Dao De Jing

LAOZI

c. 4th century BC

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道德經

Translated from the Classical Chinese with AI (Claude) and edited



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INTRODUCTION

The *Dao De Jing*, "the classic of the Way and its virtue," is a book of 81 short chapters traditionally attributed to Laozi, "the Old Master," a figure about whom almost nothing is known. It probably took shape in the fourth and third centuries BC, and it is one of the most translated books in the world.

Its subject is the Way, the nameless source of all things, and how to live and govern in harmony with it: by yielding rather than forcing, by emptiness and stillness, by acting without striving. It says all this in paradoxes, images of water, valleys and infants, and lines so compressed that every translation is also an interpretation.

The Chinese is the standard received text, edited with commentary by Wang Bi in the third century AD.

The Book of the Way

道經

Chapters 1–37

The nameless Way, emptiness and stillness, and ruling through non-action.

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
1	道可道，非常道，名可名，非常名；無名，天地之始，有名，萬物之母。故常無欲，以觀其妙，常有欲，以觀其徼；此兩者，同出而異名，同謂之玄。玄之又玄，眾妙之門。	The Way that can be told is not the constant Way. The name that can be named is not the constant name. Nameless, it is the beginning of heaven and earth. Named, it is the mother of the ten thousand things. So, ever without desire, one sees its mysteries. Ever with desire, one sees its outer edges. These two come out together but differ in name. Together they are called dark. Dark, and darker still: the gate of all mysteries.[1]
2	天下皆知美之為美，斯惡已。皆知善之為善，斯不善已。故有無相生，難易相成，長短相較，高下相傾，音聲相和，前後相隨。是以聖人處無為之事，行不言之教；萬物作焉而不辭，生而不有，為而不恃，功成而弗居。夫唯弗居，是以不去。	When all the world knows beauty as beauty, there is already ugliness. When all know the good as good, there is already the not-good. So being and nonbeing give birth to each other. Hard and easy complete each other. Long and short measure each other. High and low lean on each other. Tone and voice harmonize with each other. Front and back follow each other. Therefore the sage abides in the work of non-action and practices the teaching without words. The ten thousand things arise, and the sage does not turn them away. The sage gives life but does not possess, acts but does not rely on it, completes the work but does not dwell in it. Just because the sage does not dwell in it, it never goes away.[2]
3	不尚賢，使民不爭；不貴難得之貨，使民不為盜；不見可欲，使民心不亂。是以聖人之治，虛其心，實其腹，弱其志，強其骨。常使民無知無欲。使夫智者不敢為也。為無為，則無不治。	Do not exalt the worthy, and the people will not contend. Do not prize goods that are hard to get, and the people will not steal. Do not display what can be desired, and the people's hearts will not be stirred. Therefore the sage governs by emptying their hearts and filling their bellies, weakening their ambitions and strengthening their bones. Always keep the people without knowledge and without desire, so that the clever do not dare to act. Act through non-action, and nothing will be ungoverned.

1 Some punctuate these lines differently: "In constant nonbeing, one would see its mysteries; in constant being, its outer edges."
2 Non-action (wuwei): acting without forcing, letting things take their own course.

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
4	道沖而用之或不盈，淵兮似萬物之宗；挫其銳，解其紛，和其光，同其塵，湛兮似或存。吾不知誰之子，象帝之先。	The Way is empty, yet in use it is never filled. Deep, it seems the ancestor of the ten thousand things. It blunts the sharp, unties the tangles, dims the glare, joins the dust. Limpid, it seems perhaps to be there. I do not know whose child it is. It seems to come before the Lord on High.
5	天地不仁，以萬物為芻狗；聖人不仁，以百姓為芻狗。天地之間，其猶橐籥乎？虛而不屈，動而愈出。多言數窮，不如守中。	Heaven and earth are not humane: they treat the ten thousand things as straw dogs. The sage is not humane: the sage treats the people as straw dogs. The space between heaven and earth—is it not like a bellows? Empty, yet never exhausted. The more it moves, the more comes out. Many words soon run dry. Better to hold to the center.[3]
6	谷神不死，是謂玄牝。玄牝之門，是謂天地根。綿綿若存，用之不勤。	The valley spirit never dies. It is called the dark female. The gate of the dark female is called the root of heaven and earth. Unbroken, it seems to be there. Draw on it, and it is never exhausted.
7	天長地久。天地所以能長且久者，以其不自生，故能長生。是以聖人後其身而身先；外其身而身存。非以其無私邪，故能成其私。	Heaven is lasting; earth endures. Heaven and earth can last and endure because they do not live for themselves. So they can live long. Therefore the sage puts self last and so comes first, puts self aside and so is preserved. Is it not because the sage has no self-interest that the sage's own interests are fulfilled?
8	上善若水。水善利萬物而不爭，處眾人之所惡，故幾於道。居善地，心善淵，與善仁，言善信，正善治，事善能，動善時。夫唯不爭，故無尤。	The highest good is like water. Water is good at benefiting the ten thousand things and does not contend. It settles in places everyone disdains, and so it is close to the Way. In dwelling, the good lies in the ground. In the heart, the good lies in depth. In giving, the good lies in humaneness. In speech, the good lies in trust. In governing, the good lies in order. In work, the good lies in ability. In action, the good lies in timing. Just because it does not contend, it incurs no blame.
9	持而盈之，不如其已；揣而梲之，不可長保。金玉滿堂，莫之能守；富貴而驕，自遺其咎。功遂身退，天之道。	Hold it and fill it to the brim? Better to stop in time. Hammer a blade to a sharp point, and it cannot keep its edge long. A hall full of gold and jade—no one can guard it. Rich, honored, and arrogant, one brings blame on oneself. When the work is done, withdraw: this is the Way of heaven.
10	載營魄抱一，能無離乎？專氣致柔，能嬰兒乎？滌除玄覽，能無疵乎？愛國治民，能無知乎？天門開闔，	Bearing the soul and embracing the One, can you keep them from parting? Concentrating the breath and becoming soft, can you be like an infant?

3 Straw dogs were ritual offerings, treated with reverence during a sacrifice and thrown away after it.

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
	能為雌乎？明白四達，能無為乎？生之，畜之。生而不有，為而不恃，長而不宰，是謂玄德。	Cleansing the dark mirror, can you leave it without a flaw? Loving the state and governing the people, can you be without knowing? As heaven's gates open and close, can you play the female? With clear understanding reaching in all four directions, can you practice non-action? Give them life and nurture them. Give life but do not possess, act but do not rely on it, lead but do not control. This is called dark virtue.[4]
11	三十輻共一轂，當其無，有車之用。埏埴以為器，當其無，有器之用。鑿戶牖以為室，當其無，有室之用。故有之以為利，無之以為用。	Thirty spokes share one hub. Where there is nothing, the cart has its use. Clay is shaped into a vessel. Where there is nothing, the vessel has its use. Doors and windows are cut to make a room. Where there is nothing, the room has its use. So being makes for benefit; nonbeing makes for use.
12	五色令人目盲，五音令人耳聾，五味令人口爽，馳騁畋獵令人心發狂，難得之貨令人行妨。是以聖人為腹不為目，故去彼取此。	The five colors blind the eye. The five tones deafen the ear. The five flavors dull the palate. Racing and hunting madden the heart. Goods hard to get lead conduct astray. Therefore the sage is for the belly, not for the eye. So the sage lets go of that and takes this.
13	寵辱若驚，貴大患若身。何謂寵辱若驚？寵為下，得之若驚，失之若驚，是謂寵辱若驚。何謂貴大患若身？吾所以有大患者，為吾有身，及吾無身，吾有何患？故貴以身為天下，若可寄天下；愛以身為天下，若可託天下。	Favor and disgrace are alike alarming. Prize great trouble as you prize the body. What does "favor and disgrace are alike alarming" mean? Favor is lowly. Getting it is alarming; losing it is alarming. That is what "favor and disgrace are alike alarming" means. What does "prize great trouble as you prize the body" mean? The reason I have great trouble is that I have a body. If I had no body, what trouble would I have? So whoever prizes the body as if it were the world can be entrusted with the world. Whoever loves the body as if it were the world can be given the world.
14	視之不見名曰夷，聽之不聞名曰希，搏之不得名曰微。此三者，不可致詰，故混而為一。其上不皦，其下不昧。繩繩不可名，復歸於無物。是謂無狀之狀，無物之象，是謂惚恍。迎之不見其首，隨之不見其後。執古之道，以御今之有。能知古始，是謂道紀。	Looked at but not seen, it is called the invisible. Listened to but not heard, it is called the inaudible. Grasped at but not caught, it is called the intangible. These three cannot be fathomed, so they merge and become one. Above, it is not bright. Below, it is not dim. Unending, unbroken, it cannot be named, and it returns again to no-thing. This is called the shape without shape, the image of nothing. It is called elusive and vague. Meet it, and you do not see its head. Follow it, and you do not see its back. Hold to the Way of old to master what

4 Virtue (de): the power a thing has by following the Way, not virtue in a narrowly moral sense.

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
		is here today. To know the ancient beginning is called the thread of the Way.
15	古之善為士者，微妙玄通，深不可識。夫唯不可識，故強為之容。豫焉若冬涉川，猶兮若畏四鄰，儼兮其若容，渙兮若冰之將釋，敦兮其若樸，曠兮其若谷，混兮其若濁。孰能濁以靜之徐清？孰能安以久動之徐生？保此道者不欲盈，夫唯不盈，故能蔽不新成。	The finest scholars of old were subtle, wondrous, dark, and penetrating, too deep to be known. Just because they could not be known, I will try to describe them. Hesitant, as if crossing a river in winter. Wary, as if fearing neighbors on all sides. Reserved, like guests. Yielding, like ice about to melt. Simple, like the uncarved block. Open, like a valley. Murky, like muddy water. Who can take the muddy and, through stillness, slowly make it clear? Who can take what is at rest and, through long movement, slowly bring it to life? Those who keep this Way do not wish to be full. Just because they are not full, they can grow worn without being made new.[5]
16	致虛極，守靜篤。萬物並作，吾以觀復。夫物芸芸，各復歸其根。歸根曰靜，是謂復命。復命曰常，知常曰明。不知常，妄作凶。知常容，容乃公，公乃全，全乃天，天乃道，道乃久，沒身不殆。	Reach the utmost emptiness. Keep stillness steadfast. The ten thousand things rise together, and I watch them return. Things flourish in profusion, and each returns to its root. Returning to the root is called stillness. This is called returning to one's destiny. Returning to one's destiny is called the constant. Knowing the constant is called clarity. Not knowing the constant, one acts wildly, to disaster. Knowing the constant, one embraces all. Embracing all, one is impartial. Impartial, one is complete. Complete, one is heaven. Heaven, one is the Way. The Way, one endures. To the end of one's days, one is free from danger.
17	太上，下知有之，其次，親而譽之，其次，畏之，其次，侮之。信不足焉，有不信焉。悠兮其貴言，功成事遂，百姓皆謂：我自然。	The best rulers: those below simply know they are there. The next: people love and praise them. The next: people fear them. The next: people despise them. When trust falls short, there is distrust. Unhurried, the best are sparing with their words. The work is done, the task accomplished, and the people all say, "It happened of itself."[6]
18	大道廢，有仁義；智慧出，有大偽；六親不和，有孝慈；國家昏亂，有忠臣。	When the great Way is abandoned, there are humaneness and rightness. When cleverness and wisdom appear, there is great falsehood. When the six relations are out of harmony, there are filial piety and kindness. When the state is in darkness and disorder, there are loyal ministers.
19		Cut off sageliness, discard cleverness, and the people will benefit a hundredfold. Cut off humane-

5 The uncarved block (pu): raw, unworked wood, an image of simplicity before anything is shaped or named.
6 So of itself (ziran): literally "self-so," what is as it is without being made so. The people's words here are literally "We are self-so."

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
	絕聖棄智，民利百倍；絕仁棄義，民復孝慈；絕巧棄利，盜賊無有。此三者以為文不足，故令有所屬：見素抱樸，少私寡欲。	ness, discard rightness, and the people will return to filial piety and kindness. Cut off craft, discard profit, and thieves and robbers will disappear. These three, as refinements, are not enough. So let the people have something to hold to: show plainness, embrace the uncarved block, lessen self-interest, reduce desire.
20	絕學無憂，唯之與阿，相去幾何？善之與惡，相去若何？人之所畏，不可不畏。荒兮其未央哉！眾人熙熙，如享太牢，如春登臺。我獨泊兮其未兆，如嬰兒之未孩；儽儽兮若無所歸。眾人皆有餘，而我獨若遺。我愚人之心也哉！沌沌兮，俗人昭昭，我獨昏昏。俗人察察，我獨悶悶。澹兮其若海，飂兮若無止。眾人皆有以，而我獨頑似鄙。我獨異於人，而貴食母。	Cut off learning, and there will be no worry. “Yes” and “uh-huh”—how far apart are they? Good and bad—how far apart are they? What others fear, one cannot fail to fear. How vast, and still without end! The crowd is merry, as if feasting at a great sacrifice, as if climbing a terrace in spring. I alone am placid, showing no sign, like an infant that has not yet smiled. Weary, weary, as if with nowhere to return. The crowd all have more than enough; I alone seem to have lost out. Mine is the heart of a fool! So muddled. Ordinary people are bright and clear; I alone am dim. Ordinary people are sharp and exacting; I alone am dull and closed. Calm, like the sea. Drifting, as if without rest. The crowd all have their uses; I alone am stubborn and rustic. I alone differ from others: I prize being fed by the mother.[7]
21	孔德之容，惟道是從。道之為物，惟恍惟惚。惚兮恍兮，其中有象；恍兮惚兮，其中有物。窈兮冥兮，其中有精；其精甚真，其中有信。自今及古，其名不去，以閱眾甫。吾何以知眾甫之狀哉？以此。	The bearing of great virtue follows the Way alone. The Way, as a thing, is vague and elusive. Elusive, vague—within it there is an image. Vague, elusive—within it there is a thing. Deep and obscure—within it there is an essence. This essence is utterly real; within it there is something to trust. From now back to antiquity, its name has not departed, and by it we survey the origins of all things. How do I know the nature of the origins of all things? By this.
22	曲則全，枉則直，窪則盈，敝則新，少則得，多則惑。是以聖人抱一為天下式。不自見故明，不自是故彰，不自伐故有功，不自矜故長。夫唯不爭，故天下莫能與之爭。古之所謂曲則全者，豈虛言哉！誠全而歸之。	Bend, and be whole. Be crooked, and be straight. Be hollow, and be full. Be worn, and be new. Have little, and gain. Have much, and be confused. Therefore the sage embraces the One and becomes the model for the world. Not displaying self, the sage is clear. Not self-righteous, the sage is distinguished. Not boasting, the sage has merit. Not proud, the sage endures. Just because the sage does not contend, no one in the world can contend with the sage. The old saying “Bend, and be whole”—how could it be empty words? Truly, wholeness returns to such a one.

7 “Yes” (wei) was the respectful reply, “uh-huh” (e) the careless one.

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
23	希言自然。故飄風不終朝，驟雨不終日。孰為此者？天地。天地尚不能久，而況於人乎？故從事於道者，道者同於道，德者同於德，失者同於失。同於道者，道亦樂得之；同於德者，德亦樂得之；同於失者，失亦樂得之。信不足焉，有不信焉。	To speak little is so of itself. So a whirlwind does not last all morning; a downpour does not last all day. Who makes them? Heaven and earth. If even heaven and earth cannot make things last, how much less can people? So in following the Way: those of the Way are one with the Way. Those of virtue are one with virtue. Those of loss are one with loss. Those one with the Way, the Way is glad to receive. Those one with virtue, virtue is glad to receive. Those one with loss, loss is glad to receive. When trust falls short, there is distrust.
24	企者不立，跨者不行，自見者不明，自是者不彰，自伐者無功，自矜者不長。其在道也，曰餘食贅行。物或惡之，故有道者不處。	Those on tiptoe do not stand firm. Those who stride do not go far. Those who display themselves are not clear. Those who are self-righteous are not distinguished. Those who boast have no merit. Those who are proud do not endure. Measured by the Way, these are called leftover food and useless deeds. Things may well detest them, so one who has the Way does not dwell with them.
25	有物混成，先天地生。寂兮寥兮，獨立而不改，周行而不殆，可以為天下母。吾不知其名，字之曰道，強為之名曰大。大曰逝，逝曰遠，遠曰反。故道大，天大，地大，王亦大。域中有四大，而王居其一焉。人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。	There is a thing, blended and complete, born before heaven and earth. Silent and void, it stands alone and does not change. It moves in a circle and does not tire. It could be the mother of the world. I do not know its name. I call it the Way. Forced to name it, I call it great. Great means going on. Going on means far away. Far away means returning. So the Way is great, heaven is great, earth is great, and the king too is great. In the realm there are four greats, and the king is one of them. People model themselves on earth. Earth models itself on heaven. Heaven models itself on the Way. The Way models itself on what is so of itself.
26	重為輕根，靜為躁君。是以聖人終日行不離輜重。雖有榮觀，燕處超然。奈何萬乘之主，而以身輕天下？輕則失本，躁則失君。	The heavy is the root of the light. Stillness is the master of restlessness. Therefore the sage travels all day without leaving the baggage carts. Though there are splendid sights, the sage stays at ease, above it all. How can a lord of ten thousand chariots treat their own person lightly before the world? Be light, and you lose the root. Be restless, and you lose the master.
27	善行無轍迹，善言無瑕讁；善數不用籌策；善閉無關楗而不可開，善結無繩約而不可解。是以聖人常善救人，故無棄人；常善救物，故無棄物，是謂襲明。故善人者，不善人之師；不善人者，善人之資。不貴其師，不愛其資，雖智大迷，是謂要妙。	Good walking leaves no tracks. Good speaking leaves no flaw to fault. Good counting needs no tallies. Good shutting needs no bolt, yet what is shut cannot be opened. Good tying needs no cord, yet what is tied cannot be undone. Therefore the sage is always good at saving people, so no one is

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
		cast away; always good at saving things, so nothing is cast away. This is called cloaked clarity. So the good person is the teacher of the one who is not good. The one who is not good is the resource of the good person. Not to value one's teacher, not to love one's resource—however clever, one is greatly lost. This is called the essential mystery.
28	知其雄，守其雌，為天下谿。為天下谿，常德不離，復歸於嬰兒。知其白，守其黑，為天下式。為天下式，常德不忒，復歸於無極。知其榮，守其辱，為天下谷，常德乃足，復歸於樸。樸散則為器，聖人用之，則為官長，故大制不割。	Know the male, keep to the female, and be the ravine of the world. Being the ravine of the world, constant virtue never leaves, and you return to being an infant. Know the white, keep to the black, and be the model for the world. Being the model for the world, constant virtue never errs, and you return to the limitless. Know glory, keep to disgrace, and be the valley of the world. Being the valley of the world, constant virtue is sufficient, and you return to the uncarved block. When the uncarved block is split, it becomes vessels. The sage uses them and becomes chief of the officials. So great shaping does no cutting.
29	將欲取天下而為之，吾見其不得已。天下神器，不可為也，為者敗之，執者失之。故物或行或隨，或歔或吹。或強或羸，或挫或隳。是以聖人去甚，去奢，去泰。	Those who would win the world by acting on it—I see that they cannot succeed. The world is a sacred vessel. It cannot be acted on. Those who act on it ruin it. Those who grasp it lose it. So among things, some lead and some follow, some breathe gently and some blow hard, some are strong and some are frail, some break and some fall. Therefore the sage lets go of the extreme, the extravagant, the excessive.
30	以道佐人主者，不以兵強天下。其事好還。師之所處，荊棘生焉。大軍之後，必有凶年。善有果而已，不敢以取強。果而勿矜，果而勿伐，果而勿驕。果而不得已，果而勿強。物壯則老，是謂不道，不道早已。	One who assists a ruler of people with the Way does not use arms to be strong over the world. Such things tend to come back. Where armies camp, thorns and brambles grow. After great wars, there are sure to be years of hunger. The skilled achieve a result and stop. They do not dare to use it to seize strength. Achieve the result, but do not brag. Achieve the result, but do not boast. Achieve the result, but do not be arrogant. Achieve the result only because there is no choice. Achieve the result, but do not force. When things reach their prime, they grow old. This is called not the Way. What is not the Way soon ends.
31	夫佳兵者，不祥之器，物或惡之，故有道者不處。君子居則貴左，用兵則貴右。兵者不祥之器，非君子之器，不得已而用之，恬淡為上。勝而不美，而美之者，是樂殺人。夫樂殺人者，則不可以得志於天下	Fine weapons are instruments of ill omen. Things may well detest them, so one who has the Way does not dwell with them. At home, the noble person honors the left; at war, the right. Weapons are instruments of ill omen, not the instruments of

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
	矣。吉事尚左，凶事尚右。偏將軍居左，上將軍居右，言以喪禮處之。殺人之眾，以哀悲泣之，戰勝，以喪禮處之。	the noble person. When there is no choice but to use them, calm detachment is best. Victory is not beautiful. To find it beautiful is to delight in killing people. One who delights in killing people cannot get what they want in the world. In auspicious affairs the left is honored; in inauspicious affairs, the right. The lieutenant general stands on the left; the commanding general stands on the right. This means war is treated as a funeral rite. When many people have been killed, weep for them in grief and sorrow. A victory in war is treated as a funeral rite.[8]
32	道常無名，樸雖小，天下莫能臣也。侯王若能守之，萬物將自賓。天地相合，以降甘露，民莫之令而自均。始制有名，名亦既有，夫亦將知止，知止所以不殆。譬道之在天下，猶川谷之於江海。	The Way is constant and nameless. Though the uncarved block is small, no one in the world can make it a subject. If lords and kings could keep to it, the ten thousand things would submit of themselves. Heaven and earth would join and let fall sweet dew. With no one commanding them, the people would be even of themselves. Once shaping begins, there are names. Once there are names, one must know when to stop. Knowing when to stop, one is free from danger. The Way in the world is like valley streams flowing to the rivers and the sea.
33	知人者智，自知者明。勝人者有力，自勝者強。知足者富。強行者有志。不失其所者久。死而不亡者壽。	Knowing others is intelligence. Knowing oneself is clarity. Overcoming others is force. Overcoming oneself is strength. Knowing what is enough is wealth. Pressing on is will. Not losing one's place is lasting. To die but not perish is long life.
34	大道氾兮，其可左右。萬物恃之而生而不辭，功成不名有。衣養萬物而不為主，常無欲，可名於小；萬物歸焉而不為主，可名為大。以其終不自為大，故能成其大。	The great Way flows everywhere. It can go left or right. The ten thousand things rely on it for life, and it does not turn them away. It completes its work but claims nothing. It clothes and feeds the ten thousand things but does not act as their master. Always without desire, it can be called small. The ten thousand things return to it, yet it does not act as their master: it can be called great. Because it never tries to be great, it can achieve its greatness.
35	執大象，天下往。往而不害，安平太。樂與餌，過客止。道之出口，淡乎其無味，視之不足見，聽之不足聞，用之不足既。	Hold fast to the great image, and the world will come. It comes and meets no harm: peace, calm, and ease. Music and good food make passing travelers stop. But the Way, when it passes the lips, is bland and has no flavor. Look at it, and there is not

8 The left was the place of honor on happy occasions, the right at funerals; placing the commanding general on the right frames war as mourning.

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
		enough to see. Listen to it, and there is not enough to hear. Use it, and it cannot be used up.
36	將欲歙之，必固張之；將欲弱之，必固強之；將欲廢之，必固興之；將欲奪之，必固與之。是謂微明。柔弱勝剛強。魚不可脫於淵，國之利器不可以示人。	If you would shrink it, you must first stretch it. If you would weaken it, you must first strengthen it. If you would cast it down, you must first raise it up. If you would take from it, you must first give to it. This is called subtle clarity. The soft and weak overcome the hard and strong. Fish must not be let out of the deep. The sharp tools of the state must not be shown to others.
37	道常無為而無不為。侯王若能守之，萬物將自化。化而欲作，吾將鎮之以無名之樸。無名之樸，夫亦將無欲。不欲以靜，天下將自定。	The Way is constantly in non-action, yet nothing is left undone. If lords and kings could keep to it, the ten thousand things would transform of themselves. If, as they transform, desire arises, I will calm it with the nameless uncarved block. With the nameless uncarved block, there will be no desire. Without desire, there is stillness, and the world will settle of itself.

The Book of Virtue

德經

Chapters 38–81

True virtue, humility and yielding, and how the sage governs by not meddling.

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
38	上德不德，是以有德；下德不失德，是以無德。上德無為而無以為，下德為之而有以為。上仁為之而無以為，上義為之而有以為。上禮為之而莫之應，則攘臂而扔之。故失道而後德，失德而後仁，失仁而後義，失義而後禮。夫禮者，忠信之薄，而亂之首。前識者，道之華，而愚之始。是以大丈夫處其厚，不居其薄；處其實，不居其華。故去彼取此。	The highest virtue is not virtuous, and so it has virtue. The lowest virtue never lets go of virtue, and so it has no virtue. The highest virtue practices non-action and has nothing to act for. The lowest virtue acts and has something to act for. The highest humaneness acts, but has nothing to act for. The highest rightness acts, and has something to act for. The highest ritual propriety acts, and when no one responds, it rolls up its sleeves and drags them to it. So when the Way is lost, there is virtue. When virtue is lost, there is humaneness. When humaneness is lost, there is rightness. When rightness is lost, there is ritual propriety. Ritual propriety is the thinning of loyalty and trust and the beginning of disorder. Foreknowledge is the flower of the Way and the beginning of folly. Therefore the great person dwells in the thick, not the thin; dwells in the fruit, not the flower. So one lets go of that and takes this.
39	昔之得一者，天得一以清，地得一以寧，神得一以靈，谷得一以盈，萬物得一以生，侯王得一以為天下貞。其致之，天無以清將恐裂，地無以寧將恐發，神無以靈將恐歇，谷無以盈將恐竭，萬物無以生將恐滅，侯王無以貴高將恐蹶。故貴以賤為本，高以下為基。是以侯王自稱孤、寡、不穀。此非以賤為本邪？非乎？故致數輿無輿，不欲琭琭如玉，珞珞如石。	Of old, these attained the One. Heaven attained the One and became clear. Earth attained the One and became settled. Spirits attained the One and became potent. Valleys attained the One and became full. The ten thousand things attained the One and came to life. Lords and kings attained the One and became the standard of the world. It is the One that brings this about. Heaven, without what makes it clear, might split. Earth, without what makes it settled, might erupt. Spirits, without what makes them potent, might fade. Valleys, without what makes them full, might run dry. The ten thousand things, without what makes them live, might perish. Lords and kings, without what makes them noble and high, might fall. So the noble take the humble as their root; the high take the low as their foundation. That is why lords and kings call themselves “the orphaned,” “the lonely,” “the unworthy.” Is this not taking the humble as

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
		the root? Is it not? So strive for too much honor and you have no honor. Do not wish to glitter like jade or rattle like stone.[1]
40	反者道之動，弱者道之用。天下萬物生於有，有生於無。	Returning is the movement of the Way. Weakness is the use of the Way. The ten thousand things of the world are born from being. Being is born from nonbeing.
41	上士聞道，勤而行之；中士聞道，若存若亡；下士聞道，大笑之。不笑不足以為道。故建言有之：明道若昧，進道若退，夷道若纇，上德若谷，大白若辱，廣德若不足，建德若偷，質真若渝，大方無隅，大器晚成，大音希聲，大象無形，道隱無名。夫唯道，善貸且成。	When the best scholars hear of the Way, they practice it with diligence. When average scholars hear of the Way, they half keep it and half lose it. When the lowest scholars hear of the Way, they laugh out loud. If they did not laugh, it would not be the Way. So the established sayings have it: The bright Way seems dim. The Way forward seems to retreat. The smooth Way seems rough. The highest virtue seems like a valley. The purest white seems soiled. Ample virtue seems lacking. Firm virtue seems slack. Pure substance seems to change. The great square has no corners. The great vessel is finished late. The great sound is faint. The great image has no form. The Way is hidden and nameless. Only the Way is good at giving and completing.
42	道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。萬物負陰而抱陽，沖氣以為和。人之所惡，唯孤、寡、不穀，而王公以為稱。故物或損之而益，或益之而損。人之所教，我亦教之。強梁者不得其死，吾將以為教父。	The Way gives birth to one. One gives birth to two. Two gives birth to three. Three gives birth to the ten thousand things. The ten thousand things carry yin on their backs and embrace yang, and by blending their breath they reach harmony. What people hate most is to be “orphaned,” “lonely,” “unworthy,” yet kings and dukes call themselves by these names. So things are sometimes increased by being diminished, and sometimes diminished by being increased. What others teach, I teach too: “The violent do not die a natural death.” I will take this as the father of my teaching.[2]
43	天下之至柔，馳騁天下之至堅。無有入無間，吾是以知無為之有益。不言之教，無為之益，天下希及之。	The softest thing in the world gallops through the hardest thing in the world. What has no substance enters where there is no gap. From this I know the benefit of non-action. The teaching without words, the benefit of non-action—few in the world attain them.
44		Fame or self: which is dearer? Self or wealth: which counts for more? Gain or loss: which does

1 “The orphaned,” “the lonely,” and “the unworthy” were self-deprecating terms that rulers used to refer to themselves.
2 Yin and yang: the dark, receptive and the bright, active aspects present in all things.

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
	名與身孰親？身與貨孰多？得與亡孰病？是故甚愛必大費，多藏必厚亡，知足不辱，知止不殆，可以長久。	more harm? So great love must cost dearly; much hoarding must end in heavy loss. Know what is enough, and you will not be disgraced. Know when to stop, and you will be free from danger. Then you can last long.
45	大成若缺，其用不弊。大盈若沖，其用不窮。大直若屈，其用不居。大巧若拙，其用不輟。大辯若訥，其用不差。躁勝寒，靜勝熱。清靜為天下正。	Great perfection seems flawed, yet its use never wears out. Great fullness seems empty, yet its use never runs out. Great straightness seems bent, yet its use is never fixed. Great skill seems clumsy, yet its use never stops. Great eloquence seems halting, yet its use never errs. Restlessness overcomes cold; stillness overcomes heat. Clarity and stillness set the world right.
46	天下有道，卻走馬以糞。天下無道，戎馬生於郊。禍莫大於不知足；咎莫大於欲得。故知足之足，常足矣。	When the world has the Way, galloping horses are sent back to manure the fields. When the world lacks the Way, warhorses are bred on the outskirts. No disaster is greater than not knowing what is enough. No fault is greater than the desire to gain. So to know that enough is enough is always to have enough.
47	不出戶，知天下；不闚牖，見天道。其出彌遠，其知彌少。是以聖人不行而知，不見而名，不為而成。	Without going out the door, one knows the world. Without looking out the window, one sees the Way of heaven. The farther one goes, the less one knows. Therefore the sage knows without traveling, names without seeing, accomplishes without acting.
48	為學日益，為道日損。損之又損，以至於無為。無為而無不為。取天下常以無事，及其有事，不足以取天下。	In pursuing learning, one gains every day. In pursuing the Way, one loses every day. Lose and lose again, until one arrives at non-action. Practice non-action, and nothing is left undone. The world is always won by not meddling. Once one meddles, one is not fit to win the world.
49	聖人無常心，以百姓心為心。善者，吾善之；不善者，吾亦善之，德善。信者，吾信之；不信者，吾亦信之，德信。聖人在天下歙歙，為天下渾其心，百姓皆注其耳目,聖人皆孩之。	The sage has no constant heart, and takes the heart of the people as the sage's own. Those who are good, I treat as good. Those who are not good, I also treat as good. Such virtue is goodness. Those who are trustworthy, I trust. Those who are not trustworthy, I also trust. Such virtue is trust. The sage lives in the world withdrawn, and for the world's sake keeps the heart undivided. The people all strain their eyes and ears; the sage treats them all as children.
50	出生入死。生之徒，十有三；死之徒，十有三；人之生，動之死地，亦十有三。夫何故？以其生生之厚。蓋聞善攝生者，陸行不遇兕虎，入軍不被甲兵；兕無	Coming out is life; going in is death. The companions of life are three in ten. The companions of death are three in ten. And those who live but move toward the place of death are also three in

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
	所投其角，虎無所措其爪，兵無所容其刃。夫何故？以其無死地。	ten. Why is this? Because they cling so hard to living. I have heard that those good at keeping life travel by land without meeting rhinoceros or tiger, and go among armies without facing armor and weapons. The rhinoceros finds no place to drive its horn, the tiger no place to set its claws, the weapon no place to lodge its blade. Why is this? Because they have no place of death.[3]
51	道生之，德畜之，物形之，勢成之。是以萬物莫不尊道而貴德。道之尊，德之貴，夫莫之命而常自然。故道生之，德畜之。長之育之，亭之毒之，蓋之覆之。生而不有，為而不恃，長而不宰。是謂玄德。	The Way gives them life. Virtue nurtures them. Things give them shape. Circumstances complete them. So among the ten thousand things, none fails to revere the Way and prize virtue. The Way is revered and virtue prized not because anyone commands it, but because it is always so of itself. So the Way gives them life, and virtue nurtures them. It raises them and rears them, settles them and ripens them, shelters them and covers them. It gives life but does not possess, acts but does not rely on it, leads but does not control. This is called dark virtue.
52	天下有始，以為天下母。既得其母，以知其子，既知其子，復守其母，沒身不殆。塞其兌，閉其門，終身不勤。開其兌，濟其事，終身不救。見小曰明，守柔曰強。用其光，復歸其明，無遺身殃，是為習常。	The world has a beginning, which is the mother of the world. Once you have the mother, you know the children. Once you know the children, hold fast again to the mother, and to the end of your days you will be free from danger. Block the openings, shut the gates, and to the end of your life you will not be exhausted. Unblock the openings, pile up affairs, and to the end of your life you cannot be saved. Seeing the small is called clarity. Keeping to the soft is called strength. Use the light, return to clarity, and leave yourself no disaster. This is called practicing the constant.
53	使我介然有知，行於大道，唯施是畏。大道甚夷，而民好徑。朝甚除，田甚蕪，倉甚虛；服文綵，帶利劍，厭飲食，財貨有餘；是為盜夸。非道也哉！	If I had even a little knowledge, walking the great Way, I would fear only straying from it. The great Way is very level, but people love side paths. The court is spotless; the fields are overgrown; the granaries are empty. They wear embroidered robes, carry sharp swords, gorge on food and drink, and have wealth to spare. This is called the boasting of robbers. It is surely not the Way!
54	善建者不拔，善抱者不脫，子孫以祭祀不輟。修之於身，其德乃真；修之於家，其德乃餘；修之於鄉，其德乃長；修之於國，其德乃豐；修之於天下，其德乃	What is well planted cannot be uprooted. What is well embraced cannot slip away. Children and grandchildren will keep up the sacrifices without end. Cultivate it in yourself, and virtue will be genuine. Cultivate it in the family, and virtue will

3 "Three in ten" can also be read "thirteen," which some early commentators took as the four limbs and nine openings of the body.

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
	普。故以身觀身，以家觀家，以鄉觀鄉，以國觀國，以天下觀天下。吾何以知天下然哉？以此。	be ample. Cultivate it in the village, and virtue will be lasting. Cultivate it in the state, and virtue will be abundant. Cultivate it in the world, and virtue will be everywhere. So look at the self through the self, the family through the family, the village through the village, the state through the state, the world through the world. How do I know the world is so? By this.
55	含德之厚，比於赤子。蜂蠆虺蛇不螫，猛獸不據，攫鳥不搏。骨弱筋柔而握固。未知牝牡之合而全作，精之至也。終日號而不嗄，和之至也。知和曰常，知常曰明。益生曰祥。心使氣曰強。物壯則老，謂之不道，不道早已。	One who holds virtue in abundance is like a newborn child. Wasps, scorpions, and snakes do not sting it. Fierce beasts do not seize it. Birds of prey do not strike it. Its bones are weak and its sinews soft, yet its grip is firm. It does not yet know the union of female and male, yet its member stirs: this is the height of vital essence. It cries all day and does not grow hoarse: this is the height of harmony. Knowing harmony is called the constant. Knowing the constant is called clarity. Forcing life is called ill-omened. When the heart drives the breath, it is called forcing. When things reach their prime, they grow old. This is called not the Way. What is not the Way soon ends.
56	知者不言，言者不知。塞其兌，閉其門，挫其銳，解其分，和其光，同其塵，是謂玄同。故不可得而親，不可得而疏；不可得而利，不可得而害；不可得而貴，不可得而賤。故為天下貴。	Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know. Block the openings, shut the gates, blunt the sharp, untie the tangles, dim the glare, join the dust. This is called dark oneness. So such a one cannot be drawn close and cannot be kept at a distance, cannot be benefited and cannot be harmed, cannot be honored and cannot be demeaned. So such a one is the most honored in the world.
57	以正治國，以奇用兵，以無事取天下。吾何以知其然哉？以此。天下多忌諱，而民彌貧；民多利器，國家滋昏；人多伎巧，奇物滋起；法令滋彰，盜賊多有。故聖人云：「我無為而民自化，我好靜而民自正，我無事而民自富，我無欲而民自樸。」	Govern the state with the upright. Wage war with the unexpected. Win the world by not meddling. How do I know it is so? By this. The more taboos and prohibitions in the world, the poorer the people. The more sharp tools the people have, the more the state falls into darkness. The more skill and cunning people have, the more strange things arise. The more laws and orders are proclaimed, the more thieves and robbers there are. So the sage says: “I practice non-action, and the people transform of themselves. I love stillness, and the people become upright of themselves. I do not meddle, and the people grow rich of themselves. I am without desire, and the people become the uncarved block of themselves.”
58		

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
	其政悶悶，其民淳淳；其政察察，其民缺缺。禍兮福之所倚，福兮禍之所伏。孰知其極？其無正。正復為奇，善復為妖。人之迷，其日固久。是以聖人方而不割，廉而不劌，直而不肆，光而不燿。	When the government is dull and closed, the people are simple and honest. When the government is sharp and exacting, the people are divided and wanting. Disaster—good fortune leans on it. Good fortune—disaster hides in it. Who knows where it ends? There is no fixed norm. The upright turns back into the unexpected; the good turns back into the monstrous. People have been lost in confusion for a long time indeed. Therefore the sage is square but does not cut, has edges but does not wound, is straight but not unrestrained, is bright but not dazzling.
59	治人事天，莫若嗇。夫唯嗇，是謂早服；早服謂之重積德；重積德則無不克，無不克則莫知其極；莫知其極，可以有國；有國之母，可以長久；是謂深根固柢，長生久視之道。	In governing people and serving heaven, nothing is better than being sparing. Just by being sparing, one submits early. Submitting early means accumulating virtue again and again. Accumulating virtue again and again, there is nothing one cannot overcome. When there is nothing one cannot overcome, no one knows one's limits. When no one knows one's limits, one can hold the state. Holding the mother of the state, one can last long. This is called deep roots and a firm stem, the Way of long life and lasting sight.
60	治大國，若烹小鮮。以道莅天下，其鬼不神；非其鬼不神，其神不傷人；非其神不傷人，聖人亦不傷人。夫兩不相傷，故德交歸焉。	Governing a great state is like cooking a small fish. When the Way presides over the world, its ghosts have no spiritual power. It is not that its ghosts have no spiritual power, but that their power does not harm people. It is not that their power does not harm people, but that the sage also does not harm people. Since neither harms the other, virtue flows back to both.
61	大國者下流，天下之交。天下之牝，牝常以靜勝牡，以靜為下。故大國以下小國，則取小國；小國以下大國，則取大國。故或下以取，或下而取。大國不過欲兼畜人，小國不過欲入事人。夫兩者各得其所欲，大者宜為下。	A great state is the lower stream, where the world converges. It is the female of the world. The female always overcomes the male by stillness, and by stillness takes the lower place. So if a great state places itself below a small state, it wins the small state. If a small state places itself below a great state, it wins the great state. So one lowers itself in order to win; the other is low and so wins. A great state wants nothing more than to unite and shelter others. A small state wants nothing more than to join and serve others. If both are to get what they want, the great one should take the lower place.
62	道者萬物之奧。善人之寶，不善人之所保。美言可以市，尊行可以加人。人之不善，何棄之有？故立天	The Way is the hidden sanctuary of the ten thousand things. It is the treasure of the good and the refuge of those who are not good. Fine words can

	CHINESE	ENGLISH
	子，置三公，雖有拱璧以先駟馬，不如坐進此道。古之所以貴此道者何？不曰以求得，有罪以免邪？故為天下貴。	be traded. Honorable conduct can raise one above others. Even if people are not good, why cast them away? So when the Son of Heaven is enthroned and the three ministers are installed, though one might offer a jade disc held in both hands, followed by a team of four horses, it is not as good as sitting still and offering this Way. Why did the ancients value this Way? Is it not said that by it those who seek will find, and those who have done wrong will be spared? So it is the most honored in the world.
63	為無為，事無事，味無味。大小多少，報怨以德。圖難於其易，為大於其細；天下難事必作於易，天下大事必作於細。是以聖人終不為大，故能成其大。夫輕諾必寡信，多易必多難。是以聖人猶難之，故終無難矣	Act through non-action. Make not meddling your business. Taste the tasteless. Great or small, many or few, repay resentment with virtue. Plan for the difficult while it is easy. Do the great while it is small. The difficult affairs of the world must begin with the easy. The great affairs of the world must begin with the small. Therefore the sage never tries to be great, and so can achieve greatness. Light promises must inspire little trust. Taking much as easy must lead to much difficulty. Therefore even the sage treats things as difficult, and so in the end has no difficulty.
64	其安易持，其未兆易謀。其脆易泮，其微易散。為之於未有，治之於未亂。合抱之木，生於毫末；九層之臺，起於累土；千里之行，始於足下。為者敗之，執者失之。是以聖人無為故無敗，無執故無失。民之從事，常於幾成而敗之。慎終如始，則無敗事。是以聖人欲不欲，不貴難得之貨；學不學，復眾人之所過。以輔萬物之自然，而不敢為。	What is at rest is easy to hold. What has not yet shown a sign is easy to plan for. What is brittle is easy to break. What is minute is easy to scatter. Act on it before it exists. Put it in order before disorder arises. A tree that fills the arms grows from a tiny shoot. A tower of nine stories rises from a heap of earth. A journey of a thousand miles begins beneath one's feet. Those who act on it ruin it. Those who grasp it lose it. Therefore the sage practices non-action and so ruins nothing, does not grasp and so loses nothing. People in their affairs often ruin things when they are nearly complete. Be as careful at the end as at the beginning, and nothing will be ruined. Therefore the sage desires not to desire, and does not prize goods that are hard to get; learns not to learn, and returns to what the crowd has passed by. So the sage helps the ten thousand things be so of themselves, and does not dare to act.
65	古之善為道者，非以明民，將以愚之。民之難治，以其智多。故以智治國，國之賊，不以智治國，國之福。知此兩者亦稽式。常知稽式，是謂玄德。玄德深矣，遠矣，與物反矣，然後乃至大順。	Those of old who were good at practicing the Way did not use it to make the people bright, but to keep them unsophisticated. The people are hard to govern because they have too much cleverness. So to govern the state with cleverness is to rob the state. Not to govern the state with cleverness is the

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		state's good fortune. To know these two is also to know the standard. Always to know the standard is called dark virtue. Dark virtue is deep, far-reaching, and returns with things, and then it reaches the great accord.[4]
66	江海所以能為百谷王者，以其善下之，故能為百谷王。是以欲上民，必以言下之。欲先民，必以身後之。是以聖人處上而民不重，處前而民不害。是以天下樂推而不厭，以其不爭，故天下莫能與之爭。	Rivers and seas can be kings of the hundred valleys because they are good at staying below them. So they can be kings of the hundred valleys. So whoever wishes to be above the people must speak as one below them. Whoever wishes to lead the people must stand behind them. Therefore the sage dwells above, and the people do not feel the weight; stands in front, and the people do not feel harmed. So the world gladly pushes the sage forward and never tires of it. Because the sage does not contend, no one in the world can contend with the sage.
67	天下皆謂我道大，似不肖。夫唯大，故似不肖。若肖，久矣其細也夫！我有三寶，持而保之。一曰慈，二曰儉，三曰不敢為天下先。慈故能勇，儉故能廣，不敢為天下先，故能成器長。今舍慈且勇，舍儉且廣，舍後且先，死矣！夫慈以戰則勝，以守則固。天將救之，以慈衛之。	All the world says my Way is great but resembles nothing. Just because it is great, it resembles nothing. If it resembled anything, it would long since have become small. I have three treasures that I hold and keep. The first is compassion. The second is frugality. The third is not daring to be first in the world. With compassion, one can be brave. With frugality, one can be generous. Not daring to be first in the world, one can become the chief of all vessels. Now to give up compassion and yet be brave, to give up frugality and yet be generous, to give up being last and yet be first—that is death! With compassion, one wins in attack and holds firm in defense. When heaven would save someone, it guards them with compassion.
68	善為士者不武，善戰者不怒，善勝敵者不與，善用人者為之下，是謂不爭之德，是謂用人之力，是謂配天古之極。	One good at being an officer is not warlike. One good at fighting does not get angry. One good at defeating enemies does not engage them. One good at using people places oneself below them. This is called the virtue of not contending. This is called using the strength of others. This is called matching heaven, the highest of old.
69	用兵有言：「吾不敢為主而為客，不敢進寸而退尺。」是謂行無行，攘無臂，扔無敵，執無兵。禍莫大於輕敵，輕敵幾喪吾寶。故抗兵相加，哀者勝矣。	Those who use arms have a saying: "I do not dare be the host, but rather the guest. I do not dare advance an inch, but rather retreat a foot." This is called marching without marching, rolling up sleeves without arms, dragging without an enemy,

4 Yu, rendered "keep them unsophisticated," literally means "make them foolish." Wang Bi reads it as keeping the people artless, without scheming knowledge.

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		grasping without weapons. No disaster is greater than taking the enemy lightly. Taking the enemy lightly nearly costs me my treasures. So when opposing armies meet, the side that grieves will win.[5]
70	吾言甚易知，甚易行。天下莫能知，莫能行。言有宗，事有君。夫唯無知，是以不我知。知我者希，則我者貴。是以聖人被褐懷玉。	My words are very easy to understand and very easy to practice. Yet no one in the world can understand them, and no one can practice them. Words have an ancestor; deeds have a master. Just because people do not understand this, they do not understand me. Those who understand me are few, and those who follow me are precious. Therefore the sage wears coarse cloth and carries jade within.
71	知不知上，不知知病。夫唯病病，是以不病。聖人不病，以其病病，是以不病。	To know that one does not know is best. Not to know, yet think one knows, is a sickness. Just because one sees sickness as sickness, one is not sick. The sage is not sick, because the sage sees sickness as sickness. That is why the sage is not sick.
72	民不畏威，則大威至。無狎其所居，無厭其所生。夫唯不厭，是以不厭。是以聖人自知不自見，自愛不自貴；故去彼取此。	When the people do not fear authority, a greater terror will come. Do not crowd them in their dwellings. Do not oppress them in their livelihood. Just because you do not oppress them, they will not weary of you. Therefore the sage has self-knowledge but no self-display, self-love but no self-exaltation. So the sage lets go of that and takes this.
73	勇於敢則殺，勇於不敢則活。此兩者，或利或害。天之所惡，孰知其故？是以聖人猶難之。天之道，不爭而善勝，不言而善應，不召而自來，繟然而善謀。天網恢恢，疏而不失。	Brave in daring, one is killed. Brave in not daring, one lives. Of these two, one benefits and one harms. What heaven hates—who knows why? Therefore even the sage treats it as difficult. The Way of heaven does not contend, yet is good at winning; does not speak, yet is good at responding; is not summoned, yet comes of itself; is unhurried, yet good at planning. Heaven's net is vast. Its mesh is wide, yet nothing slips through.
74	民不畏死，奈何以死懼之？若使民常畏死，而為奇者，吾得執而殺之，孰敢？常有司殺者殺，夫代司殺者殺，是謂代大匠斲。夫代大匠斲者，希有不傷其手矣。	If the people do not fear death, why threaten them with death? If the people were made always to fear death, and someone behaved perversely, and I could seize and kill them, who would dare? There is always an official executioner who kills. To kill in place of the official executioner is called cutting wood in place of the master carpenter. Of those

5 The host is the side that starts the fighting; the guest is the side that only responds.

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	who cut in place of the master carpenter, few do not injure their hands.
75 民之饑，以其上食稅之多，是以饑。民之難治，以其上之有為，是以難治。民之輕死，以其上求生之厚，是以輕死。夫唯無以生為者，是賢於貴生。	The people starve because those above them eat up too much in taxes. That is why they starve. The people are hard to govern because those above them keep acting. That is why they are hard to govern. The people take death lightly because those above them seek life too richly. That is why they take death lightly. Those who do not make living their aim are wiser than those who prize life.
76 人之生也柔弱，其死也堅強。萬物草木之生也柔脆，其死也枯槁。故堅強者死之徒，柔弱者生之徒。是以兵強則不勝，木強則兵。強大處下，柔弱處上。	When people are born, they are soft and weak. When they die, they are hard and strong. When the ten thousand things, the grasses and trees, are alive, they are soft and supple. When they die, they are withered and dry. So the hard and strong are companions of death; the soft and weak are companions of life. Therefore when an army is strong, it does not win. When a tree is strong, it meets the axe. The strong and great take the lower place; the soft and weak take the higher.
77 天之道，其猶張弓與？高者抑之，下者舉之；有餘者損之，不足者補之。天之道，損有餘而補不足。人之道則不然，損不足以奉有餘。孰能有餘以奉天下？唯有道者。是以聖人為而不恃，功成而不處，其不欲見賢。	The Way of heaven—is it not like drawing a bow? What is high is pulled down; what is low is raised up. What has too much is reduced; what has too little is added to. The Way of heaven reduces what has too much and adds to what has too little. The way of people is not so. It reduces those who have too little to serve those who have too much. Who can take what they have in excess and offer it to the world? Only one who has the Way. Therefore the sage acts but does not rely on it, completes the work but does not dwell in it, and has no wish to display worth.
78 天下莫柔弱於水，而攻堅強者，莫之能勝，其無以易之。弱之勝強，柔之勝剛，天下莫不知莫能行。是以聖人云：「受國之垢，是謂社稷主；受國不祥，是為天下王。」正言若反。	Nothing in the world is softer and weaker than water, yet for attacking the hard and strong, nothing can surpass it, for nothing can take its place. That the weak overcomes the strong and the soft overcomes the hard—everyone in the world knows it, yet no one can practice it. Therefore the sage says: “Whoever takes on the filth of the state is called lord of its altars. Whoever takes on the misfortunes of the state is called king of the world.” True words seem to say the opposite.
79 和大怨，必有餘怨，安可以為善？是以聖人執左契，而不責於人。有德司契，無德司徹。天道無親，常與善人。	When a great resentment is settled, some resentment is sure to remain. How can this be counted good? Therefore the sage holds the left half of the tally but makes no demands on others. Those with

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		virtue keep the tally. Those without virtue collect the dues. The Way of heaven has no favorites. It always sides with the good.[6]
80	小國寡民，使有什伯之器而不用，使民重死而不遠徙。雖有舟輿，無所乘之；雖有甲兵，無所陳之。使人復結繩而用之，甘其食，美其服，安其居，樂其俗。鄰國相望，雞犬之聲相聞，民至老死，不相往來。	A small state with few people. Let there be tools that do the work of ten or a hundred, yet let them go unused. Let the people take death seriously and not move far away. Though they have boats and carts, let there be no occasion to ride them. Though they have armor and weapons, let there be no occasion to display them. Let people return to knotting cords and using them. Let them savor their food, find their clothes beautiful, be at peace in their homes, and delight in their customs. Neighboring states can see each other and hear each other's roosters and dogs, yet the people grow old and die without ever visiting one another.[7]
81	信言不美，美言不信。善者不辯，辯者不善。知者不博，博者不知。聖人不積，既以為人己愈有，既以與人己愈多。天之道，利而不害；聖人之道，為而不爭。	True words are not beautiful. Beautiful words are not true. The good do not argue. Those who argue are not good. Those who know are not learned. Those who are learned do not know. The sage does not hoard. Having done everything for others, the sage has more. Having given everything to others, the sage has still more. The Way of heaven benefits and does not harm. The way of the sage acts and does not contend.

6 Agreements were recorded on tallies split in two; the left half entitled its holder to claim what was owed.
7 Knotted cords were used to keep records before writing.