

worried about losing it. And if they are worried about losing it, there are no lengths to which they will not go.'

23. The Master said: 'Only women²² and small men seem difficult to look after. If you keep them close, they become insubordinate; but if you keep them at a distance, they become resentful.'

Book 19

21. Zigong said: 'The errors of the gentleman are like eclipses of the sun and moon. When he errs everyone observes him; and when he makes a correction, everyone looks up to him.'

■ Laozi (Lao Tzu) (c. Fourth to Third Centuries B.C.) (poems/philosophy)

TRANSLATED BY GIA-FU FENG AND JANE ENGLISH

Laozi was the legendary author of the *Dao De jing*, a collection of prose and verse wisdom literature that is considered the seminal and essential work of Daoism. Yet about Laozi and the *Dao De jing* mysteries abound. It is by no means certain that a historical personage named Laozi ever existed. The title *Dao De jing* (*Classic of the Way and Its Power*) is a later name for the collection that originally was called simply *Laozi*. Since Laozi also means "old man," and there is evidence of a body of wisdom literature whose various book titles all translate as "elder" or "old man," it may be that this collection is the lone survivor of this lost genre. It may be that the *Dao De jing* is an anthology of sayings by diverse authors linked by common themes or the work of one author augmented by later redactors. The traditional Laozi is said to have been an older contemporary of Confucius (551–479 B.C.) who instructed the younger sage in the rites, but this story seems not to have circulated until the third century B.C. It is now thought that the text dates from no earlier than the third or fourth centuries B.C. In the first century B.C., the famous historian Sima Qian recounted the Confucius encounter and other stories about Laozi, which he gathered from sources now lost. The story about Laozi's writing the *Dao De jing* follows:

Laozi cultivated the way and virtue, and his teachings aimed at self-effacement. He lived in Zhou for a long time, but seeing its decline he departed, when he reached the Pass, the Keeper there was pleased and said to him, "As you are about to leave the world behind, could you write a book for

my sake?" As a result, Laozi wrote a work in two books, setting out the meaning of the way and virtue in some five thousand characters, and then departed. None knew where he went to in the end.¹

The book itself has more than the five thousand characters mentioned by Sima Qian and is divided into eighty-one chapters in two sections. Unlike the *Zhuangzi*, the *Dao De jing* is not a work of anecdotes and parables; it is a general, didactic work of great poetic beauty, mystery, and ambiguity. Central to the work and to Daoism is the concept of the *Dao*, which means the way, method, or reason.² The *Dao* is ineffable—it can't be captured in words; it is as small as the essential nature of the smallest thing and as large as the entire universe. The term *De* means "virtue" and refers to the nature of a thing—its inherent virtue and energy. The term *jing* means "classic," and thus the title of the book translates as *The Classic of the Dao and the De*. The *Dao* in this work is seen as the source of the world, as everything and, at the same time, nothing. It is fluid, weak, and passive, yet it conquers all and is the source of all action. Its nature is paradoxical because it is so large that it contains both ends of all oppositions. The *Dao* is also a contemplative method for understanding oneself and for merging with the *Dao*. Different interpreters see it either as a method of survival through passive resistance written in a time of great insecurity and turmoil or as a more mystical treatise. In any case, a number of passages treat the proper behavior of citizen and ruler and suggest that true self-interest lies in selflessness (thus, the ruler must humble himself before the people in order to rule, follow in order to lead).

Like Confucianism, Daoism took on magical elements as it developed, and the longevity of the follower of the *Dao* (who would live longer in turbulent times) was interpreted as physical immortality. Daoism resembled Western alchemy in its quest for the secret of immortality and, later, came in part to blend with Buddhism. Throughout Chinese literature and intellectual history, Daoism has been a liberating counterbalance to the dogmatic order of Confucianism. The *Dao De jing* has been translated into English dozens of times, with varying degrees of success. At one end of the spectrum are scholarly, authoritative, and informative translations, which are inconsistently successful as poetry; at the other end of the spectrum are poetic interpretations, or modern imitations, which are good literature throughout but in which this ancient text is radically modernized. In searching for a compromise, we have settled on a lesser-known translation that attempts to be as true as possible to an original text that is notoriously ambiguous, while reflecting in lucid English its mysteriousness and literary qualities.

1. D. C. Lau, tr. *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 9. The Wade-Giles transliteration of this quotation has been changed to the Pinyin system.

FURTHER READING: Chan, Wing-tsit, tr. *The Way of Lao Tzu*, 1963. Feng, Chia-fu, and Jane English, trs. *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching*, 1972. Lau, D. C., tr. *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching*, 1963. Waley, Arthur. *The Way and Its Power*, 1934. Wu, John C. H., tr. *Tao Teh Ching*, 1961.

from *The Dao De jing*

One

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

Four

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

Eleven

Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub;
It is the center hole that makes it useful.
Shape clay into a vessel;
It is the space within that makes it useful.
Cut doors and windows for a room;
It is the holes which make it useful.
Therefore profit comes from what is there;
Usefulness from what is not there.

Sixteen

Empty yourself of everything;
Let the mind rest at peace.
The ten thousand things rise and fall while the Self watches their

They grow and flourish and then return to the source.
Returning to the source is stillness, which is the way of nature.
The way of nature is unchanging.

5

Knowing constancy is insight.
Not knowing constancy leads to disaster.
Knowing constancy, the mind is open.
With an open mind, you will be openhearted.
Being openhearted, you will act royally.
Being royal, you will attain the divine.
Being divine, you will be at one with the Tao.
Being at one with the Tao is eternal.
And though the body dies, the Tao will never pass away.

15

Twenty-two

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

5

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

20

Thirty

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

5

Achieve results,
But never glory in them.

Achieve results,

But never boast.

Achieve results,

But never be proud.

Achieve results,

Because this is the natural way.

Achieve results,

But not through violence.

Force is followed by loss of strength.

This is not the way of Tao.

That which goes against the Tao comes to an early end.

Thirty-three

Knowing others is wisdom;

Knowing the self is enlightenment.

Mastering others requires force;

Mastering the self needs strength.

He who knows he has enough is rich.

Perseverance is a sign of will power.

He who stays where he is endures.

To die but not to perish is to be eternally present.

Forty-three

The softest thing in the universe

Overcomes the hardest thing in the universe.

That without substance can enter where there is no room.

Hence I know the value of non-action.

Teaching without words and work without doing

Are understood by very few.

Forty-seven

Without going outside, you may know the whole world.

Without looking through the window, you may see the ways of heaven.

The farther you go, the less you know.

Thus the sage knows without traveling;

He sees without looking;

He works without doing.

Forty-nine

The sage has no mind of his own.

He is aware of the needs of others.

I am good to people who are good.

Because Virtue is goodness.

I have faith in people who are faithful.

I also have faith in people who are not faithful.

Because Virtue is faithfulness.

The sage is shy and humble—to the world he seems confusing.

Men look to him and listen.

He behaves like a little child.

Fifty-five

He who is filled with Virtue is like a newborn child.

Wasps and serpents will not sting him;

Wild beasts will not pounce upon him;

He will not be attacked by birds of prey.

His bones are soft, his muscles weak,

But his grip is firm.

He has not experienced the union of man and woman, but is whole.

His manhood is strong.

He screams all day without becoming hoarse.

This is perfect harmony.

Knowing harmony is constancy.

Knowing constancy is enlightenment.

It is not wise to rush about.

Controlling the breath causes strain.

If too much energy is used, exhaustion follows.

This is not the way of Tao.

Whatever is contrary to Tao will not last long.

Sixty-one

A great country is like low land.

It is the meeting ground of the universe,

The mother of the universe.

The female overcomes the male with stillness,

Lying low in stillness.

Therefore if a great country gives way to a smaller country,

It will conquer the smaller country.

And if a small country submits to a great country,

It can conquer the great country.

Therefore those who would conquer must yield,

And those who conquer do so because they yield.

A great nation needs more people;

A small country needs to serve.

Each gets what it wants.

Seventy-six

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

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

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

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

Seventy-eight

Under heaven nothing is more soft and yielding than water.
Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better;
It has no equal.

The weak can overcome the strong;
The supple can overcome the stiff.
Under heaven everyone knows this,
Yet no one puts it into practice.

Therefore the sage says:

He who takes upon himself the humiliation of the people is fit
to rule them.

He who takes upon himself the country's disasters deserves to be
king of the universe.

The truth often sounds paradoxical.

■ **Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu) (c. 369–286 B.C.)**
(philosophy)

TRANSLATED BY BURTON WATSON

Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi is a shadow behind the work that bears his name. Little is known of his life, except that a man named Zhuangzi (Master Zhuang) lived in the fourth century B.C., in what is now Henan province. Early in life he was a petty official in "the lacquer garden" of Meng, but for most of his life he scorned officialdom, preferring to be his own man. The great historian Sima Qian remarks that he had vast knowledge and that he wrote a long work explaining Laozi's teachings and attacking the doctrine of the early philosophers Confucius (551–479 B.C.) and Mo Tzu (470–391 B.C.). Zhuangzi is the most important interpreter of Daoism, and his unconventional spirit had only sarcasm for stultifying

person who sees this soon finds, like William Blake, that true marriage lies in contraries. Zhuangzi was able to look at the things of the world with a sense of relativism; therefore, since tall equals short and here equals there, if the true reality is seen to be beneath the surface, "There is nothing in the world bigger than the tip of an autumn hair, and Mount T'ai is little. No one has lived longer than a dead child, and [long lived] P'eng-tsu died young." Though the Dao is absolute, it is not unchanging; in fact, its very nature is flux. A comparison with Buddhism, in which the defining characteristic of the absolute is its freedom from flux, is informative.

Instead of presenting a system of ethical and social reform like other philosophers of his time, Zhuangzi celebrated spontaneity and the cultivation of an inner emptiness that allowed one to merge with the Dao. Human problems are created by human categories; the way out of them is not through changing the world but through changing the way you understand the world. Death and life are mere manifestations of the Dao and thus they are changes in form but not changes in essence. Therefore, we should free ourselves from fear of death and from attachment to life's worries: "How do I know that loving life is not a delusion? How do I know that in hating death I am not like a man who, having left home in his youth, has forgotten the way back?" This freedom is the primary benefit that Zhuangzi tries to give his readers, usually through dazzling rhetoric, humor, nonsense phrases, and paradoxes designed to shock us out of our preconceptions. Like Tang dynasty poet Wang Wei in his most Daoist poems, Zhuangzi celebrates inaction, even laziness, as opposed to a life of struggle for gain and a character dominated by desire. By following the Way of Daoism, one may even gain magical powers and immortality. As is the case with so many of the world's mystics, history has elided the life and left us the thought. But behind these fresh and ancient words, one can intuit a peculiar mind, like the Dao inscribed within the things of the world. In the end, it is hard to know whether the Zhuangzi text had only one author, but it is tempting to think of a man named Zhuangzi, a free spirit, unbounded and mystical, wry and just a bit crazed.

FURTHER READING: Kaltenmark, Max. *Lao Tzu and Taoism*. Translated by Roger Greaves, 1965. Watson, Burton, tr. *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*, 1964; tr. *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, 1961.

from *The Zhuangzi*

Great understanding is broad and unhurried; little understanding is cramped and busy. Great words are clear and limpid; little words are shrill and quarrelsome. In sleep, men's spirits go visiting; in waking hours, their bodies hustle. With everything they meet they become entangled. Day after day they use their minds in strife, sometimes grandiose, sometimes sly, sometimes petty. Their little fears are mean and tremulous; their great fears