

THE
BOOK
OF
THE
WAY
AND
ITS
WAY



LAO TZU

THE BOOK OF THE WAY AND ITS WAY

Rendering and Introduction by:

Jarq Terra



URBAN MYSTIC BOOKS
Surrey, British Columbia

Copyright © 2004, 2007 Jarqc Terra

The Book of the Way and its Way

ISBN 978-0-9734597-1-5

Revised second edition 2007

All rights reserved. Except for brief excerpts in reviews, this publication may not be reproduced, transmitted, stored, recorded, performed, without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by:

Urban Mystic Books
415-6832 King George Hwy.
Surrey, British Columbia
CANADA V3W 4Z9

<http://www.urbanmysticbooks.com>

Book and cover design by: Chris Dube

Front cover image by: Cezary Gwozdz



Printed on recycled paper
Printed and bound in Canada

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Lao-tzu

The book of the way and its way / Lao Tzu ; rendering and
introduction by Jarqc Terra.

ISBN 978-0-9734597-1-5

I. Terra, Jarqc, 1964- II. Title.

BL1900.L3E5 2004 299.5'1482 C2004-905193-8

*For all seekers of the way,
past, present, and
future*



CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION

The Philosophy of the <i>Tao Te Ching</i>	11-17
Note on Meditative Reading	21-22

THE POEMS

Nine Sections: Poems One to Eighty-One	23-131
I Poems One to Nine	25-35
II Poems Ten to Eighteen	37-47
III Poems Nineteen to Twenty-Seven	49-59
IV Poems Twenty-Eight to Thirty-Six	61-71
V Poems Thirty-Seven to Forty-Five	73-83
VI Poems Forty-Six to Fifty-Four	85-95
VII Poems Fifty-Five to Sixty-Three	97-107
VIII Poems Sixty-Four to Seventy-Two	109-119
IX Poems Seventy-Three to Eighty-One	121-131

The Philosophy of the “*Tao Te Ching*”



One of the most challenging tasks a writer may undertake is to try and describe the ineffable. The ineffable, by its very nature, is difficult to capture and circumscribe in words. It refuses to yield to direct elucidation. Another approach is called for—one that gestures towards the mystery and yet leaves it intact. The language and the words have to partake of the nature of what they are trying to describe. They have to become artifacts of the mystery, effectual vehicles of the presence of the ineffable.

The *Tao Te Ching* is an examination of the ineffable and of the requisite approach that the ineffable calls for, if it is to be uncovered. It is a masterful textual description of the elusive qualities of the ineffable and a lucid guide on how to approach and mirror those qualities in one’s life and affairs.

Within the *Tao Te Ching*, the way of approach to the ineffable is ‘the way’; the ineffable is ‘the way’; and the inherent nature and characteristics of the ineffable are ‘the way.’ These three pivots dance around in the text like a precipitous tripod and yet remain perfectly balanced. They become the means through which the writer gestures at ‘the way’ without reveal-

Introduction

ing its final locale, for there is none: “The way is everywhere and in everything” (*Thirty-Four*. See also, *Forty-One*).

The place to begin searching for the way is within the present moment and context (*Fourteen*). In order to get on the trail of the way, one has to begin mirroring the nature of the way within one’s immediate character and person. According to the philosophy of the way, the way is uncovered and discovered by those who live it (*Thirty-Two*). This circuitous logic is not the only one presented within the text. One could argue that the whole approach of the text is to examine the multiple paradoxes that ensue from considering the nature of the way and how to mirror it in one’s life. In this sense, the philosophy of the *Tao Te Ching* could be viewed as paradoxical, that is, as derived from seeing the world, and reality in general, from a ‘down side up’ perspective. From the writer’s vantage, the true way of seeing comes out of a perspective that considers lowliness a greater state than elevation. True greatness is lowliness according to the writer (*Sixty-One*). The focus of the writer is on restoring this truer perspective to things, which, in view of the text’s undergirding philosophy, is inherently demanded by the nature of the way (*Thirty-Four*; *Sixty-Six*). That is, the emphasis of the writer is not on turning things ‘up side down,’ but rather on revealing what is weak, yielded, humble, lowly, as precisely what best mirrors the nature of the way.

A vivid example of this approach may be seen in the writer’s use of the imagery of water (*Eight*; *Seventy-Eight*). Water is soft, gentle, pliable, and limpid, the very qualities that are inherent to the way. Similarly, those who embrace and reflect the qualities of water within their character begin to partake of the

Introduction

nature of the way. One aspect reflects the other; the qualities that reflect the way are similarly the qualities that endure in the pursuit of the way, namely, gentleness, compassion, lowliness, and yielding. The writer seems to have been painfully aware that this perspective was not the general world view of his or her contemporaries, and so repeated several times throughout the text, is the need to recognize the gentle, pliable, soft, and yielding, as far outlasting the hard, strong, and unyielding (*Thirty-Six; Forty-Three; Seventy-Two; Seventy-Eight*). This contrast is not merely a reflection of strategic advantage, of the proficiency of one approach over the other, but rather a recognition of mutual participation in the nature of what grounds reality, namely, the way and the real.

According to the *Tao Te Ching*, the source of all things is the way. The way, in turn, is the inseparable companion of 'the real'—the unspeakable beyond, the emptiness, the nothing (*One; Twenty-One; Twenty-Five; Seventy-Three*). The real is the source of the paradoxical nature of the way. It is the still, unmoving centre that does not act, request, speak, or contend, and yet accomplishes, receives, answers, and overcomes (*Seventy-Three*. See also, *Sixteen*). The real is the basis for the non-acting action which those in pursuit of the way cultivate and come to embody. A way of doing this (or rather, not doing), is to metaphorically place one's finger on the heartbeat of the way, which simultaneously, turns out to be the heartbeat of the world. Once the rhythm of the way has been attained, seekers of the way begin to live according to its flow, doing through non-doing and acting through non-action (*Forty-Three; Forty-Seven; Sixty-Three*. See also, *Twenty-Six*). That is, they only do what

Introduction

is needed and therefore accomplish everything (*Thirty-Eight*).

It is important to note that the seeker's stance of inactive action is not passive. This is because the seeker is consciously engaged with the world without seeking escape from it. The conscious aspect involves the syncing up of the heart of the seeker with the heart of the world, and therefore with the heart and flow of the way, emanating from the fathomless centre of the real. Perceptivity, sensitivity, and nuance, become the indispensable qualities of the seeker of the way. They act like an internal barometer that indicates the emphasis and non-emphasis with which things should be entered into.

Outwardly, the seeker of the way may appear to be what is classically known as 'the fool.' This view seems to have been the perceived self-portrait of the writer, at least according to poem *Twenty*. Such an outward description is misleading though, since it only serves to mask the fierce grasp that the seeker has on the rhythm of the way, which once uncovered, is never again relinquished. The seeker begins to navigate the myriad contexts of life using this rhythmic flow, perceiving within it, the elusive presence of the way, leading him or her to seek harmony, simplicity, humility, naturalness, and yieldedness (*Multiple references: see, for example, Five; Ten; Sixteen; Twenty-Two; Twenty-Three; Fifty-Five; Sixty-Four*). Seekers who uncover the way therefore acquire an inner awareness that clues them to what the way of the way is and how to yield to it. They begin to tread lightly upon the world, for within it, they now discern the true nature of the real, lurking behind the apparent reality. To the outside observer, the seeker of the way appears tentative, gingerly, humble, limpid, lowly, natural (*Fifteen*).

Introduction

What the *Tao Te Ching* achieves, quite phenomenally, as displayed in the preceding philosophical sketch, is present these ideas through an economy of words that is astounding. Not only does the text manage to address the needs of the individual, its reach extends to the social and the political. Leaders, rulers, teachers, and guides, are re-measured and re-examined using the yardstick of the way and the primary quality of humility that those who serve should, according to the writer, embody (*Sixty Six*; *Sixty-Eight*; *Seventy-Eight*. See also, *Thirty-Nine*).

The *Tao Te Ching* also hints at and points to the themes of awakening and enlightenment. Although these themes are not centrally dealt with, the writer makes it quite clear that there is a parallel relationship between the pursuit of the way and the realization of awakening and enlightenment. That is, there are certain attitudes within the pursuit of the way that are a synthesis of the attitudes that are essential for the attainment of enlightenment and awakening. One of these attitudes relates to the awareness of the unitive nature of reality: “The truest enlightenment is one which does not separate,” (*Twenty-Eight*); (See also, *Sixteen*; *Twenty-Seven*; *Thirty-Three*; *Fifty-Two*; *Fifty-Five*; *Seventy-One*). Another attitude relates to the uncovering of the nature of the real, which at the same time, turns out to be the discovery of one’s true nature, and simultaneously, the uncovering of the nature of the way (*Sixteen*).

The *Tao Te Ching* is a very far-ranging and far-reaching text, especially given its brevity. It does two things that its title portends very well—it furnishes a lucid description of the inherent nature of the way, and paints a clear picture of the attitudes and characteristics that must be embraced on an in-

Introduction

dividual, social, and political scale, if the nature of the way is to be mirrored in reality. This, according to the writer, is not merely one suggestion among many other ways of living, but rather, a way of living that mirrors the nature of the source from which reality emanates (*Twenty-One*). Peace, rest, and true contentment, are discovered only from within the locus and echo of 'the real.'

Although the *Tao Te Ching* clearly has thematic focus, it is very likely the work of more than one author, or the work of one author with several secondary contributors. The traditional ascription of authorship is to Lao Tzu, supposedly, an older contemporary of Confucius (551–479 BCE). Very little is known about the historical figure of Lao Tzu, and much of this is clearly based on legend, for example, the story that Lao Tzu composed the text at the behest of a crossing guard. The allusion of this story may have been in reference to the brevity of the text coupled with the sharpness of its vision.

What this version of the *Tao Te Ching* does is present a hermeneutical extraction of the central philosophical themes of the text, rendering them into clear, lucid statements. The whole text now reads resonantly, and presents itself as the work of one voice, issuing from a singular vision. The title that this version bears is a reflection of this refocusing. The rendering of the text is the result of cross-lateral work straddling several versions and the redaction of the thematic focus of each individual poem. The primary process of focus was to ask, what in essence, was being communicated within the poem, or within the several poems in each numbered strata. The result of this hermeneutical redaction is a clearer text, easily acces-

Introduction

sible to first readers.

My hope is that this version will make the ancient text of the *Tao Te Ching* understandable to a wider audience. There is something beautiful, wonderful, and sacred, that is achieved through this visionary work by Lao Tzu. To read these poems is to witness the luminous beauty of the spirit of humanity.

Jarcq Terra

MEDITATIVE READING



This version of the *Tao Te Ching* has been specifically rendered to enhance reading out loud. There are aspects of vocalizing words and paying attentive intention to the inherent meaning and sense of the sounds that allows access to the undercurrent of the message that the words are trying to communicate. The idea is not to simply know what each of the words mean, but rather to get a feeling impression of the intended message. In order to properly achieve this attentive form of sounding and hearing words, a proper setting has to be prepared. Meditative reading requires such a setting, both externally and internally. Below is a suggestion on how to achieve both of these requirements. The suggestions are not prescriptive, merely pointers on how the goal of contemplative and meditative reading may be achieved.

Perhaps the best way to experience and enter into the spiritual intent of meditative reading is to participate in the reading experience with at least one other person. Select a quiet place where you will not be disturbed and enter into a moment of silence before commencing the reading. Each of the poems as they are read, require some form of indicator of completion. A

Meditative Reading

Tibetan singing bowl or such other sound resonator is of great value in providing the indication as well as a vibrational accompaniment for the process of reflecting on the words just read and allowing them to, as it were, seep into one's immediate sense of being. The singing bowl is struck once after a poem has been read. Listen to the resonance of the sound as if it is another representation of the words just read. If a singing bowl is being used, it may also be struck three times in succession before commencing the reading process, while allowing room for each note to completely sound out. That is, allow each note to die down before striking the following note. In order to facilitate the reading experience, one of the at least two people present may do the reading while the other may sound the singing bowl. With more than two people present, the reading may be shared among those present.

The poems in *The Book of the Way and its Way* have been formatted into nine sections of nine poems each. This arrangement facilitates the process of meditative reading as suggested above. This means that the text does not have to be read in its entirety at each reading session, but can be divided into reading sessions of at least nine poems each or multiples thereof. While the singing bowl is struck three times before each reading session, it is suggested to also strike the singing bowl three times after a section of nine poems has been completed. This allows the hearers a longer period of resonate compartment to the entire group of poems just read and also a momentary buffer before reading the next group of poems if another section is being read.

One



The way spoken of, is not the real way
The way defined, a shadow of the real

It is what remains unnamed that is the real
What we name, its creatix

Hidden from view, it is source of all
Made visible, it is all that is

Visible and invisible
Are intertwined at source
An unfathomable depth

Grasp this, and you have begun
To embrace the mystery

Two



When beauty is defined, illusions of non-beauty manifest
When goodness is identified, badness becomes an option

To everything named there is a shadow
What is difficult is shadow to what is easy
Long—to what is short
High—to what is low
Front—to what is back

To be without shadow is the goal
Doing—without knowledge of doing
Raising up—without bringing down
Giving—without seeking recompense
Achieving—without seeking acclaim

It is through forgetting oneself
That nothing is forgotten

Three



Seeking glory creates envy in others
Gathering riches, a cause for stealing
Flaunting pleasures fans desires

Seek therefore:
The other's peace of mind
The other's contentment
The other's self-esteem
The other's well-being

Absence of wants maintains simplicity
Simplicity confounds the haughty

Do and be, only what is needed
And all will be accomplished

Four



Emptiness precedes usefulness
An unfilled infinite potential

Within it, chaos becomes symmetry
Paradoxes are untangled
Light is enlightened
The many become one

It is an unfathomable and great deep
The source of all that is

Five



All things are transient
The Universe ever-changing

The wise value fluidity of being
And flow with the changes

The Universe is a birth chamber
An unceasing font of becoming
Its creativity is inexhaustible

Words are not sufficient to express this
Find the truth within your inner being

Six



What is below is infinite
The other side of the mystery
This mysterious divine feminine is root
A doorway to all that is

It is ineffable, silent, elusive
Yet when discovered, it is ever-present

Seven



What is above is eternal
What is below is eternal

Eternity consists of this and only this:
Living life for the other

This is true wisdom
Being ahead comes from being last
Gaining from yielding
Fulfilment from emptying oneself

Eight



The best you can become
Is to be like water
It is pliable, self-giving, and yielding
It finds the most humble place
And settles there

This is the way of the way
To seek the humble way
To trust the depth that is the heart
To become an intimate of compassion
To speak moderately and truthfully
To seek love as a prelude to governance
To work at what builds up
To find harmony in all actions

Seek the way of the way in all things
And all will be what needs to be