

The Way of Virtue Classic

Lao Zi's Dao De Jing

Chapters 1-9

1

Ways that may be went are not the enduring way.
Names that may be named are not the enduring name.

Without names, the universe is the beginning.
With names, everything becomes a mother.

Thus enduring without desire means watching with wonder.
Enduring with desire means watching with limitations.

These two emerge together but have different names.
Together they are called the Mystery.

Mystery begetting deeper mystery.
Wonder crowding at the gateway.

2

Everyone in the world that knows the beautiful seeks the beautiful,
and that's where the ugly comes from.
Everyone that knows the good seeks the good,
and that's where the no-good comes from.

Similarly, having and not-having are each born from the other.
Difficult and easy are each determined by the other.
Long and short are each formed relative to the other.
High and low are each positioned relative to the other.
Noisy and musical are each discerned relative to the other.
Front and back each mutually follow the other.

This is why the Sages stick to non-doing in their work.
They teach by walking, not talking.
All things come about like this: with no discussion.

Living without possessing.
Doing without expecting.
Finishing the job without dwelling on it.
Winders of the Way alone do not dwell.
Therefore they alone do not go away.

3

Not honoring the worthy will cause the people to be without quarrel.
Not valuing the rare and expensive will cause the people to be without theft.
Not seeing what is desired will cause the people's hearts to be without chaos.

This is how the Sages govern.
They empty their heart and fill their belly.
They relax their will and strengthen their bones.

What endures will deliver the people,
without knowledge and without desire.
It causes even the Sages to dare not act.
Acting without acting is how they avoid being ungoverned.

4

The way pours out relentlessly and yet its potential seems still unfulfilled.
Such a chasm! The ten-thousand things are but ancestors.

Softening what was sharp and releasing what was stuck.
Balancing the light and organizing the dust.

So deep! It seems to just always have been.
I have no idea whose child it could be.
It came before even the idea of god.

5

The sky and the earth are inhumane.
They treat the 10,000 things as if they were straw dogs.

The Sages as well are inhumane.
They treat the 100 clans as if they straw dogs.

The sky, the earth and the space in between –
like a bellows or a flute.

Empty and unyielding,
moving and going beyond.
The many words and numbers are exhausting.
Nothing's as good as holding on to the center.

6

The spirit of the valley does not die.
It is called the “mysterious feminine.”

The gateway to the mysterious feminine
is called the “root of the universe.”

It is soft and continuous, existing as is.
Its use requires no strain.

7

The sky lasts and the earth persists.
Together they engender all that is long lasting.
It is because they do not grow a self
that they are able to grow for so long.

In the same way, it is because the Sages
put their life behind them that it ends up in front of them.
It is because they transcend beyond life that it wells up within them.
It is because they do not harbor troubles privately
that they are able to fully express their private selves.

8

The highest good is like water.
The good of water brings favor to everything and yields no contention.
It flows through even the nastiest places of humanity.
In this sense it is almost pure way.

When living is good it's grounded.

When mind is good it's deep.
When giving is good it's generous.
When speech is good it's honest.
When righteousness is good it's curative.
When work is good it's capable.
When movement is good it's timely.

It's only when effort is without contention
that it is also without fault.

9

Trying to contain it when it's overflowing
is not as good as just letting it finish.

Using it when it's still sharp
can only last so long.

When gold and jade fill the halls
there better be someone to guard it.

Affluent, dignified, and proud of it,
the self is robbed of its sense of shame.

Achievement that comes as the body retreats
is the way of the sky.