

TAO TE CHING

CLASSIC TAO AND VIRTUE



FREELY ADAPTED FOR TAI CHI

BY MICHAEL PORTE, PH.D.



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many translations of the Tao Te Ching were consulted from Lin Yu Tang's *The Wisdom of Lao Tse* to Stephen Mitchell's new English version. However, my purpose in reading them was to try to determine the possible interpretations of the concise Chinese characters.

In my own adaptation, I did not choose to write a literal translation. Instead, I attempted to adapt the meaning to the interesting times we contemplate today. My goal was to address the concerns of my tai chi students. If I could put in a phrase that calls to mind a tai chi form, I did so. If I could use a metaphor that reminds us of an everyday problem, I used it.

INTRODUCTION

The widespread practice of Tai Chi has come about for a variety of reasons. First, medical studies suggest health benefits such as the reduction of stress and the lowering of blood pressure. Tai chi has been shown to be good for improving balance and making the back stronger. A second reason for practicing tai chi is the popularity of martial arts. Tai chi is thought to be the first martial art and it is studied by those who consider themselves expert in the martial arts. A third reason for practicing tai chi is the low-impact nature of its forms. Tai chi is relatively easy to learn and to perform at any age. Its slow movements require no strength or special skill. It has been considered to be like a slow dance.

Anyone can practice tai chi. However, those who practice tai chi merely as gentle exercise are missing a great deal. Tai chi came to us from a Taoist immortal, Chang San-Feng during the Ming Dynasty. One day while meditating, he heard a noise outside. He looked down in the courtyard as a crane flew out of a tree to attack a snake. The snake tried to counter attack the crane's left leg. The crane lifted the leg. The snake then went for the right leg. The crane shifted its weight onto the left leg and lifted the right leg. Eventually the crane flew back into the tree. The snake went into its hole. The idea came to Chang to devise an exercise based on nature including animals such as the crane and the snake. He also used the movement of clouds, water, trees, horses, and monkeys. He taught his disciples in Peking these forms along with Taoist ideas and meditation. From its origins, tai chi was a way of putting philosophic ideas into practice. To learn tai chi merely as exercise is to miss its philosophical purpose.

When I was teaching in Beijing during 1986, a philosophy professor sat in on my class one day. After class, I asked him which philosophers he taught. Did he teach Confucius? No. Did he teach Lao Tzu? No. Who did he teach? Karl Marx, he replied.

Each Friday afternoon, the students were required to go to the large assembly hall where they were taught ideas of Karl Marx. I thought it was incredible that Chinese students were not taught the ideas of Confucius and Lao Tzu. As I practice tai chi daily, I meditate on the classic of Lao Tzu, the Tao Te Ching. As I teach tai chi, I want my students to understand it as part of Chinese culture, not simply exercise. For this reason, I introduce a chapter of the Tao Te Ching into every tai chi class. I have tried in my adaptation to stress the ideas of Taoism as they relate to the practice of tai chi. I call this an adaptation instead of a translation because I have purposely introduced anachronisms to make the ideas relevant to modern students. This adaptation will introduce those who practice tai chi to the underlying ideas of Taoism, ideas that existed for centuries before Lao Tzu wrote his summary of them. As he was leaving his city on the way to becoming a hermit, he was stopped by the gatekeeper who asked him to write down his ideas on Taoism. In three days, he completed his classic treatise and went on his way.

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Chapter One

Trust your instincts,
and find the Tao.
Experience points you toward your goal.
Other goals you clearly see.
What touches your heart you see through the mist:
Clues to the mystery.
Opposites come from the same stream.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Two

Beauty appears in contrast to what is ugly.
Virtue exists as the opposite of evil.
Essence is the opposite of existence.
Being is the opposite of non-being.
Easy is the opposite of difficult. Tall is the opposite of short.
Backwards is the opposite of forwards.
The best teach by example.
A good action needs no words.
To stay creative, produce something and move on.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Three

Praise someone who does a good job and others will jockey for position.

Make a fuss over an antique and someone will steal it.

Build up a good thing and everyone will want it.

A leader whets your appetite before feeding you.

A leader gets you to question everything and wonder what you really need until you are unsure.

Even if you do nothing, something is bound to happen.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Four

The Tao seems endless,
like a cave deep and empty,

Primitive,

Mysterious.

When you follow around the bend,
suddenly you forget all your troubles.

You wonder

who came this way centuries ago.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Five

The Earth shows no favoritism.

Anyone can be sacrificed by any leader.

A follower looks in vain for a clue to the right act.

Just be spontaneous.

An empty bell can ring if enough wind passes through it.

The more you talk about the unknown, the less you are saying.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Six

The Yin is like an empty tunnel

with different spokes

moving in many directions.

You can decide

where you want to go.

Moving like clouds,

the mother cow

waits for a milking.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seven

The Earth goes on forever.
Why does it last?
It is not mortal.
It can never die.
What makes it go on?
It has no ambition.
It exists for anyone.
The wise step backward
to move forward.
A part of nothing,
the wise live within.
Never selfish,
the wise find out who they are
and why they are here.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Eight

The Tao is like water.

Water helps everything in its path.

Water even goes down to the pits.

The wise think with their heart.

They give and take.

They speak the truth.

They trust,

they speak kind words, not bossy ones.

They recognize merit and move through life like water,

without making enemies.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Nine

Half a cup is better than spilling your tea.
If you sharpen a knife too much it soon breaks.
If you fill your house with antiques, you are inviting burglars.
If you brag about how smart you are,
those who believe you will hate you.
Let your work speak for itself
and you will find the Tao of peace.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Ten

Can you fuse your body with your soul?
Can your flow of energy be as natural as a baby's breath?
Can you clean up your act?
Can you love the ones you lead?
Can you let them find their own way?
Can you cool it?
The best way to live is to let life slip through your fingers.
Serve but don't expect a reward.
Let flowers grow without cutting them down.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Eleven

The four tires on your car
keep spinning as you move,
but you sit still on the seat between the wheels.
The clay thrown on the wheel
shapes into a pot.
But you eat only what's in the pot.
The large piles of wood
go into making a loft.
But it is the space created that you appreciate.
The framework is important,
but the life within matters more.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Twelve

Five colors can make you blind.

Five noises can make you deaf.

Five flavors can make you puke.

The Kentucky Derby

Can blow your budget.

Once you wear a Rolex

You are afraid of losing it.

The wise fill the belly,

forget about HDTV,

Keep good memories,

and enjoy the inner life.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Thirteen

To be picked or kicked brings risk.

Winning and losing is normal.

What kind of risks?

If you are picked,
everyone thinks you are fair game.

You feel good being picked,
but you feel stress.

What's normal about winning and losing?

If you win, you wonder when the wheel will turn.

If you lose, you blame yourself.

Who else could you blame?

If you can rise above thinking of me, me, me!

You can look up and see the clouds moving.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fourteen

See right through it.

Listen past it.

Reach out for it.

These three become one.

Darkness above it.

Light below it.

Moving. Changing. Nameless.

It moves in a circle.

The formless blur flows.

Meet it. Trail it.

Let the Tao take you back to where you started.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fifteen

The wise try to understand.

The wise copy nature to find the Tao.

Pause fording a stream.

Look both ways for danger.

Melt away like ice.

Sit as simple as wood.

Keep open as a field.

Move like mud in the river.

Only stillness purifies.

The secret of the Tao

Comes to those who are content.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Sixteen

Make your mind a blank.

Feel nothing but peace.

Think about the wheel of activity, how it spins around to its starting place.

Coming back to the starting place is natural.

In nature you find the Tao.

The Tao shows you how everything changes.

Change leads to growth and decay.

To understand how things grow and change is to find inner peace.

Though people die, the Tao goes on forever.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seventeen

The best leader is not seen. The next best is loved.

The third best is feared. The worst leader is hated.

A leader who does not trust is not trusted.

A leader takes one to the water,
and watches you swim.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Eighteen

When the Tao is overgrown with weeds,
Empty words such as justice rise up.
When a leader pretended to be clever,
Thieves and liars sprang up to follow him.
When relatives couldn't live together in peace,
the head of the family lectured them about being good.
When a country fell into civil war and chaos, the ruler was praised
for loyalty.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Nineteen

Don't act like you know it all.

And people will think you're a hundred times smarter.

Don't spout fancy ideals like "Justice."

And you'll get along better with everyone.

Don't squeeze out every nickel in a deal.

And nobody will try to rob you.

More important than these three don'ts:

What you should do, be yourself.

But don't be selfish. Enjoy nature.

But don't ask for the moon.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Twenty

When I turn away from learning, I can find peace.

When I stop thinking of good and evil, I can see what's there.

When I notice people are afraid, I know there's a reason.

When I follow the Tao, I am an outsider.

When I see people with Spring fever, I feel like a baby without teeth.

When I hear people spreading dirt, I am silent.

When I feel the strong wind, I become the calm sea.

When others set high goals, I keep my low one.

I value the Tao, as I adored the mother feeding me.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Twenty One

The Tao seems unclear.
It is formless but contains great virtue.
Inside the Tao is an image.
Barely seen, yet it is substantial.
From ancient times to the present,
everyone has felt the essence of the Tao.
Everything springs from the Tao.
How do I know its nature?
I know with my mind.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Twenty Two

If you give in, you get everything you need.

If you are able to bend, you become straight.

If you feel empty, you are full.

If you are a mess, you feel like new.

If you need anything, you have everything.

If you own a lot of stuff, you have nothing.

A thoughtful person finds the Tao and others copy.

Staying in the shadows creates a glow.

Saying nothing about yourself gives rise to fame.

Ignoring pride, inspires others.

Without goals, success follows.

It has been repeated so often, no one knows who said it:

“If you give in, you get everything you need.”

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Twenty Three

Say what you feel. Be concise.
A gale has a short life.
A thunderstorm moves on.
They don't last forever. Nor do you.
If you follow the Tao, you become part of it.
The right path is there for all who look for it.
The lost way is there for all who want it.
Trust others and they will trust you.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Twenty Four

They who stand on tiptoe will fall.
They who pose too long get nowhere.
They who look silly are merely in hiding.
They who put on airs actually smell.
They who think they are something are nothing.
They who brag have no reason to be proud.
They who follow the Tao never stand on tiptoes.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Twenty Five

Something formless existed before there was a universe:

Silent, alone, a great mother.

If I had to give her a name,

I'd say she was the Tao.

The Tao is great.

The universe is great.

The Earth is great.

The leader is great.

These are the great four.

Men and women revolve around the earth.

The earth revolves around the universe.

The universe revolves around the Tao.

The Tao revolves around Nature.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Twenty Six

Solid gives rise to empty. Stillness overcomes motion.

Thus the wise move all day and stay put.

Although sparks fly, the wise remain calm.

Why should they run around like crazy?

If you let the wind carry you, how can you be smooth?

How can you keep your center?

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Twenty Seven

A good mover leaves no trace.

A good speaker uses clear reasons.

A good auditor needs no calculator.

A good closed door can't be opened.

A good knot can't be untied.

Thus the wise help everyone

because all are worth helping.

They help without being noticed.

This action avoids the limelight.

Therefore the able person teaches the disabled

and the disabled person becomes a resource of the able.

When a teacher is not respected, chaos results,

even for a smart person.

That is the secret of learning.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Twenty Eight

If you have male strength
but practice female empathy,
you become the heart of the world.
Being the heart of the world
means following your origins
and the innocence of childhood.
Know how to shine brightly
but choose to stay in the shadows.
Turn into a role model.
Being a role model keeps you strong
on the right path, true to your purpose.
Know life's rewards but stay humble
even though you become the heart of the world.
Being the heart of the world
gives you the way to meet any challenge.
You become as innocent as plain wood.
Plain wood splits into useful tools.
The wise use them and show others how.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Twenty Nine

Do you want to change the world?

Do you want to shape it
like a piece of clay?

Holier hands have made it.

To fire it is to ruin it.

To grasp it is to lose it.

Some run ahead.

Some lag behind.

Some become hot.

Some get cold.

Some improve their strength.

Some whine in weakness.

If you follow the Tao

you avoid extremes

and think in humble terms.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Thirty

The Tao is non-violent.
Violence only leads to resistance.
Rebels spring up after the army marches by.
People starve after a war.
There is no beauty in bloodshed.
A smart general knows where to stop.
He is not proud of slaughter.
He does not brag about killing.
Killing the enemy is an evil
to anyone who hates violence.
Violence is not the way.
Those who oppose the Tao
die young.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Thirty One

Guns are evil, hated by all.

Those who follow the Tao do not use guns.

It is better to create than destroy.

Since guns are evil, those who follow the Tao
refuse to use them.

Those who win wars should not brag.

The other side is just as human as your side.

How can you hate them?

If you kill them, how can you celebrate?

It is their funeral.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Thirty Two

The Tao is a mystery,
too small to see, too unformed to use.
If the persons in charge could find the Way
we would all be living in peace.
We would find heaven here on earth.
The drought would end with a sweet rain,
falling gently on the poor as well as the rich.
When the world was formed, each new thing needed
a name.
Giving out names can involve risk.
It's safer to stop.
The Tao is there for you
as a river flowing into the sea.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Thirty Three

A person who knows about others is informed.
 A person who knows oneself is wise.
 A person who is over others has power.
 A person who masters oneself is strong.
 A person who has enough is rich.
 A person who sticks to it has will power.
 A person who finds one's center endures.
 A person who is remembered after death has longevity.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Thirty Four

The great Tao runs in all directions,
 giving rise to everything.
 It is a life path to many,
 a work which serves all and asks nothing in return.
 It feeds everyone and lets them move on.
 It is so taken for granted it seems small.
 They all come back to it but it owns nothing.
 Some think it is great.
 Because it doesn't think of itself as great, it certainly is great.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Thirty Five

Find your center.
Let Tao enter.
Peace will mentor.
Host good meals.
While music heals.
The Tao kneels.
Seek its flavor.
Hear it never.
Use Tao forever.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Thirty Six

Before one can lose power,
one must know power.
Before one can become empty,
one must feel solid.
To prevent a fall,
one must know balance.
Before one can receive,
one must give.
That is how things are.
Soft landings are better than hard.
Fish swim smoothly in deep waters,
just as the slow tortoise beats the fast hare.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Thirty Seven

The Tao does nothing;
yet all things get done.
In the hands of a leader,
The Tao brings about change.
A leader acts simply,
without formalities,
without wanting anything,
Quietly,
Bringing peace.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Thirty Eight

The wise never think they are virtuous.
Fools seeking wisdom do not find it.
The wise do not act.
They lack the motive.
Fools always act out of selfish agendas.
The kind person lacks a motive.
The just person acts with a hidden agenda.
The polite person acts to gain control.
When no one obeys,
the polite persons force their ideas on others.
A person who loses Tao
Turns to goodness.
After goodness, justice.
After justice, manners.
Manners have nothing to do with honesty.
Chaos begins.
The wise concentrate on honesty and truth.
The wise prefer the fruit to the blossom.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Thirty Nine

For many years, those who follow the Tao
See clearly, stand firm,
Grow strong, live life fully.
Those who lead are honest,
see clearly, stand firm,
grow strong, move like water
Flowing over obstacles.
Those who follow the Tao are humble.
They are the rock, the foundation
for those who are leading.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Forty

The Tao returns to where it began.
The Tao gives in.
Everything comes from something.
Something flows from nothing.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Forty One

The wise try to follow the Tao.
They practice it.
Practical people laugh at the Tao.
If they didn't laugh, it wouldn't be the Tao.
There's an old saying:
To be certain is to be wrong.
Even when ahead, one must fall behind.
Even on the way forward, one must slip back.
Show me a person of highest character,
and I'll show you a fraud.
The more imposing the front,
the darker the mischief.
Purity is always contaminated.
If a field is too big it has no corners.
It takes decades to reach overnight success.
It is hard to listen to great music.
It is impossible to make out the shape of great art.
What makes you think you can find the Tao?
In its own time, the Tao feeds everything.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Forty Two

The Tao gives life to one.
One gives life to two.
Two gives life to three.
Everyone contains yin and yang.
They can reach harmony through balance.
Even the leaders can be lonely,
express doubt about what they have won,
and gain peace when they face loss.
It has always been true
that those who kill are killed.
Those who sit peacefully by themselves gain
the whole universe.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Forty Three

Soft wins over solid.
The Tao can go anywhere.
Acting without effort has value.
In the same way, we learn by seeing.
The effortless acts
give rise to life.
This thought
is rarely understood.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Forty Four

Would you rather be famous or true to yourself?
Would you rather be rich or true to yourself?
Would you suffer more if you gained or if you lost?
A person who loves the most spends the most.
A miser becomes unhappy with each little loss.
Learn to be content with what you have.
Know when to stop and you will live a long and happy life.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Forty Five

A great deed appears to suffer a flaw but proves useful.

A full plate seems very little but proves to be enough.

An honest act seems to be crooked.

At first glance,

a graceful move turns out to be clumsy.

The best speaker

sometimes will stutter.

If you move slowly,

sometimes you become cold.

But being still is better

than getting too hot.

Say only what is needed.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Forty Six

Those countries who follow the Tao
use horses to end wars and fertilize crops.
Those countries who ignore the Tao
force warhorses to give birth on the battlefield.
There is no greater curse than wanting more and more.
There is no disaster greater
than wanting what you lack.
There is no greater fault than greed.
Thus, being content is the true path to follow.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Forty Seven

Without going out one knows what is going on.
Without looking out of the window one can know the Tao.
The more one travels, the less one knows.
The wise know from within,
know without going,
understand without using eyes,
get things done without lifting a finger.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Forty Eight

A student learns every day.
A student of the Tao
loses a desire every day
until one gives up setting goals.
Wanting nothing means
everything is complete.
Virtue can conquer more than force.
Doing what is right
is more powerful
than telling others
what to do.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Forty Nine

The wise are not rigid.
They feel with their hearts
what others think.
I am good to good people.
I am good to bad people.
This is the virtue of goodness.
I trust honest people.
I trust liars.
This is the virtue of trust.
The wise live in peace and harmony.
Their people love others with their hearts.
The wise love their people as their children.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fifty

Leave with the same number you came with.

Walk where the rhinoceros and tiger do not go.

When in a fight, avoid the rhinoceros horn,
the tiger's claw, the soldier's blade.

Keep everything guarded.

Come to life, live, and die.

Three out of ten follow life.

Three out of ten follow death.

Pleasure takes three out of ten into death.

One out of ten knows how to live.

As one travels, one avoids wild dangers.

When one joins the army, one avoids friendly fire.

Rhinos don't gore one with a horn.

Tigers don't claw one.

Soldiers don't stab one.

Following the Tao protects one out of ten.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fifty One

The Tao gives rise to all life.

Everything can follow the Tao.

Virtue gives life meaning.

Following form feels right.

Living in the present feels good.

Everything should respect the Tao.

The Tao shows how to grow safely, peacefully, warmly.

The Tao doesn't own anything, doesn't demand or dictate.

No wonder everything loves the Tao.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fifty Two

Everything comes from the Tao.

We are her children and she protects us.

To follow the Tao, one keeps quiet and lives in peace.

To lose one's way, one gossips and meddles.

To find one's way, one sees things as they are.

One remains soft with inner strength.

One uses light to see clearly.

Constant practice of virtue leads the way to wisdom.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fifty Three

I know I should stay on the right way
where it is easy to walk.
I should avoid side streets.
Most people like short cuts.
Judges can be bribed.
Farmers let fields stay empty.
Warehouses sit idle.
Politicians wear designer clothes.
Everyone carries weapons.
Everyone drinks and eats too much.
Some get rich.
Some rob the poor and the hungry.
Some do not follow the Tao.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fifty Four

A firm tree mocks the wind.
If one follows the Tao,
one cannot be blown away.
One can pass on this virtue to one's children.
Cultivated virtue makes one real.
Cultivated virtue makes one's family grow.
Cultivated virtue makes nations prosper.
Cultivated virtue brightens the sky.
Virtue can be seen in one,
in one's family,
in one's country,
in one's world.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fifty Five

One who follows the Tao is like a child.
No one dares to attack a child
who looks soft but has a strong grip,
who knows nothing about mating
yet stands erect and powerful.
A child can cry all day
and never become hoarse.
So smooth is a child's harmony.
The wise know such harmony,
search after the Tao without rushing,
without expecting a reward,
without losing the spirit of a child.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fifty Six

Those who know do not speak.

Those who speak do not know.

Close what is open.

Question the senses.

Beware of sharp edges.

Solve all riddles.

Hide those smarts.

Look at the dust.

Wait for unity.

Follow the Tao.

Do not follow loving nor hating.

Do not follow winning nor losing.

Follow the Tao and good things will happen.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fifty Seven

Govern with laws.

Fight with surprises.

Leave the world alone.

More laws lead to more poverty.

More guns lead to more trouble.

Thus the wise follow the Tao.

Let people correct themselves.

Let people earn their own living.

Let people find their own truth.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fifty Eight

When government does not act,
people work hard.

When government acts harshly,
people complain.

Fortune leads to trouble
and hides it.

New laws that control morality
lead to new sets of lies.

Therefore, the wise set a good example
and step back,

Practice honesty quietly;
look sharp,
but not too sharp.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Fifty Nine

A good leader does enough but not too much.
It is best to examine other people's ideas.
Win them over by being prepared.
Yet, have an open mind.
Those who listen are fit to govern.
Those who are open to ideas are as strong as an oak.
An oak bends with the strong winds without breaking.
Wise persons last forever because they look after their children.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Sixty

Leading the land
is like frying a fish.
The higher the flame,
the less is left.
As you lead,
watch for the Tao.
Go without greed.
Avoid harm,
and avoid harming others.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Sixty One

A large land,
like a river basin,
is like a lady
who meets everyone,
wins friends quietly,
peacefully.
Sometimes a small site
can serve successfully.
The large land wins
by moving lower,
while the small site wins
by being there.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Sixty Two

The Tao is the secret path through the world,
of value to good and bad persons.

The good persons earn respect with words and actions,
while the bad persons need pity and a handout.

When a leader takes office, no one should give him a gift.

The good persons help the leader to follow the Tao.

Those who follow the Tao help those in need.

That is why the Tao is the greatest gift of all.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Sixty Three

Do as little as possible.

Think of every small detail as important.

Solve each small problem before it becomes a big headache.

The wise accomplish greatness by solving each small problem.

Take every promise seriously or no one will trust you.

Take an issue apart and solve each small section.

Since the wise solve each small difficulty,

they never have to deal with major catastrophes.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Sixty Four

A plant is easy to hold.

A weed that pops up today is easy to pull out.

A glass is easy to break.

An apple seed is easy to scatter.

Apply mulch before weeds come up.

Send a crowd home before they riot.

A large oak tree comes from a small acorn.

A nine-story mound starts with a shovel full of dirt.

A thousand mile trip begins with a single step.

Those who act rashly fail.

Those who try to grasp anything fail.

The wise do nothing to force something to happen.

The wise do not grasp at straws; thus, they never lose them.

People who are close to success often fail.

Good players are as careful during the last quarter as the first.

Therefore, the wise let things happen, wish for nothing, learn how to

change, and teach others to find the way to recover what they lose.

In this way, the wise look to nature and let things happen.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Sixty Five

In the old days, the wise who follow the way did not try to teach others.

A person who thinks he knows it all cannot learn anything.

A person who thinks she has much to learn can find her own way.

Those who understand these two ideas know what the wise knew long ago.

There is virtue in mysticism.

Show how a simple life is a good life.

And people will be content to find their own way.

Only then will peace and harmony follow.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Sixty Six

Small streams on hills flow into the river below.

One who wants to lead must speak in the language of the people.

One who wants to lead must walk behind the people.

In this way, the wise humbly listen before they follow.

No harm comes to a good listener.

No one is bored talking to a good listener.

Because a good leader does not try to outdo anyone,

no follower outdoes such a leader.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Sixty Seven

Critics say it is foolish to follow the Way.

If it did not seem foolish, my teaching would be forgotten.

I offer three treasures: tenderness, thrift, and modesty.

Be tender to others, as your mother was to you.

Be thrifty in good times and you'll have savings when you need them.

Those who run to the front die first.

Those who are tender live to be generous in their modest way.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Sixty Eight

The greatest competitor values great competition.

The greatest fighter keeps his cool.

The greatest leader doesn't sweat the small stuff.

The greatest diplomat practices tact.

To be great means to follow the Way.

Enjoying the way you play is more important than winding up ahead.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Sixty Nine

An old soldier said:

“I don’t move first but wait to be attacked.

I would rather go back a foot than advance an inch.

This is called marching without moving.

I use camouflage.

I am without weapons.

The worst thing you can do is to underestimate your enemy.

If I underestimate my enemy I could lose my three treasures.

The man who hates to kill is the man who wins.”

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seventy

What I teach is easy to learn and easy to practice.

However, you can’t understand it and you can’t practice it.

The Way I teach goes back to the world’s beginning.

How can you hope to grasp its meaning?

My outside clothing is coarse.

Everything of value is in the heart.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seventy One

Only a strong person can say, "I do not know."

Only a sick person can say, "I know."

Only when a person knows he is sick can he get well.

Only when a wise person cures herself of all knowing, is she well.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seventy Two

Those who live without fear are destroyed.

Don't hate the way they live.

Don't hate their families.

If you hate them, they will hate you.

The wise reject destruction and try to be tender.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seventy Three

The Way wins without trying,
sentences in silence,
comes before it is called,
prevails without a plan.

The Tao spreads a wide net made with broad meshes,
catching all who come by.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seventy Four

Death comes to all of us, sooner to those who kill.
Who wants to be the executioner?
Taking his place is like taking the place of a carpenter.
As you saw, you may cut yourself in the process.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seventy Five

If you tax too much, people starve.

If you interfere too much, people rebel.

If you demand too much, people become fearless.

If you have too little, you place little value on life.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seventy Six

A baby, tender and weak,

grows into a man, hard and stiff.

A green plant, soft and springy,

grows into a stalk, brown and dry.

Those who are hard and dry are near death.

Those who are tender and springy are alive.

A stiff soldier dies in battle.

A hard tree trunk will be axed.

Dead twigs and branches will be cut.

The soft young plants will survive.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seventy Seven

The Tao is like a bow string being drawn.

What is high becomes lower;

what is low becomes higher.

The long string becomes shorter.

The short string becomes longer.

The Tao takes from those with too much

and gives to those with too little.

Men and women do just the opposite.

They take from those with too little

and give to those with too much.

Who can give away what they don't need?

Only the wise have enough sense.

They give without taking credit,

without being recognized as generous,

without being seen as wise.

Adapted from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seventy Eight

Water is weak but saps the strong.

We think this is true but never put it to the test.

Thus the Wise do not weep at suffering.

They do not shun the sinner, only the sin.

Thus does straight talk become bent.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Seventy Nine

After a peace settlement, the loser still hates the winner.

Therefore the wise choose to lose, and give up all hateful thoughts.

Heaven's way takes no sides, except that of the good person.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Eighty

In the perfect society, the population is small enough
to enjoy everything it needs.

People prefer to stay put instead of using their boats or cars.

They would rather eat a good meal or wear comfortable clothes
than look for a fight with anyone.

Neighbors can hear each other's dogs barking
while they stay in their own homes, grow old, and die content.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte

Chapter Eighty One

True words don't sound sweet.

Sweet words don't sound true.

Good persons don't debate or fight.

Persons who take pleasure in pain are not good.

The wise say, "I do not know."

The know-it-alls are not wise.

The wise don't collect things.

They live for others.

The more they do for others, the more they have.

The Tao does no harm.

It helps.

The wise manage to do good
without picking fights.

Translated from Lao Tzu by Michael Porte