The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name. The unnamable is the
eternally real. Naming is the origin of all particular things. Free from desire, you realize the mystery. Caught in desire, you see only
the manifestations. Yet mystery and manifestations arise from the same source. This source is called darkness. Darkness within
darkness. The gateway to all understanding. When people see some things as beautiful, other things become ugly. When people
see some things as good, other things become bad. Being and non-being create each other. Difficult and easy support each other.
Long and short define each other. High and low depend on each other. Before and after follow each other. Therefore the Master
acts without doing anything and teaches without saying anything. Things arise and she lets them come; things disappear and she
lets them go. She has but doesn't possess, acts but doesn't expect. When her work is done, she forgets it. That is why it lasts
forever. If you over esteem great men, people become powerless. If you overvalue possessions, people begin to steal. The Master
leads by emptying people's minds and filling their cores, by weakening their ambition and toughening their resolve. He helps people
lose everything they know, everything they desire, and creates confusion in those who think that they know. Practice not-doing,
and everything will fall into place. The Tao is like a well: used but never used up. It is like the eternal void: filled with infinite
possibilities. It is hidden but always present. I don't know who gave birth to it. It is older than God. The Tao doesn't take sides; it
gives birth to both good and evil. The Master doesn't take sides; she welcomes both saints and sinners. The Tao is like a bellows: it
is empty yet infinitely capable. The more you use it, the more it produces; the more you talk of it, the less you understand. Hold on
to the center. The Tao is called the Great Mother: empty yet inexhaustible, it gives birth to infinite worlds. It is always present
within you. You can use it any way you want. The Tao is infinite, eternal. Why is it eternal? It was never born; thus it can never die. Why is
it infinite? It has no desires for itself; thus it is present for all beings. The Master stays behind; that is why she is ahead. She is
detached from all things; that is why she is one with them. Because she has let go of herself, she is perfectly fulfilled. The supreme
good is like water, which nourishes all things without trying to. It is content with the low places that people disdain. Thus it is like the
Tao. In dwelling, live close to the ground. In thinking, keep to the simple. In conflict, be fair and generous. In governing, don't try
to control. In work, do what you enjoy. In family life, be completely present. When you are content to be simply yourself and don't
compare or compete, everybody will respect you. Fill your bowl to the brim and it will spill. Keep sharpening your knife and it will
blunt. Chase after money and security and your heart will never unclench. Care about people's approval and you will be their
prisoner. Do your work, and then step back, which is the only path to serenity. Can you coax your mind from its wandering and keep
to the original oneness? Can you let your body become supple as a newborn child's? Can you cleanse your inner vision until you
see nothing but the light? Can you love people and lead them without imposing your will? Can you deal with the most vital matters
by letting events take their course? Can you step back from your own mind and thus understand all things? Giving birth and
nourishing, having without possessing, acting with no expectations, leading and not trying to control: this is the supreme virtue. We
join spokes together in a wheel, but it is the center hole that makes the wagon move. We shape clay into a pot, but it is the
emptiness inside that holds whatever we want. We hammer wood for a house, but it is the inner space that makes it livable. We
work with being, but non-being is what we use. Colors blind the eye. Sounds deafen the ear. Flavors numb the taste. Thoughts
weaken the mind. Desires wither the heart. The Master observes the world but trusts his inner vision. He allows things to come and
go. His heart is open as the sky. Success is as dangerous as failure. Hope is as hollow as fear. What does it mean that success is
as dangerous as failure? Whether you go up the ladder or down it, your position is shaky. When you stand with your two feet on the
ground, you will always keep your balance. What does it mean that hope is as hollow as fear? Hope and fear are both phantoms
that arise from thinking of the self. When we don't see the self as self, what do we have to fear? See the world as yourself. Have
faith in the way things are. Love the world as your self; then you can care for all things. Look, and it can't be seen. Listen, and it
can't be heard. Reach, and it can't be grasped. Above, it isn't bright. Below, it isn't dark. Seamless, unnamable, it returns to the
realm of nothing. Form that includes all forms, image without an image, subtle, beyond all conception. Approach it and there is
no way to describe it; all we can describe is their appearance. They were careful as someone crossing an iced-over stream. Alert as a
grandmother, dignified as a king. Immersed in the wonder of the Tao, you can deal with whatever life brings you, and when death comes, you are ready. When the Master governs, the people are hardly aware that he exists. Next
best is a leader who is loved. Next, one who is feared. The worst is one who is despised. If you don't trust the people, you make
them untrustworthy. The Master doesn't talk, he acts. When his work is done, the people say, “Amazing: we did it, all by ourselves!”
When the great Tao is forgotten, goodness and piety appear. When the body's intelligence declines, cleverness and knowledge
step forth. When there is no peace in the family, filial piety begins. When the country falls into chaos, patriotism is born. Throw away
holiness and wisdom, and people will be a hundred times happier. Throw away morality and justice, and people will do the right
thing. Throw away industry and profit, and there won't be any thieves. If these three aren't enough, just stay at the center of the
circle and let all things take their course. Stop thinking, and end your problems. What difference between yes and no? What
difference between success and failure? Must you value what others value, avoid what others avoid? How ridiculous! Other people
are excited, as though they were at a parade. I alone don't care; I alone am expressionless, like an infant before it can smile. Other
people have what they need; I alone possess nothing. I alone drift about, like someone without a home. I am like an idiot, my mind
is so empty. Other people are bright; I alone am dark. Other people are sharp; I alone am dull. Other people have a purpose; I
alone don't know. I drift like a wave on the ocean; I blow as aimless as the wind. I am different from ordinary people. I drink from the
Great Mother's breasts. The Master keeps her mind always at one with the Tao; that is what gives her radiance. The Tao is ungraspable. How can her mind be at one with it? Because she doesn't cling to ideas. The Tao is dark and unfathomable. How can it make her radiant? Because she lets it. Since before time and space were, the Tao is. It is beyond is and is not. How do I know this is true? I look inside myself and see. If you want to become whole, let yourself be partial. If you want to become straight, let yourself be crooked. If you want to become full, let yourself be empty. If you want to be reborn, let yourself die. If you want to be given everything, give everything up. The Master, by residing in the Tao, sets an example for all beings. Because he doesn't display himself, people can see his light. Because he has nothing to prove, people can trust his words. Because he doesn't know who he is, people recognize themselves in him. Because he has no goal in mind, everything he does succeed. When the ancient Masters said, “If you want to be given everything, give everything up,” they weren't using empty phrases. Only in being lived by the Tao can you be truly yourself. Express yourself completely, and then keep quiet. Be like the forces of nature: when it blows, there is only wind; when it rains, there is only rain; when the clouds pass, the sun shines through. If you open yourself to the Tao, you are at one with the Tao and you can embody it completely. If you open yourself to insight, you are at one with insight and you can use it completely. If you open yourself to loss, you are at one with loss and you can accept it completely. Open yourself to the Tao, then trust your natural responses; and everything will fall into place. He who stands on tiptoe doesn’t stand firm. He who rushes ahead doesn’t go far. He who cries to shine dims his own light. He who defines himself can’t know who he really is. He who has power over others can’t empower himself. He who clings to his work will create nothing that endures: If you want to accord with the Tao, just do your job, then let go. There was something formless and perfect before the universe was born. It is serene. Empty. Solitary. Unchanging. Infinite. Eternally present. It is the mother of the universe. For lack of a better name, I call it the Tao. It flows through all things, inside and outside, and returns to the origin of all things. The Tao is great. The universe is great. Earth is great. Man is great. These are the four great powers. Man follows the earth. Earth follows the universe. The universe follows the Tao. The Tao follows only itself. The heavy is the root of the light. The unmoved is the source of all movement. Thus the Master travels all day without leaving home. However splendid the views, she stays serenely in herself. Why should the lord of the country flit about like a fool? If you let yourself be blown to and fro, you lose touch with your root. If you let restlessness move you, you lose touch with who you are. A good traveler has no fixed plans and is not intent upon arriving. A good artist loves his art but is not intent on terminating. If you want to accord with the Tao, you must first let go of the goal that you want to attain. If you want to shrink something, you must first allow it to expand. If you want to be given everything, give everything up. The Tao never does anything, yet through it all things are done. If you want to be powerful, you must first allow it to be powerless. The world works because there is no desire. When there is no desire, all things are at peace. People would be content with their simple, everyday lives, in harmony, and free of desire. When there is no desire, all things are at peace. The Master doesn’t try to be powerful; thus he is truly powerful. The ordinary man keeps reaching for power; thus he never has enough. The Master does nothing, yet he leaves nothing undone. The ordinary man is always doing things, yet many more are left to be done. The kind man does something, yet something remains undone. The just man does something, and leaves many
things to be done. The moral man does something, and when no one responds he rolls up his sleeves and uses force. When the Tao is lost, there is goodness. When goodness is lost, there is morality. When morality is lost, there is ritual. Ritual is the husk of true faith, the beginning of chaos. Therefore the Master concerns himself with the depths and not the surface, with the fruit and not the flower. He has no will of his own. He dwells in reality, and lets all illusions go. In harmony with the Tao, the sky is clear and spacious, the earth is solid and full, all creatures flourish together, content with the way they are, endlessly repeating themselves, endlessly renewed. When man interferes with the Tao, the sky becomes filthy, the earth becomes depleted, the equilibrium crumbles, and creatures become extinct. The Master views the parts with compassion, because he understands the whole. His constant practice is humility. He doesn't glitter like a jewel but lets himself be shaped by the Tao, as rugged and common as a stone. Return is the movement of the Tao. Yielding is the way of the Tao. All things are born of being. Being is born of non-being. When a superior man hears of the Tao, he immediately begins to embody it. When an average man hears of the Tao, he half believes it, half doubts it. When a foolish man hears of the Tao, he laughs out loud. If he didn't laugh, it wouldn't be the Tao. Thus it is said:

The path into the light seems dark,
The path forward seems to go back,
The direct path seems long,
True purity seems tarnished,
True steadfastness seems changeable,
True clarity seems obscure,
The greatest art seems unsophisticated,
The greatest love seems indifferent,
The greatest wisdom seems childish.

The Tao is nowhere to be found. Yet it nourishes and completes all things. The Tao gives birth to One. One gives birth to Two. Two gives birth to three. Three gives birth to all things. All things have their backs to the female and stand facing the male. When male and female combine, all things achieve harmony. Ordinary men hate solitude. But the Master makes use of it, embracing his aloneness, realizing he is one with the whole universe. The gentlest thing in the world overcomes the hardest thing in the world. That which has no substance enters where there is no space. This shows the value of non-action. Teaching without words, performing without actions: that's the Master's way. Fame or integrity: which is more important? Money or happiness: which is more valuable? Success or failure: which is more destructive? If you look to others for fulfillment, you will never truly be fulfilled. If your happiness depends on money, you will never be happy with yourself. Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you. True perfection seems imperfect, yet it is perfectly itself. True fullness seems empty, yet it is fully present. True straightforwardness seems crooked. True wisdom seems foolish. True art seems artless. The Master allows things to happen. She shapes events as they come. She steps out of the way and lets the Tao speak for itself. When a country is in harmony with the Tao, the factories make trucks and tractors. When a country goes counter to the Tao, warheads are stockpiled outside the cities. There is no greater illusion than fear, no greater wrong than preparing to defend yourself, no greater misfortune than having an enemy. Whoever can see through all fear will always be safe. Without opening your door, you can open your heart to the world. Without looking out your window, you can see the essence of the Tao. The more you know, the less you understand. The Master arrives without leaving, sees the light without looking, achieves without doing a thing. In the pursuit of knowledge, every day something is added. In the practice of the Tao, every day something is dropped. Less and less do you need to force things, until finally you arrive at non-action. When nothing is done, nothing is left undone. True mastery can be gained by letting things go their own way. It can't be gained by interfering. The Master has no mind of her own. She works with the mind of the people. She is good to people who are good. She is also good to people who aren't good. This is true goodness. She trusts people who are trustworthy. She also trusts people who aren't trustworthy. This is true trust.

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The greatest wisdom seems childish.
Thus whoever is stiff and inflexible is a disciple of death. Whoever is soft and yielding is a disciple of life. The hard and stiff will be hold on to. If you aren't afraid of dying, there is nothing you can't achieve. Trying to control the future is like trying to take the master though its meshes are wide, it doesn't let a thing slip through. If you realize that all things change, there is nothing you will try to without speaking a word, arrives without being summoned, accomplishes without a plan. Its net covers the whole universe. And themselves, they begin to depend upon authority. Therefore the Master steps back so that: people won't be confused. He teaches of all knowing. Thus she is truly whole. When they lose their sense of awe, people turn to religion. When they no longer trust other, the victory will go to the one that knows how to yield. My teachings are easy to understand and easy to put into practice. Yet back without using weapons. There is no greater misfortune than underestimating your enemy. Underestimating your enemy means wait and see. Rather than advance an inch it is better to retreat a yard.” This is called going forward without advancing, pushing this they are like children and in harmony with the Tao. The generals have a saying: ‘Rather than make the first move it is better to enter the mind of his enemy. The best businessman serves the communal good. The best leader follows the will of the people, and no one feels manipulated. The whole world is grateful to her. Because she competes with no one, no one can confront the difficult while it is still easy; accomplish the great task by a series of small acts. The Master never reaches foe the great; thus she achieves greatness. When she runs into a difficulty, she stops and gives herself to it. She doesn't cling to her own comfort; thus problems are no problem for her. What is rooted is easy to nourish. What is recent is easy to correct. What is brittle is easy to break. What is small is easy to scatter. Prevent trouble before it arises. Put things in order before they exist. The giant pine tree grows from a tiny sprout. The journey of a thousand miles starts from beneath your feet. Rushing into action, you fail. Trying to grasp things, you lose them. Forcing a project to completion, you ruin what was almost ripe. Therefore the Master cakces action by letting things take their course. He remains as calm at the end as at the beginning. He has nothing, thus has nothing to lose. What he desires is non-desire; what he learns is to unlearn. He simply reminds people of who they have always been. He cares about nothing but the Tao. Thus he can care for all things. The ancient Masters didn't try to educate the people, but kindly taught them to not-know. When they think that they know the answers, people are difficult to guide. When they know that they don't know, people can find their own way. If you want to learn how to govern, avoid being clever or rich. The simplest pattern is the clearest. Content with an ordinary life, you can show all people the way back to their own true nature. All streams flow to the sea because it is lower than they ate. Humility gives it its power. If you want to govern the people, you must place yourself below them. If you want to lead the people, you must learn how to follow them. The Master is above the people, and no one feels oppressed. She goes ahead of the people, and no one feels manipulated. The whole world is grateful to her. Because she competes with no one, no one can compete with her. Some say that my teaching is nonsense. Others call it lofty but impractical. But to those who have looked inside themselves, this nonsense makes perfect sense. And to those who put it into practice, this loftiness has roots that go deep. I have just three things to teach; simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures. Simple in actions and in thoughts, you return to the source of being. Patient with both friends and enemies, you accord with the way things are. Compassionate toward yourself, you reconcile all beings in the world. The best athlete wants his opponent at his best. The best general enters the mind of his enemy. The best businessman serves the communal good. The best leader follows the will of the people. All of them embody the virtue of non-competition. Not that they don't love to compete, but they do it in the spirit of play. In this they are like children and in harmony with the Tao. The generals have a saying: “Rather than make the first move it is better to wait and see. Rather than advance an inch it is better to retreat a yard.” This is called going forward without advancing, pushing back without using weapons. There is no greater misfortune than underestimating your enemy. Underestimating your enemy means thinking that he is evil. Thus you destroy your three treasures and become an enemy yourself. When two great forces oppose each other, the victory will go to the one that knows how to yield. My teachings are easy to understand and easy to put into practice. Yet your intellect will never grasp them, and if you try to practice them, you’ll fail. My teachings are older than the world. How can you grasp their meaning? If you want to know me, look inside your heart. Not knowing is true knowledge. Presuming to know is a disease. First realize that you ate sick; then you can move toward health. The Master is her own physician. She has healed herself of all knowing. Thus she is truly whole. When they lose their sense of awe, people turn to religion. When they no longer trust themselves, they begin to depend upon authority. Therefore the Master steps back so that: people won’t be confused. He teaches who can't offer to help him if he isn't asking for help. The Tao is always at ease, it overcomes without force. When you offer the answers without speaking a word, arrives without being summoned, accomplishes without a plan. Its net covers the whole universe. And though its meshes are wide, it doesn't let a thing slip through. If you recognize all things change, there is nothing you will try to hold on to. If you aren't afraid of dying, there is nothing you can’t achieve. Trying to control the future is like trying to take the master carpenter's tools. When you handle the master carpenter's tools, chances are that you'll cur your hand. When taxes are too high, people go hungry. When the government is too intrusive, people lose their spirit. Act for the people’s benefit. Trust them; leave them alone. Men are born soft and supple; dead, they are stiff and hard. Plants are born tender and pliant; dead, they are brittle and dry. Thus whoever is stiff and inflexible is a disciple of death. Whoever is soft and yielding is a disciple of life. The hard and stiff will be broken. The soft and supple will prevail. As it acts in the world, the Tao is like the bending of a bow. The top is bent downward; the
Chapter 1
Describing the indescribable, teaching the un-teachable, pointing the way to the Way—what does Lao-tzu think he is doing here? It can't bed one. No way. Hence Po Chü-i, poet and stand-up comedian, wrote, "He who talks doesn't know, he who knows doesn't talk": That is what Lao-tzu told us, in a book of five thousand words. If he was the one who knew, how could he have been such a blabbermouth? That's the problem with spiritual teachers. They have to be blabbermouths. But their words are (in the traditional Buddhist metaphor) fingers pointing at the moon; if you watch the finger, you can't see the moon. How meticulous the great Masters had to be! A monk asked Ma-tzu, "Why do you teach, "Mind is Buddha"?" Ma-tzu said, "To stop a baby from crying." The monk said, "When the crying has stopped, what then?" Ma-tzu said, "Then I teach, "Not mind, not Buddha." The monk said, "How about someone who isn't attached to either?" Ma-tzu said, "I would tell him, "Not beings." The monk said, "And what if you met a man unattached to all things: what would you tell him?" Ma-tzu said, "I would just let him experience the great Tao." In fact, the truth is right before our eyes; right under our noses; so simple that every child understands it; and yet, as Bankei said, the farther you enter into it, the deeper it is. Where is the way to the Way? What a question! Still, for complicated minds, drastic measures are needed. Lao-tzu's book was written as a response, out of grandmotherly kindness. According to the oldest biography, Lao-tzu lived for a long time in the country of Chou, but seeing its decline he departed. When he reached the frontier, the guard said, "Since you are going away, Sir, could you write a book to teach me the art of living?" Thereupon Lao-tzu wrote his book about the Tao, and departed. This is legend, but it is an accurate description of the way in which true teaching happens. He who knows doesn't talk, but words are no hindrance for him. He uses them as he would use gardening tools. When someone asks, he answers. The Tao that can be told I is not the eternal Tao: The text reads, "The Tao that can be Tao-ed [one meaning of too being 'to express'] is not the eternal Tao." Other possible renderings. "The way that can be weighed / is not the eternal Way," "The force that can be forced / is not the eternal Force." you realize the mystery: Infinitely marvelous, yet as ordinary as sunlight. Impossible to know, yet as easy as touching your nose when you wash your face. This source is called darkness: Because none of our senses can perceive it. It is also called "light," because the less we obstruct it, the more radiant we are. The gateway to all understanding: In order to understand, we have to remain in the darkness of not knowing.

Chapter 2
Acts without doing anything: Her actions are appropriate responses. Thus they are effortless. She embodies compassion, yet she doesn't try to be compassionate. She doesn't struggle to make money, yet she enjoys spending it when it comes to her. She goes her own way, yet she accepts help gratefully and has no pride in walking alone. She is not elated by praise, not discouraged by neglect. She doesn't give even a moment's thought to right or wrong. She never has to make a decision; decisions arise by themselves. She is like an actress who loves her role. The Tao is writing the script. teaches without saying anything: That is what Lao-tzu told us, in a book of five thousand words. If he was the one who knew, how could he have been such a blabbermouth? That's the problem with spiritual teachers. They have to be blabbermouths. But their words are (in the traditiona l "talk":  That is what Lao-tzu told us, in a book of five thousand words. If he was the one who knew, how could he have been such a blabbermouth? That's the problem with spiritual teachers. They have to be blabbermouths. But their words are (in the traditional Buddhist metaphor) fingers pointing at the moon; if you watch the finger, you can't see the moon. How meticulous the great Masters had to be! A monk asked Ma-tzu, "Why do you teach, "Mind is Buddha"?" Ma-tzu said, "To stop a baby from crying." The monk said, "When the crying has stopped, what then?" Ma-tzu said, "Then I teach, "Not mind, not Buddha." The monk said, "How about someone who isn't attached to either?" Ma-tzu said, "I would tell him, "Not beings." The monk said, "And what if you met a man unattached to all things: what would you tell him?" Ma-tzu said, "I would just let him experience the great Tao." In fact, the truth is right before our eyes; right under our noses; so simple that every child understands it; and yet, as Bankei said, the farther you enter into it, the deeper it is. Where is the way to the Way? What a question! Still, for complicated minds, drastic measures are needed. Lao-tzu's book was written as a response, out of grandmotherly kindness. According to the oldest biography, Lao- tzu lived for a long time in the country of Chou, but seeing its decline he departed. When he reached the frontier, the guard said, "Since you are going away, Sir, could you write a book to teach me the art of living?" Thereupon Lao-tzu wrote his book about the Tao, and departed. This is legend, but it is an accurate description of the way in which true teaching happens. He who knows doesn't talk, but words are no hindrance for him. He uses them as he would use gardening tools. When someone asks, he answers. The Tao that can be told I is not the eternal Tao: The text reads, "The Tao that can be Tao-ed [one meaning of too being 'to express'] is not the eternal Tao." Other possible renderings. "The way that can be weighed / is not the eternal Way," "The force that can be forced / is not the eternal Force." you realize the mystery: Infinitely marvelous, yet as ordinary as sunlight. Impossible to know, yet as easy as touching your nose when you wash your face. This source is called darkness: Because none of our senses can perceive it. It is also called "light," because the less we obstruct it, the more radiant we are. The gateway to all understanding: In order to understand, we have to remain in the darkness of not knowing.

Chapter 3
Implying people's minds; He empties them of concepts, judgments, and desires. Thus they can return to a state of childlike simplicity.
Filling their cores: He fills them with a sense of their original identity. Thus they can return to a state of childlike simplicity.
Weakening their ambition: When they have no false self to nourish or defend, they find that greed, hatred, and arrogance vanish by themselves. Toughening their resolve: Their innermost intention. They develop enough self-reliance to give up the idea of self.

Chapter 4
Following Ch'ên Ku-ying, I have deleted the second stanza of the Chinese text, which seems to be an interpolation from chapter 56. It is older than God: There is no God when there is nothing but God.

Chapter 5
The Tao doesn't take sides; it gives birth to both good and evil: Literally, "Heaven and earth are impartial; they treat all things like straw dogs," as the Master "treats all people like straw dogs. "Straw dogs were ritual objects, venerated before the ceremony but afterward abandoned and trampled underfoot. The point here is not that the Tao is not cruel to things, nor that the Master is ruthless with people, but that they impartial. The Master sees all beings arising from the same source, working out their karma (usually with great suffering), and returning to the source. And since people are in constant flux, she understands that at any moment they are capable of the most astonishing spiritual transformations. Why should she pin them motionless with a judgment of "good" or "bad"?
Chapter 6
First stanza: Literally, "The spirit of the valley never dies. It is called the mysterious female. The gate of the mysterious female is the root of heaven and earth." Chu Hsi said, "The female is one who receives something and, with it, creates. This creative principle is the most marvelous thing in the universe."

Chapter 7
The Tao is infinite, eternal: Here is everywhere. Anytime is now. The Master stays behind; that is why she is ahead: She is like a turtle: wherever she is, is home. Actually, she is neither behind nor ahead, but exactly even with all things. She is detached: Bunan said, "It is easy to keep things at a distance; it is hard to be naturally beyond them." Detachment results in clarity; clarity expresses itself in love. Her heart is like a mirror, which reflects all faces, without judgment, exactly as they are.

Chapter 8
The supreme good is like water: I asked my friend and teacher Emilie Conrad-Da'oud, founder of Continuum, to comment on this verse. She said, Water is the source of all life, life's matrix and fecundity; it overflows into everything, it moves everywhere. Whatever a fundamentally water: muscled water. And the idea that we ever leave the amniotic fluid is a misconception. The amniotic fluid is the state of total nourishment and unconditional love. It is always present for us and contains everything we could possibly want. In fact, we are that fluid of love.

Chapter 9
Do your work, then step back: When you do your work wholeheartedly, you are glad to let it go, just as a parent lets a child go, into its own life.

Chapter 10
Canyon let your body become; Literally, "Can you concentrate your ch'i [vital energy] until it becomes . . . "supple as a newborn child's: Emilie Conrad-Da'oud's comment: There is no self-consciousness in the newborn child. Later on, the mind wanders into self-images, starts to think should I do this? Is this movement right? And loses the immediacy of the moment. As self-consciousness develops, the muscles become less supple, less like the world. But the young child is pure fluidity. It isn't aware of any separation, so all its movements are spontaneous and alive and whole and perfect. If an adult body becomes truly supple, though, there 's a quality to its movement that the child's doesn't have, a texture of experience, a fourth dimension of time. When we watch a seventy-year-old hand move, we feel, "Yes, that hand has lived." All the bodies it has touched, all the weights it has lifted, all the heads it has cradled are present in its movement. Iris resonant with experience; the fingers curve with a sense of having been there. Whereas in a child's hand there's a sense of just arriving. The child's movement is pristine and innocent and delightful, but a truly supple adult movement is awesome, because all life is included in it. Until you see nothing but the light. "That is, until your heart is at peace. The great modern Indian sage Ramana Mahar-shi said, There is no greater mystery than this, that we keep seeking reality though in fact we are reality. We think that there is something hiding our reality and that this must be destroyed before reality is gained. How ridiculous! A day will dawn when you will laugh at all your past efforts. That which will be on the day you laugh is also here and now. The suppler your body is, the less dictatorial you'll be. The military stance is the most invasive stance that you can possibly take. Its opposite—the boneless, wishy-washy posture of someone who doesn't stand for anything—is just as unhealthy. Suppleness is really fluidity. It transcends strength and weakness. When your body is Supple, it feels like there's no barrier in you, you can flow in any direction, your movement is a complete expression of yourself. By letting events take their course: Literally, "by becoming the female." The Ho-shang Kung commentary says, "In arranging one's life properly, one should be as calm and flexible as a woman,"

Chapter 11
Non-being is what we use: The true teacher realizes that there is nothing to teach; that's why he can teach anyone who wants to learn. The true lover realizes that there is no one to love; chat's why he is available to anyone who needs him. The Master realizes that there is nowhere to stand; that's why he can stand anywhere.

Chapter 12
Colors blind the eye, etc.: We need space in order to see, silence in order to hear, sleep in order to carry on with out wakefulness. If the senses are too cluttered with objects, they lose their acuteness and will eventually decay. Desires wither the heart. Once it has let go of desires, the heart naturally overflows with love, like David's cup in Psalm 23, his inner vision: There is no inside or outside for him. He reflects whatever appears, without judgment, whether it is a flower or a heap of garbage, a criminal or a saint. Whatever happens is all right. He treats his own anger or grief just as he would treat an angry or grieving child: with compassion. Open as the sky: The sky holds sun, moon, stars, clouds, rain, snow, or pure azure. Because it doesn't care which of these appear, it has room for them all.

Chapter 13
Keep your balance: The trick is to go up or down the ladder with your feet on the ground. Bravo! Bravissimo!! See the world as your self: The outer mirrors the inner.

Chapter 14
Look, and it can't he seen: Another way of saying this: "Look, and it's right before your eyes."

Chapter 15
Till your mud settles: "Mud" stands for concepts, judgments, desires, expectations—everything that obscures and narrows reality. The Master's life is pure and placid: predictable like the seasons, obvious like the moon. When our mind/heart becomes transparent, the light of the Tao shines through. The water is clear: I asked my old teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, to comment on this verse. He said, Our mind is like a glass of clear water. If we put salt into the water, it becomes salt water; sugar, it becomes sugar water; shit, it becomes shit water. But originally the water is clear. No thinking, no mind. No mind, no problem.

Chapter 16
Empty your mind: This doesn't mean, "Suppress your thoughts," but "step back from them." Insight into the Tao has nothing to do with the intellect and its abstractions. When we step out of self-consciousness, we step into the Tao. Lin Ching-hsi said, The mind is...
originally empty, and only when it remains empty, without grasping or rejecting, can it respond to natural things, without prejudice. It should be like a river gorge with a swan flying overhead; the river has no desire to retain the swan, yet the swan's passage is traced by its shadow, without any omission. Another example: A mirror will reflect all things perfectly, whether they are beautiful or ugly; it never refuses to show a thing, nor does it retain the thing after it is gone. The mind should be as open as this. Does this sound anti-intellectual? But listen to Einstein: The scientist's religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, in comparison with it, all the systematic thinking of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection. This feeling is the guiding principle of his life and work.

Chapter 17
One of several chapters that ate as relevant to child rearing as to government. The Matter doesn't talk, heads: His words are in perfect harmony with his actions. He is always genuine.

Chapter 18
The great Tao: Jay at a said to Vasubandu, "If you have nothing to ask for in your mind, that state of mind is called the Tao." goodness and piety appear: When the Tao is forgotten, people act according to rules, not from the heart. This goodness is as insecure as Job's and can be as self-sat is tied as Little Jack Horner's. Whereas a good rather has no intention of being good; he just acts naturally.

Chapter 19
Throw away holiness and wisdom: When some folks are called saints, other folks think of themselves as sinners. When one fellow is called wise, others imagine that there is something they need to know. The Master doesn't have these categories; for her, no one is wise or holy, thus, in her presence everyone feels at home.

Chapter 20
Yes and no: Chao-chou asked Nan-ch'üan, "What is the Tao?" Nan-ch'üan said, "Everyday mind is the Tao." Chao-chou said, "How can I approach it?" Nan-ch'üan said, "The more you try to approach it, the farther away you'll be." "But if I don't get close, how can I understand it?" The Master said, "It's not a question of understanding or not understanding. Understanding is delusion; not understanding is indifference. But when you reach the unattainable Tao, it is like pure space, limitless and serene. Where is there room in it for yes or no?"
I alone don't care: If good happens, good; if bad happens, good.
I am like an idiot: First you erase the blackboard; then you can write something new.
I am different from ordinary people: I am mote ordinary. When I am hungry, I eat; when I am tired, I sleep; that's all. Pai-chang said, After enlightenment one is still the same as one was before. One is simply free from unreality and delusion. The ordinary person's mind is the same as the sage's, because Original Mind is perfect and complete in itself. After you have had this recognition, please don't lose it.

Chapter 21
Before time and space; Philo said, "Today means boundless and inexhaustible eternity. Months and years and all pe-riods of time are concepts of men, who gauge every thing by number; but the true name of eternity is Today."

Chapter 22
If you want to become whole, etc.: Unless you accept yourself, you can't let go of yourself. Because he doesn't know who be is: From the standpoint of personality, he knows very well who he is; that is what allows him to use his personality for people's benefit, rather than be used by it. But from the standpoint of his true self, there is nowhere to stand and no self to know. He doesn't know; he just is. Only in being lived by the Tan: This is what Paul of Tarsus meant by, "Not I, but Christ in me." Or, in a more light-hearted vein, the little boy who when his mother got annoyed and said "Stop sneezing!" answered, "I'm not sneezing!. It's sneezing me!"

Chapter 23
Trust your natural responses: Trust the intelligence of the body.

Chapter 24
Power over others: The other is the self. When we understand this, we are able to use power wisely.

Chapter 25
Mother of the universe: "The Tao gives birth to all beings,/nourishes them, maintains them,/ cares for them, comforts them, protects them,/takes them back to itself." These are the four great powers: Ho-hum.

Chapter 26
Without leaving home: She never loses touch with who she really is. In the midst of joy or anger or sorrow, she remains imperturbable.

Chapter 27
This is one of the most important chapters in the Tao Te Ching. First stanza; I have been very free here, because the central point—openness to reality, open heartedness—needs to be made as clearly as possible. The original text reads: A good walker leaves no traces or tracks; a good speaker makes no slips or errors. A good calculator needs no counting-sticks or tallies. A good locksmith uses no bolts or keys, yet no one can open. A good binder uses no ropes or cords, yet no one can loosen. Available to all people: Because he is not attached to his own ideas. you will get lost: In moral judgments. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is the Tree of Death.

Chapter 28
Know the male, /yet keep to the female: Keeping to the receptive allows the creative to arise. Actually, the creative and the receptive are complementary sides of the same process.

Chapter 29
Do you want to improve the world: Ramana Maharshi said, Wanting to reform the world without discovering one's true self is like trying to cover the world with leather to avoid the pain of walking on stones and thorns. It is much simpler to wear shoes.
It can't be improved: This is the Sabbath mind, as in the first chapter of Genesis: when God, from a state of perfect repose, looks at
the world and says, "Behold, it is very good." Actually, this "it can't be improved" is the greatest possible improvement. Compare
chapter 35: "She perceives the universal harmony, / even amid great pain, / because she has found peace in her heart."

Chapter 30
Doesn't try to force issues: He lets the issues resolve themselves.
Out of control: Out of the control of his own, tiny, personal, conscious self.

Chapter 31
Peace is his highest value: Peace means wholeness.

Chapter 32
Smaller than an electron: Neither small nor large. Neither here nor there. Neither past nor future nor present. Also (as long as we're
discussing this) all of the above.

Chapter 33
True wisdom: When I know myself, I know others. When I master myself, I don't need to master others.

Chapter 34
It doesn't create them: It is more like a mother than like an artisan, giving birth rather than making. It acts without any conscious
plan or purpose. God doesn't say, "Let there be light." The light simply is, and is God.

Chapter 35
Peace in her heart: She is centered in the peace; thus she can give herself fully to his pain.
Without flavor: Zen Master Seung Sahn's comment:
The Great Way has no gate.
Clear water has no taste.
The tongue has no bone.
In complete stillness, a stone girl is dancing.

Chapter 36
If you want to shrink something: For example, defects in your character. When suppressed or ignored, they continue; but when
allowed to be present in your awareness, they eventually wither away. Or, as Blake said from a slightly different perspective, "The
road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom."

Chapter 37
If powerful and women/could center themselves in it: They can!

Chapter 38
The Master does nothing: He has no goal in mind, doesn't think that be is doing anything. He's just along for the ride.
Yet he leaves nothing undone: No expectations. No regrets. No residue.
When the Tao is lost: You can never lose the Tao. But you can find it.
Therefore the Master concerns himself with the depths and not the surface: In the depths, there is no distinction between depths
and surface. Fruit in autumn, flowers in spring. He enjoys the flowers, as he enjoys the fruit.

Chapter 39
Lets himself be shaped by the Tao: As a piece of marble lets itself be shaped by the sculptor, so that the statue inside can be
revealed. Hammer and chisel are necessary agents. Ouch.

Chapter 40
Being is born of non-being: "Non-being" means beyond the categories of being and non-being.

Chapter 41
The greatest love seems indifferent: Because it has no preferences. A good father loves all his children equally, whether they
turnout to be thieves or carpenters or messiahs. As Jesus of Nazareth said, "Love your enemies [i.e., treat them with generosity
and compassion], so that you may be children of your father in heaven: for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and
sends his rain on the just and on the unjust."

Chapter 42
The Tao gives birth to one: When it's called One, it is no longer the Tao. (When it's called the Tao, it is no longer the Tao.)
One gives birth to two: Oy!
Two gives birth to three: Where will it end?
Three gives birth to all things: I knew it! Now once more from the top, with feeling.
All things have their backs to the female, etc.: Literally, "The ten thousand things carry [at their backs] the yin and embrace [in front]
the yang; through the blending of the energy [ch'i] of these two, they achieve harmony."
Last stanza: I have improvised here. The text reads: People hate to be orphans, widowers, starvelings. Yet kings and princes take
these names as their titles. Therefore sometimes you gain by losing; sometimes you lose by gaining. What others have taught, I
learn also: 'The violent will not die a natural death.' I will make this the father of my teaching.

Chapter 43
Gentlest is hardest: Examples: water and rock, love and hostility.

Chapter 44
Fame or integrity, etc.: But why be caught in these dichotomies? Once he has surrendered to the Tao, the Master accepts whatever
comes to him. If fame comes, he uses it with integrity. If money comes, he uses it as pure energy. Success and failure are equally
irrelevant to him, because his heart rests in the Tao.

Chapter 45
True perfection: A cracked coffee cup. The sound of traffic outside your window. True fullness: Attention, for example.
Chapter 46
Whoever can see through all fear: This is the only real defense. President Roosevelt said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." I would say, "Not even that."

Chapter 47
The more you know: The more you know without knowing yourself.

Chapter 48
True mastery can be gained: Actually, it can't be gained. True mastery is letting things take their course.

Chapter 49
Shea/so trusts people who aren't trustworthy: Like a parent whose child has broken a rule. Of course, if a parent is genuine, the child will be genuine too.

Chapter 50
There are a number of passages in the Tao Te Ching where a much narrower consciousness is at work than in the rest of the book. These passages may be interpolations (several show a concern with immortality, as the later, magical Taoism did). Or perhaps the old fellow had indigestion on the days he wrote them. But since my job was to recreate the essential mind of Lao-tzu, I couldn't not in good conscience include them in this version. What I have done instead is to make improvisations on the passage's theme, always taking care to remain within the consciousness and language of the main body of the test. For those who are curious, I have included literal translations in these notes. The text here reads: Coming in is life; going out is death. Three in ten are companions of life; three in ten are companions of death. And three in ten are moving from life to the place of death. Why is this? Because they live life too intensely, I have heard that he who knows how to preserve his life meets neither rhinoceros nor tiger when he travels by land, and is untouched by the sword when he enters a battle. The rhinoceros finds no place in him to drive its horn; the tiger finds no place in him to sink its claws; the soldier finds no place in him to thrust his sword. Why is this-because in him there is no place of death. 

Chapter 51
Sponstaneously honors the Tan: Honoring the Tao means respecting the way things are. There is a wonderful Japanese story (adapted here from Zenkei Shibayama Roshi's A FilmverDoes Not Talk) which portrays this attitude: A hundred and fifty years ago there lived a woman named Sono, whose devotion and purity of heart were respected far and wide. One day a fellow Buddhist, having made an arry trip to see her, asked, "What can I do to put my heart at rest?" She said, "Every morning and every evening, and whenever anything happens to you, keep on saying, 'Thanks for everything, I have no complaint whatsoever.' "The man did as he was instructed, for a whole year, but his heart was still not at peace. He returned to Sono, crestfallen. "I've said your prayer over and over, and yet nothing in my life has changed; I'm still the same selfish person as before. What should I do now?" Sono immediately said, "Thanks for everything. I have no complaint whatsoever. "On hearing these words, the man was able to open his spiritual eye, and returned home with a great joy.

Chapter 52
Trace back the manifestations: Where do you come from?

Chapter 53
The great Way is easy: Zen Master Seng-ts'an said, the great Way is not difficult. If you don't cling to good and bad. Just let go of your preferences and everything will be perfectly clear.

Chapter 54
Genuine: The mark of a genuine person is straightforwardness. He has nothing to hide, nothing to defend.

Chapter 55
Like a newborn child: Chuang-tzu said. The infant cries all day long without straining its throat. It clenches its fist all day long without cramping its hand. It stares all day long without weakening its eyes. Free from all worries, unaware of itself, it acts with out thinking, doesn't know why things happen, and doesn't need to know. The Master's power is like this, etc.: I have improvised here. The text reads: To know harmony is to know the eternal; to know the eternal is to have insight. To improve upon life is ominous; to control the ch'i by the mind is aggressiveness. When they are too aggressive, things decay. This is non-Tao. Non-Tao soon ends,

Chapter 56
Those who know don't talk: They don't talk for the sake of talking, or to prove something, or to display themselves. They talk only if it's appropriate (and if they feel like talking).
Those who talk don't know: This is ignorance, nor the openness of not knowing.

Chapter 57
The world will govern itself: Just as Nature regulates itself, without any need of our bright ideas.

Chapter 58
Second stanza: I have improvised here. The text reads: Prosperity tests on disaster; disaster is hidden in prosperity. Who knows the line that separates them? The normal becomes the perverted, the good becomes the monstrous. People have long been confused about this.

Chapter 59
I have improvised here. The text reads: In governing people and serving heaven, nothing is better than moderation. Only he who is moderate can prepare in advance. He who prepares in advance accumulates a reserve of te [virtue or power; the Tao as it informs
things and acts in the world]. He who accumulates a reserve of ft overcomes all obstacles. He who overcomes all obstacles has no
limits. He who has no limits can possess a country. He who possesses the mother of a country can keep it for a long time. This is
called having deep roots and a strong stem, long life and enduring vision.

Chapter 60
Step out of its way: It will be like a sword cutting the air. No harm.

Chapter 61
I have improvised here. The text reads: A large country is like the lower pact of a river. It is the meeting-point of the universe, the
female of the universe. The female, by tranquility, conquers the male. By tranquility she takes the lower position. There fore a large
country by placing itself in a lower position can conquer a small country. A small country by being in a lower position can conquer a
large country. Therefore the one conquers by placing itself lower, the other conquers by being naturally lower. A large country
wants nothing more than to gather people and nourish them. A small country wants nothing more than to enter and serve the
people. Since both get what they want, the large country should take the lower position.

Chapter 62
The Tao is the center of the universe: The center is everywhere.

Chapter 63
When she runs into a difficulty: A difficulty is like a letter with her address on it.

Chapter 64
He cares about nothing but the Tao: Which is not to say that he doesn't love his wife, children, friends, country, planet. But he sees
them in the proper perspective: of eternity. And since he and his wife love the Tao even more than they love each other, their
marriage is radiant with love. This is the meaning of the Biblical verse "You shall love the Unnamable your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength."

Chapter 65
Kindly taught them to not-know; the ancient Masters taught them the supreme value of Don't-know Mind, which is for-ever fresh,
open, and fertile with possibilities. (Another name for it is Beginner's Mind.)

Chapter 66
The Master is above the people: Not that she feels superior, but that, looking from a higher vantage point, she can see more. The
whole world is grateful to her: Even those who think they ate ungrateful. No one can compete with her: She sees everyone as her
equal.

Chapter 67
Second stanza; I have improvised here. The text reads: I have three treasures, which I preserve and treasure. The first is
compassion, the second is frugality, and the third is daring not to be first in the world. Whoever has compassion can be brave.
Whoever has frugality can be generous. Whoever dares not to be first in the world can become the leader of the world. But to be
brave without compassion, generous without frugality, prominent without humility: this is fatal. Whoever shows compassion in battle
will conquer. Whoever shows compassion in defense will stand firm. Heaven helps and protects those with compassion.

Chapter 68
I have improvised here. The text reads: A skillful officer isn't warlike. A skillful fighter isn't violent. A skillful conqueror isn't
competitive. A skillful employer places himself below others. This is called the te of not competing. This is called the power to use
men's abilities. This is called complying with heaven. Since ancient times it has been the best way.

Chapter 69
Underestimating your enemy; Even thinking of him as an enemy is dangerous. If you need a word, use "opponent." May the best
man (as they say) win?

Chapter 70
Easy 10 put into practice: Grasses and trees have no trouble with it; animals are perfect disciples.

Chapter 71
First realize that you are sick: Novalis said, "We are close to waking up when we dream that we are dreaming."

Chapter 72
Therefore the Master steps back: He doesn't act as guru or messiah, because he doesn't want to keep people dependent on him,
and thus spiritually immature. When people start to treat him like a holy man, he nips their adoration in the bud and points them to
their inner messiah. People will have nothing to learn: They just need to unlearn.

Chapter 73
The Tao is always at ease: At ease with herself, the Master puts everyone else at ease.

Chapter 74
Trying to control the future; thinking that you know what is good or bad, what is advantageous or harmful. The Huai Nan Tzu tells a
story about this: A poor farmer's horse ran off into the country of the barbarians. All his neighbors offered their condolences, but his
father said, "How do you know that this isn't good fortune?" After a few months the horse returned with a barbarian horse of
excellent stock. All his neighbors offered their congratulations, but his father said, "How do you know that this isn't a disaster?" The
two horses bred, and the family became rich in fine horses. The farmer's son spent much of his time riding them; one day he fell off and broke his hipbone. All his neighbors offered the farmer their condolences, but his father said, "How do you know that this isn't good fortune?" Another year passed, and the barbarians invaded the frontier. All the able-bodied young men were conscripted, and nine-tenths of them died in the war. Thus good fortune can be disaster & vice versa. Who can tell how events will be transformed?

**Chapter 75**

Leave them a/one: Offer them the gift of not being dependent on you.

**Chapter 76**

Disciple of life; the less rigid, the reader for life or death.

**Chapter 77**

And doesn't think that she is better: She is simply mote transparent.

**Chapter 78**

He is people's greatest help: The greatest help is wholeheartedly trusting people to resolve their own problems. A true philanthropist, like a good parent, brings people to the point where they can help themselves.

True words seem paradoxical: Only when the mind is clucked with untruth.

**Chapter 79**

If you blame someone else: Confucius said, In the archer there is a resemblance to the mature person, When he misses the mark, he turns and seeks the reason for his failure in himself.

**Chapter 80**

Without ever having gone to see it: Not that they are lacking in appropriate curiosity. But they have the it priorities straight,

**Chapter 81**

The Master has no possessions: These no-possessions may include a house, a car, 3 computers, a roomful of books, and an electric toothbrush. The more he does for others, I the happier he is: Because he is doing it for himself. The more he gives to others, I the wealthier he is: The less he holds on to, the more he can give himself to others. When he can give himself completely, his wealth is infinite.