please do not think I am advocating the Oriental distortion of Lao Tzu's principles.

We should blunt our sharp points. By “sharp points” the sage means our simplistic thinking which entails intense “either/or” insistence and demand. Extreme black/white attitudes are very much sharp points on which we impale others and eventually ourselves. Children are very prone to this; that is why every time their wishes are thwarted—even if only verbally—they cry and go into a kind of emotional fit or seizure. Later they may learn to control the fits and the tears, but the mentality persists. Throughout history, whatever the culture, “youths” have been extraordinarily troublesome to family and society because of their insistence on “truth” and “right.”

Since the advent of systematic education in the West, students (usually of university age) have been at the forefront, if not the fomenters, of riots and revolution. That is because they still think in the simplistic manner of the nursery. If anyone expresses an ideal and then fails to embody it perfectly, they begin to scream about deception and hypocrisy. Even though a government may be extremely benevolent and provide much benefit to the citizens, if these young people learn of a single breach or inconsistency in policy by even a single governmental official or agency, then it is time to demonstrate and riot.

As children they could not comprehend the difference between a mistaken statement and a lie, and they still cannot. They would not think of discarding a machine simply because it had a defective part, but they insist that a religion or political policy be totally scrapped if any inconsistency, error, or defect be discovered in it. No matter how much their parents have sacrificed and put up with during their upbringing, all it takes is a single denial or demand to make them denounce their parents as “not really caring at all.” (Though they will usually be there to collect the next dole from them.)

Most people grow out of this simplistic way of thinking and acting, but many do not. We have all known these types and heard from them about how they “have principles” and “hate hypocrisy” and “mean what they say” and do not “believe in not telling the truth just because of what people will think.” They pride themselves on their “honesty” and “truthfulness” and lack of hypocrisy. “People know where I stand,” they announce (unnecessarily!), and: “You know me; I believe in speaking my mind.” Yes, we all know such people, but none of us knows a single person who likes them for it. “I know people think I talk too much,” they growl as they stomp along through life.

Sri Ramakrishna put it in a very homely manner: people with “crazes” do not succeed in spiritual life. There is nothing wrong with having principles, but those who beat the drum and bully others under the guise of having “strong convictions” have much more ego than ideals. We should be firm in our principles, but not be stabbing others with them. There is a difference between expressing ideals and bludgeoning others with them.

Buddha said that “views” can be a terrible defect in a seeker for enlightenment. He

did not mean that we should have no opinions, but that we must not bully others with them—nor ourselves, either. We should understand the limitations of our intellect and always be ready to reconsider and even alter our ideas if we find them mistaken or wanting in any way. We should be neither rigidly dogmatic nor wishy-washy. Much of the problem is not in the idea, but in the way we express or try to impose it. Attitude is the problem here, along with egoic attachment to “my convictions.” Closed-mindedness is not really firmness in principles any more than vagueness, flabby-mindedness, and lack of principle is open-mindedness.

Really, it is our egos that need the blunting.

And unravel the complications of things. Human beings have a natural pendulum action in just about everything. So when we guard against something we have to consider whether we are indulging in its opposite. Simplistic thinking is at one end of the pendulum swing and over-complex thinking is at the other. Many people tangle up their mental feet the moment they look at something. Just as simplistic-minded people blunder on heedless of the consequences, the over-complex dodge and feint and end up in a heap or paralyzed into inaction, overwhelmed by what they think is the complexity of the situation or problem. Of course a lot of people try to avoid responsibility by claiming the situation is too complex. Russians especially like to say: “It is so complicated” when what they mean is: “I don’t want to bother,” or “I don’t want to take responsibility.” (They also call someone “a complex personality” when they mean they are nuts or a pain in the neck.) Italians on the other hand like to say: “*Ma, se difficile*”—“But it is difficult.” Sometimes it is our laziness and sometimes it is our thinking that is at fault. And sometimes things really are complicated or difficult, but we need to put forth our intelligence and initiative and figure (and work) them out. To a great extent Lao Tzu also means that we need to see through complexities to the simple principles beneath their outward appearance and then act.

Putting the two imperatives together we understand that Lao Tzu is warning us against looking at things either simplistically or in a complicated or complicating manner. Intelligence and insight are the needful.

We should temper our brightness. Again moderation and circumspection in thought and outlook are being urged upon us by the sage, especially in relation to others. How easy it is for childish people to burst upon the world as “the wise” with “a message for all.” There is an old joke about the farmer who claimed he looked up in the sky and saw the gigantic gold letters “GPC.” Interpreting this as “Go Preach Christ,” he became a traveling evangelist. But those who heard him tell of this experience and heard him preach expressed the opinion that the letters really meant “Go Plow Corn.” I have met a lot of “New Age Messengers” operating on a similar flimsy basis.

What Lao Tzu is pointing out is our valuation and attitude toward our own understanding of things. Ego often makes us over-value our ideas. And here, too, we can become a nuisance to others when we want to “share the light” that is really no more than our idea about things. Also, I have seen that the truly wise never push their understanding forward and even on occasion silently let ignorance be expressed if they have not been specifically asked about their opinion. “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone,” (Hosea 4:17) is good advice when dealing with ignoramuses who idolize their own “wisdom.”

And bring ourselves into agreement with the obscurity of others. This does not mean that we should adopt a “dull like you” policy in order to get along with people, nor is it a plea for the dumbing down of ourselves and others (this is currently very popular). It means that we must strive to comprehend the view of those we may think have a lesser understanding than ourselves, for we may be the uncomprehending ones and need to

learn from them. Again, children are particularly prone to label something or someone not in alignment with their ways as “dumb.” We must avoid this. Often we think that those who do not see things our way are not seeing at all. And we are usually wrong. Also it means that we must establish communication with those who do not see as clearly as we do and make our view comprehensible to them. Yes, we may persuade, but should never coerce. The idea is that we should learn to see with others’ eyes and share our vision with them in a unity of spirit that is all too rare in this world. It also means that we should give people the freedom to be “wrong” since we may be the ones that are wrong, and even if we are not, others need to discover the truth for themselves in many instances. The tolerance of the East for divergent opinion is a good example for us as long as it is not a cover for lack of principle or mental vigor. A lot of people say “be tolerant” when they really mean “Let ’em go to hell.” And as already pointed out, we need to realize that our ideas may not be as “bright” as we think, and those of others may not be as “dull.”

How pure and still the Tao is, as if it would ever so continue! This final part of the second section of the fourth chapter of the Tao Teh King is both interesting and at first puzzling–puzzling because it seems a *non sequitur*. Why does Lao Tzu speak of the purity and stillness of the Tao at this point? *Because those who follow the preceding advice will experience these aspects of the Tao.*

The Tao is unchanging, so why does the sage then say: “...as if it would ever so continue”? Because the aspirant will certainly enter into a state of mind approximating the purity and stillness of the Tao, but since it is a state of mind, and since the mind is ever changing, the experience will not last forever, however much it may seem it will. One of the most frustrating illusions of the mind is its false assurance to us that at last we are “home free” and there will be no more wandering or change. But there will be. That is the law of relative existence. Only when we step out of the world of body and mind and into the realm of the spirit is there a chance of everlasting peace—and not then, until we are permanently established in spirit consciousness. Until then there is a movement back and forth from silence to the hubbub of conditioned life. Yet, for that time Lao Tzu is speaking of we are experiencing just a touch of the Tao. It is real, but not permanent. So he lauds our attainment but cautions us against mistaking its real nature: only a reflection of the Tao proceeding from our nearness and affinity to It. We must strive, then, to enter the Tao and leave all else behind.

Finally, we are told a basic truth that only seems vague:

I do not know whose son it is. It might appear to have been before God.

Here we find the concept of the Son of God over five centuries before Jesus was born. For Lao Tzu is certainly saying that the Tao is a Son. We have covered the subject of the Trinity so often in my commentaries that it would be a relief to skip it in this place. Let it suffice to say that the “Son of God” *is* God (Tao) in His immanent, personal aspect, the Way (Tao) to the Transcendent Reality.

Lest we make the mistake of Arius (and others) and think that the Son of God is a being other than God—lesser and only existing in the relative realm of time, the text says: “It might appear to have been before God”—before the emanation-manifestation of the Mahat Tattwa or immanent extension of God into creation. And indeed It was before such an extension occurred. For: “In the beginning was the Word.” That is, when a “beginning” began, the Word already was—It is eternal. “And the Word was with God” in a seemingly separate existence, but “the Word WAS God.” There was only the One.

How, can the Son of God be *before* God? In the sense that That which we think of as

God in the relative communicative sense was preceded by Its own self in Its transcendent reality. Before there was anyone to say “God” the Tao already was.

If we follow the counsels of Lao Tzu we shall become like—and then become—the Tao.

5. Nature

Heaven and earth do not act from (the impulse of) any wish to be benevolent; they deal with all things as the dogs of grass are dealt with. The sages do not act from (any wish to be) benevolent; they deal with the people as the dogs of grass are dealt with.

May not the space between heaven and earth be compared to a bellows?

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

(Tao Teh King 5:1).

This is strong medicine, especially for those of us brought up in the sentimentality of “devotional” religion. It is very hard to shed the golden dreams of spiritual childhood for the glaring and harsh realities of spiritual adulthood. For many people, as Lili Tomlin’s character, Trudy, says: “Reality gives you cancer.”

Saint John the Beloved Disciple tells: “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (I John 4:16). This is very reminiscent of a verse from the Bhagavad Gita, which it is not unlikely Jesus quoted to His disciples—as He did others that are reflected in the Gospels. In the ninth chapter of the Gita, verse twenty-nine, Krishna tells Arjuna: “Those who worship Me with devotion are in Me, and I, too, am in them.” This is identical with Saint John’s words. However, lest Arjuna understand Him in a simplistic or partial manner, Krishna prefaces those words with these: “I am the same to all beings: to Me there is none hateful or dear.” Then He continues: “But those who worship Me with devotion are in Me, and I, too, am in them.” Swami Prabhavananda gives this excellent interpretive translation: “My face is equal to all creation, loving no one nor hating any. Nevertheless, my devotees dwell within me always: I also show forth and am seen within them.”

God is an absolute unity—an all-embracing unity that includes all beings. Therefore there is no one (and no thing) that He could view as an object separate from Him. How could He, being without the conditioned ego which is the source of like and dislike, possibly love or hate anyone? Certainly we, who in our present state of colossal ignorance look at the ways of God as outside observers and construe them according to our egoic frame of reference, think of God liking or disliking that which pleases or displeases Him, but that is pure fantasy. It is not in the nature of God to engage in such reactions—for who will He react to? Seeing the wheels of cosmic law grinding on, raising some and throwing down others, we mistakenly think that God is taking a personal interest and favoring or disfavoring them, rewarding some and punishing others. This is as foolish as thinking that when we eat nourishing food God is pleased with us and blesses us with health, and when we eat poison He becomes angry and kills us. “The Lord is everywhere and always perfect: what does He care for man’s sin or the righteousness of man? (Bhagavad Gita 5:15)

“He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree,” sang the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:52). It is the machinery of the cosmos that puts down and exalts, but since God is its source and architect, in one sense He does so through His universal law. But that law is not based on whim or opinion, but upon The Way Things Are and is utterly impersonal and impartial. “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). “For there is no respect of persons with God” (Romans 2:11).

What other perspective but this is spiritually sensible? In the religions that make God no more than a cosmic dictator there is a lot of talk about pleasing, displeasing, angering, and placating God, but such is nonsense and blasphemy. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8). Certainly we may interpret the phenomena in the cosmos as proceeding from thoughts and ways like ours, but we are very wrong to do so, and such misunderstanding can lead us into grave errors in both thought and deed. Our attempts to make sense of things may only confuse us more if we do not realize the basics of How Things Are.

Children do not like to be spoken to in a straightforward manner about their failings; but we are not children and have no business reverting to childish desires and attitudes when considering spiritual facts. So the Master Lao Tzu is respecting us enough to speak to us as adults who really do want to know What Is Going On.

Heaven and earth do not act from (the impulse of) any wish to be benevolent.

God and His creation, being essentially one, do not act from an impulse to be “kind” or “nice,” but from the pure intention of our ultimate perfection—a perfection that already exists, but which we have lost contact with and fallen into the illusions of imperfection.

“Do not say: ‘God gave us this delusion.’ You dream you are the doer, you dream that action is done, you dream that action bears fruit. It is your ignorance, it is the world’s delusion that gives you these dreams. The Lord is everywhere and always perfect: what does He care for man’s sin or the righteousness of man? The Atman is the light: the light is covered by darkness: this darkness is delusion: that is why we dream. When the light of the Atman drives out our darkness that light shines forth from us, a sun in splendor, the revealed Brahman. The devoted dwell with Him, they know Him always there in the heart, where action is not. He is all their aim. Made free by His Knowledge from past uncleanness of deed or of thought, they find the place of freedom, the place of no return” (Bhagavad Gita 5:14-17).

Just as it is an illusion to attribute human attitudes to God, so it is an illusion to attribute either good or evil, sin or righteousness, to our true Self, the Atman. Such attributions can be made to the dream personality we have assumed in our dreaming, but if we would awaken we must first realize that it is all unreal, only a dream. We do not need to “clean up our act” we need to stop the act. And to do so we must be ruthlessly honest with ourselves. So Lao Tzu proceeds:

They [God and creation] deal with all things as the dogs of grass are dealt with.

In ancient China, in the time of Confucius and Lao Tzu, a ritual to produce rain was performed in which grass was shaped into the form of dogs. These grass dogs were then placed in beautiful baskets or boxes and wrapped up in elegantly embroidered cloths. Before presenting the effigies in the rite, the officiants had to fast and purify themselves to be worthy to touch them. During the ritual they were clothed in beautiful brocade, carried solemnly in beautiful containers and handled with reverence—even awe. However, once the ceremony was completed the grass dogs were slung away with no regard whatsoever. The Taoist writer Kwangtze says: “After they have been set forth, however, passersby trample on their heads and backs, and the grass-cutters take and burn them in cooking. That is all they are good for.”

The idea here is extremely simple: That which conforms to and is part of the Divine Plan is “real” and meaningful to “heaven” and “earth.” That which conflicts, disrupts,

or negates the Divine Plan is NOTHING to heaven and earth; unreal and non-existent. This is why in the Bible we read of God not “hearing” or “seeing” or even *knowing* some people or things. Obviously God cannot be incognizant of any thing, being omniscient. What is meant is that any person or thing that does not contribute actively to the evolution of the cosmos and the beings living within it is for all practical purposes non-existent to both heaven and earth.

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23).

The Gita indicates that God does not engage in either love or hatred. Yet in Romans 9:13 we find: “As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” The thing is, “love” and “hate” are here symbolical of the forces within the evolutionary creation. Those who are moving consciously and without self-hindrance in the stream of upward evolution are fostered by the divine powers of heaven and earth. This is “love” on the part of heaven and earth.

Those who are either willfully or ignorantly moving against the stream of upward evolution, sidetracking themselves into cul-de-sacs of egoic involvements of myriad sorts, are utterly disregarded by heaven and earth, literally left to their own devices, immersed in the chaos of the hash they have made of their lives. The ancient root meaning of the Greek word *miseo*, usually translated “hate” means to thoroughly disregard, to account as nothing and to ignore. *Miseo* is *indifference*, not animosity. It is this disregard which is the “hate” they incur, not humanlike animosity and enmity.

In the same vein, heaven and earth assist those moving upward, and oppose or resist those who are struggling downward or to the side—who themselves oppose and resist evolution in their own life sphere. That which they have sown, both the wise and the foolish reap. It is a matter of Divine Law—of The Way Things Are—and has nothing to do with an emotional (or even an intellectual) reaction on the part of God. Fools who walk up a downward-moving escalator or down an upward-moving escalator will find themselves impeded—no one is angry with them or hating them. They are simply experiencing the natural reaction of their own foolish action.

The practical meaning of the grass dog simile is this: That which fosters evolution is “favored” by heaven and earth; that which hinders, stops or reverses evolution is trashed by heaven and earth. It has to be faced. This is the basis of the Four Aryan Truths of Buddha: 1) there is suffering; 2) suffering has a cause; 3) suffering can be ended; 4) there is a way to end suffering. There is suffering because we go against the evolutionary grain; our suffering will be ended when we move with the evolutionary flow. Simple.

There is a Zen story of a roshi who asked a philosophical question of a student. When the student replied, the roshi nodded and said: “Yes.” The next day he asked the student the same question. When he gave the same answer as the day before, the roshi shook his head and said: “No.” “But you said ‘Yes’ yesterday,” protested the student. “It was ‘Yes’ yesterday, but ‘No’ today!” said the roshi. He meant that the previous day’s answer was all right because it was in keeping with the student’s level of understanding at that time. By the next day, however, his understanding should have changed and grown enough for him to realize that his former opinion was not fully correct. So the answer was “wrong.”

When the grass dogs have a legitimate purpose they are treated with honor and respect. In the same way, anything—including we ourselves—that helps us up the

evolutionary ladder is good and fostered by the forces of heaven and earth. But when those things are outgrown and gone beyond to the degree that those things either no longer have a positive effect because they have become unnecessary or actually hold us back through further involvement, they become inconsistent with our continuing development and become garbage. Yes: that which once was noble and worthy because they moved us along the path of expanding consciousness can become ignoble and unworthy if they stop our forward movement.

Saint Paul expresses it very well: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (I Corinthians 13:11). It is a matter of growth. It is all right for little girls to play with dolls and little boys to play with toy cars, but no sane adult plays with dollies or toy cars. It is good for an infant to crawl, but after a while he must stop crawling and walk. And when he is skilled at walking he needs to learn to run. It is good for an infant to feed from a bottle and eat liquefied food, but in time he must eat mostly solid food. A child should be under the control of his parents, but not forever; he must become independent in deed and thought. School is good, but not if we never graduate. An airplane is wonderful to travel in, but would be a trap if we could never get out. A medication may be good for us to take, but not once we recover. Throughout life we encounter situations and things that are good for us until we move beyond them. They then are either useless or detrimental. It is good to be a child—but not for all our life. There is a time when belief in Santa Claus may be cute, but not into adolescence and adulthood. The Law is this: Grow, Grow Up, and Grow Beyond. “Brethren, be not children in understanding: but in understanding be men” (I Corinthians 14:20).

Although the grass dogs are tossed out and trampled or burned according to Kwangtze, they are not regarded as completely nonexistent. They can actually have a detrimental effect on those who keep them around. After describing their fate as refuse, he continues: “If one should again take them, replace them in the box or basket, wrap them up with embroidered cloths, and then in rambling, or abiding at the spot, should go to sleep under them, if he does not get evil dreams,” that is, dreams that presage misfortune, “he is sure to be often troubled with nightmare”—illusions of misfortune. Either way, he will be upset and unhappy, even miserable. The same is true of those who do not move on beyond what at one time may have been essential to their spiritual progress but which now is irrelevant to their present stage. Even the differing concepts of God must be outgrown, as Swami Vivekananda has expounded in some of his discourses. Spiritual practices can also be gone beyond. Attitudes that at one time elevated us can, once their benefits have been fully derived, become hindrances. Just as food that has been fully digested in time becomes expelled from the body, having passed from nourishment to toxicity, so that which has lifted us at one time can pull us down at another. A boat moves us easily over water, but once land has been reached we do not push it over the terrain, laboring to no purpose.

The ways of the divine heaven and earth must be operative in our lives, as well. This is the key to freedom.

In the ocean there are many strata with various species of fish “native” to them. According to the water pressure and level of light, so these strata are marked out in clear zones, and the fish always swim in their appropriate levels. It is the same with our own life; things which are appropriate to some levels are inappropriate in others.

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul!
As the swift seasons roll!

Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

So said Oliver Wendell Holmes regarding reincarnation. But in actuality we live many small lives in our longer life—the more evolved we are, the more “lives” we live. We have to continually build “more stately mansions” and leave the less stately mansions behind until *we* at length are free, leaving our outgrown shells by life's unresting sea.

In the highly symbolic motion picture, *Labyrinth*, an old woman tries to distract the girl from the search for her baby brother and entrap her by taking her into a room which contains all the things she loved in her childhood. “Ooooh, here's your little teddy! You love your little teddy, don't you?” She chortles as she tries to get the girl to hold on to past “treasures” and forget the infant she is seeking. We, too, seek the lost “inner child” of our own spirit in the labyrinth of this world; and to pause for nostalgic reinvolverment with the things we have outgrown and laid aside is to endanger our quest.

The sages do not act from (any wish to be) benevolent; they deal with the people as the dogs of grass are dealt with.

As above, so below—this is the ancient Hermetic Principle that can be applied to all aspects of life. The perspective of God must be our perspective if we would ascend to divine union. Just as there is no hate or love in God, so there is no sentimentality or nostalgia. And there must be none in us, for such is deadly indulgence of ego. In relation to God, others, and ourselves, the Straw Dog Principle must be adhered to. Then we will have a real and enduring relationship with God.

“Among those who are purified by their good deeds, there are four kinds of men who worship me: the world-weary, the seeker for knowledge, the seeker for happiness and the man of spiritual discrimination. The man of discrimination is the highest of these. He is continually united with me. He devotes himself to me always, and to no other. For I am very dear to that man, and he is dear to me. Certainly, all these are noble: but the man of discrimination I see as my very Self. For he alone loves me because I am myself: the last and only goal of his devoted heart. Through many a long life his discrimination ripens: he makes me his refuge, knows that Brahman is all. How rare are such great ones!” (Bhagavad Gita 7:16-19)

**May not the space between heaven and earth be compared to a bellows?
'Tis emptied, yet it loses not its power; 'tis moved again, and sends forth air
the more. Much speech to swift exhaustion leads, we see; your inner being
guard, and keep it free.**

Before we start looking at this passage, it is really necessary for us to consider the concept of Emptiness. Unfortunately we (naturally) impose the standard English meaning on this term, thinking that emptiness is both nothing and a state that abrogates “thingness.” To ascertain the correct meaning we can be greatly assisted by modern science. We now know that there is no such thing as gold, or wood, or water in themselves, but rather that they are simply differing arrangements of atomic particles forming gold, wood, and water molecules. The molecules can be broken down, the atomic particles rearranged and we have “something” utterly different. Therefore, at

no time do gold, wood, or water really exist as self-existent, permanent “things.” There is only a great field of basic energy from which they emerge and into which they resolve. Therefore at all times they are “empty” of goldness, woodness, or waterness. That is, no “thing” is a permanent entity, “just itself” without mutability or dissolution. Rather, every “thing” is nothing but mutability moving toward inevitable dissolution. So nothing ever really “is”—it only appears to “be.” Thus all relative existence is Emptiness, a Thing that contains no “thing” whatsoever. The same understanding applies to the concept of Void (Shunya). It is No Thing, but it is not Nothing. It is actually the only Existent. All “things” draw their momentary existence from It. Emptiness is true Fulness (Purna) and the Source of All. It is also known as the Chidakasha, Conscious Space.

Space then, including “the space between heaven and earth,” is that from which all things arise and into which they subside. It possesses an infinite capacity for an infinite variety of manifestations. None of which are “things” in themselves, but all of which are The Thing essentially. Therefore “empty space” is creative fulness. Lao Tzu asks if we cannot think of it as a bellows. No matter how much streams forth from it, it draws it all back in and projects it, maintaining a perpetual cycle of projection and absorption. In the human being this is especially manifested in the lungs and the breath as the basis of “life.” Space (akasha) can never be exhausted, for it perpetually renews itself.

This is not true of ordinary human speech, however, which is a projection that does not renew or receive back into itself. The spoken word and the energy, physical and mental, that produced it, are lost to us forever when we speak. Speech, then, is seen to be a depletion. In the most ancient philosophical writings of India, sages are habitually referred to as “munis”—those who do not speak, “the silent ones.”

In the Bhagavad Gita we find an interesting concept of action that is inaction. “The real nature of action is hard to understand,” (Bhagavad Gita 4:17) Krishna tells us, then continues: “He who sees the inaction that is in action, and the action that is in inaction, is wise indeed. Even when he is engaged in action he remains poised in the tranquility of the Atman” (Bhagavad Gita 4:18). The wise know how to act—and yet not be acting.

In the same way the yogi knows how to speak without expending his internal energies. Lao Tzu is exhorting us to this when he concludes: “Your inner being guard, and keep it free.” That is, through keeping our awareness centered in our true Self we shall be free from the exhaustion or depletion of our subtle life forces that are usually lost through speaking. For this reason Sanderson Beck renders this phrase: “Much talk brings exhaustion. It is better to keep to the center.” And Lin Yutang: “By many words is wit exhausted. Rather, therefore, hold to the core.”

6. The Spirit of the Valley

The valley spirit dies not, aye the same;
The female mystery thus do we name.
Its gate, from which at first they issued forth,
Is called the root from which grew heaven and earth.
Long and unbroken does its power remain,
Used gently, and without the touch of pain. (Tao Teh King 6)

One of my most cherished memories of India was the day I visited the great Kashmiri yogi, Swami Rama, in his simple ashram on the banks of the Ganges in Hardwar. I had known Swamiji for several years and found that each visit to him opened new and wonderfully clear vistas. This would be no exception. I had brought with me a young Austrian who had taken advantage of his parents' vacation to take a plane to India without their having any idea of where he might be. Actually, he had not much idea either, having come directly from New Delhi to Hardwar to the ashram of Anandamayi Ma and its attendant East Bengali insularism and open aversion to all non-Indians, as well as the mental and emotional chaos of full-blown Puranic Hinduism. Poor Thomas! His reading of purely theoretical books on nothing but the abstractions of Non-Dual Vedanta had not prepared him for the primitive riot surrounding him. Seeing his utter bewilderment at the ways of Anandamayi Ma and her devotees, I had invited him to go along with me to see Swami Rama, a total contrast to the intellectual backwater he had been struggling to find stability within. (He gave up. A wise decision.)

As always, Swami Rama's presence was a haven of peace and awareness. This was to be our last conversation, though I did not know it. Almost without preamble Swamiji began speaking to me about Om and its inner constitution. His words were unique and marvelous. After concluding that subject, Swamiji looked at Thomas and asked if he had any particular interest in the field of yoga. To my chagrin, Thomas asked for an explanation of Kundalini. Oh, not again! Both Indians and Westerners were fascinated with Kundalini as many satsangs had demonstrated to me. But my dismay turned to delight as Swamiji began speaking as no teacher or book ever had. This is not the place for a full recounting of his words, but one thing is relevant to the words of the Tao Teh King cited above.

Swamiji was emphatic that Kundalini, as Mulaprakriti, is not just primal power, but Primal Consciousness. This he said was crucial for the yogi to understand lest he fall into the absurdity of thinking the Kundalini needed "awakening" and could be directed or "used" in any way. "Imagine thinking that the Creative Consciousness of the Universe needs some yogi to awaken Her!" he exclaimed. "In Her true nature Kundalini is not even energy but the consciousness behind all energy. We need awakening—not Her. She is the one who awakens us, not the other way around." Then he had some pungent but profoundly instructive things to say about the reported experiences of yogis who thought they had awakened their kundalini. Thomas and I were entranced at Swamiji's inspired words, knowing them to be the truth. I have treasured them now for many decades, and they shine as brightly in my mind as ever.

The valley spirit. Strange as it may seem, if we look at two Christian monastic orders we will find the key to these cryptic words.

The first formal or official monastic order in the Christian West was that of Saint

Benedict. Although the order had monasteries everywhere in and all kinds of places, if possible they built them on the tops of mountains. This was because it expands the mind to look out into boundless space, and attunes the spiritual mind to the Boundless Infinite. Also, this reflected the spiritual psychology of the Benedictine monks, the keynote of which was expansiveness. All the Christians arts were fostered in their monasteries, which were places of beauty and liturgical splendor, both in the externals of worship and in the development of the chant and ritual. All that is splendid and glorious in Western Christendom had its origin in the Benedictine order. The great liturgiologists were Benedictines, the greatest being Saint Gregory the Great who wrote the life of Saint Benedict and was an archetype of Benedictine Christian mysticism. (I recommend *Benedictine Monachism* by Dom Cuthbert Butler for a full exposition of these subjects.)

In contrast, when the Cistercians separated from the Benedictines, they did just the opposite: they made their monasteries in valleys—the narrow and more confined, the better—in order to draw in their minds and center them in the spirit within. Their churches and rites were of utmost simplicity (even barren), but their spiritual lives were not. Rather, they developed a way of ascetic life and mystical practice that enabled them to become completely focused internally, and therefore spiritually.

All right, what does this tell us about the Valley Spirit? That it has boundaries—in other words, that it has definition and form. It is circumscribed and thereby has characteristics, qualities, and definition. It is saguna—with form and qualities—rather than nirguna—without any such things. The Benedictines were mystically intent on the obviously Boundless Formless, whereas the Cistercians were intent on the Form that would reveal itself in time as The Boundless. (Since they are both ultimately the same, neither approach is better or more right than the other. It is wise to embrace both, I think.)

So the Valley Spirit is Mahashakti, the Great Power, Mulaprakriti, the Primal Energy that forms all things, the Great Mother. She is all that can be spoken about, all that can be known by sentient beings, and within which they live and evolve. For She is also the Great Womb, as this verse makes clear. She is also Ritam, Divine Order, and therefore all endeavors must be in conformity with her ways, with her “laws.” Yoga—and all mysticism—are embodiments of her “ways.” That is why mystics of East and West feel such an affinity with the Divine Mother aspect of Reality.

Dies not, aye the same. As the hymn says: “Change and decay all around I see.” Birth and death, appearing and disappearing, emerging and withdrawing, forming and breaking apart—all are the Mother’s doing. Constant change is the basic trait of Her realm, but it is not real, it is the magical power of Maya. Neither birth nor death are real—they are dreams, motion pictures of the mind. Why? Because everything is the Mother, who certainly dies not but remains ever the same. Therefore:

The female mystery thus do we name. The mystery of Maya is the mystery of the Mother. Charles Muller translates it: “the mysterious female.” Ramprasad, the renowned Bengali composer, wrote:

Who knows what Mother Kali is?
Even the six systems of philosophy fail to reveal her.
The yogi contemplates her in the two-petalled and the thousand-
petalled lotuses.
Mother Kali plays with the swan in the lotus field as a swan.
Kali is the bliss of Brahman, the meaning of Om.
She dwells in every being just as she desires.

Do you know the universe is in the womb of the Mother?
The great womb of time (mahakala) knows the secret of Kali!
Can anyone else know it?
Ramprasad is afloat. People laugh at his attempt to cross the ocean
by swimming.
My mind understands but the heart does not;
It is the dwarf's attempt to seize the moon.

Perhaps I should not try further to explain the unexplainable.

Its gate, from which at first they issued forth, is called the root from which grew heaven and earth. Lin Yutang: "The Door of the Mystic Female is the root of Heaven and Earth." The Mother herself is the Door—that which in Sanskrit is called the Brahma Yoni, the Womb of God. All that we see has arisen in the ocean of the Mother who is known as Mulaprakriti and Mulashakti—Root Matter and Root Power.

A wave is really nothing but a momentary part of the ocean, rising and subsiding—so are all things which "exist." They are only seen for a moment and then they go, never really having been anything but the ever-abiding ocean. The waves are only momentary modifications of the ocean, existing only on the ocean's surface. A little further down in the ocean the waves never exist. Yogananda often spoke of the need to dive into the ocean and know the Reality behind the appearance-waves of relative existence.

Heaven and earth have "grown" from the Mother's Pure Being and shall return there—both "grown" and "return" being mere words covering the truth of the Mother as the Sole Existence. Really, human beings, however intelligent, cannot think of or speak of the Mother, but perfected yogis can know the Mother.

In India there is a time of the year when children fly kites whose strings have been covered with a mixture of glue and ground glass. They try to use their kite strings to cut the strings of others' kites and see who can cut the most strings without theirs being severed. It is all great fun with a lot of handclapping, laughing, and challenging. Yet it is taken very seriously, too, by the competitors. Regarding this, Ramprasad also wrote:

In the market place of the world, O dark Mother [Kali], you are
flying kites.
They fly high lifted by the wind of hope and held fast by the string of
maya.
Tied together with bones, flesh and nerves,
The kites are made by the three gunas themselves.
You have glued manjapaste (powdered glass) on the strings to make
them abrasive.
One or two among millions of kites are cut free,
And you, O Mother! clap your hands laughing.
Prasad says the kites will fly driven by the southern wind,
And will quickly land on the other side of the ocean of relative
existence.

Long and unbroken does its power remain, used gently, and without the touch of pain.
The manifestation of name and form does not last forever, but is eventually withdrawn for a period and then projected again in a perpetual cycle. But it does last for a vast period of time.

Here we have the secret of using the Mother's power in our life—it must be used gently, in peace and intelligent reflection, and without the desires that are the inevitable bringers of pain. Our use must also be free from coercion of any kind such as the opinion of others or fear in any form. If we can so live, then we will pass beyond the Mother's realm into the Transcendent Eternal where no illusion or suffering can ever come.

7. Living for Others

Heaven is long-enduring and earth continues long. The reason why heaven and earth are able to endure and continue thus long is because they do not live of, or for, themselves. This is how they are able to continue and endure.

Therefore the sage puts his own person last, and yet it is found in the foremost place; he treats his person as if it were foreign to him, and yet that person is preserved. Is it not because he has no personal and private ends, that therefore such ends are realised?

(Tao Teh King 7)

Heaven is long-enduring and earth continues long. The reason why heaven and earth are able to endure and continue thus long is because they do not live of, or for, themselves. This is how they are able to continue and endure.

This seventh verse extols the condition of egolessness. When the ego is operative it is engaged in constant struggle with its environment, inner and outer, and especially with other human beings. The entire lifetime of the ego-directed (and enslaved) individual is a war which expends all its inner and outer resources, ensuring that peace and inner harmony are impossibilities, however “righteous” the ego may pretend that war to be. Only those who live in humility can rest content in the true Self. Here is how the Gita describes such people:

“He knows bliss in the Atman and wants nothing else. Cravings torment the heart: he renounces cravings. I call him illumined. Not shaken by adversity, not hankering after happiness: free from fear, free from anger, free from the things of desire. I call him a seer, and illumined. The bonds of his flesh are broken. He is lucky, and does not rejoice: he is unlucky, and does not weep. I call him illumined. To obey the Atman is his peaceful joy; sorrow melts into that clear peace: his quiet mind is soon established in peace. Water flows continually into the ocean but the ocean is never disturbed: desire flows into the mind of the seer but he is never disturbed. The seer knows peace: the man who stirs up his own lusts can never know peace. He knows peace who has forgotten desire. He lives without craving: free from ego, free from pride. This is the state of enlightenment in Brahman: a man does not fall back from it into delusion. Even at the moment of death he is alive in that enlightenment: Brahman and he are one” (Bhagavad Gita 2:55-57, 65, 70-72).

“A man should not hate any living creature. Let him be friendly and compassionate to all. He must free himself from the delusion of ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ He must accept pleasure and pain with equal tranquility. He must be forgiving, ever-contented, self-controlled, united constantly with me in his meditation. His resolve must be unshakable. He must be dedicated to me in intellect and in mind. Such a devotee is dear to me. He neither molests his fellow men, nor allows himself to become disturbed by the world. He is no longer swayed by joy and envy, anxiety and fear. Therefore he is dear to me. He is pure, and independent of the body’s desire. He is able to deal with the unexpected: prepared for everything, unperturbed by anything. He is neither vain nor anxious about the results of his actions. Such a devotee is dear to me. He does not desire or rejoice in what is pleasant. He does not dread what is unpleasant, or grieve over it. He remains unmoved by good or evil fortune. Such a devotee is dear to me. His attitude is the same toward friend and foe. He is indifferent to honor and insult, heat and cold, pleasure and pain. He is free from attachment. He values praise and blame equally. He

can control his speech. He is content with whatever he gets. His home is everywhere and nowhere. His mind is fixed upon me, and his heart is full of devotion. He is dear to me. This true wisdom I have taught will lead you to immortality. The faithful practice it with devotion, taking me for their highest aim. To me they surrender heart and mind. They are exceedingly dear to me.”(Bhagavad Gita 12:13-20).

Therefore the sage puts his own person last, and yet it is found in the foremost place; he treats his person as if it were foreign to him, and yet that person is preserved. Is it not because he has no personal and private ends, that therefore such ends are realized?

When the ego is pushed to the end of the line, the real Self will be found at its head. That is why Jesus said: “The last shall be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16). And: “Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it” (Luke 17:33). When the phenomenal, conditioned personality is seen as really external, and in no way our true self, it is purified and preserved, becoming a mirror of our inner reality. Those who truly desire nothing find that they attain much. The Yoga Sutras say that when a person is completely indifferent to materiality then all the treasures of the earth are available to him. Also, when the limited ego is set aside, the limitless Self comes into function.

8. Water

The highest excellence is like (that of) water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things, and in its occupying, without striving (to the contrary), the low place which all men dislike. Hence (its way) is near to (that of) the Tao.

The excellence of a residence is in (the suitability of) the place; that of the mind is in abysmal stillness; that of associations is in their being with the virtuous; that of government is in its securing good order; that of (the conduct of) affairs is in its ability; and that of (the initiation of) any movement is in its timeliness.

And when (one with the highest excellence) does not wrangle (about his low position), no one finds fault with him.

(Tao Teh King 8)

The highest excellence is like (that of) water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things, and in its occupying, without striving (to the contrary), the low place which all men dislike. Hence (its way) is near to (that of) the Tao.

Once when someone asked Swami Brahmananda, the great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, if he would bless him, the swami replied: “We have nothing to give but blessings”—referring to the superstitious idea held even today that sadhus have the power to curse as well as bless. The simile of a rose and a piece of sandalwood is often used in relation to truly good people: when crushed they only give forth their sweet fragrance. Without water nothing can live; in the same way the benevolence of the wise extends to every form of being.

Furthermore, the wise occupy the lowliest position as uncomplainingly and as naturally as water flows to the lowest level. Water on the mountaintop and water deep in the earth is still water and possesses the same characteristics. In the same way the sage is unaffected by any external conditions or situations. Late one afternoon in Delhi I was sitting in a taxi as a friend of mind was buying rice. From a distance I saw a remarkable-appearing sadhu. His entire appearance was that of someone from a century before—even his eyeglasses were of a style I had only seen in photographs from the previous century. But the outstanding quality of his appearance was his great dignity and tranquility. People flowed all around him, jostling him here and there, but he remained unresponsive, obviously centered within. One man ran into him violently and nearly knocked him over. His reaction was to look at the man with complete calmness and a caring and compassionate look. He had no blame, but understood the inner turmoil that had propelled the man along so heedlessly and so unconsciously that he had made no apology but kept hurtling on. He turned back and resumed his calm pace. Right then my friend returned to the taxi and I asked him to take some money from me and give it to the sadhu. He hurried after him, bowed and touched the sadhu’s feet and handed him the money respectfully. The sadhu’s demeanor never changed. He turned and looked for a moment as my friend came back to the car and then walked on unaffected by any of it. That day I saw that the ideal of the Gita regarding evenness of mind in the pleasant and the unpleasant, in honor and dishonor, could be realized. As my friend Hari Dutt Vasudeva used to say regarding such people: “That is the glory of India.”

God is the same, the godly being merely reflections of that Absolute Goodness.

The excellence of a residence is in (the suitability of) the place; that of the mind is in abysmal stillness; that of associations is in their being with the virtuous; that of government is in its securing good order; that of (the conduct of) affairs is in its ability; and that of (the initiation of) any movement is in its timeliness.

The excellence of a residence is in (the suitability of) the place; that of the mind is in abysmal stillness. It is not the dwellingplace of the body, but that of the mind which is of prime importance. And by “dwellingplace” we mean the state or level of consciousness, not the type of discursive thoughts. Mere thoughts do not at all indicate where we “live,” for they come and go and constantly shift in character. Sri Ramakrishna often mentioned the scriptural scholars that spent hours a day talking about the highest reaches of philosophy, but all the time were intent on the money they were going to be given for their discourse and all the material things that money would buy. “Vultures soar very high in the sky, but their eyes are fixed on rotten carrion on the ground. The book-learned are reputed to be wise, but they are in search of carrion. They are attached to the world of ignorance.”

Every religion has its exhortations to keep the mind in “heaven” or with some sacred figure or deity, but Lao Tzu gives us the ultimate advice: our minds should ever dwell in the silence of transcendental Reality—the Tao. The only way for that to be possible is to enter that Silence through the portal of profound meditation—and often. It is through meditation alone that our consciousness can be established in the Primal State.

That of associations is in their being with the virtuous. However much we may like someone, if they develop a highly contagious and deadly disease, we stay away from them. Just as association with them would be the height of foolishness, so also is friendship with the unvirtuous, for they, too, carry a deadly disease—vice and the root of vice: ignorance. Association with such people inevitably results in our moral and spiritual contamination.

Yogananda often said: “Company is greater than will power.” That is why in India satsang—the company of worthy spiritual seekers—is considered an essential ingredient of successful spiritual life. It is possible to “catch” virtue as much as it is possible to catch vice. So we should actively seek such association. If we cannot find anyone to establish satsang with, then we should do so through reading books about and by those of higher consciousness. If we can find video recordings of them or their lives, that too is valuable. We should keep their depictions in our homes and where we meditate. In India it is common to see holy imagery in autos, busses, and painted on trucks and taxis (especially three-wheelers). As Jesus said: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21).

That of government is in its securing good order. Lao Tzu did not separate private from public life, and Taoists have always had a goodly bit to say about how society should be ordered. Unhappily, most governments are interested in order only, and not good order. However that may be, it is our duty to secure good order in our minds and lives through regular discipline and spiritual practice.

Any practice that does not produce such order in us is useless. A lot of “yogis” sit and “get high” only to come out of meditation and live very low. One of the most cruel and spiteful people I ever knew would have “ecstatic” meditation every day, being visited by saints, avatars, and gods—or so she said. But when she got up after meditation her family and associates ran for the exits, for she embodied our slang expression “hell on wheels.”

I knew a “lady” swami that continually roamed about like a bear with a bur under its

tail, though occasionally pausing to write articles and poems about love and devotion for her magazine. It only took a few hours for her to terrorize the entire staff of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. When her long-distance groupies came to escort her to a pre-arranged place for talks and classes, one of the staff at the hotel desk laughed and said: "Are you ever in for a surprise!" He was right, for she came charging into the lobby and into the midst of the groupies and whirled around and shouted at a friend of mine (who would not believe me when I had earlier warned her about "swamiji's" real character): "I WANT A DRINK OF WATER!!!" As the group was leaving the manager quietly told the person who had made the reservation for her that she would not be permitted accommodation in the future. Well, at least she made a mark in the world. But we must be different.

That of (the conduct of) affairs is in its ability. Somehow both East and West have gotten the ridiculous idea that impracticality is a trait of spirituality. It is not. As Sri Ramakrishna said: "If you can weigh salt you can weigh sugar." He was very strict with his disciples about developing good sense and practical and efficient ways. "Be a devotee, but why a fool?" was his comment. We, too, must live effectively on all levels. It is not necessary for us to become sharpsters and wheeler-dealers, but we should be sensible and capable people. This will not be hard if we have an ordered and orderly mind. Meditation is the way for that, too.

And that of (the initiation of) any movement is in its timeliness. Knowing when and how to act is a true virtue of mind, as is the ability to know whether something is even worth doing or not.

And when (one with the highest excellence) does not wrangle, no one finds fault with him.

A worthy person is not argumentative, oppressive, or repressive. He lives to himself, setting an example for others but not pestering them. The Gita describes such a one as "he who does not agitate the world, and who is not agitated by the world" (Bhagavad Gita 12:15). It must be acknowledged, though, that the solitary life is a Taoist ideal, since few are they that follow the example of the wise.

9. The Danger of Overweening Success

It is better to leave a vessel unfilled, than to attempt to carry it when it is full. If you keep feeling a point that has been sharpened, the point cannot long preserve its sharpness.

When gold and jade fill the hall, their possessor cannot keep them safe. When wealth and honours lead to arrogance, this brings its evil on itself. When the work is done, and one's name is becoming distinguished, to withdraw into obscurity is the way of Heaven.

(Tao Teh King 9)

Although Taoism is often thought of as a mystical system of magic and wonders, with sages flying through the sky and immortals hidden away in secret places, it is actually eminently practical and a philosophy of exquisite simplicity that is yet awesomely profound. (But it does have all those other qualities as well in a perfectly consistent manner.)

This ninth section of the Tao Teh King deals with the wisdom of “lesser is better” in contrast to our modern “more is better and most is best” unwisdom. The translators of the first part do not agree in their understanding, so we need to look at all views in hope of at least getting the general idea, which I think is rather clear.

It is better to leave a vessel unfilled, than to attempt to carry it when it is full. If you keep feeling a point that has been sharpened, the point cannot long preserve its sharpness.

This is Legge's translation. Mitchell renders it: “Fill your bowl to the brim and it will spill. Keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt.” And Lin Yutang: “Stretch [a bow] to the very full, and you will wish you had stopped in time. Temper a (sword-edge) to its very sharpest, and the edge will not last long.”

Flexibility is a cardinal virtue in Taoism, so perhaps Lin Yutang's interpretation is correct. For if a bow is stretched as far as it can go, the archer loses full control and may miss the target, but if there is some leeway (flexibility) he can aim with confidence and accuracy. In the same way, though, a vessel filled to the maximum will be impossible to move or carry. The ability to function well (even perfectly) in both the inner and outer worlds is a prime principle of Taoism. It is not enough to speak high-flown philosophy and delight in being able to figure out abstruse (and often obtuse) philosophical points. So whatever the exact translation, the idea is gotten across.

The same principle is embodied in the second half which deals with overdoing something, with being obsessive about obtaining the best or the most. Such an endeavor always results in the best and the most being pushed out of reach by our efforts to reach it. Only those who are relaxed and detached can really live in peace and harmony, and *that* is the true “most” and “best.” It is a matter of living, not getting.

When gold and jade fill the hall, their possessor cannot keep them safe. When wealth and honors lead to arrogance, this brings its evil on itself. When the work is done, and one's name is becoming distinguished, to withdraw into obscurity is the way of Heaven.

The meaning here is that too much is...too much—and it robs us of the very thing we were looking for: security and satisfaction. It is good to know when to stop short of

too much.

The belief that very successful and renowned people should withdraw while at the peak of their accomplishments and thereby evade the decline that would inevitably come, is unique to Taoism. Since Taoism was the foundation of Chinese philosophical thought, it pervaded all other philosophies such as Confucianism and Buddhism. As a result people of all persuasions acknowledged this fact, and it was quite the norm for renowned personages to quit all public life and go to out of the way places where they could live a simple life and not be bothered with notoriety. It was considered that the ideal form of withdrawal was to take up the heremitic life and live in solitary tranquility—and in that way continue to benefit society by example. Such hermits were sometimes visited by those who had great power and influence over society, and their advice, given in their “outside” perspective, wrought much good for the entire nation. As a result, even today hermits are looked upon as benefactors by the Chinese people.

10. Embracing the One

When the intelligent and animal souls are held together in one embrace, they can be kept from separating. When one gives undivided attention to the (vital) breath, and brings it to the utmost degree of pliancy, he can become as a (tender) babe. When he has cleansed away the most mysterious sights (of his imagination), he can become without a flaw.

In loving the people and ruling the state, cannot he proceed without any (purpose of) action? In the opening and shutting of his gates of heaven, cannot he do so as a female bird? While his intelligence reaches in every direction, cannot he (appear to) be without knowledge?

(The Tao) produces (all things) and nourishes them; it produces them and does not claim them as its own; it does all, and yet does not boast of it; it presides over all, and yet does not control them. This is what is called 'The mysterious Quality' (of the Tao).

(Tao Teh King 10)

According to scholars, this tenth section is the most difficult to translate of all the Tao Teh King, so we will be feeling our way along, but hopefully we will get some of Lao Tzu's intended teaching.

When the intelligent and animal souls are held together in one embrace, they can be kept from separating. When one gives undivided attention to the (vital) breath, and brings it to the utmost degree of pliancy, he can become as a (tender) babe. When he has cleansed away the most mysterious sights (of his imagination), he can become without a flaw.

When the intelligent and animal souls are held together in one embrace, they can be kept from separating. A great deal of the human being's problem is his fragmentation into many parts, or at least having the components of his nature out of synchronization with one another—no longer functioning as a single, whole entity—or even in conflict with one another. That is why we have the expression "personality conflict." In the early days, what we call psychiatrists were called "alienists" because they dealt with those who have become alienated from external reality. But that alienation usually has its roots in internal alienation. This has two forms: alienation from one's own self (this takes many forms), and the alienation of one's inner factors from one another. The inner gears no longer mesh and may even attack and damage one another or bring one or more gears to a halt.

Lao Tzu is saying that these parts of our makeup can be held together in a complete and harmonious unity that will never revert to the state of separation.

Lin Yutang, however, considers that this sentence is about the individual's capacity to unite himself with the Tao in a permanent manner. Disunity with the Tao is the condition that makes inner, individual disunity possible, so this is relevant, indeed.

Both problems exist, beyond doubt, and they both need to be solved. So now Lao Tzu gives his prescription for our trouble.

When one gives undivided attention to the breath, and brings it to the utmost degree of pliancy, he can become as a babe. That which Buddha much later called Anapanasati—mindfulness of the inhaling and exhaling breath—is a fundamental practice of Taoism. Of no relation to the complicated breathing methods of later Taoism, this is the practice described in Taoist texts as "the breath resting on the mind and the mind

resting on the breath.” It is gentle and simple, yet it leads in time to what the texts called “the womb breath” in which the breathing becomes completely internal, in the way the infant breathes in the womb without movement of the lungs. In itself this is not important, but it opens the way to perception of Original Nature, and therefore to union with the Tao.

When he has cleansed away the most mysterious sights, he can become without a flaw. Few are those that develop an inward orientation of the mind, and very few of those are able to resist wandering in the labyrinth of psychic experiences that ultimately prove no more real or worthwhile than idle dreams. One of the signs of an authentic yoga practice is its cutting off of those psychic distractions right at the beginning of meditation, even though most “yogis” not only revel in such things, they cite them as proof of their spiritual progress. But they are wrong—very wrong. It is necessary to aim the mind straight at the target and shoot for it with no side excursions. Rare are those who even know how to do this, and rarer still those who crush the ego and do so.

In loving the people and ruling the state, cannot he proceed without any (purpose of) action? In the opening and shutting of his gates of heaven, cannot he do so as a female bird? While his intelligence reaches in every direction, cannot he (appear to) be without knowledge?

In loving the people and ruling the state, cannot he proceed without any action? Lin Yutang: “In loving the people and governing the kingdom, can you rule without interference?” The Taoists had no use at all for the Confucian approach to government, which was extremely invasive and unrestrainedly heavy-handed. As a result, they usually refused to become government employees of any type. Some, however, felt that they should prove the validity of Taoist theories of government by joining and showing the way. Some did succeed. The basic idea of Taoist government was that the officials should be so evidently virtuous and intent on the welfare of people that their example would be followed—that people would do right for its own sake and for their own self-respect and integrity. It often worked, and this challenge of Lao Tzu was vindicated.

In the opening and shutting of his gates of heaven, cannot he do so as a female bird? The translator says that Taoist commentaries on this sentence say that the “gates of heaven” are the two nostrils, and this is in keeping with what has gone before. “Shutting” the gates is making the breath so subtle that it disappears for a while and become totally internal. And this internal breath sustains the body just as well as the outer breath usually does. But this dramatic process is not one that can be done in the usual sense—that is, it is not intentional, but occurs as a side effect of the deep internalization of the awareness. In the East a common simile of this state is the female bird sitting on her eggs. Her attention is completely absorbed on the eggs, not on the things around her. Sri Ramakrishna said that her eyes have a distinctive appearance, and that an adept yogi’s eyes look the same.

While his intelligence reaches in every direction, cannot he be without knowledge? Lin Yutang: “In comprehending all knowledge, can you renounce the mind?” There is a knowing that is merely intellectual and therefore theoretical, but there is a knowing that is a matter of direct experience which results in something far beyond intellectuality—so far that it is sometimes called “unknowing.” Unknowing is actually intuition which cancels out the need for the lesser knowing of the mind. Swami Prabhavananda’s translation of Bhagavad Gita 9:1, speaks of “knowledge which is nearer than knowing, open vision direct and instant.”

(The Tao) produces (all things) and nourishes them; it produces them and

does not claim them as its own; it does all, and yet does not boast of it; it presides over all, and yet does not control them. This is what is called 'The mysterious Quality' (of the Tao).

This is one of the most wonderful passages in this book, and one that should be carefully pondered especially by those raised in the God Is Watching You And You Had Better Watch Out Or Else religions of the West. The Bhagavad Gita speaks the truth about this superstition, but here Lao Tzu has put it so succinctly and yet so completely.

The Tao produces all things and nourishes them; it produces them and does not claim them as its own. This first clause tells us that the Tao is intimately involved with all things, maintaining the existence and the possibility of their evolution. Yet, even though their Source, It does not look upon them as Its possessions in the way a human artisan would the products of his skill. We do not “belong” to the Tao—we are a part of the Tao. That is a completely different matter altogether. We are not pygmies squatting at the feet of some Big Master, owned by him as his slaves who are dependent on his will for their very life. Few things are more paralyzing and poisonous than this Big Daddy view of God as a Cosmic Tyrant that we had better obey and please or else suffer forever and ever. No wonder the West has been so violent, competitive and vengeful throughout its recorded history, ruled by governments that are supreme in authority and in which the individual is so often crushed heedlessly. Freedom exists in comparatively few lands, and there it is in constant peril of annihilation. Big Brother is indeed watching in politics, and Big God is watching in religion. Both have little regard for the individual, but delight in a herd mentality they can easily control. The outcry for world government and world order comes from hearts and minds intent on domination and suppression of dissent. And the sheepwits accept it meekly. As a Greek Orthodox theologian has written, the “peace” they want is “the feverlessness of a corpse.” It is a natural consequence of their religion.

It does all, and yet does not boast of it. Think how full Western scriptures are of gorilla-like chest-beating assertions by God implying that we who would dare question or disobey are as nothing—mere motes floating in a sunbeam. For a perfect example of this, see the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth chapters of Job which contain megalomaniacal ravings supposedly by God to shut Job up and put him in his place. Here are just a few of the questions put to Job:

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof?

Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth?

Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days?

Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea?

Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?

Hath the rain a father?

Out of whose womb came the ice?

Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?

Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are?

Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lion?

Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth?

Who hath sent out the wild ass free?

Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?...Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn?

Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks?

Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?

Convincing and humbling, if not outright devastating, yes?

For a satirical treatment of this divine psychosis, see *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God*, by George Bernard Shaw.

It presides over all, and yet does not control them. This is a major point. Naturally the omniscient and omnipresent God is aware of all things—holds all things within His consciousness, otherwise they would cease to be. But, having manifested them within a framework of natural law, God needs do nothing more. Human beings, on the other hand, can indeed control both themselves and their environment as an exercise in the evolution of consciousness—which is the sole purpose of creation. It is all in our hands, including the consequences we call karma. This is what free will is all about—an inescapable faculty that God never interferes with. No, neither Mommy-God nor Daddy-God will kiss it and make it well. That is what we are intended to do for ourselves.

This is what is called 'The mysterious Quality' of the Tao. However, it is only mysterious to limited human consciousness, for it is the only possible Order (Ritam) of things.

In conclusion we need to realize that in our personal life sphere we must eventually be exactly like the Tao, for that, too, is our Mysterious Quality.

11. The Utility of Not-Being

The thirty spokes unite in the one nave; but it is on the empty space (for the axle), that the use of the wheel depends. Clay is fashioned into vessels; but it is on their empty hollowness, that their use depends. The door and windows are cut out (from the walls) to form an apartment; but it is on the empty space (within), that its use depends. Therefore, what has a (positive) existence serves for profitable adaptation, and what has not that for (actual) usefulness.

(Tao Teh King 11)

Mitchell's translation is a bit more clear:

We join spokes together in a wheel,
but it is the center hole
that makes the wagon move.

We shape clay into a pot,
but it is the emptiness inside
that holds whatever we want.

We hammer wood for a house,
but it is the inner space
that makes it livable.

We work with being,
but non-being is what we use.

The idea here is that we simply see things wrongly. We think that "solid matter" is real, and that absence of matter is "nothing." There is no such thing as solid matter except to the sense of touch. There is far more space in an object than there are atomic particles. So "things" are mostly empty space. If the space was removed, the particles would collapse into a dense blob and we would have another form of nothing.

So emptiness gives shape to everything, and that is why the ancient yogis of India realized that there is a fifth element: Space (Akasha). Akasha, or Ether, is like the canvas on which a picture is painted by spreading pigments over it. It is unseen, but without it the picture would not even exist. The yogis went even further in their investigations and found that Space is not just an element, but is properly called Chidakasha—Conscious Space or the Space of Consciousness. Consciousness is the fundamental reality upon which the illusion of thingness rests. In India they use the simile of a pond covered with algae. All the observer sees is the algae, but if it is moved aside the water is revealed and the algae is seen as only incidental. In the same way Maya, the Appearance of Illusion, is only a veneer behind which is Eternal Reality, the Tao.

Emptiness is seen in this verse as Potential, as observable being. The many forms will eventually disappear, but the frame or background on which they were resting remains forever. That is the Tao.

So all things depend on the Tao, and to be united with the Tao in our consciousness is to be limitless in our potential and in our actualization of the potential.

12. The Senses

Color's five hues from th' eyes their sight will take;
Music's five notes the ears as deaf can make;
The flavors five deprive the mouth of taste;
The chariot course, and the wild hunting waste
Make mad the mind; and objects rare and strange,
Sought for, men's conduct will to evil change.

Therefore the sage seeks to satisfy (the craving of) the belly, and not the (insatiable longing of the) eyes. He puts from him the latter, and prefers to seek the former.

(Tao Teh King 12)

Lin Yutang has it somewhat easier to comprehend:

The five colors blind the eyes of man;
The five musical notes deafen the ears of man;
The five flavors dull the taste of man;
Horse-racing, hunting and chasing madden the minds of man;
Rare, valuable goods keep their owners awake at night.”
Therefore the Sage:
Provides for the belly and not the eye.
Hence, he rejects the one and accepts the other.

In the last verse we saw that Emptiness is the only real Substance even though we see it differently through mental and sensory illusion.

Now Lao Tzu assures us that the objects of the senses actually paralyze the senses and prevent us from really seeing, hearing, tasting, etc. In the same way the objects of the mind keep us from knowing the mind and submerge it beneath experiences that in essence are dangerous lies. In other words, they make us crazy.

What is the solution? It is not to just say: “It is all illusion!” and go mentally comatose. Rather, Lao Tzu tells us to pick out the strands of the web that are connected at least obliquely to some level of reality and through them begin to work our way out of the web of delusion. He chooses hunger as something to pay attention to because if we do not eat we will die. People can live without one or more of the senses, but not without the body on which the senses depend. This is the basis of authentic asceticism which is not denial or rejection, but a cultivation of what is real by turning from the unreal.

13. Praise and Blame

Favour and disgrace would seem equally to be feared; honour and great calamity, to be regarded as personal conditions (of the same kind).

What is meant by speaking thus of favour and disgrace? Disgrace is being in a low position (after the enjoyment of favour). The getting that (favour) leads to the apprehension (of losing it), and the losing it leads to the fear of (still greater calamity): this is what is meant by saying that favour and disgrace would seem equally to be feared.

And what is meant by saying that honour and great calamity are to be (similarly) regarded as personal conditions? What makes me liable to great calamity is my having the body (which I call myself); if I had not the body, what great calamity could come to me?

Therefore he who would administer the kingdom, honouring it as he honours his own person, may be employed to govern it, and he who would administer it with the love which he bears to his own person may be entrusted with it.

(Tao Teh King 13)

Favor and disgrace would seem equally to be feared; honour and great calamity, to be regarded as personal conditions (of the same kind).

This is going to be explained later, but here at the beginning we have the assurance that such things as favor and disgrace, gain and loss, etc., are simply so from the way that we view them. Of themselves they are nothing, but our valuation of them gives them a character. Many people have found that calamities were good for them and that successes were burdens and miseries. It is all according to our personal view of them, a view that can change with time. This is a valuable piece of knowledge, because it can help us to be even-minded in times of intense change.

What is meant by speaking thus of favour and disgrace? Disgrace is being in a low position (after the enjoyment of favour). The getting that (favour) leads to the apprehension (of losing it), and the losing it leads to the fear of (still greater calamity): this is what is meant by saying that favour and disgrace would seem equally to be feared.

This is quite reasonable. When we are high on the ladder we fear a fall, and when we are low on the ladder we scramble to climb higher. Both are a torment to us. Realizing this, if we develop indifference to them and put our attention on inner cultivation, we will not suffer.

And what is meant by saying that honour and great calamity are to be (similarly) regarded as personal conditions? What makes me liable to great calamity is my having the body (which I call myself); if I had not the body, what great calamity could come to me?

Relative existence is a great calamity if we do not know how to deal with it, how to make it an instrument for wisdom and peace. But once we do know how to use it meaningfully, then the disaster becomes great good fortune.

Therefore he who would administer the kingdom, honoring it as he honors his own person, may be employed to govern it, and he who would administer

it with the love which he bears to his own person may be entrusted with it.

If only we could find such people in government! For now we will be wiser to turn our attention to our own life and make sure that we live it with honor and integrity, placing the highest value on this chance for higher consciousness and the freedom it brings.

14. Prehistoric Origins

We look at it, and we do not see it, and we name it 'the Equable.' We listen to it, and we do not hear it, and we name it 'the Inaudible.' We try to grasp it, and do not get hold of it, and we name it 'the Subtle.' With these three qualities, it cannot be made the subject of description; and hence we blend them together and obtain The One.

Its upper part is not bright, and its lower part is not obscure. Ceaseless in its action, it yet cannot be named, and then it again returns and becomes nothing. This is called the Form of the Formless, and the Semblance of the Invisible; this is called the Fleeting and Indeterminable.

We meet it and do not see its Front; we follow it, and do not see its Back. When we can lay hold of the Tao of old to direct the things of the present day, and are able to know it as it was of old in the beginning, this is called (unwinding) the clue of Tao.

(Tao Teh King 14)

This section really reveals how incredibly, inconceivably vast is the distance—gulf, actually—between Eastern and Western religion. It is simply not true that it is a tiny step from East to West. Reading a paperback book, going to a yoga class, seeing a super-guru when he passes through town on his annual world tour, or liking what is seen of the Dalai Lama on a TV spot (usually brief), does not make anyone able to leap the gulf and really become a practitioner of Dharma. A person has to be able to *think* East, not just *talk* East. The very observable fact that Western “Buddhists” and “Hindus” almost never follow the moral precepts of those religions is proof that, to paraphrase the Bible, they do not have the mind of Buddha or the mind of Krishna (Vyasa). For if they did, they would comprehend the wisdom of those precepts and naturally follow them as necessary principles of life.

I am not saying that everyone born in the East really is Eastern, or that everyone born in the West is Western. Actually, we are not speaking of geographical East and West—for, after all, America is the far East to people living in China and Japan. What we are dealing with is a matter of brain dominance—of left-brain dominance versus right-brain dominance. And I mean *dominance*, not just a hint. Drug-use can warp a person's brain enough to make him open to the paradoxes of Eastern religious thought, but that is neither understanding them nor evidence of the complete psychology necessary to be of the East.

This is not just my idea about the matter. During my first visit to India I was fortunate enough to meet with Swami Maheshananda Giri who for many years had held the chair of Sanskrit and Indology at Harvard. For decades he had encountered many Western students of Eastern religion, men and women of highly developed intellects, certainly not superficial in their interest. But when I asked him if he had met a single Westerner who truly understood Eastern religion, he answer was “No. Nor have I met a single Easterner who really understood Western religion. To understand Eastern religion a person would have to tear down every bit of their Western background and build up a new frame of reference to really comprehend Hinduism or any other Oriental philosophy.” At the time I agreed with him, but in later years I came to understand that what is really needed is not an intellectual catharsis, but a shifting from left-brain to right-brain dominance. And that is accomplished by diligent practice of authentic yoga meditation.

I have seen people that could be called typical Westerners become typical Orientals

after taking up yoga practice. I am not speaking culturally, but psychologically. I well remember the day Sri Kaka Sahib Kellelkar, one of Gandhi's closest associates, said to another one of Gandhiji's disciples regarding myself and some of our ashramites: "I have travelled throughout the world and met people from every land, yet today for the first time I have seen people who truly have a kinship with us." Many times very strict Hindus have said to me: "You are not an American, you are one of us." Now so many years later, there are some real American Hindus, I am glad to say, and in India there are very authentic sadhus that were born in the West. They crossed over the gulf or were born already there. That is why Mahendranath Gupta, the author of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, once said: "Undoubtedly there are good people in every land, but they are aliens in those lands and their faces are toward India."

We look at it, and we do not see it, and we name it 'The Equable.' We listen to it, and we do not hear it, and we name it 'The Inaudible.' We try to grasp it, and do not get hold of it, and we name it 'The Subtle.' With these three qualities, it cannot be made the subject of description; and hence we blend them together and obtain The One.

Lin Yutang is a bit better:

Looked at, but cannot be seen—
That is called the Invisible (*yi*).
Listened to, but cannot be heard—
That is called the Inaudible (*hsi*).
Grasped at, but cannot be touched—
That is called the Intangible (*wei*).
These three elude our inquiries
And hence blend and become One.

The Absolute Reality, the Tao, can be looked at but not seen, listened to, but not heard, and touched, but not felt. Only those who have seen, heard, and touched the Tao know that It cannot be seen, heard, or touched. This is not some cute zen-like string of contradictions meant to titillate the smokers and tokers, but carefully considered fact. And by the way, this is the authentic position of Eastern Christianity: only when you have seen God will you know that God cannot be seen.

Two eyes, two ears, and two hands cannot perceive or contact the Tao, for they are external and dual, but the single eye, ear, and hand of our internal being can see, hear, and touch that to which the outer faculties are blind, deaf, and numb.

When these three experiences elude the dual mind, persistent inner search results in the single perception of the Single (and Sole) Reality. This only makes sense to the yogi.

Its upper part is not bright, and its lower part is not obscure. Ceaseless in its action, it yet cannot be named, and then it again returns and becomes nothing. This is called the Form of the Formless, and the Semblance of the Invisible; this is called the Fleeting and Indeterminable.

Lin Yutang:

Not by its rising, is there light,
Nor by its sinking, is there darkness.
Unceasing, continuous,

It cannot be defined,
And reverts again to the realm of nothingness.

The yogi knows the unknowable; knows It as everything, yet knows that in essence It is the No Thing.

We meet it and do not see its Front; we follow it, and do not see its Back. When we can lay hold of the Tao of old to direct the things of the present day, and are able to know it as it was of old in the beginning, this is called (unwinding) the clue of Tao. Lin Yutang:

That is why it is called the Form of the Formless,
The Image of Nothingness.

That is why it is called the Elusive:

Meet it and you do not see its face;
Follow it and you do not see its back.

“Front,” “back,” and “sides” do not apply to the Tao. Yet, since the Tao does assume form we sometimes get a fleeting perception of it in an expressible form, but It is gone before we even begin to speak of it. Yet we did perceive It, so we know It exists, but Its almost instant disappearance tells us that It really is formless and No Thing. After a few encounters of this kind we begin to realize that the same is true of us. We are as indefinable as the Tao, because...WE ARE THE TAO.

15. The Wise Ones of Old

The skilful masters (of the Tao) in old times, with a subtle and exquisite penetration, comprehended its mysteries, and were deep (also) so as to elude men's knowledge. As they were thus beyond men's knowledge, I will make an effort to describe of what sort they appeared to be.

Shrinking looked they like those who wade through a stream in winter; irresolute like those who are afraid of all around them; grave like a guest (in awe of his host); evanescent like ice that is melting away; unpretentious like wood that has not been fashioned into anything; vacant like a valley, and dull like muddy water.

Who can (make) the muddy water (clear)? Let it be still, and it will gradually become clear. Who can secure the condition of rest? Let movement go on, and the condition of rest will gradually arise.

They who preserve this method of the Tao do not wish to be full (of themselves). It is through their not being full of themselves that they can afford to seem worn and not appear new and complete.

(Tao Teh King 15)

The skillful masters (of the Tao) in old times, with a subtle and exquisite penetration, comprehended its mysteries, and were deep (also) so as to elude men's knowledge. As they were thus beyond men's knowledge, I will make an effort to describe of what sort they appeared to be.

The Tao is incomprehensible, even though It is in all things, and human beings can perfectly embody it. The problem is, those who do embody It are then as incomprehensible as the Tao. Yet we need to have some idea of the ways of such masters so we will know if we meet them. For meeting them opens vast opportunities for advancement in wisdom and practical development. Because of this Lao Tzu wishes to give us some idea of them. We should notice that Lao Tzu is not the originator of what we call Taoism, for he speaks here of ancient masters. The Tao Itself is Taoism. The philosophy and practice we call Taoism is the way to the eternal Tao/Taoism. This, too, should be understood.

Shrinking looked they like those who wade through a stream in winter; irresolute like those who are afraid of all around them; grave like a guest (in awe of his host); evanescent like ice that is melting away; unpretentious like wood that has not been fashioned into anything; vacant like a valley, and dull like muddy water.

Shrinking looked they like those who wade through a stream in winter. Lin Yutang: "Cautious, like crossing a wintry stream." The sages were never brash and overconfident. They had never heard the Western adage: "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," but they certainly acted according to it like angels. This sentence does not mean that the sages were fearful—fearlessness is a main ingredient of spiritual life—but they were extremely careful in their words and acts. I found this to be true in India. The worthy teachers would not teach unless asked to, and even then they proceeded very leisurely and subtly. The fools, of course, would latch on to me and dump their unwisdom on me. They were walking mines of spiritual misinformation. Sages are like ripe oranges: you have to squeeze them to get the juice, and how much juice you get depends on how persistently you squeeze.

Also the masters live carefully, thinking out things well ahead, truly ordering their lives and controlling the situations in which they placed themselves. Because intelligence always prevailed, to the unwise they appeared unsure. So Lao Tzu continues:

Irresolute like those who are afraid of all around them. Lin Yutang: “Irresolute, like one fearing danger all around.” Again, they do not fear, but they are well aware of how dangerous and unsure is this world. Masters know that a single misstep can result in long-term disaster, and think and act accordingly. Buddha vigorously warned against heedlessness, and Lao Tzu is describing the opposite of that failing. Through the years one thing that has most amazed me about people who are supposedly seeking God is their complete lack of the realization that a spiritual seeker is in constant danger from influences in the world around him and that he needs to protect himself from them and preserve and increase the strength of his aspiration. Instead they dawdle around, put themselves in questionable situations, do not take advantage of favorable situations, do very little to inform or prepare themselves for a real spiritual life, and pay no attention to what is happening to them. I have met people that had spiritually come to a halt decades before and just did not know it. They were dead and unburied. Minimalism does not work in spiritual life.

Grave like a guest. In most cultures there is a strong awareness of the obligations of a host, but in China they knew that the guest also had serious obligations. Courtesy was a prime factor in Chinese society, and people were deeply aware that it was worse to fail as a guest than as a host. That is why Lao Tzu speaks of a worthy guest as an example of the gravity which characterized the wise of earlier times. They possessed a deep regard for those with whom they interacted and showed it by their conduct at all times. The social conscience of a master is concerned with those he meets daily, not with some abstraction used for political manipulation of society in general. It was his obligation to be the best possible kind of person. That was his debt to society. It was deeply personal and not at all theoretical. This, too, I saw in all the holy people I met. Their sensitivity and care for everyone impressed me greatly. They had realized that a person must first be a perfect human being before they can advance to a higher level of evolution.

Evanescence like ice that is melting away. Lin Yutang: “Self-effacing, like ice beginning to melt.” “Written in stone” was not an ideal for the ancient masters. They valued flexibility and unpretentiousness. They did not define themselves, but remained fluid and open to positive change. They never pushed their ideals on others or even spoke them unless asked. They were the kind of people Jesus had in mind when he spoke of the meek that inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). Freed from the compulsion of form, they would never impose form in the sense of egoic definition on others. As we have seen and will see, they had very definite ideas about government, but realizing that human society was not capable of following them, they simply withdrew, content to fulfill their ideals in their own life at peace and harmony. This is why Taoist hermitages would be hidden away in very inaccessible places, for they did not want to intrude on anyone. Yet, their hospitality was renowned, and they received guests with a warmth and solicitude not found anywhere else. They were true “humanists” in all things.

Unpretentious like wood that has not been fashioned into anything. Lin Yutang: “Genuine, like a piece of undressed wood.” In English we have the expression: “Plain as an old shoe,” and its variation: “Comfortable as an old shoe.” Both were applicable to the Taoist masters. They were plain and straightforward, yet with a courtesy that was thoroughly comfortable. They were what they were—they spent a lifetime uncovering what they really were and establishing themselves in it. They never “made

anything” of themselves, and lived free of the compulsion to “be” anything in the eyes of others. Artificiality was childish in their opinion. As a result they had perfect mastery of everything, within and without. Not wanting to strut or display themselves on earth, they literally walked in the sky and controlled nature from deep within where they were one with all. They did not live in the Tao, the Tao lived in them. This was a blessedness unthought of by the busy and notable of the world. Yet, when those harried denizens of an ever-fermenting society sought them out, they gently did their best to reveal the way of wisdom to them. The Taoist hermits were a great force in Chinese culture, though they never sought to be so.

Vacant like a valley. Lin Yutang: “Open-minded, like a valley.” The sages were always ready to see, to learn, to change. This is almost impossible for most everyone, adults especially, because they have defined themselves and loaded themselves with mental furniture in accordance with their definition. Consequently they are both blind and resistant to anything different, anything that does not fit into or accord with the definition. Their response to anything different tends to fall into three categories: complete unawareness, rejection, and hostility.

No matter what passes through a valley, it remains a valley. Even if fires destroy all vegetation, still it is no less a valley. If a river flows through it or if it dries up, the valley remains. Seeming to be empty, virtually nothing since it is empty space, the valley is yet more permanent than anything that comes into it. This is a marvelous ideal for all. It is unfortunate that these magnificent ideals are little noticed, because people become totally occupied with the exotica of Taoism and not its eternal foundations of wisdom.

Dull like muddy water. The old Taoists greatly admired water—as did Saint Francis—for its power to be ever yielding and accommodating without at any time violating or altering its nature in any way. Eventually water wore away obstacles in its path by just flowing and being itself. No effort was needed at all. So water was a symbol of placid stability for them, of rightness and effortless order and integrity.

“Dull like muddy water” indicates that the wise are willing to seem valueless, for who wants muddy water? They do not mind being disregarded by others. Again we have their love for being unremarkable outwardly. However, Lin Yutang renders this: “Mixing freely, like murky water” meaning that water is not rejective, but receives into itself, mingles within itself, whatever it encounters. This is even more profound. Here, too, we see the lack of definition. Water does not say: “I am not earth or opaque material, so I want nothing to do with it. I refuse to let it touch or infuse me.” No, it is totally accepting, yet water will return eventually to its pure nature. For Lao Tzu continues:

Who can (make) the muddy water (clear)? Let it be still, and it will gradually become clear. Who can secure the condition of rest? Let movement go on, and the condition of rest will gradually arise.

This is awesomely profound. It is so simple, yet so large in scope that it is a wonder.

Who can (make) the muddy water (clear)? Let it be still, and it will gradually become clear. This first part is not so hard. Just be still and the silt of mind and heart will settle out and all will be clear and pure. But the water does not agitate itself to do so, otherwise the muddiness will remain. Stillness clarifies the mind—not just an empty mind, but a still mind. They are not the same. Meditation is the way of stillness.

Who can secure the condition of rest? Let movement go on, and the condition of rest will gradually arise. This is clarified by two verses from the Gita: “Freedom from activity is never achieved by abstaining from action. Nobody can become perfect by

merely ceasing to act. In fact, nobody can ever rest from his activity even for a moment. All are helplessly forced to act, by the gunas” (Bhagavad Gita 3:4, 5).

External actions must go on—there is no choice—while complete inactivity, “the condition of rest,” is established within. This is all a matter of extremely subtle and competent practice, and when I say “competent” I mean that the methodology and the practitioner must be competent.

They who preserve this method of the Tao do not wish to be full (of themselves). It is through their not being full of themselves that they can afford to seem worn and not appear new and complete.

Of course, by “themselves” is meant ego and imposition of finite individuality on everything, making that the standard by which the universe is evaluated in all its parts. Those who follow the Tao do not hold any formalized self-concept, nor do they strive after one. Genuine Taoists do not think of themselves, nor do they think of the Tao. They merge with It. They embody it.

Lao Tzu understood human folly, especially the utterly baseless idolizing and idealizing of “new” and “contemporary” and “the whole enchilada.” So they resigned themselves to being sneered at as old and irrelevant, outdated and outworn. It did not upset them because they had a wonderful secret: They knew they were eternal and therefore ever new, relevant, and total. In other words: the Tao.

16. Knowing the Eternal Law

The (state of) vacancy should be brought to the utmost degree, and that of stillness guarded with unwearying vigour. All things alike go through their processes of activity, and (then) we see them return (to their original state). When things (in the vegetable world) have displayed their luxuriant growth, we see each of them return to its root. This returning to their root is what we call the state of stillness; and that stillness may be called a reporting that they have fulfilled their appointed end.

“The report of that fulfillment is the regular, unchanging rule. To know that unchanging rule is to be intelligent; not to know it leads to wild movements and evil issues. The knowledge of that unchanging rule produces a (grand) capacity and forbearance, and that capacity and forbearance lead to a community (of feeling with all things). From this community of feeling comes a kingliness of character; and he who is king-like goes on to be heaven-like. In that likeness to heaven he possesses the Tao. Possessed of the Tao, he endures long; and to the end of his bodily life, is exempt from all danger of decay.

(Tao Teh King 16)

The translation of Lin Yutang is much clearer, I think; here it is:

“Attain the utmost in Passivity, hold firm to the basis of Quietude.

“The myriad things take shape and rise to activity, but I watch them fall back to their repose. Like vegetation that luxuriantly grows but returns to the root (soil) from which it springs.

“To return to the root is Repose; it is called going back to one’s Destiny. Going back to one’s Destiny is to find the Eternal Law. To know the Eternal Law is Enlightenment. And not to know the Eternal Law is to court disaster.

“He who knows the Eternal Law is tolerant; being tolerant, he is impartial; being impartial, he is kingly; being kingly, he is in accord with Nature; being in accord with Nature, he is in accord with Tao; being in accord with Tao, he is eternal, and his whole life is preserved from harm.”

Attain the utmost in Passivity, hold firm to the basis of Quietude. The ideal of the Tao Teh King, the Bhagavad Gita, and the teachings of Buddha are the same: we must transfer our awareness into the Stillpoint, the Silence that is the unmoving Consciousness which is our true Being. At the same time we must move through the world skillfully, so living as to end the compulsion to further rebirth. Meditation enables us to “attain the utmost in Passivity.” That is, it enables us to live centered in the unmoving Silence while being fully and effectively active. Through long practice of meditation we become able to “hold firm to the basis of Quietude” at all times.

The myriad things take shape and rise to activity, but I watch them fall back to their repose. Like vegetation that luxuriantly grows but returns to the root (soil) from which it springs. Here we have another unanimity. All things arise into manifestation from the “primal soup” that consists of numberless elements that themselves are composites. Since coming implies going and getting implies losing—for there is an inexorable impulse to ever return to the original state—it is inevitable that all things will return to non-manifestation, which Lao Tzu sees not as death or destruction, but a return to repose, to peace and freedom from the tension or stress inherent in all forms. There is a Root to all things: the Tao which is both Origin and Completion.

To return to the root is Repose; it is called going back to one’s Destiny. Total union/

identity with the Tao is the only real destiny anything or anyone has. There is no real distinction between sentient and insentient being—all is Tao. And about That nothing can be said.

Going back to one's Destiny is to find the Eternal Law. This is a perfect definition of Dharma: the return to the One. Anything that aids in this return is dharmic, and that which hinders the return is adharmic. This is the only basis upon which we should determine what is right or wrong, good or evil. Return is “the Eternal Law.”

To know the Eternal Law is Enlightenment. “Death is certain for the born. Rebirth is certain for the dead” (Bhagavad Gita 2:27). Those who are born are without exception destined to die, so in a sense they are “dead” the moment they are born. In the same way, those that tread the way of the Eternal Law which ends in enlightenment are already enlightened by the fact of their pilgrimage. For this reason, those who walk the Way deserve our utmost respect, and those who persevere unto the end deserve our reverence—and imitation.

And not to know the Eternal Law is to court disaster. That is so obvious to anyone with a functioning mind that it needs no comment.

He who knows the Eternal Law is tolerant; being tolerant, he is impartial; being impartial, he is kingly; being kingly, he is in accord with Nature; being in accord with Nature, he is in accord with Tao; being in accord with Tao, he is eternal, and his whole life is preserved from harm. Those who walk the Way advance in unfoldment of character step by step as outlined here until they are the Tao alone.

17. Rulers

Of the best rulers the people (only) know that they exist; the next best they love and praise; the next they fear; and the next they revile.

When they do not command the people's faith, some will lose faith in them, and then they resort to oaths!

But (of the best) when their task is accomplished, their work done, the people all remark, 'We have done it ourselves.'

(Tao Teh King 17)

Of the best rulers the people (only) know that they exist; the next best they love and praise; the next they fear; and the next they revile.

It is interesting that Taoism was traditionally very outspoken about society, and especially about government. At the same time Taoism advocated being distanced from the regular run of things and was insistent that no coercion in any form was to be applied to other people. So Taoism was a fundamentally "live and let live" philosophy that felt an obligation to present wisdom to all and then stand back and see what happened. This is of course characteristic of the major Eastern religions Taoism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism—at least ideally. It is no surprise that human beings in the grip of ego have always gone contrary to this principle, but anyone who reads the scriptures and the teachings of true sages can see that coercion and even persuasion is a violation of their essential nature. For true religion frees a person, it does not bind or obligate him in any way. In no other way can hypocrisy and corruption be avoided.

Now I have my own story. If the best rulers are only known to exist—and nothing more—what about rulers that no one knows even exist? That is the way it was in my one-mile-square hometown of four hundred and fifty residents in the nineteen forties. We had no mail delivery—everything came to our tiny post office on the town square. Any outsider wanting to find a house or business had to ask and be directed to it. So imagine our amazement when my uncle George came home one evening and asked: "Did you know all our streets have names?" Our town was over one hundred years old, yet my family who had lived there for three generations have never heard of any street names. It seems that my uncle had found an old map at the town hall which gave the street names.

After everyone had expressed surprise, he topped himself by asking: "Did you know we have a mayor?" Again, this was astonishing. NO ONE had ever heard of a mayor or any form of town government whatever. And when he told us the mayor's name we were really flummoxed because it the name of a rich drunk that no one even gave a second thought. (I had been told when very small that I must never go into their large impressive house because they were the wrong kind of people—typical F. Scott Fitzgerald type of moral degenerates—not appreciated in a community like ours in which "poor but honest" topped the list.)

Anyhow, it turned out that the town was "governed" by a town board who had some time in the past decided to call its chairman the mayor. What town board? No one knew of them because they had been appointed long ago and given the power to appoint replacements when one of them died or resigned. That was even more shocking. But since the board did not seem to do anything, we shrugged it off and went on as before. (Actually they did a few things, but very slowly and made it seem

that it was county regulation.)

Nearly forty years went by. When I was visited by a cousin and his wife I learned that the old town hall was falling to bits. It contained the library and a huge auditorium where school plays and suchlike were performed, so my cousin's wife was especially concerned about its imminent demolition and was trying to persuade the locals to raise money on their own to preserve it. Some hope! A few month's later my father and mother came for their annual visit and in conversation my father revealed that in the flurry and fury of Save the Town Hall my cousin and his wife had discovered that the sleepy little town actually had over two hundred thousand dollars in the bank gathering interest—enough to repair several town halls. Another aspect of the invisible board's inactivity. So the hall was saved and today a photograph of it is displayed on the town's minimal website. (Another board project I suppose.) By the way, the town now has street signs.

The government that governs least is not the best—it is the government that is unknown and does virtually nothing.

What my story demonstrates is the wisdom of the Taoist position. Invisible government is best. Next best is government that governs so minimally and wisely that all love and praise it. Not at all good is government that rules by fear, and the worst is reviled by those with good sense.

Since we do not run government as individuals, what is the message of the Tao Teh King to us? It shows us how benevolent detachment while doing our personal best within society is the way of wisdom.

When they do not command the people's faith, some will lose faith in them, and then they resort to oaths!

Moral coercion precedes active physical coercion, so beware. Also they vehemently praise and congratulate themselves and hold themselves up to the people as the pinnacle of virtue and wisdom, implying that those who oppose them are stupid and without right moral sense. In this, government is following the lead of religion much of the time, for religions do just the same. The further a religion drifts from being based on the individual's free choice, the worse it gets until it, too, is a monstrosity everyone prays will go away.

But (of the best) when their task is accomplished, their work done, the people all remark, 'We have done it ourselves.'

And so they truly will have done—as a free society acting willingly on right principles. It is the same with religion. Each person attains moral perfection and enlightenment on their own. The religion pointed the way, but they lived out what they learned and proved its value by reaching the Eternal even while living in time.

18. The Decline of Tao

“When the Great Tao (Way or Method) ceased to be observed, benevolence and righteousness came into vogue. (Then) appeared wisdom and shrewdness, and there ensued great hypocrisy.

“When harmony no longer prevailed throughout the six kinships, filial sons found their manifestation; when the states and clans fell into disorder, loyal ministers appeared.

(Tao Teh King 18)

Lin Yutang is a bit more on target:

“On the decline of the great Tao, the doctrine of ‘humanity’ and ‘justice’ arose. When knowledge and cleverness appeared, great hypocrisy followed in its wake.

“When the six relationships no longer lived at peace, there was (praise of) ‘kind parents’ and ‘filial sons.’ When a country fell into chaos and misrule, there was (praise of) ‘loyal ministers.’”

On the decline of the great Tao,... The Taoists felt that “in the beginning” the Tao was known and therefore followed. Yet in time people began to lose their grip on the Tao. As a result it was not the Tao that faded away or declined, but the people themselves. So when we have the phrase “on the decline of the great Tao,” it means the awareness of the Tao declined in people’s minds.

...the doctrine of “humanity” and “justice” arose. When people lost their innate awareness of the Tao—and therefore of their true selves—they began to violate their true nature which was the Tao. Instead of natural and true virtue in thought, word, and deed, they began to behave in disorderly and destructive ways. In order to stop this aberration and chaos at least externally, various codes for human behavior were formulated. Some were merely presented for consideration, and others through social and civil law were imposed. Infraction of these laws resulted in either loss of reputation—the “losing face” so abhorrent to the Chinese—and risk of social ostracism or even punishment by the civil authorities.

Taoists considered the Confucian definitions and prescription for right behavior to be trivial and hypocritical, especially when they became so rigid and heavy-handed that authentic humanity and justice became extinct to a troubling degree. The individual became less and less as “society” and “order” gained in importance and overt dominance.

The Tao has “declined” throughout the world, and as a result nearly all people believe that by acting a certain way we can make ourselves into what we really only appear to be. It is believed that people who act “nice” really are nice, that those engaged in “helping” others are kind, caring and compassionate. And so it goes in many directions. But any intelligent and insightful person, though in a minority, is aware that this is a superficial and simplistic way of seeing things that is really self-deception. We all know “godly” people who are hellish, and “caring” people that are nothing but manipulative psychopaths, and “helping” people that are exploitive opportunists. (Remember the hateful teachers—especially in grade school—that constantly bellowed: “If I did not like children I would not have become a teacher!”? And: “I am not a policeman!” I’ll say they weren’t! They were commandants of a gulag, tyrants with unquestionable authority, social fascists of the worst sort.) Isn’t it interesting that at this point in time the label of hypocrite is only applied to religious

people? Everyone else is to be accepted at face value and not questioned. Otherwise we will be “negative” and “obstructive.” Heaven only knows what would be thought of Taoists today if they did not have the (wrong) reputation for being advocates of supersex and therefore “one of us” in society’s eyes.

When knowledge and cleverness appeared, great hypocrisy followed in its wake. When intelligence and integrity waned, education and craftiness took over. P. J. O’Rourke has written an excellent essay on the horror of “A students” that is gospel truth. As I once read, universities are places where pebbles are polished and diamonds made dull. If we observe children we can see their natural creativity and spontaneity being eroded year by year by public schools. It is a revelation to meet and converse with a home-schooled child.

As Byrn translates this: “When intellectualism arises, hypocrisy is close behind.” Fakery on all levels becomes rife, even though often unintentional.

When the six relationships no longer lived at peace, there was (praise of) “kind parents” and “filial sons.” When real families declined in numbers, “ideal” families that were artificial and hypocritical appeared. Parents were praised for being humane—or appearing to be—and children were praised for being “good” and “respectful.” Love being the basis of family life, there is no need for such labels when there is genuine love between parents and children. As Blackney translated this: “The six relations were no more at peace, So codes were made to regulate our homes.” Byrn renders it: “When there is strife in the family unit, people talk about ‘brotherly love’.”

In ancient China the rules of subservience developed from the Six Kinships of Confucius. Under its order of loyalties, the older is always master of the younger, man is master of woman, the lord is master of the subject, the father is master of the son, the husband is master of the wife, and the brother is master of the sister. This a very poor model for a real family.

“When a country fell into chaos and misrule, there was (praise of) “loyal ministers.” Blackney: “The fatherland grew dark, confused by strife: Official loyalty became the style.” Byrn: “When the country falls into chaos, politicians talk about ‘patriotism’.” Things have not changed much, have they?

All of these troubles come from losing touch with the Tao which is one’s own primal Self. Consequently no one can be what they really are, and artificial standards arise and compound the present problems and create many more. There is only one solution: return to the Reality of the Tao.

19. Realize the Simple Self

Banish “wisdom,” discard “knowledge,” and the people shall profit a hundredfold. Banish “humanity,” discard “justice,” and the people shall recover love of their kin. Banish cunning, discard “utility,” and the thieves and brigands shall disappear. As these three touch the externals and are inadequate, the people have need of what they can depend upon:

Reveal thy simple self,
Embrace thy original nature,
Check thy selfishness,
Curtail thy desires.

(Tao Teh King 19).

The Taoists were very outspoken in their opinion of Confucius and Confucianism as nothing more than busybodies that had ruined society by advocating veneer rather than solid substance. Jesus spoke of this as “the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees” (Matthew 5:20). Neither he nor the Taoists were listened to very much—he withdrew to India and the Taoists to solitary places in the countryside. It is wisdom to know when nobody really wants to hear or think about what you have to say, and greater wisdom when you consequently go away and keep silent.

So why did Lao Tzu say what he did in the Tao Teh King? Because he was leaving society forever—literally—and when the gatekeeper asked him to write down his insights he did so, not with any intention that people would heed and reform society, but so the few that really had ears to hear and a brain between them to think would reform themselves and be at peace. For this reason we must not think of Taoism as a rival of Confucianism, having the wish to reform others. Taoism is a marvelously solitary and independent approach to cultivation of inner worth.

Once man came to Swami Keshabananda (written about in *Autobiography of a Yogi*) and begged him to cure his son who was dying. The great yogi told him: “I will tell you how to cure your son yourself, but you will not do it and he will die.” And so it was. In the same way Lao Tzu is explaining how society can be corrected, knowing full well that it will never be done. But wise and blessed is he who applies Lao Tzu’s words to himself and his own mode of life.

So let us consider them in that context, for we are each one little “kingdoms” that need correction.

Banish ‘wisdom,’ discard ‘knowledge,’ and the people shall profit a hundredfold.

Lao Tzu is speaking of intellectual, spoon-fed “wisdom” and “knowledge” both social and religious that have been put into our heads from various sources that have in no way proved the validity of that which they have imposed on us. It is very difficult for us to sweep away all the things we have been told from childhood, because it means rejection of the authority or trustworthiness of those that crammed them into our heads. Moreover, it is much easier for the mentally and morally lazy to accept the clichés society and religion run on, and thus avoid any conflict or the pain of straining the brain to figure out what is really wisdom and knowledge. But those who do toss aside mere words and seek experience of reality shall “profit a hundredfold.”

Banish ‘humanity,’ discard ‘justice,’ and the people shall recover love of their kin.

Again, Lao Tzu is speaking of artificial rules of thought and behavior that are not rooted in sincere good will but in a desire to be thought humane and just. A great deal of inhumanity and injustice are perpetrated under the accepted cliches of society and religion—all “for the greater good” they say.

Banish cunning, discard ‘utility,’ and the thieves and brigands shall disappear.

“People are so skillful in their ignorance,” Yogananda used to say. People can be very creative in justifying their foolishness and in reasoning themselves out of good sense. They are equally skilled in demonstrating how “practical” and “beneficial” their desires and whims are. “It’s all for the best” rarely is even good, much less best. This is used in conforming to wrong on many levels, especially social, rather than rejecting the false and holding to the real and consequently getting censured and even in trouble with “them.” It is sad but true that we are usually ourselves the thieves and brigands that plunder our spiritual treasure of divine potential.

As these three touch the externals and are inadequate, the people have need of what they can depend upon.

These three rules, though of great value, yet lack the supreme value because they deal with our response to external factors, leaving aside internal matters. Thus they are inadequate, because we must build our life structure on bedrock reality to be secure and at peace. So Lao Tzu gives us four rules to ensure this.

Reveal thy simple self.

We must put ourselves in touch with our essential being, really come to know our Self by removing the veils that hide it. The Self being interior in nature, this requires an interior life—in other words, meditation. And our meditation practice should be putting us in touch with the Self immediately—not in some far away time. It may not give us instant and total enlightenment, but it should certainly begin the process right away. We should come out of our first meditation having touched at least the periphery of our Self, and things should increase from there. We must not stop until the Self is fully revealed (realized).

Embrace thy original nature.

We must not just experience the Self, we must “embrace” it by making it manifest in our entire life, by establishing ourselves in Self-knowledge outside meditation as well as in meditation. We must live out what we perceive inwardly, and if our inner experience is real, it will be natural and easy.

Check thy selfishness.

Do not pay attention to the ego, just forget it—drop it—and all egotism will vanish in the newly-revealed Self. Be intent on that eternal reality and the ego and its delusive realm will simply vanish.

Curtail thy desires.

Again, do this by being satisfied and fulfilled in the Self. Desire the Self—that will end all desires.

20. The World and I

Banish learning, and vexations end. Between “Ah!” and “Ough!” how much difference is there? Between “good” and “evil” how much difference is there? That which men fear is indeed to be feared; but, alas, distant yet is the dawn (of awakening)!

The people of the world are merry-making, as if partaking of the sacrificial feasts, as if mounting the terrace in spring; I alone am mild, like one unemployed, like a newborn babe that cannot yet smile, unattached, like one without a home.

The people of the world have enough and to spare, but I am like one left out, my heart must be that of a fool, being muddled, nebulous!

The vulgar are knowing, luminous; I alone am dull, confused. The vulgar are clever, self-assured; I alone, depressed. Patient as the sea, adrift, seemingly aimless.

The people of the world all have a purpose; I alone appear stubborn and uncouth. I alone differ from the other people, and value drawing sustenance from the Mother.

(Tao Teh King 20)

Banish learning, and vexations end. Between “Ah!” and “Ough!” How much difference is there? Between “good” and “evil” how much difference is there? That which men fear is indeed to be feared; but, alas, distant yet is the dawn (of awakening)!

Banish learning, and vexations end. “Learning” means the mistaken idea that reading a book and mindlessly repeating it back is wisdom, that intelligence can be gained in a classroom. Intelligence and insight are the needed elements for wisdom.

Between “Ah!” and “Ough!” How much difference is there? Various translations give different “sounds,” all meaning a kind of response or reaction, but without meaning to us in the modern West. My speculation is that “Ah!” is an expression of liking or appreciation, and “Ough!” is one of dislike or disgust: “Ugh!” or “Uck!” Since the same object can elicit approval or rejection from people, there is no absolute to their reaction which is, therefore, fundamentally meaningless. So the “difference” is substantially nil. Lao Tzu is saying that the reactions or judgments of people really mean very little if anything.

Between “good” and “evil” how much difference is there? He is not speaking here of actual good and evil, but of the labels which inherently mean very little, since different people will react differently to the same thing. Some people think narrow-mindedness is good and openness is bad, while others think just the opposite. Lao Tzu is especially urging us to ignore the labels of society in general and not be influenced by them. We should come to our own conclusions and keep them to ourselves, not imposing them on others, though we should express them if asked to.

That which men fear is indeed to be feared. Many translators agree, however other translations are like this one by Wu: “Must I fear what others fear? What abysmal nonsense this is!” Both make sense.

Intellectual labels are one thing, but practical experience is another, and fear is based on experience or observation. People fear erupting volcanoes if they are nearby, and so should any sensible person. So we should be cautious regarding that which so many people fear and hope to avoid. At the same time, it is silly to fear something just because others do so. For centuries in the West it was believed that tomatoes were deadly poison, and I was brought up on the belief that one half of a buckeye is poison and the other is not—only a squirrel could tell the difference. Worse, I grew up in the

era when no one would put a burn under cold water or apply ice—the dogma was that to do so would “drive in the fire” and make it worse. So as we suffered we put butter or Unguentine on it, which did absolutely nothing. Nowadays we know that the severity of a burn can be dramatically lessened by the application of cold in some form. So it is sometimes wise to fear what others do, and sometimes it is completely foolish. There is no substitute for experience and intelligence.

But, alas, distant yet is the dawn (of awakening)! For those caught up in the gears of society and public opinion, even the beginning of awakening is far in the future. Only those who can quietly and unobtrusively live according to their independent understanding can hope to eventually pass into higher knowing. That is why the Gita says: “He who does not agitate the world, and who is not agitated by the world, who is freed from joy, envy, fear, and distress [anxiety], is dear to Me” (Bhagavad Gita 12:15).

The people of the world are merry-making, as if partaking of the sacrificial feasts, as if mounting the terrace in spring; I alone am mild, like one unemployed, like a new-born babe that cannot yet smile, unattached, like one without a home.

Happy are those than can live out of step with the herd that runs on to nothing at all. As Jesus said: “Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented” (Matthew 11:16, 17). Blessed are they that can be called “odd” or “unsociable” and be contented, “wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess” (I Peter 4:4). “Peer pressure” means nothing to the worthwhile, but everything to all others.

So Lao Tzu says that in the midst of the mindless merrymaking of the heedless the wise is calm and disengaged from the fuss going on all around him, and likens the sage to a new-born babe that never reacts to its environment because it simply does not perceive it. The sage ignores the world and the world certainly ignores the sage as long as he does not spoil their “fun” by being obviously out of their track. Lao Tzu had the right idea: he went far away and was at peace, “unattached, like one without a home,” for we can have no home but the Tao.

Now Lao Tzu is going to be sarcastic yet right on target as to how the foolish view the wise.

The people of the world have enough and to spare, but I am like one left out, my heart must be that of a fool, being muddled, nebulous!

How proud “the people of the world” are of their abundance of worthless nonsense. The wise, however, choose to be “left out,” “losers” in the sight of the world, foolish, unaware, and “without direction”—“underachievers” for sure! What a blessed state.

The vulgar are knowing, luminous; I alone am dull, confused. The vulgar are clever, self-assured; I alone, depressed. Patient as the sea, adrift, seemingly aimless.

How proud are the small and the petty as they strut around—masters of all they survey, “in the know” and “bright as a button” in contrast to the dull, boring, and “confused” man of wisdom. The “unique” run-of-the mill people see themselves as clever and confident. The sage is considered isolated for he is not “a good mixer.” How miserable the world considers him to be. “We’ve got to bring him out of himself” they assure one another if he is unlucky enough to be noticed by them. His patient

contentment is considered a lack of “get up and go” since he is not a “go getter” or a “doer”—adrift and seemingly aimless.

The people of the world all have a purpose; I alone appear stubborn and uncouth. I alone differ from the other people, and value drawing sustenance from the Mother.

Yes, there is no doubt about it: the sage is a party pooper, refusing to have fun and therefore very unmannerly, out of step and obsessed with a lot of daft ideas about metaphysics and God knows what else. How impossible it is for the world to know that the unsociable kook and wierdo they so indignantly despise is living abundantly in and by the Mother Tao, knowing a fulfillment they do not even dream about—to which they cannot even aspire in their pedestrian minds. How shocked they would be to find that the sage really does live in Dream Castles and feasts daily on Pie In The Sky. A happy man indeed.

21. Manifestations of Tao

The marks of great Character follow alone from the Tao.

The thing that is called Tao is elusive, evasive. Evasive, elusive, yet latent in it are forms. Elusive, evasive, yet latent in it are objects. Dark and dim, yet latent in it is the life-force. The life-force being very true, latent in it are evidences.

From the days of old till now its Named (manifested forms) have never ceased, by which we may view the Father of All Things. How do I know the shape of the Father of All Things? Through these (manifested forms)!

(Tao Teh King 21)

The marks of great character follow alone from the Tao.

This is an essential piece of wisdom. Only when the Infinite is revealed in and through the finite, only when the cosmic is shown as the true essence of the individual life, is there any greatness of character. Tao–God–being the Source, the more our consciousness is being merged in that Consciousness the more the traits of the immanent Tao manifest in us as the eternal seeds they are, and the further we move along the path of transcendence whose goal is That which is completely without character or attribute (guna) of any kind. Saint Paul was thinking of this when he wrote: “When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man [aner–adult], I put away childish things” (I Corinthians 13:10, 11).

It is important to realize that when Christianity became a state religion its scriptures were edited to reflect the prevailing attitudes. For example, Luke 21:34 which was an exhortation to total abstinence from meat and alcohol was modified into a caution against overeating or drinking to much alcohol. Saint Stephen’s final words in the book of Acts, in which he outlined the previous lives of Jesus, was changed into an outline of Jewish history. The Divine Feminine, the Holy Spirit, was turned into a Male. In the same way the epistles of Saint Paul and the other apostles were altered to suit the imperial religion Christianity had sadly become. Because of this, when we read the gospels and epistles we must bear in mind that they have been altered to suit the editors and their religious and political masters. Consequently, some statements are outright falsified, others skewed up or down, and some are the gems of wisdom they originally were. We have to face this fact.

Religionists will of course sniff and sneer and say this is the “cafeteria approach,” and they are absolutely right. In a cafeteria some things are good to eat and some are not. Only a fool tries to eat everything available just because it is there. No book is the Word of God. God is His own Word, the Tao. Only that which is harmony with the Tao is truth. In the Aquarian Gospel, especially chapter nine, we find that the Essenes were conversant with Taoism and actively taught its principles—that Jesus was taught the principles of Taoism by his mother, Mary.

In summation: only those who increasingly dwell in the Tao possess “great character”—any other traits are evanescent mirages, being fundamentally unreal. Therefore only those who know and reveal the Tao are worthy of our respect. All others are phantoms.

The thing that is called Tao is elusive, evasive.

The East, including Eastern Christianity, has always known that the Real is also the Unknowable, the Unseeable, the Inconceivable. But such insight is possible only to those who have known, seen and accurately conceived It—as truly unknowable, unseeable, and inconceivable. In Eastern Christian mystical writings it is almost dogmatically stated that when we see God we shall know that He cannot be seen. This makes no sense to the left-brain intellect of the West, but is perfectly good sense to the right-brain intellects of the East.

The Absolute Reality that is Tao eludes the grasp of thought and conception, but to the purified consciousness that fact itself is a revealing mystical experience, a knowing beyond the mind—the intuition of the spirit.

Evasive, elusive, yet latent in it are forms. Elusive, evasive, yet latent in it are objects. Dark and dim, yet latent in it is the life-force. The life-force being very true, latent in it are evidences.

It is usually thought in non-dual philosophy that the Absolute Non-dual Being is the antithesis of all relativity, that the relative and the Absolute are incompatible—when one prevails the other is banished. But Lao Tzu is telling us that forms, in the sense of subtle archetypes, are an inherent part of the Tao, as are their manifested objects which we perceive—that unless the Tao existed, they would not exist, even as mirages. Further, the Tao enlivens all that exists in relative mode. Their existence is not false or illusory, but those that do not see the one Tao in all have the error and illusion in their own minds. Of course, duality never really exists, it is a matter of the One appearing as Many. It all comes down to perception.

From the days of old till now its named (manifested forms) have never ceased, by which we may view the Father of All Things. How do I know the shape of the Father of All Things? Through these (manifested forms)!

So relative existence is not a veil hiding the Tao from us, but is a revealing of the Tao to us. The problem lies in our not seeing this to be true. Again, it is all in the seeing. As Swami Sriyuktswar said regarding astrology: “If ignoramuses misread the heavens, and see there a scrawl instead of a script, that is to be expected in this imperfect world. One should not dismiss the wisdom with the ‘wise.’” The same is true in relation to the entire creation. God is not hiding from us, but is present right in front of us at all times.

22. Futility of Contention

To yield is to be preserved whole. To be bent is to become straight. To be hollow is to be filled. To be tattered is to be renewed. To be in want is to possess. To have plenty is to be confused.

Therefore the Sage embraces the One, and becomes the model of the world. He does not reveal himself, and is therefore luminous. He does not justify himself, and is therefore far-famed. He does not boast of himself, and therefore people give him credit. He does not pride himself, and is therefore the chief among men.

Is it not indeed true, as the ancients say, “To yield is to be preserved whole?” Thus he is preserved and the world does him homage.

(Tao Teh King 22)

To yield is to be preserved whole. To be bent is to become straight. To be hollow is to be filled. To be tattered is to be renewed. To be in want is to possess. To have plenty is to be confused.

The ancient Taoists were very much like the Stoics of Greece who prized the principle cited by Saint Paul: “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (II Corinthians 6:17). The Tao is the Source of All and the Indweller of All, yet It does not assert itself—at least not in the manner of human beings. Seeking to be like the Tao we can recover our identity as the Tao in essence. Consequently Lao Tzu is giving us several points of “likeness” that we should cultivate.

To yield is to be preserved whole. First we must understand that Lao Tzu is not telling us to become mental and moral jellyfish, always giving in to everything and never at any time standing firm on anything—this is the way of the morally lazy. Considering the pungent things Lao Tzu has to say about aspects of personal and social life, it is obvious he took a very firm stand on many things, and expressed his opinion. What he is inculcating here is both flexibility and simply stepping away from the tar baby of situations in which we would be caught and shaped by involving or committing ourselves. Almost the only activism advocated by Lao Tzu is personal discipline.

So what is he advising us? He is telling us to never get involved in a manner which will seize our mind and narrow it—which is the great danger of all advocacy and resistance, especially in social matters. To be fervent in a “cause” can be very harmful because it usually involves obsession, indignation, the spending of large amounts of time, interference, the adoption of a “pro” or “con” self-identity, and a narrowing of interest and awareness. I have known people who were really a one-note personality, continually thinking and speaking of a single thing: their advocacy or their opposition.

One of the worst aspects of this is a supposedly moral insistence that a person “stand up and be counted” or “speak out whenever necessary.” This can entail being a real nuisance. I think we all know people who consider it an obligation for them to express an opinion on everything, no matter how small—often arguing on and on—if they are to be really honest. I knew a woman who felt it an obligation to rebuke anyone who said or did anything she considered mistaken or wrong—and I do mean *anything*. Contempt, bullying, and often cruelty spiced her “honesty.” She often boasted about her practice of writing what she called “get straight letters” to those who transgressed her principles. All she really did was vent her resentments and prejudices. Finally her only friends were two dogs.

Lao Tzu is certainly advocating the ability to know when to speak and when not to speak, when to act and when not to act—and when we do speak and act we must know how to be quit of the matter and not hang on to it like a dog worrying a rag. There are times when we should express our convictions, but then end it right there and put it out of our mind and get on with our life. We often hear about being possessed by possessions. The remedy is not to have nothing, but to be able to own things and not be owned by them. It is the same way with our words and actions. We need to know how to let go, not to keep on. The ability to let go is a necessary factor for inward peace. Actually, Lao Tzu is recommending the attitude expressed in the Gita where we are told to act as we should and then let the results be what they are—to let go, move on, and put our energies where they should be.

If we follow the sage's counsel, we will “be preserved whole”—not shattered or reshaped in the image of any object or situation. Simply facing facts and accepting them for what they are is part of this wisdom. Ultimately Lao Tzu is urging us to a kind of benevolent and wise indifference, the ability to let things be and go on our way. Is it any surprise that the Taoists tended to the heremitic life? Even when living in a large city, Taoists lived in a very self-contained manner, with a light touch all around.

To be bent is to become straight. If we can be flexible, we will have the ability to be “straight” within ourselves, not shaped or twisted by outer influences. Even if something pushes at us, we will be able to retain our footing. Years ago we had salt and pepper shakers that were round, but could not be knocked over because there was a heavy metal weight in their base. Children (me included) loved knocking or pushing them down over and over, watching them immediately come right back to upright—and not rocking around, either. They were a perfect symbol of mental equilibrium. It is the same with the wise, and the same with the Tao. In its manifestation the Tao undergoes an infinite variety of changes, yet remains unchanging. All around us is the Tao, and no matter how much we assault It and seek to destroy It, it yields and bends and thus remains Itself in total integrity.

To be hollow is to be filled. Byrn: “If you want to become full, first let yourself become empty.” Chan: “To be empty is to be full.” Both of these differing translations give a valid aspect to this principle. Only an empty vessel can be filled. A vessel with rocks in it will not be able to receive and hold the intended amount of water. In the same way, a life cluttered with extraneous things will not be the truly full life it was intended to be. Those who mentally “possess” nothing can possess everything, for they are open to all things. To not keep any identity enables us to be everything. To “know” nothing is the way to know everything. Basically we must be ever open and ready for what comes to hand. This is the way to live in totality. When our hands are holding on to something they cannot grasp anything else, so to live with open hands is to accept and receive all. This is to be understood in an intelligent—not in a simplistic or minimal—manner. Life offers infinite possibilities to the “empty” sage.

To be tattered is to be renewed. In childhood I knew quite a few elderly people who had lived through very hard times economically, so they had a fear of things wearing out and becoming useless. Their response to this was not use anything they bought. It was really absurd. In *Mill On The Floss* there is a character who keeps all her newly-bought clothing in drawers with paper between them. Only after a long while can she bring herself to wear them, and by that time they are completely out of style and she looks ridiculous. I knew people like that—even some that hardly drove their auto lest it wear out or break. So they rarely went anywhere. One of my great-aunts was really obsessive about anything she got. She would not even allow her grandchildren to play with the toys she bought them. But life is not like that—it is self-renewing. So the more

we live the more life will come to us. The fuller we live life the more it expands and increases. This is one of the reasons Taoists lived to be so old and retained their youthfulness. One of my dearest friends, “Grandma Sullivan,” used to climb around on her roof, repairing it herself, mowed her own extensive yard, made her own repairs to her house, and was thoroughly independent. She had been that way when young and kept it up, living to be nearly a century old without lessening any activity. She was “tattered” but renewed. Using life keeps it new.

Another aspect is in this translation by Byrn: “If you want to become new, first let yourself become old.” We must grow, develop, and be adults. Those who cling to childhood just become childish, those who do not want to grow up—the kind that call themselves “Johnny” and “Debbie” when their hair has turned white—frustrate the purpose of life. Those who let themselves become “seasoned citizens” continue to grow and be new in mind and heart. Further, those who live worthily and wisely attain a good rebirth when the present life ends. Many are those that return to birth with a continuing consciousness from the previous life, retaining the wisdom gained there, and so able to build on it in the new life, ever moving forward.

To be in want is to possess. To have plenty is to be confused. Better is the translation by Chan: “To have little is to possess. To have plenty is to be perplexed.” This has two meanings. One is that only when we have a few simple necessities can we really own them in the sense of profitably using them to our benefit without anxiety, for they will be easy to replace if need be. But when we own a lot of things we are worried and unsure as how to retain or maintain them. They cause us anxiety just by being in our lives and minds, cluttering them up in many ways. The other meaning is that those who own little can “own” all things by appreciating them and yet not having to possess or “relate” to them in any way. He who owns nothing can yet own all—so Lao Tzu tells us.

Therefore the Sage embraces the One, and becomes the model of the world.

Byrn: “For this reason the Master embraces the Tao, as an example for the world to follow.” This is quite clear and needs no comment, but I would like to point out that Lao Tzu tells us the Tao-embracing sage is an example for us to follow—not just admire and consider beyond our scope to imitate. “That is for saints” is not the view of the Taoist, for we are all part of the Tao and so no ideal, however exalted, is beyond our capacity to fulfill.

He does not reveal himself, and is therefore luminous. He does not justify himself, and is therefore far-famed. He does not boast of himself, and therefore people give him credit. He does not pride himself, and is therefore the chief among men.

He does not reveal himself, and is therefore luminous. Feng and English: “Not putting on a display, They shine forth.” Obviously they do not “shine forth” to the eyes of the ordinary person, but to those whose “Tao eyes” are open to at least some degree. I have known saints in East and West who were disregarded or sneered at by the ignorant (even if religious), but revered by those who themselves had some degree of spiritual progress. All of them simply lived the holy life and minded their own business, often hiding or downplaying their virtues and accomplishments. Nor could they be drawn out by jackasses who wanted to enter into controversy with them or test them in any way.

One of my friends was a yoga-siddha, possessing astonishing psychic powers, and

head of his own ashram in western India. I loved him for his good qualities, but he was amazingly rude and contemptuous of—and to—people who did not have similar psychic experiences and powers. One of my painful memories is his treatment of a wonderful one-hundred-eight-year-old sadhu who lived next to me in the Sapta Rishi Ashram outside the holy city of Hardwar (not any more—the city has extended and engulfed the ashram property). Having learned about his advanced age, he asked me to arrange a meeting with the swami (whose name really was “Swami Om Namah Shivaya”). My heart and stomach sank. I knew he would have no use for the wonderfully humble and simple little sadhu. And I was right. After a few minutes he stood up and walked out without even a farewell to the swami. So next day when he went to Sivanandashram in Rishikesh I refused to accompany him, dreading the outcome. That night he told me that he had gotten a private interview with Sivananda and had trotted out all his psychic experiences/phenomena. Sivananda listened attentively and then quietly said: “I would not know about these things. I have never had any psychic experiences.” And that was right: he had only *spiritual* experiences. “But I still respect him,” was Dattabal’s comment, “because he is a great karma yogi.” Many people met Sivananda and thought he was an ignoramus and a fool because he was so unassuming and egoless. Yet many others saw his greatness and loved him as the colossal Master he was. As Yogananda wrote in a song: “Devotee knows how sweet You are. He knows whom You let know.” Having myself been fooled by great yogis who could perfectly hide their inner status, I cannot boast of my great insight—but I can express gratitude for their eventually revealing themselves to me. Lao Tzu would understand.

He does not justify himself, and is therefore far-famed. A man once came storming into Alfred Deller’s dressing-room after a concert. “Mister Deller, I just want to know that I hate your voice!” he shouted. Deller calmly replied: “Well, that is between you and your psychiatrist.” It is the same with the really wise—they live their life and what others think of them is their own problem. As Sri Ramakrishna said, when the elephant walks down the street the little dogs bark, but the elephant just keeps on walking. One mark of fake teachers and institutions is their constant anxiety about how they appear to prospective followers and the public in general. But the real ones have their consciousness focussed on the Transcendent and are satisfied with that. When people tried to get Sri Ramakrishna to define his spiritual status he would say: “I am the dust of your feet” and then bow down to them. One time someone phoned the church where FDR usually attended to ask if the President would be there the next Sunday. The pastor had answered the phone, and he replied: “We are not sure, but we are confident that God will be here.” It is all according to one’s priorities.

The wise do not expound themselves and project an image of wisdom and worthiness. They know that what they really are is the only thing that matters—and that most people are clueless regarding themselves, what to say of others. So they do not worry. Many great ones have fled from place to place to get away from clamoring adorers who understood nothing of their purpose. This is the case with Buddha Boy in Nepal. Anandamayi Ma often “disappeared” for a while, especially after having been surrounded by thousands of people for days at a time.

He does not boast of himself, and therefore people give him credit. Feng and English: “Not boasting, They receive recognition.” So it is.

He does not pride himself, and is therefore the chief among men. What is more humble than the Tao? It is and does all things, yet never announces itself, never gives commands or revelations, but awaits for awakening intelligences to figure out Its existence. It has no interest in right views or wrong views—in fact, it has no interest in anything—not even Itself. This is humility that only the Supreme Reality can have. So it

is with those that know the Tao and themselves as part of the Tao—in other words: real people. They are not only “the chief among men,” they are the only men among “men.”

Is it not indeed true, as the ancients say, ‘To yield is to be preserved whole?’ Thus he is preserved and the world does him homage.

So now we are back at the beginning—and a good beginning it is, indeed. For such a one the whole world is his domain. Humanity may ignore him, but Reality does not. He is in the Tao and the Tao is in him.

23. Identification with Tao

Nature says few words: Hence it is that a squall lasts not a whole morning. A rainstorm continues not a whole day. Where do they come from? From Nature. Even Nature does not last long (in its utterances), how much less should human beings?

Therefore it is that: He who follows the Tao is identified with the Tao. He who follows Character (*Teh*) is identified with Character. He who abandons (Tao) is identified with abandonment (of Tao). He who is identified with Tao–Tao is also glad to welcome him. He who is identified with character–Character is also glad to welcome him. He who is identified with abandonment–Abandonment is also glad to welcome him. He who has not enough faith will not be able to command faith from others.

(Tao Teh King 23)

Nature says few words: hence it is that a squall lasts not a whole morning. A rainstorm continues not a whole day. Where do they come from? From Nature. Even Nature does not last long (in its utterances), how much less should human beings?

Byrn: “Nature uses few words: when the gale blows, it will not last long; when it rains hard, it lasts but a little while; what causes these to happen? Heaven and Earth. Why do we humans go on endlessly about little when nature does much in a little time?”

This is really quite clear. We should give only the amount of attention to a subject that it really needs and then let it go. The same is true of action. Our actions should be very economic—and efficient. We should do a thing with the minimum expenditure of energy, involvement, and attention. This does not mean we live carelessly, slovenly, and miserly with time and energy, but that we should do all things as simply and effectively as we can. That itself will conserve energy. Another reason for doing this is to keep ourselves from obsessing on things and getting stuck up in them, having them revolve around and around in our mind to no end but frustration and pain.

Basically, we should live with a light touch, which does involve both simplicity and frugality. The idea of a king living in splendor and luxury while indifferent to it is absurd. Who retains what they are indifferent to? A king may have a palace, but if he is a wise king he will live simply and never lavishly. One of the most splendid places in the world is the Vatican. Its contents are beyond price, and certainly beyond any other place in the world. There are entire countries whose assets cannot equal the Vatican's. Yet the Pope lives in incredible simplicity. Pope Pius XII's bedroom was a tiny thing with little more than his cast-iron bedstead. All worthy Popes have lived with great frugality, however the unworthy may have indulged themselves. The great master Paramhansa Yogananda lived in two little rooms with a little kitchen across the hall. In one of his talks he speaks of having only a little box with a slot in the top for money. He never counted it, but it always contained enough. His mind was in God, so the universe was his. The same was true of Swami Sivananda who lived in total simplicity. My sannyasa guru lived in a small, barren room containing a plain wooden bed, a tiny wood table and two wooden chairs. He possessed two changes of clothes, one chaddar and one pair of canvas shoes. He was providing education (mostly free of charge) for nearly one thousand rural students, many of whom were residents. Yet, when visiting government officers asked him how much money he was given a month by the spiritual organization he was affiliated with, he laughed and truthfully told them:

twenty rupees a month (at that time exactly two American dollars). They were not just surprised—they were shocked. How, then, they asked did he manage? “God provides—just enough,” he replied. They were so impressed that even though the war with China was going on and most government aid to schools had been cut or stopped, on their recommendation he was given five hundred thousand rupees! God does provide. That is the real lesson. If we make the Tao our support, our very existence, we will live lightly and happily.

Therefore it is that: He who follows the Tao is identified with the Tao. He who follows Character (*Teh*) is identified with Character. He who abandons (Tao) is identified with abandonment (of Tao). He who is identified with Tao—Tao is also glad to welcome him. He who is identified with character—character is also glad to welcome him. He who is identified with abandonment—abandonment is also glad to welcome him. He who has not enough faith will not be able to command faith from others.

Byrn: “If you open yourself to the Tao, you and Tao become one. If you open yourself to Virtue, then you can become virtuous. If you open yourself to loss, then you will become lost. If you open yourself to the Tao, the Tao will eagerly welcome you. If you open yourself to virtue, virtue will become a part of you. If you open yourself to loss, the lost are glad to see you. When you do not trust people, people will become untrustworthy.”

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: “Mind is everything,” and so it is. Everything about us in this realm of relative existence is a manifestation of our mind (which includes will). If our mind is changed, really changed, those things change, too. Over and over, throughout history, unfit people have been given everything they needed only to wreck everything and put themselves right back in the mud wallow. This is why Gandhi advocated teaching beggars to work for a living rather than just giving money that would be spent in a day, returning them to their former state. In this way many were rescued from poverty.

Lao Tzu tells us that what we choose to identify with will be just what we will become in this world. Whatever we choose, that will be awaiting us, for the world is but a mirror for our divine, creative will. Our entire surroundings are revelations of our mind. So if we choose the Tao, we will be revealed as the Tao.

24. The Dregs and Tumors of Virtue

“He who stands on tiptoe does not stand (firm); he who strains his strides does not walk (well); he who reveals himself is not luminous; he who justifies himself is not far-famed; he who boasts of himself is not given credit; he who prides himself is not chief among men. These in the eyes of Tao are called “the dregs and tumors of Virtue,” which are things of disgust. Therefore the man of Tao spurns them.

(Tao Teh King 24)

The Feng and English translation is a bit more on target: “He who stands on tiptoe is not steady. He who strides cannot maintain the pace. He who makes a show is not enlightened. He who is self-righteous is not respected. He who boasts achieves nothing. He who brags will not endure. According to followers of the Tao, ‘These are extra food and unnecessary luggage.’ They do not bring happiness. Therefore followers of the Tao avoid them.”

He who stands on tiptoe is not steady.

Those who try to overreach themselves and try to appear to others as much more than they really are, are always uncertain, in flux, and unbalanced. In time they fall over—such is the folly of the ego. But those who stand firmly on the ground with feet secure, with be certain, steady, and balanced, able to cope with any forces that might seek to push them over. Honesty with themselves and others is an essential character of the wise. Truth in living is as important as truth in speech.

He who strides cannot maintain the pace.

Here again we have the folly of those that overextend themselves in the hope of gaining the admiration of others for qualities they do not really have. Such persons may maintain a good appearance for a short while, but soon they stumble and fall, making their real status clear to all.

He who makes a show is not enlightened.

Legge: “He who displays himself does not shine.” In Greek there is a term: *i agia phania*—“holy show.” In religion this takes many forms of outer display, and the same is true of “show” in any area of life. The very fact that a person must make a show of something is an indication of his lacking it. For a show is an appearance only, not a reality. Many people are busy starring in the theater of life, but not really living at all since they are so absorbed in being a lie.

He who is self-righteous is not respected.

Legge: “He who asserts his own views is not distinguished.” Those who let the world know how good or intelligent, or capable—or whatever—they are, are not such at all. Those who display themselves or seek to force themselves and their ways and ideas on others are only mirages, not real people. They are themselves lies.

He who boasts achieves nothing.

Legge: “He who vaunts himself does not find his merit acknowledged.” I think we all know braggarts who exemplify the old adage: “The empty wagon rattles the most.” Nothing ever comes of them since all their energy is spent in claiming to be something

rather than really being it. Their boasting is a dead-end, reminding us of Jesus' words: "Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward" (Matthew 6: 2, 5, 16). Such people end up with nothing but themselves—a pitiful reward, indeed.

He who brags will not endure.

Legge: "He who is self-conceited has no superiority allowed to him." Arrogance, pride, and boasting are sure pathways to loss and ruin. I knew a very wise old man who, when he saw such persons, would laugh and say: "They are headed for the ash-heap, and it won't be long now." Many years of intelligent observation had given him that insight, and now over fifty years after his sharing that with me, I can say it is my observation, too. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18) is as true as the day it was first spoken.

According to followers of the Tao, "These are extra food and unnecessary luggage." They do not bring happiness. Therefore followers of the Tao avoid them.

Legge: "Such conditions, viewed from the standpoint of the Tao, are like remnants of food, or a tumor on the body, which all dislike. Hence those who pursue (the course) of the Tao do not adopt and allow them."

Let us turn from all these follies and seek the Tao in all things—and in ourselves.

25. The Four Eternal Models

Before the Heaven and Earth existed there was something nebulous:

Silent, isolated, standing alone, changing not, eternally revolving without fail, worthy to be the Mother of All Things.

I do not know its name and address it as Tao. If forced to give it a name, I shall call it “Great.” Being great implies reaching out in space, reaching out in space implies far-reaching, far-reaching implies reversion to the original point.

Therefore: Tao is Great, the Heaven is great, the Earth is great, the King is also great. There are the Great Four in the universe, and the King is one of them.

Man models himself after the Earth; the Earth models itself after Heaven; the Heaven models itself after Tao; Tao models itself after nature.

(Tao Teh King 25)

Before the Heaven and Earth existed there was something nebulous: silent, isolated, standing alone, changing not, eternally revolving without fail, worthy to be the Mother of All Things.

This is the potential for manifestation known in Sanskrit as Mulashakti or Mulaprakriti—Primal Power that breathes without breath and moves without motion, not to be confused with the manifestation we call Shakti or Prakriti. It is more allied to Pradhana, the primordial “substance” that evolves into Divine Energy producing the evolving cosmos and the evolving vehicles within the cosmos in which the individual consciousnesses are embodied. It is this understanding that divides the Oriental religions from those of the West.

The West sees relative existence as a kind of mechanistic toy, totally unlike the Toymaker who uses it for his amusement, destroying it when it displeases him and venting his anger and frustration on it when it does not go according to his intentions. Human beings are caught in the middle of this, subject to materiality yet desperately needing to placate the Toymaker and win his favor so he will eventually take them out of the present toy and put them into a better one for their own enjoyment. What happens then is anyone’s guess.

The East sees our present status as living entities within a living “womb” whose purpose is to lead us into higher and higher “births” which enable us to become increasingly more conscious until we realize our eternal and infinite potential, recognizing ourselves as waves or points in an infinite expanse of Life and Consciousness which is our own essential being. At the full opening of our consciousness we realize that we are ourselves the source and empowerer of this entire process of perfection, that perfection has always been ours in potential, that nothing has ever begun or ended for us—only manifested within our own consciousness linked to Infinite Consciousness.

I do not know its name and address it as Tao. If forced to give it a name, I shall call it “Great.”

The Tao is not great in the sense of being big or powerful, but in the sense of being Everything and Nothing at the same time, embracing both form and formlessness, being and non-being, life and death, knowing and unknowing—while transcending them all and remaining what it has always been.

Being great implies reaching out in space, reaching out in space implies far-reaching, far-reaching implies reversion to the original point.

It has long been said that if we go far enough in a straight line we will eventually come back to the original point. That is the way of the Tao. Its very greatness means that eventually It returns to Its original unmanifested potential state. In the beginning is the ending. A yogi needs to keep this in mind when considering the nature of his practice and its ultimate purpose.

Therefore: Tao is Great, the Heaven is great, the Earth is great, the King is also great. There are the Great Four in the universe, and the King is one of them.

Heaven and Earth are the manifested duality of the power, taking on the forms of endless dwandwas or “pairs of opposites.” (I will let you formulate your own list.) “The King” here represents any human power which affects us, and that includes our own power. At the time of Lao Tzu the Emperor was an absolute force that had unlimited power over all within the boundaries of his empire. The King can also represent the forces of nature, as we will see from the next verse.

Man models himself after the Earth; the Earth models itself after Heaven; the Heaven models itself after Tao; Tao models itself after nature.

Naturally man conforms to the material world around him and therefore mistakenly identifies with it. The “earth” is material creation which ever expands and strives to transcend itself in order to return to the measureless “heaven” of creative intelligence from which it expanded and became separate. Heaven is the direct “offspring” of Tao and consequently seeks to reunite to the Tao as the earth seeks to reunite with heaven. The Tao, in contrast with those that seek to be like the higher, seeks to conform to the lower, to Mother Nature spoken of in the opening verse. That is, the Tao reaches out to the further reaches of manifestation, secure in the sureness of eventually returning to Its own starting point. Someone has said that waves are the laughter of the ocean, and all Its extensions are the joyful play of the Tao. In India this is known as the Nitya and the Lila, the Absolute and Its momentary play at being the ever-changing many while yet remaining at rest in Its own unchanging nature.

26. Heaviness and Lightness

“The Solid is the root of the light; the Quiescent is the master of the hasty. Therefore the Sage travels all day yet never leaves his provision-cart. In the midst of honor and glory, he lives leisurely, undisturbed. How can the ruler of a great country make light of his body in the empire (by rushing about)? In light frivolity, the Center is lost; in hasty action, self-mastery is lost.

(Tao Teh King 26)

Human beings habitually “live backwards” like Merlin. That is, they confuse cause with effect, and continually mistake the order in which things arise. They also confuse things with one another. For thoroughly negative people, peace is war and war is peace; virtue is vice and vice is virtue. So Lao Tzu is going to dispel some of our misperceptions.

The universe is composed of two basic processes: involution and evolution. They are mirror images of one another, exact opposites. For example, the involution process involves moving from formlessness into form, but evolution involves moving from form into formlessness. In this section of the Tao Teh King Lao Tzu is speaking of evolution.

The Solid is the root of the light.

Legge: “Gravity is the root of lightness.” We must first be perfectly “grounded”—defined and stabilized—before we can consciously (i.e., intelligently and purposefully) begin to refine, expand, and ultimately resolve back into all-pervasive formlessness, into pure consciousness.

The Quiescent is the master of the hasty.

Legge: “Stillness, the ruler of movement.” We cannot act meaningfully until we can be perfectly still within action, identifying with the core of silent, unmoving consciousness that is at the heart of everything. There is a lengthy section from the Bhagavad Gita that is very relevant to this subject:

“What is action? What is inaction? Even the wise are confused in this matter. This action I shall explain to you, having known which, you shall be released from evil.

“You must know the nature of action, the nature of wrong action, and also the nature of inaction. The way [path] of action is profound.

“He who perceives inaction in action, and action in inaction, is wise among men; he is steadfast in yoga while performing all actions.

“He who has excluded desire and motive from all his undertakings, and has consumed his karma in the fire of knowledge, him the wise men call a sage.

“He who has abandoned all attachment to the fruits of action, always content, not dependent, even when performing action, does not do anything whatever.

“Performing action with the body alone, without wish, restrained[controlled] in thought [mind] and self, with all motives of acquisition abandoned, he incurs no evil.

“Content with whatever spontaneously comes to him, transcending the dualities [dwandwas: the pairs of opposites], free from envy, the same in success or in failure, even though he acts, he is not bound.

“The karma of one who is free from attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, who does action only as a sacrifice, is wholly dissolved” (Bhagavad Gita 4:16-23).

Therefore the Sage travels all day yet never leaves his provision-cart.

Legge: “Therefore a wise prince, marching the whole day, does not go far from his baggage wagons.” We must never leave the center of our existence—spirit-consciousness—however far we “travel” in our lifespan. For that is the essence of our life, our very existence. To forget our selves in wandering through earthly life is to invite frustration, misery, decay, and death.

In the midst of honor and glory, he lives leisurely, undisturbed.

Legge: “Although he may have brilliant prospects to look at, he quietly remains (in his proper place), indifferent to them.” Unpleasant things at least have the advantage of causing us to withdraw into ourselves in defense and retain our independence and integrity. But pleasant things draw us outward into identification with them and forgetfulness of our true nature as the Tao. We literally lose ourselves in them. Great and wise, then, is the one who can live in the midst of glamor and glory, untouched and undisturbed by it.

How can the ruler of a great country make light of his body in the empire (by rushing about)?

Legge: “How should the lord of a myriad chariots carry himself lightly before the kingdom?” Our life sphere is our “kingdom,” but we must not trivialize ourselves by becoming so absorbed in the kingdom that we forget our kingship and forsake our throne. The sage is the absolute opposite of the shallow and trivial people who rush around “living life” to their own detriment.

In light frivolity, the Center is lost.

Legge: “If he do act lightly, he has lost his root (of gravity).” This is a truth that should occupy our concern. Although there are many ills in the world today, perhaps cheapness, shallowness, insubstantiality, and triviality are the worst of all. Our “consumer society” is the fruition of such deadly roots.

In hasty action, self-mastery is lost.

Legge: “If he proceed to active movement, he will lose his throne.” Once again we encounter the necessity to act from the still point within so that only the body acts while the mind and spirit remain in perfect stillness. In this way all things can be accomplished within the ever-moving, ever-quiescent Tao.

27. On Stealing the Light

A good runner leaves no track. A good speech leaves no flaws for attack. A good reckoner makes use of no counters.

A well-shut door makes use of no bolts, and yet cannot be opened. A well-tied knot makes use of no rope, and yet cannot be untied.

“Therefore the Sage is good at helping men; for that reason there is no rejected (useless) person. He is good at saving things; for that reason there is nothing rejected. This is called stealing the Light.

Therefore the good man is the Teacher of the bad. And the bad man is the lesson of the good.

He who neither values his teacher nor loves the lesson is one gone far astray, though he be learned. Such is the subtle secret.

(Tao Teh King 27)

None of these statements are meant to be taken literally. Lao Tzu is speaking of living life skillfully, to use the parlance of Buddha.

A good runner leaves no track.

Along with those absurd “Young People The World Is Now In Your Hands” graduation speeches, modern youth are bombarded with the insistence that they should “leave their mark” in the world, that they should leave the world a different place from the way they entered it. “Making a difference” is a kind of idol reared in today’s society.

To pass through the world so subtly and lightly as to leave not a trace is a high ideal, but it can be accomplished by those who live illumined by the Inner Light. Saint Paul said: “The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). The sage does not live in the world, nor does the world live in him. Neither bothers or influences the other, but each goes their own way in peace. Although the sage will have no effect on the world and those immersed in the world, he may have a profound effect on those like himself. There are many accounts given of great masters simply walking by someone and that person following and seeking contact with them, as in the case of Jesus and Saint Matthew (Matthew 9:9). Saint John wrote of the experience of himself and his brother James. Seeing Jesus walk by, they followed after him. “Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day” (John 1:38, 39). As bees come to the flower, so ripened souls come into the orbit of great souls and are helped by coming into contact with them. But the seeking is all on the side of the “bees,” the flower simply remains what it is. In India I right away discovered that the wise would not speak a word of wisdom unless asked, but the ignorant would take every opportunity to sermonize whomever they could corner.

The sage does not make a difference in those who seek him out. Rather, the seekers make a difference in themselves—just as has the master previously—by learning from him and applying it in their lives. All real change comes from within at the will of the individual. The wise know this to be unfailingly true. So “a good runner leaves no track.” He ignores the world and the world ignores him—an ideal arrangement.

A good speech leaves no flaws for attack.

Legge: “The skillful speaker says nothing that can be found fault with or blamed.” The only way this can be true is if the sage only speaks to the worthy. If the world hears his words it goes into a tailspin and tries to silence him. So Lao Tzu is speaking of the teachings of a master-soul to qualified hearers. Such a one teaches perfectly, for he not only conveys his ideas in a manner that informs and removes all doubts even before they can arise, he also teaches fully, leaving not a word unsaid. In this way the student has complete understanding of all he hears. The Chandogya Upanishad tells us about a seeker named Satyakama and his teacher Gautama. At one point the text says: “Then the sage taught him that knowledge, and left nothing out” (Chandogya Upanishad 4:9:1-3). So it is. The sage leaves nothing out, nor does he waste the student’s time with irrelevant and trivial words.

A good reckoner makes use of no counters.

Legge: “The skillful reckoner uses no tallies.” Wu: “Good calculation makes no use of counting-slips.” Since the abacus was invented much later than Lao Tzu, this does not refer to it, but considering the practical genius of the Chinese people, it is certainly likely that some kind of calculation device was in use at his time, though Wu thinks it means some kind of written notation or “scratch sheets.” Whichever it might be, the idea is that the good mathematician does all calculation in his head with no external assist or expression whatever. This is symbolic of the totally inward life and perception of the sage. He needs no external source to draw from nor an external means of expression, but retains everything in his skillful intellect (buddhi). Such a one never looks outside to find truth, but only looks inward. In this way he comes to know all things, while those of externalized consciousness stumble around either seeing nothing or perceiving only partially. The complete picture is to be “seen” only within. All solutions to all problems are internally discovered, as well as the understanding as to what is a problem and what is not, what should be considered and what should be ignored.

Again, as in the first sentence, we are being given a picture of a thoroughly self-contained and independent individual. The sage is at no time “a member of society,” but lives in solitude wherever he may be, even in a crowded place. Saint Silouan of Mount Athos once commented that many people go into desert places and take the whole world with them, but Saint John of Kronstadt, though surrounded day and night by many people, was always alone in his inmost self.

A well-shut door makes use of no bolts, and yet cannot be opened.

Legge: “The skillful closer needs no bolts or bars, while to open what he has shut will be impossible.” Wu: “Good shutting makes no use of bolt and bar, And yet nobody can undo it.” As just mentioned, the sage is a solitary being. His “door” is well shut and cannot be opened. In relation to society this is especially true. As Emily Dickinson wrote:

The soul selects her own society,
Then shuts the door;
On her divine majority
Obtrude no more.

Unmoved, she notes the chariot’s pausing
At her low gate;

Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling
Upon her mat.

I've known her from an ample nation
Choose one;
Then close the valves of her attention
Like stone.

This also means that when a sage shuts the door on ignorance and evil they are excluded forever, that he totally expunges all misperception and wrong thinking from his mind. Rebirth is also a closed door to him as are all forms of weakness and failing. Living in an iron fortress he is safe, secure, and at peace. Yet he need not hide away from anything, for he knows how to exclude externals without necessarily secluding himself. That is why Lao Tzu continues:

A well-tied knot makes use of no rope, and yet cannot be untied.

Legge: "The skillful binder uses no strings or knots, while to unloose what he has bound will be impossible." Wu: "Good tying makes no use of rope and knot, And yet nobody can untie it." Having determined in his mind what is to be shut out from his consciousness, he accomplishes this exclusion solely by an act of will—a sankalpa, which is a life-changing exercise of will or determination. A sage never wishes; he wills. And what he wills in that moment comes to be. The wise make no use of externals to accomplish what they will. Thus it cannot be reversed or dissolved.

This has a very practical application. Lao Tzu further says:

Therefore the Sage is good at helping men; for that reason there is no rejected (useless) person.

Because the sage is totally self-contained, neither needing nor wanting anything from others, he is of great benefit to the true, worthy seeker, for he leaves him alone in freedom. If he ignores what he is taught or if he follows it, it is all the same to the sage, for he knows that everyone is moving at the right pace in exactly the right place on the path to liberation. As Krishna says: "Even a wise man acts according to the tendencies of his own nature. All living creatures follow their tendencies. What use is any external restraint?" (Bhagavad Gita 3:33). Even if it were possible to influence another, such a thing would be a terrible transgression, an act of spiritual sociopathy. Religion attempts to do it all the time, and only ends up with discontented hypocrites.

If the seeker is moving toward freedom, he must be given freedom at every step along the way. That does not mean that the teacher does not warn against missteps, but his warning is only for the student's information. The choice must be his alone. Trying to motivate the student is deadly, for the only right motivation comes from within, not from without. Attempting to influence the student by speaking of reward and punishment—even of right and wrong—is unknown to the real sage. Enslavement in any form is despicable to an honest person, and certainly to a wise one. Buddha said that a true teacher is like a finger pointing to the moon in silence. There is no attempt to persuade anyone to look at the moon, only a simple indication. The intelligent look up and see, and the ignorant just keep plodding on looking down. A good teacher is a teacher of men, not a trainer of animals.

The sage rejects no one, for he knows the eternal potential of each person. Nevertheless, his illumined vibration ensures that the unfit pass on and do not become groupies or fixtures in his orbit. That is why multitudes crowd around false teachers,

while only a comparative handful remain near a great master. Sri Gajanana Maharaj of Nasik was one of the most remarkable yogis of the first half of the twentieth century, yet he was almost totally unknown in Nasik, and two years before his leaving this world it was estimated that he had less than fifty students. The same was true of Paramhansa Yogananda's guru, Swami Sriyukteswar Giri. In the twelfth chapter of his autobiography Yogananda says this: "...Master was not popular with superficial students. The wise, always few in number, deeply revered him. I daresay Sri Yukteswar would have been the most sought-after guru in India had his words not been so candid and so censorious....Students came, and generally went. Those who craved a path of oily sympathy and comfortable recognitions did not find it at the hermitage. Master offered shelter and shepherding for the aeons, but many disciples miserly demanded ego-balm as well. They departed, preferring life's countless humiliations before any humility. Master's blazing rays, the open penetrating sunshine of his wisdom, were too powerful for their spiritual sickness. They sought some lesser teacher who, shading them with flattery, permitted the fitful sleep of ignorance."

On the other hand, a great master like Swami Sivananda can be the clarion call to the worthy. He was merciful, kind, and loving, but he was also so awake in God that his mere presence awakened others. His faith in their divine potential communicated itself to them and they accomplished great things inwardly in the spirit and outwardly in the world where their living example inspired others to "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). At the same time the unworthy considered him unworthy of their attention and busied themselves with lesser teachers who would welcome and flatter them.

He is good at saving things; for that reason there is nothing rejected.

Through the ages it has been seen that contact with the holy can enable divine potential to manifest in those who come into their orbit, and Lao Tzu makes an interesting statement regarding the matter:

This is called stealing the Light.

That is, the sage can bring forth the Light of the Tao in a true seeker's consciousness as skillfully as a thief can penetrate into a house and remove all the valuables there. A sage is like a very good safecracker. His senses of inner hearing and touch are so subtle that he can figure out the combination that will open the inmost consciousness of those around him and set them free—if they apply it themselves. There is no doubt that the presence of the illumined can affect and even change those who meet him, but that only lasts a short time. If they use that blessing to uplift themselves by following the master's teachings, then it will not drain away but will be compounded by the evocation of their own spiritual treasury. Otherwise the benefit will be lost completely. It is a complete waste of time to approach the wise if we do not intend to become wise ourselves.

An example comes to mind from my own experience. One time a saint recommended that I see a certain popular movie. Knowing that it was all about brutality and violence, I was determined not to see it, even though I respected the saint. And there we have the first lesson: admiring and respecting a sage means absolutely nothing if we do not listen to him. Anyway, after some time a friend came to visit me and was very eager to see that motion picture, so reluctantly I went with him to see it—and it changed my life, literally. During the picture I experienced profound and detailed past life recall which made clear where I was at that point in my development and the way in which I should proceed for further progress. The second lesson is obvious: pay attention to the words of the wise and wisdom will open to us. I

must admit to several times ignoring the counsel of holy ones, but in time I would follow their words and be astounded at the results. So I learned to look, listen, and do.

Therefore the good man is the Teacher of the bad.

Since all are part of the Tao, all are essentially good, “bad” being only an illusory veneer. However, human beings are caught in the web of “bad” dreams” and need to extricate themselves—but how will they do it? Through the teaching of the truly good, whether they learn from this directly, face-to-face, or whether they learn through written records of their teaching. True masters never die, their bodies only disappear from our sight. Having become infinite, they are always just as present in the world as they were when “alive.”

There is more to this, though. When a person resolves to attain higher consciousness and follows it up with practical application—especially in the form of meditation and other spiritual disciplines—he imperceptibly begins to transfer his consciousness, his real existence, into higher dimensions. Although he appears to still be “in the world” he increasingly becomes a resident of higher worlds, of higher levels of consciousness. In time he hardly lives in this material world at all, but mostly lives in those rarefied worlds which only the yogi can ascend to. Liberated masters are never really born into this world, even though a body vehicle appears for their habitation, nor do they ever die. That is why the great master, Yogananda, said at one of his birthday celebrations: “Yogananda was never born, nor will he ever die.” When Panchanon Bhattacharya, a disciple of Yogiraj Shyama Charan Lahiri (Lahiri Mahasaya), was grieving over his master’s death, the guru suddenly materialized before him and said: “Why are you sorrowing? You do not live in this world. You live with me!”

And the bad man is the lesson of the good.

Wise are those who observe others and learn from both their wise and unwise ways. The good learn from the “bad” how not to live, just as they learn how to live from the example of the good.

He who neither values his teacher nor loves the lesson is one gone far astray, though he be learned.

There is a great deal of wisdom in what we consider children’s rhymes and fairy stories. Many of them contain profound wisdom, especially the stories that often have practical esoteric teaching. Although the teacher rejects none and freely shares his knowledge, that does not prevent unqualified people, and even outright fools, from approaching him. I always think of such people as Simple Simons, for the little comic poem portrays them quite well. So here it is:

Simple Simon met a pieman,
Going to the fair.
Said Simple Simon to the pieman,
“Let me taste your ware.”

Said the pieman unto Simon,
“Show me first your penny.”
Said Simple Simon to the pieman,
“Indeed I have not any.”

Simply being interested in higher consciousness means very little if the seeker

does not have the requisite inner development and will power to understand the principles of spiritual life and to persevere in the practice of spiritual disciplines. People of this type always say things such as: “I am sincerely interested,” “I realize it is time for me to get serious,” and “I am willing to do whatever is needed.” These noble statements are mere sham intended to impress the prospective teacher and get him to overlook their obvious lack of qualification for even the rudiments of spiritual life. The fact is, they do not have the “penny” necessary to “purchase”—comprehend and value—authentic wisdom, much less apply it. So in time they get bored or disillusioned, blame the teacher and the teaching for the lack that is really in themselves, and wander on to the next diversion. Unless, of course the teacher is as unworthy as are they. In that case they stay around for life, secure and safe from making any real change in their life or awareness.

What do they lack? The rest of the poem tells it all:

Simple Simon went a-fishing,
For to catch a whale;
But all the water he had got
Was in his mother’s pail.

Without increasing his understanding by study and listening, and certainly without purifying his mind and heart by discipline, the Simple Simon thinks to catch the “whale” of boundless divine consciousness in the tiny “pail” of his mind which he has not improved on since childhood. Often such types chortle over “childlike saints” and the need to “become as little children” to excuse their mental and spiritual infantilism. And they love the silly little ditty about “It’s a gift to be simple.” It is their habit to say at every opportunity: “It’s really all so simple.” I knew a person like this, and after the umpteenth time of hearing how simple it all was, I said: “Yes. It is so ‘simple’ it doesn’t even work!” And of course that is the intention.

Simple Simon went to look,
If plums grew on a thistle;
He pricked his fingers very much,
Which made poor Simon whistle.

A favorite Simple Simon ploy is to ask stupid questions or make stupid statements ad infinitum as an intellectual smokescreen to veil their utter emptiness of mind and soul. One of their favorite activities is looking for the right thing in the wrong place so they will be guaranteed not to find it. They especially love foolish and shallow teachers to whom they “resonate” readily. Sometimes they rhapsodize about such teachers to let a real teacher know that if he does not do what they like or want he may “lose” them—something for which he fervently hopes and even prays.

Simple Simons “whistle” a lot about how disappointed and even “hurt” they are, but they never see that it is the result of their own foolish deeds.

He went for water in a sieve,
But soon it all fell through;
And now poor Simple Simon
Bids you all adieu.

Since they have a mind and heart like a sieve, shot full of holes by worldly ways and

wrong thinking, what “water” the teacher gives them falls to the ground almost immediately. Simple Simons are continually having to be told the same things over and over. Constantly they come up with problems that are no problems, troubles that are no troubles, and baseless arguments and excuses in relation to what they have been taught. The teacher may waste his time explaining and “helping” them to “understand,” and as they leave they turn and smile broadly and say: “I’m so glad we had this talk. I really needed to hear these things.” And one or two days later they are right back at Square One.

Now a teacher may not reject anyone in the sense of not seeing his divine Self, but that does not mean he wastes his time with Simple Simons. Quite some time ago the BBC made a funny series called *Hallelujah!* about a Salvation Army officer (played by Thora Hurd). In one episode a sleazy family showed up and began demanding all sorts of “help” and attention. At one point they even claimed the doctor had prescribed gin for “Dad” as a medicine, and expected the Salvation Army to supply it to him. One weekend they went away for a vacation (it is amazing how professionally “poor” people suddenly find the money to do what they want) and when they came back “mum” showed up for some more handouts. But she was told that the officers had decided to terminate their membership in the Sally Ann, so they should panhandle elsewhere. Like all such frauds, the woman whined: “I thought you were Christians!” To which she got the reply: “Christians, yes. But damn fools, NO.” So I can assure you that authentic teachers often teach by stating the simple truth to fake seekers. I particularly enjoyed watching Swami Sivananda do this. He was kind and even used humor, but he got the point across. Some really got the idea and straightened up and others left in a huff. But truth prevailed, always.

Anyhow, laying aside ego-based “compassion,” it is always wonderful to hear the words: “And now poor [put-upon and mistreated] Simple Simon bids you all adieu”—music to the ears that is unparalleled. Indeed, there is joy in heaven over a sinner that reforms himself (Luke 15:7), but there is a great sigh of relief over an incorrigible sinner that departs, having “gone far astray” in his heart long before. Again, truth prevails.

Such is the subtle secret.

Wu: “This is an essential tenet of the Tao.” That is, we must learn to discern the true and the false in the people around us and respond accordingly, for good sense in relation to ourselves and others is definitely an aspect of the Tao.

28. Keeping to the Female

He who is aware of the Male but keeps to the Female becomes the ravine of the world. Being the ravine of the world, he has the original character (*teh*) which is not cut up. And returns again to the (innocence of the) babe.

He who is conscious of the white (bright) but keeps to the black (dark) becomes the model for the world. Being the model for the world, he has the eternal power which never errs, and returns again to the Primordial Nothingness.

He who is familiar with honor and glory but keeps to obscurity becomes the valley of the world. Being the valley of the world, he has an eternal power which always suffices, and returns again to the natural integrity of uncarved wood.

Break up this uncarved wood and it is shaped into vessel in the hands of the Sage they become the officials and magistrates. Therefore the great ruler does not cut up.

(Tao Teh King 28)

Existence has two (seeming) aspects, the transcendent and the immanent, the Absolute and the Relative. One is an absolute Unity and the other is an absolute Duality—even though they are both the one Tao. The Tao is one, yet It is also dual as is illustrated in the yin-yang symbol. In the Tao Teh King this duality is spoken of in more than one place as “male” and “female.” In Indian cosmology the passive transcendent principle is considered male and the active creative power which manifests as the entire field of relative existence is considered to be feminine (though this was not always so, as the symbol of Nataraja indicates). In Taoism the opposite is postulated: the passive is feminine and the active is masculine. We must keep this in mind whenever the Tao Teh King speaks of male and female.

He who is aware of the Male but keeps to the Female becomes the ravine of the world. Being the ravine of the world, he has the original character (*teh*) which is not cut up. And returns again to the (innocence of the) babe.

He who is aware of the Male but keeps to the Female becomes the ravine of the world. There is no reason to tune out material existence. Certainly the artificial world of human making is mostly deadly or useless, but the simple world around us is both beneficial and necessary. The yogi is keenly aware of the natural world, but does not identify with it or allow any of its phenomena to dislodge his consciousness from being centered in the spirit-self.

Those who never lose their awareness of spirit have no danger of being ensnared by matter, but I am speaking of a state of consciousness, not an intellectual outlook or attitude. Many are those who claim to be “above it all” or “understanding” materiality while being hopelessly enmeshed in and addicted to it. There is no way to spiritualize delusion, but many dishonest ways to justify it. One time while eating in Yogananda’s marvelous vegetarian restaurant on Sunset Boulevard, some carnivore related that when Edgar Cayce was questioned about eating a pork chop he said: “If I can’t raise the vibration of this pork chop, what good am I?” I saw no reason to point out that Edgar Cayce had proved to be of very little worth, spiritually speaking, and that only a very foolish person would try to raise the vibration of a dead pig, much less waste energy doing so even if it were possible. And anyway, why EAT it? A number of people have bragged to me about their “holy” drug use and sexual indulgence, but their state of mind and life proved them either liars or dupes. So “keeping to the Female” involves

very real detachment and non-involvement with the world of deluded humans.

Lao Tzu informs us that those who move through the world while remaining centered in spirit-awareness will be like a ravine into which water flows—all the good and valuable elements of the world will flow to such a one naturally. He will live life to the fullest, and his time on this earth will not be a misery or a weary awaiting of death so he can escape it—though this is the attitude of negative religion. Rather, his life will be full and a means of his development, inner and outer. There is no richer or more satisfying life than that of the yogi, as the Bhagavad Gita describes so beautifully. Here is the result of “keeping to the Female”:

“The illumined soul whose heart is Brahman’s heart thinks always: ‘I am doing nothing.’ No matter what he sees, hears, touches, smells, eats; no matter whether he is moving, sleeping, breathing, speaking, excreting, or grasping something with his hand, or opening his eyes, or closing his eyes: this he knows always: ‘I am not seeing, I am not hearing: it is the senses that see and hear and touch the things of the senses.’

“He puts aside desire, offering the act to Brahman. The lotus leaf rests unwetted on water: he rests on action, untouched by action. To the follower of the yoga of action, the body and the mind, the sense-organs and the intellect are instruments only: he knows himself other than the instrument and thus his heart grows pure.

“United with Brahman, cut free from the fruit of the act, a man finds peace in the work of the spirit. Without Brahman, man is a prisoner, enslaved by action, dragged onward by desire. Happy is that dweller in the city of nine gates whose discrimination has cut him free from his act: he is not involved in action, he does not involve others.

“The devoted dwell with Him, they know Him always there in the heart, where action is not. He is all their aim. Made free by His Knowledge from past uncleanness of deed or of thought, they find the place of freedom, the place of no return” (Bhagavad Gita 5:8-13, 17).

Being the ravine of the world, he has the original character (teh) which is not cut up. Identifying with the Eternal Witness, the Tao, the sage returns to and lives in perfect and undisturbed Unity. Fragmentation is the root evil of the deluded and bewildered who stumble through life after life in this world. Only when the mind and heart are unified along with the body can peace and wisdom be attained. To live in—and as—The One is the secret of freedom.

And returns again to the babe. Taoist texts speak of the spiritual embryo—the arising in the consciousness of the original state of Tao. We must all return to that primal state. Jesus was referring to that when he prayed: “O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). We must be clothed again in the Tao—that is, the Tao must become our body and soul. Nothing but the Tao can remain in our consciousness, for the Tao IS consciousness. We must “know” the Tao and “unknow” everything else. The Tao is the Divine Darkness which is the only true Light. All viable mystical traditions tell us this and urge us onward to its realization.

He who is conscious of the white (bright) but keeps to the black (dark) becomes the model for the world. Being the model for the world, he has the eternal power which never errs, and returns again to the Primordial Nothingness.

He who is conscious of the white (bright) but keeps to the black (dark) becomes the model for the world. Those who can be aware of—and deal successfully with—the world and yet never lose awareness of their true nature is a model for all sentient life. Why?

Being the model for the world, he has the eternal power which never errs, and returns

again to the Primordial Nothingness. Conserving his inner powers by refusing to expend them in externals—especially in emotions and desires—he is enabled to return to that Unity which existed before Diversity and to which all must return, for that is the sole Goal of evolving life.

He who is familiar with honor and glory but keeps to obscurity becomes the valley of the world. Being the valley of the world, he has an eternal power which always suffices, and returns again to the natural integrity of uncarved wood.

This is a reaffirmation of the first two verses. Those who prefer to be unknown to a world which clamors for notoriety (usually undeserved) become reservoirs of creative power which develops into recreative power which of its own turns back to the Primal Integrity and rejoices in the peace and stillness of eternal Formlessness that is hidden by form.

Break up this uncarved wood and it is shaped into a vessel. In the hands of the Sage they become the officials and magistrates. Therefore the great ruler does not cut up.

To make something we must destroy the unity and integrity of the material(s) from which it is to be made. That is why the Zen Master Seung Sung advocated the simple maxim: “Make Nothing.” It is the same with people: they can be “made” into many things, but in the “making” they cease to be what they really are. The great authorities, the masters of wisdom such as Lao Tzu, show us how to be what we are, for we can really be nothing else. As long as we try to be something we are not, only great confusion, pain, and evil can result. A yogi I once travelled with in the West was approached by a child on a ferry boat. Seeing his Indian sadhu clothing as well as his long hair and beard, she asked him: “What are you supposed to be?” He smiled radiantly and answered: “Oh, just What I’m supposed to be!”

The truly wise do not disturb the original integrity of people or things. In this way the Tao alone prevails.

29. Warning Against Interference

There are those who will conquer the world and make of it (what they conceive or desire). I see that they will not succeed. (For) the world is God's own Vessel it cannot be made (by human interference). He who makes it spoils it. He who holds it loses it.

For: Some things go forward, some things follow behind; some blow hot, and some blow cold; some are strong, and some are weak; some may break, and some may fall.

Hence the Sage eschews excess, eschews extravagance, eschews pride.
(Tao Teh King 29)

In *The Great Divorce* C. S. Lewis writes of a woman who cannot stand to not be running other people's lives. "Give me someone to 'do' something with," is her constant demand. She cannot exist on her own, but must live through others. A great many people to this, not least those addicted to "spectator sports" as well as adulation of heroes and "stars" in many areas of life—usually all useless and mostly destructive in the long run. Terrible suffering is produced by the insistence of governments and families that their members must be ordered about and changed in various ways "for their own good." I would like to offer you some advice: Whenever anyone says to you: "I only want you to be happy..." RUN. For they really only want to be happy themselves by controlling and reshaping you to their ideas. Few things are more vicious.

My mother used to laugh and say: "There is not a thing in the world my father does not think he can't improve on." Actually, he was right, for my grandfather was a great creative genius who could accomplish just about anything in the external world—especially in improving gadgets and machines. Still, the addiction to tinkering with the people and things around us can be a grave defect, as Lao Tzu now explains.

There are those who will conquer the world and make of it (what they conceive or desire). I see that they will not succeed.

Wu: "Does anyone want to take the world and do what he wants with it? I do not see how he can succeed."

Swami Vivekananda has expounded this far better than I ever could. Ego is at the root of the problem of "world changers," and he explained their folly in this way in his book *Karma Yoga*.

"There was a poor man who wanted some money; and somehow he had heard that if he could get hold of a ghost, he might command him to bring money or anything else he liked; so he was very anxious to get hold of a ghost. He went about searching for a man who would give him a ghost, and at last he found a sage with great powers, and besought his help. The sage asked him what he would do with a ghost. 'I want a ghost to work for me; teach me how to get hold of one, sir; I desire it very much,' replied the man. But the sage said, 'Don't disturb yourself, go home.' The next day the man went again to the sage and began to weep and pray, 'Give me a ghost; I must have a ghost, sir, to help me.' At last the sage was disgusted, and said, 'Take this charm, repeat this magic word, and a ghost will come, and whatever you say to him he will do. But beware; they are terrible beings, and must be kept continually busy. If you fail to give him work, he will take your life.' The man replied, 'That is easy; I can give him work for all his life.' Then he went to a forest, and after long repetition of the magic

word, a huge ghost appeared before him, and said, 'I am a ghost. I have been conquered by your magic; but you must keep me constantly employed. The moment you fail to give me work I will kill you.' The man said, 'Build me a palace,' and the ghost said, 'It is done; the palace is built.' 'Bring me money,' said the man. 'Here is your money,' said the ghost. 'Cut this forest down, and build a city in its place.' 'That is done,' said the ghost, 'anything more?' Now the man began to be frightened and thought he could give him nothing more to do; he did everything in a trice. The ghost said, 'Give me something to do or I will eat you up.' The poor man could find no further occupation for him, and was frightened. So he ran and ran and at last reached the sage, and said, 'Oh, sir, protect my life!' The sage asked him what the matter was, and the man replied, 'I have nothing to give the ghost to do. Everything I tell him to do he does in a moment, and he threatens to eat me up if I do not give him work.' Just then the ghost arrived, saying, 'I'll eat you up,' and he would have swallowed the man. The man began to shake, and begged the sage to save his life. The sage said, 'I will find you a way out. Look at that dog with a curly tail. Draw your sword quickly and cut the tail off and give it to the ghost to straighten out.' The man cut off the dog's tail and gave it to the ghost, saying, 'Straighten that out for me.' The ghost took it and slowly and carefully straightened it out, but as soon as he let it go, it instantly curled up again. Once more he laboriously straightened it out, only to find it again curled up as soon as he attempted to let go of it. Again he patiently straightened it out, but as soon as he let it go, it curled up again. So he went on for days and days, until he was exhausted and said, 'I was never in such trouble before in my life. I am an old veteran ghost, but never before was I in such trouble.' 'I will make a compromise with you,' he said to the man, 'you let me off and I will let you keep all I have given you and will promise not to harm you.' The man was much pleased, and accepted the offer gladly.

"This world is like a dog's curly tail, and people have been striving to straighten it out for hundreds of years; but when they let it go, it has curled up again. How could it be otherwise? One must first know how to work without attachment, then one will not be a fanatic. When we know that this world is like a dog's curly tail and will never get straightened, we shall not become fanatics. If there were no fanaticism in the world, it would make much more progress than it does now. It is a mistake to think that fanaticism can make for the progress of mankind. On the contrary, it is a retarding element creating hatred and anger, and causing people to fight each other, and making them unsympathetic. We think that whatever we do or possess is the best in the world, and what we do not do or possess is of no value. So, always remember the instance of the curly tail of the dog whenever you have a tendency to become a fanatic. You need not worry or make yourself sleepless about the world; it will go on without you. When you have avoided fanaticism, then alone will you work well. It is the level-headed man, the calm man, of good judgment and cool nerves, of great sympathy and love, who does good work and so does good to himself. The fanatic is foolish and has no sympathy; he can never straighten the world, nor himself become pure and perfect."

(For) the world is God's own Vessel. It cannot be made (by human interference). He who makes it spoils it. He who holds it loses it.

Wu: "The world is a sacred vessel, which must not be tampered with or grabbed after. To tamper with it is to spoil it, and to grasp it is to lose it."

The paragraph that comes right after the words of Vivekananda cited above will complete this picture.

"To recapitulate the chief points in today's lecture: First, we have to bear in mind that we are all debtors to the world and the world does not owe us anything. It is a

great privilege for all of us to be allowed to do anything for the world. In helping the world we really help ourselves. The second point is that there is a God in this universe. It is not true that this universe is drifting and stands in need of help from you and me. God is ever present therein, He is undying and eternally active and infinitely watchful. When the whole universe sleeps, He sleeps not; He is working incessantly; all the changes and manifestations of the world are His. Thirdly, we ought not to hate anyone. This world will always continue to be a mixture of good and evil. Our duty is to sympathize with the weak and to love even the wrongdoer. The world is a grand moral gymnasium wherein we have all to take exercise so as to become stronger and stronger spiritually. Fourthly, we ought not to be fanatics of any kind, because fanaticism is opposed to love. You hear fanatics glibly saying, 'I do not hate the sinner. I hate the sin,' but I am prepared to go any distance to see the face of that man who can really make a distinction between the sin and the sinner. It is easy to say so. If we can distinguish well between quality and substance, we may become perfect men. It is not easy to do this. And further, the calmer we are and the less disturbed our nerves, the more shall we love and the better will our work be."

It is essential that we come to perceive truly that the world is the ever-perfect Tao.

For: Some things go forward, some things follow behind; some blow hot, and some blow cold; some are strong, and some are weak; some may break, and some may fall.

Wu: "In fact, for all things there is a time for going ahead, and a time for following behind; A time for slow-breathing and a time for fast-breathing; A time to grow in strength and a time to decay; A time to be up and a time to be down."

Everything in the world changes, and a skillfully living person knows when to change his response to them in accordance with their altered character. First he must be able to perceive the change—perhaps even to anticipate the change and prepare himself for the altered circumstances. It is only natural to wish stability in our life and mind, but we must be sure that what we mistake for stability is not really stagnation. Most people have stale personalities because their lives are stale. Instead of growing and changing they have been running in the same tracks for their entire life. We all know of people who dress, speak, and act like they did when they were in high school—the "best years of their lives" to those who have remained stunted in their minds and hearts. Such people always respond just as they have always responded. They make no differentiation between past or present, so when the future arrives they are the same old "psychological antiques" to use Yogananda's expression. He said that they are so boring that when they die the angels say: "Oh, let's send this one back quickly."

Besides the teaching of this verse, it also demonstrates an important truth: the Essenes within Judaism studied the scriptures of other religions—for which they were officially condemned by the other Jews. (See *The Christ of India*.) In the book of Ecclesiastes, attributed to Solomon, we find the following:

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

"A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

"A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

"A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

"A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

"A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

"A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

“A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace” (Ecclesiastes 3:8).

This is not coincidence, but a restating of what the author had read for himself in the Tao Teh King. The *Aquarian Gospel* also reveals that the Essenes were very conversant with the Taoist philosophy, and that Jesus had Taoist disciples that came to learn from him after his return to Israel from India.

Hence the Sage eschews excess, eschews extravagance, eschews pride.

Wu: “Therefore, the Sage avoids all extremes, excesses and extravagances.”

Knowing that whatever his present situation it will eventually change—and so will everything including the people around him—the wise man does not allow himself to overreact to anything, but to avoid extremes, excesses, and extravagances at all times, including his own internal conditions. Especially he keeps his mind and heart unclouded by intense emotional or intellectual reactions, and consequently also acts at all times in a temperate and deliberate manner. In this way he perfectly expresses the Tao.

30. Warning Against the Use of Force

He who by Tao purposes to help the ruler of men will oppose all conquest by force of arms. For such things are wont to rebound. Where armies are, thorns and brambles grow. The raising of a great host is followed by a year of dearth.

Therefore a good general effects his purpose and stops. He dares not rely upon the strength of arms; effects his purpose and does not glory in it; effects his purpose and does not boast of it; effects his purpose and does not take pride in it; effects his purpose as a regrettable necessity; effects his purpose but does not love violence.

(For) things age after reaching their prime. That (violence) would be against the Tao. And he who is against the Tao perishes young.

(Tao Teh King 30)

He who by Tao purposes to help the ruler of men will oppose all conquest by force of arms. For such things are wont to rebound.

Byrn: “Those who lead people by following the Tao do not use weapons to enforce their will. Using force always leads to unseen troubles.” Mabry: “A leader who is advised to rely on the Tao Does not enforce his will upon the world by military means. For such things are likely to rebound.”

This verse applies to both nations and individuals. Military action should be avoided as much as possible—and practical—because violence always causes a negative rebound, as will be explained in the second verse. Actually, government should avoid any type of coercion, for those who bring pressure on others and force them to go against their principles or will, in time will find the same thing happening to them. Those who use reason and benevolence will find the same virtues being directed at them. This also applies to individuals: kindness and reason bolstered by good example are the only way we should affect others—if possible. (This has to be qualified because just as there are incorrigible governments there are also incorrigible people who cannot be dealt with as rational.) The basic attitude should be that following the Tao will in time bring about all that is good. Refugees from the Soviet Union told me of amazing instances of people who boldly lived in a manner that often brought imprisonment and execution of others by the Communist regime, yet they would not even be reprimanded by the government, but continued to openly follow their principles and defy the evil power. Questioning about them revealed that they were perfectly honest and consistent in all things, having a completely peaceful and kindly attitude toward those that could have jailed or killed them. Patanjali said that when a person was perfect in ahimsa (non-violence) that violence could not arise in their presence. Buddha proved this more than once.

Where armies are, thorns and brambles grow. The raising of a great host is followed by a year of dearth.

Byrn: “In the places where armies march, thorns and briars bloom and grow. After armies take to war, bad years must always follow.”

Armies of aggression bring terrible misery in their wake. It is as if the earth is cursed by the touch of their feet, and the civilians become overwhelmed with darkness of mind and heart. (Liberating armies do just the opposite, fortunately.) Although in a war there may be a good or “right” side, nevertheless war itself always has terrible consequences, even if evil forces were eliminated by it. For example, immediately after

World War I the terrible influenza plague swept through the world and killed far more people than the war had killed. Close examination shows that the countries that are forced into war in order to fight evil are without exception experiencing moral and civil degeneration afterward. After every war there is a marked lowering of the quality of civilized and moral life. “How You Gonna Keep ‘Em Down On The Farm?” has dire implications in the long run.

A multitude of “natural disasters” accrue to a world that tolerates and even encourages violence. Consider the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century. A heavy toll of civilian life was taken in so many ways as the karmic reaction to the many small wars that raged constantly around the world.

Right now there are more people in slavery than at any time in the past. Even more surprising—especially since governments and media suppress knowledge of it—piracy is thriving throughout the world as well. Institutions of evil that we smugly assure ourselves have been long eliminated in our “more advanced times” are actually on the increase. And look at the proliferation of bizarre and unheard-of diseases that are bringing horror to the world daily. There is a law that demands equalization and it must be satisfied.

Yogananda has said it perfectly—as usual: “The year 1945 has also ushered in a new age—the era of revolutionary atomic energies. All thoughtful minds turn as never before to the urgent problems of peace and brotherhood, lest the continued use of physical force banish all men along with the problems.

“Though the human race and its works disappear tracelessly by time or bomb, the sun does not falter in its course; the stars keep their invariable vigil. Cosmic law cannot be stayed or changed, and man would do well to put himself in harmony with it. If the cosmos is against might, if the sun wars not with the planets but retires at dueful time to give the stars their little sway, what avails our mailed fist? Shall any peace indeed come out of it? Not cruelty but good will arms the universal sinews; a humanity at peace will know the endless fruits of victory, sweeter to the taste than any nurtured on the soil of blood.”

Therefore a good general effects his purpose and stops. He dares not rely upon the strength of arms.

Mabry: “A good leader accomplishes only what he has set out to do And is careful not to overestimate his ability.” Wu: “What you want is to protect efficiently your own state, But not to aim at self-aggrandizement.”

This, too, applies to individuals and nations. Only what is truly needed should be done or aspired to. Ego must not fool us into doing more. The Bhagavad Gita describes those of demonic character as saying: “I wanted this and today I got it. I want that: I shall get it tomorrow. All these riches are now mine: soon I shall have more. I have killed this enemy. I will kill all the rest. I am a ruler of men. I enjoy the things of this world. I am successful, strong and happy” (Bhagavad Gita 16:13, 14). This is the direct route to destruction of ourselves and others. Wise are those who know their limitations and also know when to rein in their capacities and not go further even if they are able to do so. It is important to live with the lightest possible touch in all things. Moderation and frugality in themselves are not the purpose; rather we are to learn to engage in external involvements as little as possible. In this way peace and contentment will be ours. The bulk of our attention and time should be on cultivation of the Tao.

[He] effects his purpose and does not glory in it; effects his purpose and does not boast of it; effects his purpose and does not take pride in it; effects

his purpose as a regrettable necessity; effects his purpose but does not love violence.

Byrn: "When victory is won over the enemy through war it is not a thing of great pride. When the battle is over, arrogance is the new enemy. War can result when no other alternative is given, so the one who overcomes an enemy should not dominate them." Wu: "After you have attained your purpose, You must not parade your success, You must not boast of your ability, You must not feel proud, You must rather regret that you had not been able to prevent the war. You must never think of conquering others by force."

The nobility of this passage is so evident that there is no need to comment on it. I would like to point out that in my visits to India I have met many rajahs and maharajas and saw in them exactly what a warrior (kshatriya) should be: compassionate and interested only in the welfare of those under their care, detesting all violence and conflict, yet able to intelligently engage in it for the good of others without any enmity toward those they must oppose and conquer. They were all of outstanding courage and strength of character, yet gentle though firm and dedicated. Every one of them practiced meditation and were markedly religious. One, the Raja of Solan whom we called Brother Yogi (Yogi Bhai), was of outstanding spiritual attainment, simplicity and humility.

(For) things age after reaching their prime. That (violence) would be against the Tao. And he who is against the Tao perishes young.

Byrn: "The strong always weaken with time. This is not the way of the Tao. That which is not of the Tao will soon end." Mabry: "Things that grow strong soon grow weak. This is not the Way of the Tao. Not following the Tao leads to an early end." Wu: "For to be over-developed is to hasten decay, and this is against Tao, And what is against Tao will soon cease to be."

Duality is not just a law of relative manifestation, it is a law governing the externals of life. Ma Anandamayi used to say: "Getting implies losing." Everything gained must eventually be lost, otherwise we could never return to our original status and be liberated. Happily, this applies to "bad" as well as "good" so nothing can hold to us nor can we hold to it—blessed freedom, frustrating to the ego but a balm to the Self. So we must realize that all our gains will in time pass away and that all the "good" we accomplish will fade away after a while. And this is as it should be, otherwise the Tao would not be unconditioned and perfect. We are the Tao, and to seek to be otherwise is to willfully suffer and fail. Consequently we should be ever detached to everything but the Tao—which we should seek and find to discover we have always been inseparable from It.

31. Weapons of Evil

Of all things, soldiers are instruments of evil, hated by men. Therefore the religious man (possessed of Tao) avoids them. The gentleman favors the left in civilian life, but on military occasions favors the right.

Soldiers are weapons of evil. They are not the weapons of the gentleman. When the use of soldiers cannot be helped, the best policy is calm restraint.

Even in victory, there is no beauty, and who calls it beautiful is one who delights in slaughter. He who delights in slaughter will not succeed in his ambition to rule the world.

The things of good omen favor the left. The things of ill omen favor the right. The lieutenant-general stands on the left, the general stands on the right. That is to say, it is celebrated as a Funeral Rite.

The slaying of multitudes should be mourned with sorrow. A victory should be celebrated with the Funeral Rite.

(Tao Teh King 31)

I have mentioned this previously, but I want to make a point of the fact that armies of liberation are not quite as awful as Lao Tzu says. But in his time such things did not exist—all armies were armies of conquest and greed that relied on violence and cruelty to win. Nevertheless there is a down side to all war as was made clear in the previous section.

Of all things, soldiers are instruments of evil, hated by men. Therefore the religious man (possessed of Tao) avoids them. The gentleman favors the left in civilian life, but on military occasions favors the right.

The wise avoid all forms of secular power because it eventually comes into conflict with wisdom since all things secular stem from the ego and before them all principles and convictions melt away as the foolish make all kinds of excuses and rationalizations for it. During times of peace the wise advocate calm, passivity, and non-interference, preferring to live in peace and non-involvement. But when it is necessary, he advocates strength in opposition and even aggressive conflict for the protection of that which is good and which will ensure the return to tranquility. In other words, he is never a “peace at any price” person, knowing well that some prices are much too high to pay. Regarding the venerable Swami Sri Yukteswar, his guru, Yogananda related: “My guru personally attended to the details connected with the management of his property. Unscrupulous persons on various occasions attempted to secure possession of Master’s ancestral land. With determination and even by instigating lawsuits, Sri Yukteswar outwitted every opponent. He underwent these painful experiences from a desire never to be a begging guru, or a burden on his disciples.”

Although the wise do not initiate conflict they must be adamant in resolving it in such a way that it will not rise again from the same roots. It is this outlook which has given rise to the martial arts of the East in which a person engages in intense conflict while remaining still in mind and heart.

This section also applies to the individual’s inner life. He should refuse in his private life to engage in outer disturbances, and should ruthlessly eliminate from his inner self all forms of violence and selfish aggression. Even when he must act in opposition to wrong, he never lets that be a justification for ill will toward another. He

puts forth intelligent, dispassionate effort to bring about the cessation of evil, but never utilizes the passions such as “righteous indignation,” “holy anger” and other such evils masquerading as good and necessary.

Soldiers are weapons of evil. They are not the weapons of the gentleman. When the use of soldiers cannot be helped, the best policy is calm restraint.

Wise government engages in conflict governed by calmness and restraint. If this had been observed in World War I there would never have been a Nazi Germany in reaction to the unreasonable vengefulness of the Versailles Treaty, and therefore no World War II.

On a personal level, the wise never employ negative means, and even in using right means they are always calm and restrained.

Even in victory, there is no beauty, and who calls it beautiful is one who delights in slaughter. He who delights in slaughter will not succeed in his ambition to rule the world.

To consider victory won by injury, destruction and death as a beautiful thing betrays the craven heart of the violent and sadistic. Those who love slaughter will never ultimately rule, for their own evil will destroy them in time.

The wise individual detests harming another and never considers any advantage won by crushing another to be truly good and desirable. Those who are ruled by malice and vengefulness will never remain for long in the ascendancy. They will be their own downfall.

The things of good omen favor the left. The things of ill omen favor the right. The lieutenant-general stands on the left, the general stands on the right. That is to say, it is celebrated as a Funeral Rite.

Those things that arise from calm observation and non-involvement or objective, careful, and passionless involvement in action always move toward the good. But jumping in and thrashing around with ego and emotion running at top level will end in distress and eventual ill. The lieutenant-general represents calm objectivity and quiet living, while the general represents charging ahead “getting things done” with expenditure of life force and mental strength. It is a kind of funeral rite before the fact.

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This is the perspective of those who possess rare wisdom and humility. Such behavior is actually recorded in the annals of ancient India, especially in the Mahabharata where the victory of the Pandavas was observed by them through undergoing intense spiritual discipline for purification of heart—and with much grief at the loss of life on both sides.

In the same way the individual should be saddened at any “winning” which has involved the physical or mental injury of others, and should be accompanied with the endeavor to compensate for the unavoidable situation. This is why the Gita says that we should not rejoice at either victory or defeat.