

Of all the various translations of Lao Tsu's *Tao Te Ching*, the one by Gia-fu Feng and Jane English is the most popular, having sold well over one million copies. Gia-fu was a scholar, and recognized his lack of balance. So he devoted his life to being wild, erotic, emotional and illogical – and to using simple and direct language. His Stillpoint Retreat Center near Wetmore Colorado was oftentimes anything but still. The bathtub was in the main meeting room; the toilet was just inside the entrance to the building; Gia-fu could see everything from his window at night, and often accused his followers of spreading venereal diseases. The community members were encouraged to express emotion openly rather than suppress it, and I once saw a slapping exchange between a man and a woman at 3 am just before the morning meeting, in the presence of the full assembly. It was not interrupted by the others. Gia-fu himself did not pretend to be beyond sex, and had marriages with two of his followers. Sometimes he drank heavily, and his smoking habit undoubtedly contributed to his death from lung cancer at 66. Not exactly the life of “The Wise Man” of the *Tao Te Ching*, but nevertheless his chaotic way fits perfectly with the workings of the Tao.

Though the primitive can be a road to the Primal, it is not the Primal. Many people who style themselves “spiritual”, “egoless”, and “beyond sex” are stuck in their ideas of what it is to be truly spiritual, egoless, and beyond sex. Perhaps they are denying who they are, and confused about who they think they want to be. Gia-fu was a master at detecting hypocrisy, and he routinely exposed anyone around him who pretended anything. One who lives in pretense can often become unstuck by being reduced to his instincts.

Sanctimonious words are useless. And so, Gia-fu's *Tao Te Ching* is real and alive and unpretentious. Some translators of Lao Tsu sugarcoat the medicine when it is bitter. Not Gia-fu! Honest people seeking truth, and not afraid of truth, resonate with it. If you seek to arrive, and to not just follow this or that path all your life, this may be the only book you will need.



* * *

All religions are religions because they are self-limiting. A religion is defined by a specific teaching and ritual. This teaching and ritual are what give the religion a sense of solidity, of certainty. And this sense of certainty is the *sine qua non* of faith. Thus, to secure the faith of a flock, the founders must self-limit their system. And the very thing that a religion claims to do – approach the Unlimited – it can't do.

What Lao Tsu offers is not a religion. What he offers is liquidity. He teaches the way of flowing with life – the direct path to the Tao. This has been called “the path without a path”. He does not lay down rules and prohibitions, he does not threaten divine retribution or seduce with divine rewards. There is no “good and evil”. Thus, there are no morals to limit the seeker's path, but on the contrary: Lao Tsu encourages each individual to go ahead and try anything he wishes; he will only meet with dead ends. Then he will discover for himself that living the Tao is the only life worth living. Man and the world are seen as ghosts only. It does not matter what we do because we have no power. Eventually, we all return to the Tao – the True Self. When? That is up to us.

Lao Tsu does not offer a meditation practice. Gia-fu states: “Meditation in Taoism is when you hit rock bottom. We call it ‘The Great Stillness’. Or sometimes I translate it as ‘The Great Certainty’... Your whole body is settling in stillness. You reach the rock bottom like a rock in the ocean. You really are a rock because you don't have to use mind. No interference with the mind” (From an interview entitled “Wandering on the Way”, originally published in *The Dragon's Mouth* magazine, and available on the website abode-tao.com)

And Lao Tsu does not even offer us a saint to emulate. A Buddhist can live as he believes the Buddha lived; a Christian can aspire to be “Christ-like”. But both The Wise Man and Lao Tsu himself are as slippery as the Tao itself. They are authentic originals; you too must be an authentic

original.

Just as there have been many translations and interpretations of the *Tao Te Ching*, there have been many varieties of Tao-isms. But Lao Tsu's teaching can't be made into one. No -ism can be compatible with the *Tao Te Ching*. There are no rituals, no priests or ministers, no temples, no congregation, no gods mentioned anywhere in the *Tao Te Ching*. And no beliefs! All this is mere fantasm and excess baggage. We are simply advised to drop everything, to return to our unborn, Primal state. This state is prior to and beyond the opposites of Yang and Yin that are the primitive roots of the world; prior to fear, desire, and thought. It is the No-thing-ness: darkness, emptiness, chaos, the absence of a conscious mind. What is then left? In Gia-fu's words: "A state of mind that is non-judgmental, a state of suchness. Nothing is set, you notice; it's all in flux and you can stay with your experience without rejecting or accepting. If you're angry, be angry. If you feel shitty, be shitty. If you're depressed, be depressed. You really see the pure Light (that) is beyond accepting or rejecting. The Taoist mantra would be: 'There's nothing lacking, nothing in excess'. It is only because we accept and reject that we know not the suchness of things" (Ibid.)

* * *

There are various ways to translate the title of this text into English. The Chinese character "Ching" means "classic" or "great book". The character "Te" means "virtue", "integrity", "inner strength", or even "divine power". The character "Tao" is impossible to translate. (See our treatment of this word in the **Notes** section at the end of the text, and in "The Nectar of Chuang Tsu", also on this website).

General information about the text, which is dated about 600 BC, and its author Lao Tsu, is available from many sources and will not be repeated here. It is said that Confucius, after he met with Lao Tsu, said to his disciples: "The animal which runs on the ground gets caught in a trap, the fish leaping out of the water gets caught in a net, the bird which soars in the skies is shot by an arrow, but the Dragon which rises above the clouds I do not know how to capture. I have

met Lao Tsu; he is as this Dragon.” (Translated from Colodron, A. *Tao Te King* de la versión de John Wu, Arca de Sabiduria, Editorial EDAT, 1993). Why a Dragon? Lao Tsu is not interested in your health, your safety, your relationships with others, your accomplishments; he points out to you the chaos, the confusion, the contradiction of your life, the futility of all your efforts, that at any moment anything can change into its opposite. This Dragon is not interested in presenting to you a new world view; he shatters your old reality. He is not interested in offering you “food for thought”; he grabs you by the gonads and slams your mechanical brain to the pavement. He is not interested in whether you like his words or not; he cuts out your sentimental heart and feeds it to you raw.

There will always be those who look at their lives and need to believe that such a man as Lao Tsu could not exist. To them, he will always be “just a legend”.

* * *

When we are reading something that moves us, we usually have a strong urge to continue to read. To do so is a mistake. Words loaded on top of words – we are attempting to keep an emotion or insight alive. We read on in the hope that the author will take our hand and find for us the way out of all the layers of our own disowned “stuff”, lead us through the dark catacombs to the Light. No author can do this. Our effort to take the easy way leaves us empty handed; our strategy simply dilutes the intensity of the symbols as they all run together in the soup of our memory. This problem is serious enough in the Chinese, but is even worse in modern occidental languages, which are so rational and logical that the real Life behind them is difficult for a reader to feel.

With a piece of writing such as the *Tao Te Ching*, it is better to read a few words, close the book, close your eyes, and passively sink into the space of no-thought. Between the words and the lines, lapse into non-action, non-talking, non-judging. This takes time. It also takes silence – a conducive atmosphere. Something in you deeper than the

consensus reality has been closed for a long time. To open it is not exactly an effort, but it does take the courage to look beyond what you have been calling your world. Look to your silence, your emptiness, your Primal nature, the paradox of who you are, a new way to be – but the ancient way that we really are. Be naked and alone, and just fall into this profound teaching. Disappear into it. Die into it. Select almost any verse of the *Tao Te Ching* for your meditation, and it will lead you to the reversal which is the essence of Lao-Tsu's teaching. This essence is not a doctrine, it is a taste.

So go slow. Take the time to open yourself to all the layers of meaning in a passage which strikes a chord in you. You will find yourself at one with "the Tao that is working silently, without words, that really runs the whole universe". (Gia-fu, *Ibid.*) The Explosion into enlightenment will occur.

* * *

Chapter One contains the essence of the entire work. It is supremely profound. If you feel the meaning within these words, you will be able to see that the remaining chapters are as it were footnotes to the first. It is recommended that the reader return frequently to this first chapter as he reads, and see if new, deeper meanings occur to you.

Be alert. For, if you are ready, your Teacher has now appeared.

* * * * *

The Nectar of the
Tao Te Ching

Lao Tsu

Adapted from the translation by
Gia-fu Feng and Jane English

One

The tao that can be put into words is not the eternal Tao;
A presence that can be named
Is not the enduring Presence.
The Indistinguishable is the Source
And the nature of the above-and-below;
To distinguish is to mother ten thousand separate things.

Ever desireless, one dwells in the Splendor;
Ever desiring, one can but look at its manifestations.
These two spring from the same Source,
But appear to be two separate realities;
Thus arises the wandering in darkness.

Enter into the Vast Emptiness within the darkness:
The gateway out of the darkness.

*

See end notes - p. 88

Two

Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty
Only because there is ugliness;
All can know good as good
Only because there is evil.

Therefore having and not having arise together.
Difficult and easy complement each other.
Long and short contrast each other.
High and low rest upon each other.
Voice and sound harmonize each other.
Front and back follow one another.

Therefore the sage goes about doing nothing,
Teaching no-talking,
Meanwhile, the ten thousand things
Rise and fall without cease.

Creating, yet not possessing,
Working, yet not taking credit.
Work is done, then forgotten.
Therefore it lasts forever.

*

See end notes - p. 88

Three

Not exalting the gifted
Prevents quarreling.
Not collecting treasures
Prevents stealing.
Not seeing desirable things
Prevents confusion of the heart.

The wise therefore rule
By emptying desires from hearts and stuffing bellies,
By weakening ambitions and strengthening bones.

If people lack accomplishment and desire,
Then the clever will not try to interfere.
If nothing is done, then all will be well.

*

Four

The Tao is an empty vessel;
It is constantly used, but never filled.
Oh, unfathomable source of ten thousand things!
Blunt the sharpness,
Untangle the knot,
Soften the glare,
Merge the dust.
Oh, hidden deep but ever present!
I do not know from whence it comes.
It is the forefather of the gods.

*

Five

The above-and-below does not bargain;
It sees the ten thousand things as false and meaningless.
The Wise also do not bargain;
They see human beings as false and meaningless.

The space between the above-and-below
Is like the inside of a bellows.
Its shape changes but not its condition.
The more it expands, the more it must yield.

More words count less.
Hold fast to the Center.

*

See end notes - p. 88

Six

The valley spirit never dies;
It is the feminine, yin, the primal mother.
She holds the key to life under heaven.
It is like a veil barely seen through.
Use it; it will never fail.

*

See end notes - p. 89

Seven

Above-and-below lasts forever.
Why does above-and-below last forever?
It is unborn, so ever living.
The sage stays behind, thus he is ahead.
He is detached, thus at one with all.
Through action without "I act", he attains fulfillment.

*

Eight

The highest good is like water.
Water gives life to the ten thousand things
And does not strive.
It flows to places humans reject and so is like the Tao.

In dwelling, be close to the land.
In meditation, go deep in the heart.
In dealing with others, be gentle and kind.
In speech, be true.
In ruling, be just.
In business, be conscientious.
In action, be in the present moment!

No fight, no blame.

*

Nine

Better stop short than fill to the brim.
Oversharpen the blade, and the edge will soon blunt.
Amass a store of gold and jade, and no one can protect it.
Claim wealth and titles, and disaster will follow.

Retire when the work is done.
This is the way of heaven.

*

Ten

Carrying both a body and a soul, yet embracing the One,
Can you avoid being split?
Fully alert, yet non-resisting,
Can you be as a newborn babe?
Purifying and clarifying the Primal Vision,
Can you be impeccable?
Loving all and ruling the country,
Can you be without cleverness?
Opening and closing the gates of heaven,
Can you play the role of the feminine?
Understanding and being open to all things,
Are you able to do nothing?

Giving birth and nourishing,
Bearing yet not possessing,
Working yet not taking credit,
Leading yet not dominating,
This is Primal Virtue.

*

See end notes - p. 89

Eleven

Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub;
Worthless without the hole in the center!
Shape clay into a vessel;
Worthless without the space within.
Cut doors and windows for a room;
It is these openings which make it accessible.

Therefore profit may come from what is there;
But value comes from what is not there.

*

Twelve

The five colors blind the eye.
The five tones deafen the ear.
The five flavors dull the taste.
Racing and hunting madden the mind.
Precious things lead one astray.

Therefore the sage is guided by what he feels
And not by what he imagines.
He lets go of that and chooses this.

*

Thirteen

Accept disgrace willingly.
Accept misfortune as the human condition.

What do you mean by
"Accept disgrace willingly?"
Accept being unimportant.
Do not be concerned with loss or gain.
This is called "Accepting disgrace willingly."

What do you mean by
"Accept misfortune as the human condition?"
Misfortune comes from having a body.
Without a body, how could there be misfortune?

Surrender yourself humbly.
Then you can be trusted to care for all things.
Love the world as your own self.
Then you can truly care for all things.

*

Fourteen

Look, it cannot be seen --- it is beyond form.
Listen, it cannot be heard --- it is beyond sound.
Grasp, it cannot be held --- it is beyond control.
These three are illimitable;
Therefore they are joined as one.

From above it is not bright;
From below it is not dark:
An unbroken thread beyond description.
It returns to nothingness.
The form of the Formless,
The image of the Invisible,
It is called indefinable and beyond imagination.

Stand before it and there is no beginning.
Follow it and there is no end.
Stay with the ancient Tao,
Move with the present.

Tasting the Unbegun Beginning is the essence of Tao.

*

Fifteen

The ancient masters were
Subtle, mysterious, profound, responsive.
The depth of their wisdom is unfathomable.
Because it is unfathomable,
All we can do is describe their appearance.

Watchful, like men crossing a winter stream.
Alert, like men aware of danger.
Courteous, like visiting guests.
Yielding, like ice about to melt.
Simple, like uncarved blocks of wood.
Hollow, like caves.
Opaque, like muddy pools.

Who can wait quietly while the mud settles?
Who can remain still until the moment of action?
Observers of the Tao do not seek to succeed.
Not seeking to succeed,
They are not swayed by desire for change.

*

See end notes - p. 90

Sixteen

Empty yourself of everything.
Let the mind rest at peace.
The ten thousand things rise and fall
While the Self watches their return.
They grow and flourish and then return to the Source.
Returning to the Source is stillness,
Which is the way of nature.
The way of nature is unchanging.

Knowing that which endures is insight.
Not knowing that which endures leads to disaster.
Knowing that which endures, the mind is open.
With an open mind, you will be openhearted.
Being openhearted, you will act royally.
Being royal, you will attain the divine.
Being divine, you will be at one with Tao.
Being at one with Tao is eternal.

And though the body dies, the Tao will never pass away.

*

Seventeen

The very highest is little known by men.
Then comes that which they know and love,
Then that which is feared,
Then that which is despised.

He who does not trust the highest
will not be entrusted with it.

Actions produce results
Without unnecessary speech.
But then people claim: "We did it!"

*

See end notes - p. 90

Eighteen

When the great Tao is forgotten,
Kindness and morality arise.
When the clever intellect is born,
The great pretense begins.

When there is no peace within the family,
Filial piety and ties of blood are invoked.
When the country is confused and in chaos,
'Loyal patriots' appear.

*

Nineteen

Give up sainthood, renounce wisdom,
And it will be a hundred times better for everyone.

Give up kindness, renounce morality,
And men will rediscover sincere filial love.

Give up ingenuity, renounce profit,
And bandits and thieves will disappear.

These three are outward forms alone;
They are not sufficient in themselves.
It is more important
To see the simplicity,
To realize one's true nature,
To cast off selfishness
And temper desire.

*

Twenty

Give up thinking and put an end to your troubles.

Is there a difference between yes and no?
Is there a difference between good and evil?
Must I fear what others fear? What nonsense!
Other people are contented
Enjoying the sacrificial feast of the ox.
In spring some go to the park, and climb the terrace.
But I alone am drifting, not knowing where I am.
Like a newborn babe before it learns to smile,
I am alone, without a place to go.

Others have more than they need,
But I alone have nothing.
I am a fool. Oh, yes! I am confused.
Other men are clear and bright,
But I alone am dim and weak.
Other men are sharp and clever,
But I alone am dull and stupid.
Oh, I drift like the waves of the sea,
Without direction, like the restless wind.

Everyone else is busy,
But I alone am aimless and depressed.
I am different.
I am nourished by the Great Mother.

*

See end notes - p. 90

Twenty-One

The greatest virtue is to follow Tao and Tao alone.
The Tao is elusive and intangible.
Oh, it is intangible and elusive,
And yet within It is all that is imaginable.
Oh, it is elusive and intangible,
And yet within It is all that has form.
Oh, it is dim and dark, and yet within It is essence.
This essence is very real,
And in it alone can we place our faith.
From the very beginning until now
Its presence has never lapsed.
Thus I perceive the creation.

How do I know the ways of creation?
Because they are obvious.

*

See end notes - p. 90

Twenty-Two

Yield and overcome;
Bend and be straight;
Empty and be full;
Wear out and be new;
Have little and gain;
Have much and be confused.

Therefore the wise embrace the one
And set an example to all.
Not putting on a display,
They shine forth.
Not justifying themselves,
They are distinguished.
Not boasting,
They receive recognition.
Not bragging,
They never fail.
They do not quarrel,
So no one quarrels with them.
Therefore the ancients say, "Yield and overcome."
Is that an empty saying?

Be really whole,
And all things will come to you.

*

Twenty-Three

To talk little is natural.
High winds do not last all morning.
Heavy rain does not last all day.
Why is this? Above-and-below! Yang-and-yin!
If above-and-below cannot make anything eternal,
How is it possible for man?

He who follows the Tao
Is at one with the Tao.
He who is virtuous
Encounters Virtue.
He who loses the way
Feels lost.

When you are at one with the Tao,
The Tao welcomes you.
When you are at one with Virtue,
The Virtue is always there.
When you are at one with loss,
The loss is experienced willingly.

He who does not trust in Tao
Will not be entrusted with It.

*

See end notes - p. 91

Twenty-Four

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.

*

Twenty Five

Something mysteriously formed,
Born before heaven-and-earth.
In the Silence and the Void,
Standing alone and unchanging,
Ever present but in motion.
Perhaps it is the mother of ten thousand things.
I do not know its name.
Call it Tao.
For lack of a better word, I call it great.

Being great, it flows.
It flows far away.
Having gone far, it returns.

Therefore, "Tao is great;
Heaven is great;
Earth is great;
The Master is also great."
These are the four great powers of the universe,
And the Master is one of them.

The Master obeys earth.
Earth obeys heaven.
Heaven obeys the Tao.
Tao follows what is natural.

*

Twenty-Six

The heavy is the root of the light;
The still is the master of unrest.

Therefore the sage, travelling all day,
Does not lose sight of his baggage.
Though there are beautiful things to be seen,
He remains unattached and calm.

Why should one who has transcended the world
Act lightly in public?
To be light is to lose one's root.
To be restless is to be trapped in the world.

*

Twenty-Seven

A good walker leaves no tracks;
A good speaker makes no slip;
A good reckoner needs no tally;
A good door needs no lock,
Yet no one can open it.
Good binding requires no knots,
Yet no one can loosen it.

Therefore the sage takes care of all men
And abandons no one.
He takes care of all things
And abandons nothing.

This is called "following the Light."

What is a good man?
A teacher of a bad man.
What is a bad man?
A good man's task.
If the teacher is not respected,
And the student not cared for,
Confusion will arise, however clever one is.
This is a crossroads, a profound mystery.

*

Twenty Eight

Know the strength of the masculine,
But keep the caring of the feminine!
Be the stream of the universe!
Being the stream of the universe,
Ever true and unswerving,
Become as a little child once more.

Know the white,
But keep the black!
Be an example to the world!
Being an example to the world,
Ever true and unwavering,
Return to the infinite.

Know honor,
Yet keep humility.
Be the valley of the universe!
Being the valley of the universe,
Ever true and resourceful,
Return to the state of the uncarved block.

When the block is carved, it becomes useful.
When the sage uses it, its use is quickened.
Thus, "A great tailor cuts little."

*

See end notes - p. 91

Twenty-Nine

Do you think you can take over the universe
And improve it?
I do not believe it can be done.

The universe is sacred.
You cannot improve it.
If you try to change it, you will ruin it.
If you try to keep it, you will lose it.

So sometimes things are ahead
And sometimes they are behind;
Sometimes breathing is hard, sometimes it comes easily;
Sometimes there is strength and sometimes weakness;
Sometimes one is up and sometimes down.

Therefore the sage avoids
Extremes, excesses and complacency.

*

Thirty

Whenever you advise a ruler in the way of Tao,
Counsel him not to use force to conquer the universe.
For this would only cause resistance.
Thorn bushes spring up wherever an army has passed.
Lean years follow in the wake of a great war.
Just do what needs to be done.
Never take advantage of power.

Achieve results,
But never glory in them.
Achieve results,
But never boast.
Achieve results,
But never be proud.
Achieve results,
Because this is the natural way.
Achieve results,
But not through violence.

Force is followed by loss of strength.
This is not the way of Tao.
That which goes against the Tao
Comes to an early end.

*

Thirty-One

Sharp weapons are instruments of fear;
All creatures hate them.
Therefore followers of Tao never use them.
The wise man prefers the left.
The man of war prefers the right.

Weapons are instruments of fear;
They are not a wise man's tools.
He uses them only when he has no choice.
Peace and quiet are dear to his heart,
And victory no cause for rejoicing.
If you rejoice in victory, then you delight in killing;
If you delight in killing, you cannot fulfill yourself.

On happy occasions precedence is given to the left,
On sad occasions to the right.
In the army the general stands on the left,
The commander-in-chief on the right.
This means that war is conducted like a funeral.
When many people are being killed,
They should be mourned in heartfelt sorrow.
That is why a victory must be observed like a funeral.

*

See end notes - p. 91

Thirty-Two

The Tao is forever undefined.
Small though it is in the unformed state,
It cannot be grasped.
If kings and lords could harness it,
The ten thousand things would naturally obey.
Above-and-below would disappear into one another
And gentle rain would fall.
Humans would need no more correction,
And all things would flow in harmony.

Once the whole is divided, the parts need names.
There are already enough names and enough words.
One must know when to stop.
Knowing when to stop averts trouble.

Tao in the world is like a river flowing home to the sea.

*

See end notes - p. 91

Thirty-Three

Knowing others is wisdom;
Knowing the Self is enlightenment.
Mastering others requires force;
Mastering one's ego needs strength.

He who knows he has enough is rich.
Perseverance is the power of stillness.
He who accepts where he is endures.

To die as an ego but not to perish
is to be eternally present.

*

See end notes - p. 92

Thirty-Four

The great Tao flows everywhere,
Both to the left and to the right.
The ten thousand things depend upon it;
It holds nothing back.
It fulfills its purpose silently and makes no claim.

It nourishes the ten thousand things.
And yet is not their lord.
It has no aim; it is very meek.

The ten thousand things return to it,
Yet it is not their lord.
It is very great.

It does not show greatness,
And it is therefore truly great.

*

Thirty-Five

All men will come to him who keeps to the One.
For there lie rest and happiness and peace.

Passersby may stop for music and good food,
But when the Tao is described,
It seems without substance or flavor.
It cannot be seen, it cannot be heard.
And yet it cannot be exhausted.

*

Thirty-Six

That which shrinks
Must first expand.
That which fails
Must first be strong.
That which is cast down
Must first be raised.
Before receiving
There must be giving.

This is called perception of the nature of things.
Soft and weak overcome hard and strong.

Fish cannot leave deep waters.
And a country's weapons should not be displayed.

*

Thirty-Seven

Tao abides in non-action,
Yet nothing is left undone.
If kings and lords observed this,
The ten thousand things would develop naturally.
Then, whatsoever they desire,
Would return them to the simplicity of formless substance.
Without form there is no desire.
Without desire there is tranquility.
And through this all things would be at peace.

*

Thirty-Eight

A truly good man is not aware of his goodness,
And is therefore good.
A foolish man tries to be good,
And is therefore not good.

A truly good man does nothing,
Yet leaves nothing undone.
A foolish man is always doing,
Yet much remains to be done.

When a truly kind man does something,
He leaves nothing undone.
When a just man does something,
He leaves a great deal to be done.
When an authority does something and no one responds,
He rolls up his sleeves in an attempt to enforce order.

Therefore when the Tao is lost, there is goodness.
When goodness is lost, there is kindness.
When kindness is lost, there is justice.
When justice is lost, there is ritual.
Now ritual is the husk of faith and loyalty,
The beginning of confusion.
Knowledge of what 'should be'
Is only a flowery trapping of Tao.
It is the beginning of folly.

Therefore the truly great man dwells on what is real
And not what is on the surface,
On the fruit and not the flower.
Therefore accept the one and reject the other.

*

See end notes - p. 92

Thirty-Nine

These things from ancient times arise from one:
The sky is whole and clear.
The earth is whole and firm.
The spirit is whole and strong.
The valley is whole and full.
The ten thousand things are whole and alive.
Kings and lords are whole, and the country is upright.
All these are by virtue of wholeness.

The clarity of the sky prevents its falling.
The density of the earth prevents its splitting.
The strength of the spirit prevents its being used up.
The fullness of the valley prevents its running dry.
The growth of the ten thousand things
Prevents their dying out.
The leadership of kings and lords
Prevents the downfall of the country.

Therefore the humble is the root of the noble.
The low is the foundation of the high.
Princes and lords consider themselves
"abandoned," "unloved," and "worthless."
Do they not depend on being humble?

Too much success is not an advantage.
Do not tinkle like jade
Or clatter like stone chimes.

*

Forty

Returning is the motion of the Tao.
Yielding is the way of the Tao.
The ten thousand things are born of Being.
Being is born of Non-being.

*

Forty-One

The wise student hears of the Tao
And practices it diligently.
The average student hears of the Tao
And gives it thought now and again.
The foolish student hears of the Tao
And laughs aloud.
If there were no laughter, the Tao would not be what it is!

Hence it is said:
The bright path seems dim;
Going forward seems like retreat;
The easy way seems hard;
The highest Virtue seems empty;
Great purity seems sullied;
A wealth of Virtue seems inadequate;
The strength of Virtue seems frail;
Real Virtue seems unreal;
In a perfect square you see no corners;
Great talents ripen late;
The greatest sound is Silence;
The greatest form has no shape.

The Tao is hidden and without name.
The Tao alone
Nourishes and brings everything to fulfillment.

*

Forty-Two

The Tao begets the One.
The One begets two.
Two beget three.
And three beget the ten thousand things.

The ten thousand things carry yin and embrace yang.
They achieve harmony by combining these forces.
Men hate to be "orphaned," "widowed," and "worthless,"
But this is how kings and lords describe themselves.

For one gains by losing
And loses by gaining.

What others teach, I also teach; that is:
"A violent man will die a violent death!"
This will be the essence of my teaching.

*

See end notes - p. 92

Forty-Three

The softest thing in the universe
Overcomes the hardest thing in the universe.
That without substance can enter where there is no room.
Hence, I know the value of non-action.

Teaching without words and work without doing:
It is a world where very few dwell.

*

See end notes - p. 92

Forty-Four

To be famous or simply to Be: Which matters more?
To have wealth or Self: Which is more precious?
Gain or loss: Which is more painful?

He who is attached to things will suffer much.
He who saves will suffer heavy loss.
A contended man is never disappointed.
He who knows when to stop
Does not find himself in trouble.
He will stay forever safe.

*

Forty-Five

Great accomplishment seems imperfect,
Yet its value outlives it.
Great fullness seems empty,
Yet it cannot be exhausted.

Great straightness seems twisted.
Great intelligence seems stupid.
Great eloquence seems awkward.

Movement overcomes cold.
Stillness overcomes heat.

Stillness and tranquillity set things in order in the universe.

*

Forty-Six

When the Tao is present in the universe,
The horses haul manure.
When the Tao is absent from the universe,
War horses are bred outside the city.

There is no greater sin than ambition;
There is no greater curse than desire;
There is no greater misfortune than selfishness.

Therefore he who knows that enough is enough
Will always have enough.

*

Forty-Seven

Without going outside,
You may know the whole world.
Without looking through the window,
You may see the ways of heaven.
The farther you go, the less you know.

Thus the sage knows without traveling;
He sees without looking;
He works without doing.

*

Forty-Eight

In the pursuit of learning,
Every day something is acquired.
In the pursuit of Tao,
Every day something is dropped.

Less and less is done.
Until non-action is achieved.
When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.

The world is ruled by letting things take their course.
It cannot be ruled by interfering.

*

Forty-Nine

The sage has no mind of his own.
He is aware of the needs of others.

I am good to people who are good.
I am also good to people who are not good.
Because Virtue is goodness.
I have faith in people who are faithful.
I also have faith in people who are not faithful.
Because Virtue is faithfulness.

The sage is shy and humble --
To the world he seems confusing.
People look to him and listen.
He behaves like a little child.

*

Fifty

Between birth and death,
Three in ten place their faith in life,
Three in ten place their faith in death,
And those just passing from birth to death
With no faith also number three in ten.
Why is this so?
Because they live their lives on the animal level.

He who knows how to live can walk abroad
Without fear of rhinoceros or tiger.
He will not be wounded in battle.
For in him the rhinoceros can find no place
To thrust its horn,
The tiger no place to use its claws,
And weapons no place to pierce.
Why is this so?
He has already died; there is no place for death to enter.

*

See end notes - p. 93

Fifty-One

All things arise from Tao.
They are nourished by Virtue.
They are formed from matter.
They are shaped by environment.
Thus the ten thousand things
All respect Tao and honor Virtue.
Respect of Tao and honor of Virtue are not forced,
But they are in the nature of things.

Therefore all things arise from Tao.
By Virtue they are nourished,
Developed, cared for,
Sheltered, comforted,
Grown, and protected.

Creating without forcing,
Doing without taking credit,
Guiding without interfering,
This is Primal Virtue.

*

Fifty-Two

The beginning of the universe
Is the mother of all things.
Knowing the mother, one also knows the child.
Knowing the child, yet remaining in touch with the mother,
Brings freedom from fear and from death,
Even though the body be destroyed.

Keep your mouth shut,
Guard the senses,
And life is ever full.
Open your mouth,
Always be busy,
And life is beyond hope.

Seeing the unnoticed is insight;
Yielding to force is strength.
Using the outer light, return to insight,
And in this way be saved from harm.
This is the way to attain immortality.

*

See end notes - p. 93

Fifty-Three

If I have even just a little sense,
I will walk on the main road
And my only fear will be of straying from it.
Keeping to the main road is easy,
But people delight in diversions!

When the court is arrayed in splendor,
The fields are full of weeds,
And the granaries are bare.
Some wear gorgeous clothes,
Carry sharp swords,
And indulge themselves with food and drink;
They have more possessions than they can use.
They are robber barons.
This is certainly not the way of Tao.

*

See end notes - p. 93

Fifty-Four

What is firmly established cannot be uprooted.
What is firmly grasped cannot slip away.
It will be honored from generation to generation.

Cultivate Virtue in your self,
And Virtue will be real.
Cultivate it in the family,
And Virtue will be shared.
Cultivate it in the village,
And Virtue will grow.
Cultivate it in the nation,
And Virtue will be abundant.
Cultivate it in the universe,
And Virtue will be everywhere.

Therefore treat the body as exactly what it is;
Treat the family as exactly what it is;
Treat the village as exactly what it is;
Treat the nation as exactly what it is;
Treat the universe as exactly what it is.

How do I know what these are?
By looking!

*

Fifty-Five

He who is filled with Virtue is like a newborn child.
Wasps and serpents will not sting him;
Wild beasts will not pounce upon him;
He will not be attacked by birds of prey.
His bones are soft, his muscles weak,
But his grip is firm.
He has not experienced the union of man and woman,
But his whole being flows with the juice of life;
He is undivided.
He screams all day without becoming hoarse.
This is perfect harmony.

Knowing harmony is stillness.
Knowing stillness is enlightenment.

It is not wise to rush about.
Controlling the breath causes strain.
If too much energy is used, exhaustion follows.
This is not the way of Tao.
Whatever is contrary to Tao will not last long.

*

Fifty-Six

Those who know do not talk.
Those who talk do not know.

Keep your mouth closed.
Guard your senses.
Temper your sharpness.
Simplify your problems.
Mask your brightness.
Be at one with the dust of the earth.
This is primal union.

He who has achieved this state
Is unconcerned with friends and enemies,
With good and harm, with honor and disgrace.
This therefore is the highest state of man.

*

Fifty-Seven

Rule a nation with justice.
Wage war with spontaneous moves.
Become master of the universe without striving.
Why do I say these words?
Because of this:

The more laws and restrictions there are,
The poorer people become.
The sharper people's weapons,
The more trouble in the land.
The more ingenious and clever people are,
The more strange things happen.
The more rules and regulations,
The more thieves and robbers.

Therefore the sage says:
I take no action and people are transformed
I enjoy peace and people become honest.
I do nothing and people become rich.
I have no desires
And people return to the good and simple life.

*

See end notes - p. 93

Fifty-Eight

When the country is ruled with a light hand,
The people are simple.
When the country is ruled with severity,
The people are cunning.

Happiness is rooted in misery.
Misery lurks beneath happiness.
Who knows what 'ought to be' ?
There is no 'normal.'
The 'normal' becomes the 'abnormal.'
Goodness becomes witchcraft.
And the bewitchment of a person lasts for a long time.

Therefore the sage is sharp but not cutting,
Pointed but not piercing,
Straightforward but not mean,
Brilliant but not blinding.

*

See End Notes - p. 94

Fifty-Nine

In caring for others and serving heaven,
There is nothing like using temperance.
Temperance begins with giving up one's own ideas.
This depends on Virtue gathered in the past.
If there is a good store of Virtue,
Then nothing is impossible.
If nothing is impossible, then there is the infinite.
If a man knows the infinite, then he is fit to be a ruler.

The mother principle of ruling holds good for a long time.
This is called having a deep root in the Great Certainty:
The Tao of long life and eternal vision.

*

See end notes - p. 94

Sixty

Ruling the country is like cooking a small fish.
Approach the universe with Tao,
And evil will have no power.
Not that evil is not powerful,
But its power will not be aroused to harm others.
Not only will it do no harm to others,
But the sage himself will also be protected.
They do not oppose each other,
And the Virtue in each one is enjoyed by both.

*

Sixty-One

A great country is like low land.
It is the meeting ground of the universe,
The mother of the universe.

The female overcomes the male with stillness,
Lying low in stillness.

Therefore if a great country
Gives way to a smaller country,
It will conquer the smaller country.
And if a small country
Submits to a great country,
It can conquer the great country.
Therefore those who would conquer must yield,
And those who conquer do so because they yield.

A big nation needs more servants;
A small country needs to serve.
Each gets what it wants.
And, in due course, the big nation will yield.

*

Sixty-Two

Tao is the source of the ten thousand things.
It is the treasure of the good man,
And the refuge of the bad.
Sweet words can buy honor;
But sincere deeds can gain respect.
If a person is bad, do not abandon him.

Therefore on the day the emperor is crowned,
Or the three officers of state installed,
Do not send a gift of jade and a team of four horses,
But remain still and offer the Tao.

Why does everyone at last seek the Tao above all else?
Isn't it because you find what you seek
And are guided by your mistakes?
Therefore this is the greatest treasure of the universe.

*

Sixty-Three

Practice non-action.
Work without doing.
Taste the tasteless.
Honor the humble.
Remember the forgotten.
Reward bitterness with care.
See simplicity in the complicated.
Achieve greatness in little things.

In the universe the difficult things
Are done as if they are easy.
In the universe great acts are made up of small deeds.
The sage does not attempt anything very big,
And thus greatness befalls him.

Easy promises make for little trust.
Taking things lightly results in great difficulty.
Because the sage accepts all hardships,
He never experiences them.

*

See end notes - p. 94

Sixty-Four

Peace is easily maintained;
Trouble is easily overcome before it starts.
The brittle is easily shattered;
The trivial is easily scattered.

Deal with it before it happens.
Set things in order before there is confusion.

A tree as great as a man's embrace
Springs from a small shoot;
A terrace nine stories high begins with a pile of earth;
A journey of a thousand miles starts under one's feet.

He who acts defeats his own purpose;
He who grasps loses.
The sage does not act, and so is not defeated.
He does not grasp and therefore does not lose.

People usually fail when they are on the verge of success.
So give as much care to the end as to the beginning;
Then there will be no failure.

Therefore the sage seeks freedom from desire.
He does not collect precious things.
He learns not to hold on to ideas.
He brings others back to what they have lost.
He helps the ten thousand things find their own nature --
But refrains from action.

*

Sixty-Five

In the beginning those who knew the Tao
Did not try to enlighten others,
But kept them in the dark.

Why is it so hard to teach?
Because people are so clever.
Teachers who try to use cleverness
Cheat the people.
Those who teach without cleverness
Are a blessing to the land.
These are the two alternatives.
Understanding these is Primal Virtue.
Primal Virtue is deep and far.
It leads all things back
Toward the great Oneness.

*

See end notes - p. 94

Sixty-Six

Why is the sea king of a hundred streams?
Because it lies below them.
Therefore it is the king of a hundred streams.

If the sage would guide the people,
He must serve with humility.
If he would lead them, he must follow behind.
In this way when the sage rules,
The people will not feel oppressed;
When he stands before them, they will not feel threatened.
The whole world will support him and will not tire of him.

Because he does not compete,
He does not meet with competition.

*

Sixty-Seven

Everyone under heaven says that
My Tao is great and beyond compare.
Because it is great, it seems different.
If it were not different, it would have vanished long ago.

I have three treasures which I cherish and live by:
The first is mercy without preference;
The second is never too much;
The third is daring not to compete with others.

From mercy comes courage;
From economy comes generosity;
From humility comes leadership.

Nowadays people shun mercy, but try to be brave;
They abandon economy, but try to be generous;
They do not believe in humility, but always try to be first.
This is certain death.

Mercy brings victory in battle and strength in defense.
It is the means by which heaven saves and guards.

*

Sixty-Eight

A good soldier is not violent.
A good fighter is not angry.
A good winner is not vengeful.
A good teacher is humble.
This is known as the Virtue of not striving.
This is known as ability to deal with people.
This since ancient times has been known
As the ultimate unity with heaven.

*

Sixty-Nine

There is a saying among soldiers;
"I dare not make the first move
But would rather play the guest;
I dare not advance an inch
But would rather withdraw a foot."

This is called marching without appearing to move,
Rolling up your sleeves without showing your arm,
Capturing the enemy without attacking,
Being armed without weapons.

There is no greater catastrophe
Than underestimating the enemy.
By underestimating the enemy, I almost lost what I value.

Therefore when the deciding battle is joined,
He who has accepted the most pain will win.

*

Seventy

My words are easy to understand and easy to perform,
Yet no person under heaven
Truly knows them or practices them.

My words have ancient beginnings.
My actions are controlled by the All.
Because men do not understand,
They have no knowledge of me.

Those that know me are few;
Those that abuse me are honored.
Therefore the sage wears worn out clothing
And holds the Jewel in his heart.

*

Seventy-One

Knowing ignorance is strength.
Ignoring knowingness is sickness.

If one is sick of sickness, then one is not sick.
The sage is not sick because he is sick of sickness.
Therefore he is not sick.

*

Seventy-Two

When men lack a sense of awe, there will be disaster.

Do not intrude in their homes.

Do not burden them at work.

If you do not interfere, they will not weary of you.

Therefore the sage knows himself but makes no show.

He reveres the Self but is not arrogant.

He lets go of that and chooses this.

*

Seventy-Three

A brave and passionate person will kill or be killed.
A brave and calm person will always preserve life.
Of these two which is good and which is harmful?
Some things are not favored by heaven; who knows why?
Even the sage is unsure of this.

The Tao of heaven does not strive, and yet it overcomes.
It does not speak, and yet is answered.
It does not ask, yet is supplied with all its needs.
It seems at ease, and yet it follows a plan.

Heaven's net casts wide!
Though its meshes are coarse, nothing slips through.

*

Seventy-Four

If people are not afraid to die,
It is of no avail to threaten them with death.

If men live in constant fear of dying,
And if breaking the law means that they will be killed,
Who will dare to break the law?

There is always an official executioner.
If you try to take his place,
It is like trying to be a master carpenter and cutting wood.
If you try to cut wood like a master carpenter,
You will only hurt your hand.

*

Seventy-Five

Why are the people starving?
Because the rulers eat up the money in taxes.
Therefore the people are starving.

Why are the people rebellious?
Because the rulers interfere too much.
Therefore they are rebellious.

Why do the people worry so little about death?
Because the rulers demand too much of life.
Therefore the people take death lightly.

Having little to live on,
One knows better than to value life too much.

*

Seventy-Six

A man is born gentle and weak.
At his death he is hard and stiff.
Green plants are tender and filled with sap.
At their death they are withered and dry.

Therefore the stiff and unbending is the disciple of death.
The gentle and yielding is the disciple of life.

Thus an army without flexibility never wins a battle.
A tree that is unbending is easily broken.

The hard and strong will fall.
The soft and weak will overcome.

*

Seventy-Seven

The Tao of heaven is like the bending of a bow.
The high is lowered, and the low is raised.
If the string is too long, it is shortened;
If there is not enough, it is made longer.

The Tao of heaven is
To take from those who have too much
And give to those who do not have enough.
The way of the human is different:
He takes from those who do not have enough
to give to those who already have too much.

What man has more than enough
And gives it to the world?
Only the man of Tao.

Therefore the sage works without recognition.
He achieves what has to be done without dwelling on it.
He does not try to show his knowledge.

*

Seventy-Eight

Under heaven,
Nothing is more soft and yielding than water.
Yet for attacking the solid and strong,
Nothing is better; it has no equal.
The weak can overcome the strong;
The supple can overcome the stubborn.
Under heaven everyone knows this,
Yet no one puts it into practice.

Therefore the sage says:
He who takes upon himself the humiliation of the people
Is fit to rule them.
He who takes upon himself the country's disasters
Deserves to be king of the universe.

The truth often sounds paradoxical.

*

Seventy-Nine

After a bitter quarrel, some resentment must remain.
What can one do about it?
Therefore the sage keeps his half of the bargain
But does not exact his due.
A man of Virtue performs his part,
But a man without Virtue
Requires others to fulfill their obligations.

The Tao of Heaven is impartial.
It stays with good men all the time.

*

Eighty

A small country has fewer people.
Though there are machines
That can work ten to a hundred times faster than man,
They are not needed.
The people take death seriously and do not travel far.
Though they have boats and carriages,
No one uses them.
Though they have armor and weapons,
No one displays them.
Men return to the knotting of rope in place of writing.
Their food is plain and good,
Their clothes fine but simple,
Their homes secure.
They are happy in their ways.
Though they live within sight of their neighbors,
And crowing cocks and barking dogs
Are heard across the way,
They leave each other in peace,
While they all grow old and die.

*

Eighty-One

Truthful words are not sweet.
Sweet words are not truthful.
Good men do not argue.
Those who argue are not good.
Those who know are not learned.
The learned do not know.

The sage never tries to store things up.
The more he does for others, the more he has.
The more he gives to others, the greater his abundance.
The Tao of heaven is pointed but does no harm.
The Tao of the sage is work without effort.

*

See end notes - p. 95

* * * *

End notes

One

+The original translation by Gia-fu and Jane was as follows:

"The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.
The named is the mother of ten thousand things.
Ever desireless, one can see the mystery.
Ever desiring, one can see the manifestations.
These two spring from the same source but differ in name;
This appears as darkness.
Darkness within darkness.
The gate to all mystery."

+ "Tao": The All and the Nothing! There is no equivalent word in English, or in Spanish.

+Throughout this text 'above-and-below' refers to the dynamic interplay between the two primal polarities of yang and yin, which are inseparable. John Wu uses 'heaven-and-earth' hyphenated. Gia-fu does not use hyphens.

+ "The ten thousand things" is an expression which indicates the experience of ordinary perception of a world composed of separate objects. When we shift our consciousness from the True Self to the objective, this is the only world available to us - the 'duality-play' begins. This is all mere fantasies of the body's senses.

*

Two

+Throughout the text, the value of 'non-action' or 'non-doing' is taught in many ways. It does not refer to a deliberate inactivity. It is the way of being which comes automatically to the sage. He makes no effort to be still, it is just his inclination. Movements occur, speaking occurs, but not with the sense of "I am moving" or "I am talking."

*

Five

+There were two different translations by Gia-fu and Jane of the first four lines. Their original translation was:

"Heaven and earth are ruthless;
They see the ten thousand things as dummies.
The wise are ruthless;
They see the people as dummies."

And their later translation was:

"Heaven and earth are impartial;
They see the ten thousand things as straw dogs.
The wise are also impartial,
They see the people as straw dogs."

The message of this verse is a strong one. The word dummies has the connotations of phony, artificial, a puppet, mindless, and dead. To the mystic, such as Lao Tsu, there is no consideration given to whether the truth insults egos or not. He tells us exactly what we are! Those who can hear, learn. Lao Tsu is not concerned with those who cannot hear. They are just dummies.

"Straw dogs" refers to festivals in ancient China in which dogs stuffed with straw were paraded before the onlookers, in order to represent the senselessness of physical existence. So this verse tells us that 'the gods' have no patience for those who try to make it seem real.

*

Six

+The primal masculine, yang: "the sunny side of the mountain", and the primal feminine: "the shady side of the mountain", are the foundation of all phenomena, not only in ancient Chinese cosmology, but also in that of the Andean peoples of South America. A lifelong study and reflection upon this duality is a worthy usage of time. However, we will avoid going any further with it here.

+A second interpretation of the symbol of the veil is that once it is drawn, it is difficult to recognize that our vision is occluded.

*

Ten

+ "Primal Virtue" -- refers to the pre-ego condition of the human

being, which is still there, but "veiled". It is a consciousness beyond, or without, body-awareness, and before the impurities of the animal instincts (Freud's 'pleasure principle'). It is the condition of the sage.

*

Fifteen

+Gia-fu comments on the line: "Who can remain still until the moment of action?" as follows: "There is the meaning of some kind of divine accident here also. You really are very open and still until the moment that you are moved to act. Again, back to the emptiness, total openness, to totally listen to your own center, with no preconceived idea. Now I think that emptiness is the essence of Taoism. Many chapters start with "Be empty." Quoted from an interview with Gia-fu Feng entitled 'Wandering on the Way', *Dragon's Mouth* magazine.

*

Seventeen

+John Wu's translation includes an extra line: "The sage passes unnoticed and spares words."

*

Twenty

+Gia-fu and Jane say: "Give up learning." After comparing this with the translation by Wu and the one by Mitchell, we favor Mitchell's "Give up thinking."

*

Twenty one

+To clarify this point, consider this: "The most perfect road is to seek, find, and experience, first and foremost, the Tao in each moment of your life. "

*

Twenty three

+The words "virtue" and "integrity" both refer to the one who is complete, at One with All.

*

Twenty eight

+The first lines do not refer to a distinction between the sexes, but to yin and yang. Many pseudo-scholars of this and other Chinese writings identify the masculine, yang, with men, and the feminine, yin, with women. In reality, both sexes possess the same 'amounts' of each. We just use them in different ways.

*

Thirty one

+ 'The left' is a symbol for yin, 'the right' a symbol for yang.

*

Thirty two

+We cannot directly experience for what it is anything to which we attach a name. We cannot know its essence, because the word moves our mind into a world which consists solely of symbols. This transition is comparable to the transition from life to death. When we name, we kill our experience, and we may never get it back. The child has a pure connection with life until we teach him to think different words for different 'things.' This is like killing him. Perhaps it is worse than killing his body. After we have spent a certain amount of time in the world of symbols, experiences of the Reality, the inner, are just other things with names. They are not direct experiences any longer. Thus, here Lao Tsu firmly pronounces condemnation of the proliferation of words for and discussion of the Real, the Tao. Just *be* the river flowing to the sea.

*

Thirty three

+The man who immerses himself in peace wherever he may be has found his true home. This line is an excellent example of the many levels on which the teachings of Lao Tsu apply. The reader can begin reading literally, then with poetic symbols, and later through meditation, can discover many new meanings.

*

Thirty eight

+The reference to the future can be taken as a caution against getting lost in an ego trip of clairvoyance, and as a caution against worrying about or planning for a future in general. Both are mere sidetracks.

*

Forty two

+You reap what you sow, and this is certain. "A violent man" is not precisely a man who physically assaults people and things, but a man who violates, trespasses, in any form. We are free to trespass, but then we have to accept it when it comes back! To the sage, speaking when one can remain silent is usually trespassing. He is finely tuned, and senses the dead-end street that we send another on by bringing his mind into the physical. If instead we leave him alone, it is always possible that he might settle into the Real, the word-free, action-free awareness.

*

Forty three

+ In the interview 'Wandering on the Way', Gia-fu stated that he wanted to do a new translation of the last line, which he translated originally as "Are understood by very few." He stated that this does not convey 'the punch' of the Chinese, and proposed instead the words "People seldom get into it."

*

Fifty

+Just as the mouse, remaining still does not attract the attention of the cat, the tranquility in the sage does not attract attack. When a part of the body is tensed in preparation for attack, that is the part that draws the attention of another person. The life energy (ch'i) does not flow freely through this part, but gets concentrated there. Sensorially, and perhaps psychically, one can perceive this, and a defensive move is mobilized by one's own ch'i in response. It is like a magnet. But there is an even deeper level, on which the sage's purity attracts no attack simply because he has no such karma.

*

Fifty two

+The line "even though his body be destroyed" is from John Wu's translation; it is omitted in Feng and English. We suspect that such references to the mystical were deliberately avoided by Gia-fu.

*

Fifty three

+People love to play, and there is no intention here to condemn this in a moralistic sense. However, getting sidetracked complicates life, and wastes the always available direct road to the Tao. The playing with illusions is always playing in the Tao, with one of the potentialities within the Tao, and always offers a lesson in the perfect justice of the law of karma in life.

*

Fifty seven

+As are many of the references to government and politics, waging war here is a symbol for living life. Don't get caught in mindless routines imposed by things and people, rules and words.

*

Fifty eight

+This chapter is a clear and succinct caution against pressure to 'conform to the norm.' When we try to proscribe what a person 'should' be, we are no longer in the realm of his true nature; we induce him to pursue an ideal. Everything turns sour. Thus, we feel that Gia-fu's word 'honesty' really has the sense of 'normal.' The effort to be 'normal,' to 'adapt,' to 'fit in' has bewitched, confounded, obsessed, misled, and sidetracked man for a long time. He can't see who and what he really is.

*

Fifty nine

+ "temperance" - the original text says "restraint."

+ 'The Great Certainty' is a term proposed by Gia-fu in the interview 'Wandering on the Way'.

*

Sixty three

+We feel that this chapter appears to be a summary of the essential preconditions of a miracle. A miracle is a discontinuity in the ordinary course of things. When we stop supporting the ordinary course of things and just be still, we allow the rare event. If we are afraid of some particular rare event, however, our tension makes it very unlikely to happen. If we have any self-interest whatsoever, our impurity prevents it. So we have to stabilize in an ego-free state. Perhaps there were more miracles in Lao Tsu's time because more people had less ego. A speculation. It is certain, however, that humans have the potential to live much less egoistically than the vast majority of us live in high-tech societies.

It is an empirical question: follow the sort of life that Lao Tsu outlines for us, and see if miracles happen.

*

Sixty five

+We have taken a liberty here, and changed the sense of the latter part of this chapter so that it follows more clearly from the beginning lines. The original says "Why is it so hard to rule?" and goes on talking about rulers and ruling the country.

*

Eighty one

+Gia-fu and Jane say: "Truthful words are not beautiful; Beautiful words are not truthful." But there is a kind of beauty that is merely romantic emotion, and then there is real Beauty. We are trying to avoid this confusion.

* * * *