

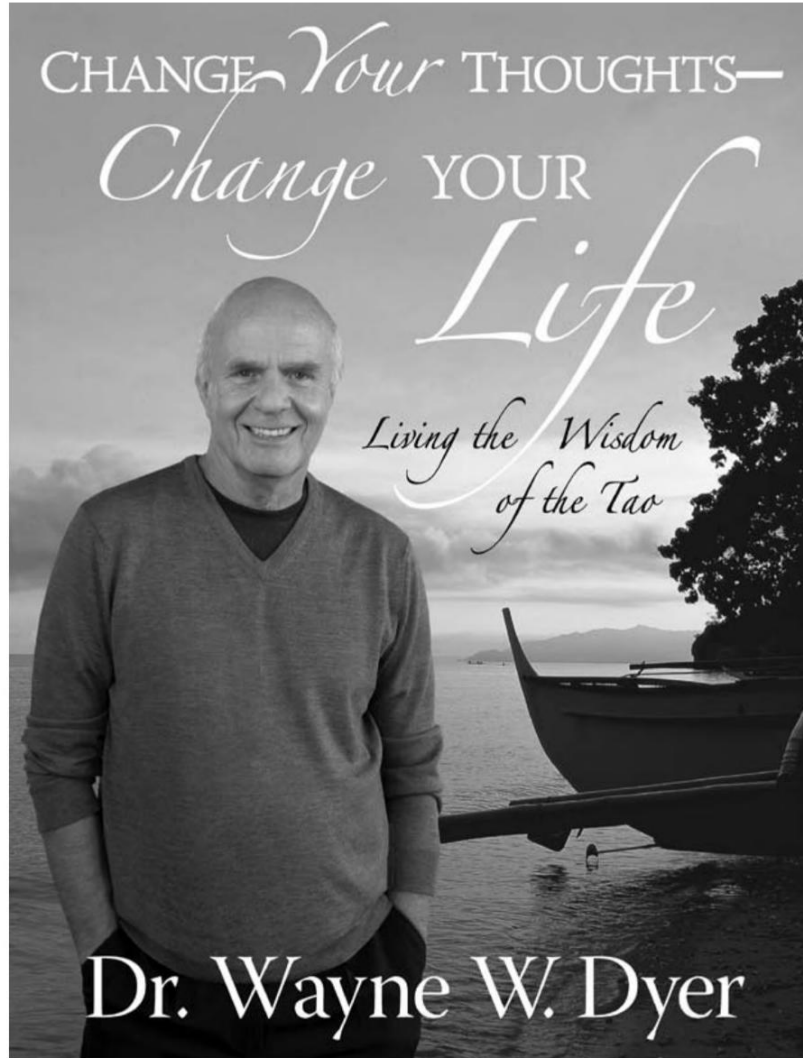
The #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *Inspiration*

Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

CHANGE *Your* THOUGHTS—
Change YOUR
Life
*Living the Wisdom
of the Tao*



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Preface

Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.

— **George Bernard Shaw**

Change Your Thoughts—Change Your Life is the end product of my yearlong journey of research, contemplation, and application of the Tao Te Ching, a book of wisdom that's been translated more than any volume in the world, with the exception of the Bible. Many scholars consider this Chinese classic the ultimate discourse on the nature of existence; and it continues to be a valuable resource for achieving a way of life that guarantees integrity, joy, peace, and balance. I recently read about someone who overcame life-threatening addictive behaviors by reading and rereading the 81 verses of this ancient text. Just imagine! In fewer than 100 short passages, it describes a way of living that's balanced, moral, and spiritual; and that works for all facets of life on Earth.

Legend tells us that the Tao Te Ching was authored by Lao-tzu, a prophet who was also the keeper of the imperial archives in the ancient capital of Luoyang. Seeing the continual decay during a period of warring states, Lao-tzu decided to ride westward into the desert. At the Hanku Pass, a gatekeeper named Yin Hsi, knowing of Lao-tzu's

reputation for being a man of wisdom, begged him to record the essence of his teaching. Thus, the Tao Te Ching was born out of 5,000 Chinese characters.

In all my reading on the origins of the Tao Te Ching, I never found a definitive historical record of its writing . . . yet today it survives in thousands of versions in virtually every language. In fact, after reading this classic text one morning and then taking in a different interpretation that afternoon, I was hooked. I ordered more translations, five of which were quite old and five of which were more modern (you'll find their titles in the Acknowledgments). Since neither Lao-tzu nor the origins of his verses are historically certain, I was fascinated by the different ways the 5,000 characters were interpreted by scholars in the editions I studied—especially when you consider that many of these ancient Chinese symbols are no longer in use and invite differing translations themselves.

I then felt called upon to write an essay for each verse that showed its valuable wisdom applied to the 21st century. From those ten translations I'd gone over, I pieced together the 81 passages in *Change Your Thoughts—Change Your Life*, based on how they resonated with me. This book is my personal interpretation of the Tao Te Ching, each verse of which gave me an insight into life and nature. As you read on, know that these pages were pasted together from what I *personally* felt were the most useful aspects of those ten different translations I studied, and I apologize for any exclusions (or if the inclusions don't seem to be a perfect fit).

One of the many gifts of the Tao Te Ching is its mind-stretching quality, especially in the way that Lao-tzu uses irony and paradox to get you to look at life. If you think that being forceful is the appropriate response, Lao-tzu urges you to see the value in being humble. If action seems called for, he asks you to consider nonaction. If you feel that grasping will help you acquire what you need or want, he counsels you to let go and be patient.

And just what is this thing called "the Tao"? As we're told in the 1st verse, to name it is to lose it, so here's the best that I can come up with: The Tao is the supreme reality, an all-pervasive Source of everything. The Tao never begins or ends, does nothing, and yet animates everything in the world of form and boundaries, which is called "the world of the 10,000 things."

Commentaries on the Tao Te Ching generally interpret *Tao* as “the Way,” *Te* as “the shape and power” (that is, how the Tao manifests), and *Ching* as “book.” Every translation I read referred to the Tao as the Way with a capital *W*, and *Te* as adding light or color to the Way. Well, as I look at the name I’ve carried with me for over 65 years, *Wayne Dyer*, I realize what may have attracted me to studying and writing these essays! As you can see, the first three letters of my name make up the word *Way*, while a dyer is one who adds light or color. It’s no wonder why I’ve been so totally involved in reading, writing, interpreting, and, most significantly, putting into practice these 81 verses.

In *The Wisdom of China and India*, Dr. Lin Yutang states, “If there is one book in the whole of Oriental literature which should be read above all others, it is, in my opinion [Lao-tzu’s] Book of Tao. . . . It is one of the profoundest books in the world’s philosophy . . .” As you read *Change Your Thoughts—Change Your Life*, you’re going to find your way through Lao-tzu’s mystical and practical philosophy, along with the joy of applying it to your life in today’s modern world.

Writing this book was a complete surrender to ideas that didn’t always seem to fit a linear rational approach, and it has changed me in a way that’s like the Tao itself: unexplainable and unnameable. Once I knew that I’d be spending a year on this project, its creation came about in the following way, which I have journaled for you:

I awake before 4 A.M., meditate, consume juices and supplements, and enter my sacred writing space. On a table, I have some framed drawings of Lao-tzu: In one he’s clad in simple robes, in another he’s standing with a staff, and in a third he’s astride an ox. I ease into my work and read one verse of the Tao Te Ching, letting the words stay with me and inviting the forces of both the outer and the inner life to inform me.

Some of the passages contain ideas that seem to be directed to political leaders—yet in all cases I keep the average reader in mind. In other words, I seek the wisdom for everyone, not just for those in positions of government or business.

I jot down a few notes, and for the next three days I think about what Lao-tzu is offering. I invite the Tao to be with me

throughout the day in all my activities as a background to the title of this book. “Change your thoughts, Wayne,” I tell myself, “and watch how your life changes.” And my thoughts do change.

I feel the Tao with me, always there, always doing nothing, and always leaving absolutely nothing undone. As I’m now Seeing with a capital S, the landscape looks different. The people I See are godly creations who are ignoring their own nature, or even more poignantly, needily interfering in the affairs of others. I have a different perspective now: I feel more peaceful and patient. I keep being reminded of the cyclical nature of the world of the 10,000 things and have powerful insights that change what I see. I know that we humans are like the rest of the natural world and that sadness, fear, frustration, or any troubling feeling cannot last. Nature doesn’t create a storm that never ends. Within misfortune, good fortune hides.

Following my days of thinking and then applying the wisdom of a particular verse, I look into the eyes of Lao-tzu’s picture in the early morning, and I wonder, What did you mean? How does this apply here, today, to anyone who might want to live according to these majestic teachings?

What happens next is mind-blowing in that it simply comes. Through the ages, through the atmosphere, through my purple pen and onto the page, flows what I can only call automatic writing. I know I don’t own it. I know I can’t touch it, feel it, see it, or even name it, but the words arrive in the world of the 10,000 things. I am grateful, bewildered, astonished, and overjoyed. The next day I begin another four-day adventure with this wisdom a Chinese master recorded 2,500 years ago, feeling so blessed, honored, and completely awestruck by the profound impact these words have on me.

It’s my vision that in this 21st century, our world must recruit future leaders who are steeped in the importance of Lao-tzu’s words. Our survival may depend on understanding that the concepts of “enemy” and “war” can cease to exist through living Tao-centered lives. Government will need to retreat from regulating our personal lives, overly taxing our income, and invading our privacy.

Yet the lessons and truths of the Tao must be discovered and applied by individuals. In this way, it can bring you to the enormous wonder of your own being—yes, you are the Tao at work. Your

being came from, and will return to, nonbeing. So for maximum enjoyment and benefit, make reading this book a personal journey. First peruse one of the passages of the Tao Te Ching and the essay that follows it. Next, spend some time applying it, changing the way you've been conditioned to think and letting yourself open up to a new way of conceptualizing these ideas. Finally, individualize the verse by writing, recording, drawing, or expressing yourself in whatever way you're called to. And move on to the next verse with a rhythm that suits your nature.


The following is from *365 Tao: Daily Meditations* by Deng Ming-Dao, which I love to turn to each day. Read this excerpt and see the Tao coming alive in you:

If you spend a long period of time in study and self-cultivation, you will enter Tao. By doing so, you also enter a world of extraordinary perceptions. You experience unimaginable things, receive thoughts and learning as if from nowhere, perceive things that could be classified as prescient. Yet if you try to communicate what you experience, there is no one to understand you, no one who will believe you. The more you walk this road, the farther you are from the ordinary ways of society. You may see the truth, but you will find that people would rather listen to politicians, performers, and charlatans.

If you are known as a follower of Tao, people may seek you out, but they are seldom the ones who will truly understand Tao. They are people who would exploit Tao as a crutch. To speak to them of the wonders you have seen is often to engage in a futile bout of miscommunication. That is why it is said that those who know do not speak.

Why not simply stay quiet? Enjoy Tao as you will. Let others think you are dumb. Inside yourself, you will know the joy of Tao's mysteries. If you meet someone who can profit by your experience, you should share. But if you are merely a wanderer in a crowd of strangers, it is wisdom to be silent.

Perhaps the overriding message of the Tao Te Ching is to learn how to luxuriate in the simplicity of what you're being told throughout this ancient sacred text. As you put its ideas into practice, you'll discover how profound it all is—but then you'll find yourself startled by its simplicity and naturalness. The advice of this ancient master is so easy to apply that you mustn't try to complicate it. Simply allow



Change *Your* Thoughts—*Change Your Life*

yourself to stay in harmony with your nature, which can be trusted if you just listen and act accordingly.

I hope that you'll feel joyously in love with Lao-tzu and his wondrous Tao Te Ching, and that you'll add *your* light and color to the Great Way. I offer you my love, along with my commitment to a Tao-centered world. I can think of no greater vision for you, for our planet, or for our universe.

— **Wayne W. Dyer**
Maui, Hawaii



(Editor's note: Lao-tzu's name has been spelled many different ways over the years, so in order to avoid confusion in this book, we'll be using the spelling preferred by *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition.*)

*Of birds
I know that they
have wings to fly with,
of fish that they have fins to
swim with, of wild beasts that they
have feet to run with. For feet there are traps,
for fins nets, for wings arrows.
But who knows how dragons
surmount wind and cloud
into heaven? This day I have seen
[Lao-tzu] and he is a dragon.*

— from *The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu*,
translated by Witter Bynner

(This quote is attributed to Confucius, after he visited the elder Lao-tzu
to seek advice on points of ceremonial etiquette.)

1st Verse

*The Tao that can be told
is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named
is not the eternal name.*

*The Tao is both named and nameless.
As nameless it is the origin of all things;
as named it is the Mother of 10,000 things.*

*Ever desireless, one can see the mystery;
ever desiring, one sees only the manifestations.
And the mystery itself is the doorway
to all understanding.*

y



Living the *M*ystery

In this opening verse of the Tao Te Ching, Lao-tzu tells us that the “Tao is both named and nameless.” This sounds paradoxical to our Western intellect—and it is! Paradoxical thinking is embedded in Eastern concepts such as yin *and* yang or the feminine *and* the masculine, and where things are comfortably described as both this *and* that. We in the West, by contrast, tend to view opposites as incompatible concepts that contradict each other. Yet this book is asking that we change our ingrained ways of thinking and see how our lives change as a result.

The Tao is an unknowable, unseeable realm where everything originates; while at the same time, the Tao is invisibly within everything. When we desire to see this invisibility (mystery), we attempt to define it in terms of the outer world of form—what Lao-tzu calls “the 10,000 things.” He counsels us that letting go of trying to see the mystery will actually allow us to see it. Or, as I like to think of it, “let go and let God.” But how can we do that? One way is to permit ourselves to practice more paradoxical thinking by recognizing that desiring (wanting) and desireless (allowing) are different and the same . . . rather like the mysterious ends of a continuum.

Desiring is the physical expression of creating conditions that allow us to be receptive; that is, it's in-the-world preparation for receiving. According to Lao-tzu, wanting to know or see the mystery of the Tao will reveal evidence of it in a variety of manifestations, but not the mystery itself. But this isn't a dead end! From this ground of desiring, the flowering of the mysterious Tao grows. It's as if wanting transforms into effortless allowing. Desiring, one sees the manifestations; desireless, one can see the mystery itself.

When we tune in to what Lao-tzu is telling us, it becomes readily apparent that our world produces abundant examples of this paradoxical process. Think of gardening and desiring those luscious homegrown tomatoes or spring daffodils: *Allowing* them to grow is ultimately what happens. Now think of the things in life that involve *wanting* and how they differ from allowing: Wanting to go to sleep, for instance, rather than going to sleep. Wanting to diet, rather than dieting. Wanting to love, rather than loving. In this reference to the Tao, desireless means trusting, permitting, and allowing. Desire is both the beginning and the ground of desirelessness, yet wanting is also the beginning and the ground of allowing. They are the same, and they are different.

Pay attention to times when you can feel in your body where you are on the continuum between desiring and allowing (or trying and doing). *Trying* to play the piano, drive the car, or ride the bicycle is the same as, and different from, actually playing the piano, driving the car, and riding the bicycle. Once those outer-world activities are desired and learned, there's a time when allowing is what you do. The point here is to recognize the difference in your body between trying and allowing, and to then become aware of the effortless sensation of the latter. This practice will also lead to a greater awareness of the invisible mystery and the 10,000 things, which are the visible phenomena of our world.

The 10,000 things that Lao-tzu refers to represent the categorized, classified, and scientifically named objects of the earth, which help us communicate and identify what we're talking and thinking about. Yet for all our technological expertise and scientific categorization, we can never truly create a human eye or liver, or even a grain of wheat for that matter. Each of these things—along with the remainder that comprise the known or named world—emerge from the mystery, the eternal Tao. Just as the world is not its named parts, we're not exclusively the skin, bone, and rivers of fluids that we're

physically made of. We, too, are the eternal Tao, invisibly animating our tongues to speak, ears to hear, and eyes to see and experience the manifest and the mystery. Consciously allowing this nameless mystery is ultimately the way to practice the Tao.

Does that mean putting yourself in harm's way? Of course not. Does that mean trusting the mystery at the moment you're being mugged or mistreated? Probably not. Does it mean never trying to change things? No. It *does* mean cultivating a practice of being in the mystery and allowing it to flow through you unimpeded. It means permitting the paradox of being in form at the same time that you allow the mystery to unfold.

Do the Tao; find your personal ways of living in the mystery. As Lao-tzu says in this 1st verse, "And the mystery itself is the doorway to all understanding."

Here's my advice for translating this passage into daily practice in this 21st century:

First and foremost, enjoy the mystery!

Let the world unfold without always attempting to figure it all out. Let relationships just be, for example, since everything is going to stretch out in Divine order. Don't try so hard to make something work—simply allow. Don't always toil at trying to understand your mate, your children, your parents, your boss, or anyone else, because the Tao is working at all times. When expectations are shattered, practice allowing that to be the way it is. Relax, let go, allow, and recognize that some of your desires are about how you think your world *should* be, rather than how it *is* in that moment. Become an astute observer . . . judge less and listen more. Take time to open your mind to the fascinating mystery and uncertainty that we all experience.

Practice letting go of always naming and labeling.

The labeling process is what most of us were taught in school. We studied hard to be able to define things correctly in order to get what we called "high grades." Most educational institutions insisted on identifying everything, leading to a tag that distinguished us as graduates with knowledge of specific categories. Yet we know, without anyone telling us, that there is no title, degree, or distinguishing



label that truly defines us. In the same way that water is not the word *water*—any more than it is *agua*, *Wasser*, or H_2O —nothing in this universe is what it's named. In spite of our endless categorizations, each animal, flower, mineral, and human can never truly be described. In the same way, the Tao tells us that “the name that can be named is not the eternal name.” We must bask in the magnificence of what is seen and sensed, instead of always memorizing and categorizing.

Do the Tao Now

At some point today, notice an instance of annoyance or irritation you have with another person or situation. Decide to do the Tao (or practice the Way) in that moment by turning inward with curiosity about where you are on the continuum between desire and allowing. Permit the paradox of wanting the irritant to vanish and allowing it to be what it is. Look inward for it in your thoughts and allow yourself to feel it wherever it is and however it moves in your body.

Turn all of your attention to becoming open-minded, allowing permissiveness to befriend the mystery within yourself. Notice how the feeling manifests itself: perhaps doing “loop-de-loops” in your stomach, giving a rigidity to your skeleton, making your heart pound, or tightening your throat. Wherever it is, allow it as an enigmatic messenger within you, and give it nonjudgmental attention. Notice the desire for the feeling to disappear, and allow it to be monitored compassionately by you. Accept whatever comes. Encounter the mystery within without labeling, explaining, or defending. It's a subtle distinction at first, which you must take personal responsibility for identifying. You alone can prepare the ground of your being for the experience of living the mystery.





2nd Verse

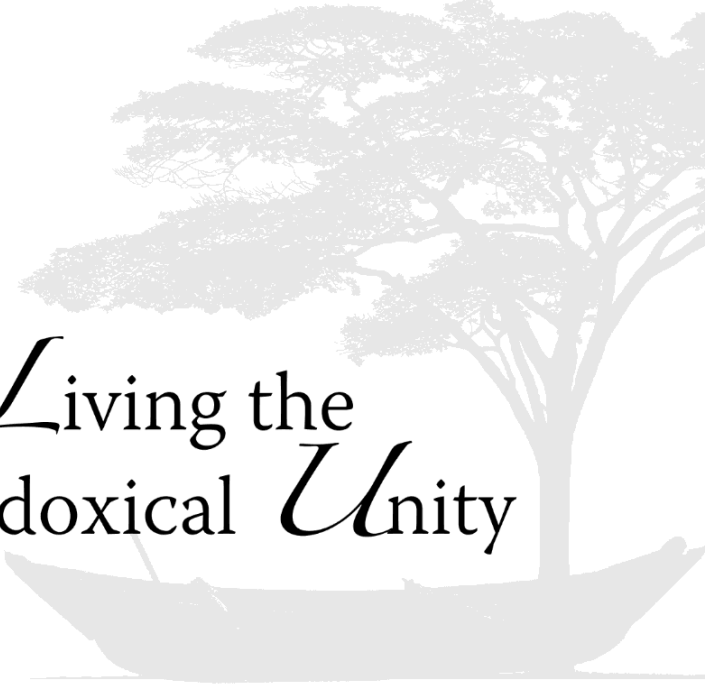
*Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty,
only because there is ugliness.
All can know good as good only because there is evil.*

*Being and nonbeing produce each other.
The difficult is born in the easy.
Long is defined by short, the high by the low.
Before and after go along with each other.*

*So the sage lives openly with apparent duality
and paradoxical unity.
The sage can act without effort
and teach without words.
Nurturing things without possessing them,
he works, but not for rewards;
he competes, but not for results.*

*When the work is done, it is forgotten.
That is why it lasts forever.*

y



Living the Paradoxical Unity

The concept of something or someone being beautiful is grounded in a belief system that promotes duality and judgment. This way of thinking is prevalent and commonplace for just about everybody in our culture, perhaps even having some value in society. I encourage you to explore the concept of paradoxical unity in this 2nd verse of the Tao Te Ching. By changing your thoughts, you can change your life and truly live the bliss of oneness.

Has it ever occurred to you that beauty depends on something being identified as ugly? Therefore, the idea of beauty produces the idea of ugliness, and vice versa. Just think of how many concepts in this “duality belief system” depend on opposites: A person isn’t tall unless there’s a belief system that includes short. Our idea of life couldn’t exist without that of death. Day is the opposite of night. Male is the antithesis of female.

What if you instead perceived all as a piece (or a glimpse) of the perfection of oneness? I think this is what Lao-tzu is suggesting with his description of the sage who “lives openly with apparent duality and paradoxical unity.” Imagine the perfect oneness coexisting in the apparent duality, where opposites are simply judgments made by



human minds in the world of 10,000 things. Surely the daffodil doesn't think that the daisy is prettier or uglier than it is, and the eagle and the mouse have no sense of the opposites we call life and death. The trees, flowers, and animals know not of ugliness or beauty; they simply *are* . . . in harmony with the eternal Tao, devoid of judgment.

As the sage lives openly with apparent duality, he synthesizes the origin with the manifestation without forming an opinion about it. Living without judgment and in perfect oneness is what Lao-tzu invites his readers to do. He invites our wisdom to combine perceived opposites and live a unified life. The perfection of the Tao is allowing apparent duality while seeing the unity that is reality. Life and death are identical. Virtue and sin are judgments, needing both to identify either. These are the paradoxes of a unified life; this is living within the eternal Tao. Once the dichotomies or pairs of opposites are transcended, or at least seen for what they are, they flow in and out of life like the tides.

Practice being a living, breathing paradox every moment of your life. The body has physical boundaries—it begins and ends and has material substance. Yet it also contains something that defies boundaries, has no substance, and is infinite and formless. You are both the Tao and the 10,000 things simultaneously. Let the contrasting and opposite ideas be within you at the same time. Allow yourself to hold those opposite thoughts without them canceling each other out. Believe strongly in your free will and ability to influence your surroundings, and simultaneously surrender to the energy within you. Know that good and evil are two aspects of a union. In other words, accept the duality of the material world while still remaining in constant contact with the oneness of the eternal Tao. The debilitating necessity to be right and make others wrong will diminish.

I believe that Lao-tzu would apply the Tao Te Ching to today's world by suggesting the following:

Live a unified life.

Enter the world of oneness with an awareness of the propensity to compartmentalize everything as good or bad, right or wrong. Beautiful or ugly are standards of the physical world, not the Tao.

Contemplate the insight that duality is a mind game. In other words, people look the way they look, period—criticism is not always necessary or helpful. See the unfolding of the Tao inside everyone, including yourself, and be at peace with what you observe.

Be a good animal and move freely, unencumbered with thoughts about where you *should* be and how you *should* be acting. For instance, imagine yourself as an otter just living your “otterness.” You’re not good or bad, beautiful or ugly, a hard worker or a slacker . . . you’re simply an otter, moving through the water or on the land freely, peacefully, playfully, and without judgments. When it’s time to leave your body, you do so, reclaiming your place in the pure mystery of oneness. This is what Lao-tzu means when he says, “When the work is done, it is forgotten. That is why it lasts forever.”

In other words, you don’t have to leave your body to experience forever; it’s possible to know your eternal self even in the embodied condition. When duality and judgment crop up, allow them to be a part of the perfect unity. When other people create dichotomies, you can always know oneness by practicing the Tao.

Accomplish much by trying less.

Effort is one piece of the whole; another piece is non-effort. Fuse these dichotomies, and the result is effortless action without attachment to outcome. This is precisely how you dance with someone: You make an attempt, assume a position, listen to the music, and let go all at the same time, allowing yourself to easily move with your partner. Combine the so-called opposites into the oneness of being without judgment or fear. Labeling action as “a fine effort” implies a belief that trying hard is better than not trying. But trying itself only exists because of beliefs about not trying. Attempting to pick up a piece of trash is really just *not* picking up the trash. Once you’ve picked it up, then trying and not trying are irrelevant.

Understand that you can act without the implied judgment of words such as *effort* and *trying*. You can compete without being focused on outcome. Eliminating opposites paradoxically unifies them so that it is unnecessary to identify with one position. I imagine that in today’s language, Lao-tzu would sum up this 2nd verse of the Tao Te Ching in these two simple words: *Just be.*



Do the Tao Now

Do the Tao today by noticing an opportunity to defend or explain yourself and choosing not to. Instead, turn within and sense the texture of misunderstanding, feeling it all the way through your physical system. Just be with what is, instead of opting to ease it by traversing the outer-world path of explaining and defending. Don't get caught up in the apparent duality of being right or wrong. Congratulate yourself for making a choice to be in paradoxical unity, a oneness where all of the spectrum simply is. Silently appreciate the opportunity, along with your willingness to practice your sageness!





3rd Verse

*Putting a value on status
will create contentiousness.
If you overvalue possessions,
people begin to steal.*

*By not displaying what is desirable, you will
cause the people's hearts to remain undisturbed.*

*The sage governs
by emptying minds and hearts,
by weakening ambitions and strengthening bones.*

*Practice not doing. . . .
When action is pure and selfless,
everything settles into its own perfect place.*

y



Living Contentment

This 3rd verse of the Tao Te Ching advises rearranging priorities to ensure contentment. Focusing on obtaining more objects of desire encourages external factors to have control over us. Pursuit of status, be it monetary or a position of power, blinds us to our relationship to the eternal Tao, along with the contented life that is available. Overvaluing possessions and accomplishments stems from our ego's fixation on getting *more*—wealth, belongings, status, power, or the like. The Tao recommends refraining from this kind of discontented way of life, which leads to thievery, contentiousness, and confusion. Rather than seeking more, the Tao practice of gratitude is what leads us to the contented life. We must replace personal desires with the Tao-centered question: *How may I serve?* By simply changing these kinds of thoughts, we will begin to see major changes taking place in our lives.

The advice to practice “not doing” and trusting that all will settle into a perfect place may sound like a prescription for laziness and a failed society, yet I don't think that's what Lao-tzu is offering here. He isn't saying to be slothful or inactive; rather, he's suggesting that trusting in the Tao is the way to be directed by the Source of your creation and to be guided by a higher principle than your ego-driven desires.

Ego-fixated wants can get in the way of Divine essence, so practice getting ego out of the way and be guided by the Tao in all that you do. In a state of frenzy? Trust in the Tao. Listen for what urges you onward, free from ego domination, and you'll paradoxically be more productive. Allow what's within to come forward by suspending worldly determination. In this way, it will no longer be just you who is conducting this orchestration that you call your life.

Much of this 3rd verse contains advice on how to govern. I view this not as political or administrative advice, but as it pertains to our own personal lives and those we're entrusted to guide—that is, our immediate family, and in a larger sense, the human family that comprises all of those with whom we're in contact on a daily basis.

Encourage your relatives to empty their minds of thoughts about status and acquisitions, and think instead about serving others and contributing to the health and strength of all. Model the harmony of this attitude; after all, everyone has a calling to be inspired. The Source of creation is not interested in material possessions or status. It will provide what is needed—it will guide, motivate, and influence you and everyone else. Ego (and its incessant inventory of desires) probably needs to be weakened so that the beauty of the Tao can be sensed. Demonstrate this to others by being a leader who removes the egocentric temptations that foster envy, anger, and competition.

If Lao-tzu were able to view our contemporary world from his 2,500-year-old perspective, I believe that he'd offer the following advice based upon this 3rd verse of the Tao Te Ching:

**Remind yourself daily that there is no way to happiness;
rather, happiness is the way.**

You may have a long list of goals that you believe will provide you with contentment when they're achieved, yet if you examine your state of happiness in this moment, you'll notice that the fulfillment of some previous ambitions didn't create an enduring sense of joy. Desires can produce anxiety, stress, and competitiveness, and you need to recognize those that do. Bring happiness to every encounter in life, instead of expecting external events to produce joy. By staying in harmony on the path of the Tao, all the contentment you could ever dream of will begin to flow into your life—the right people, the means to finance where you're headed, and the necessary

factors will come together. “Stop pushing yourself,” Lao-tzu would say, “and feel gratitude and awe for what is. Your life is controlled by something far bigger and more significant than the petty details of your lofty aspirations.”

Trust the perfection of the eternal Tao, for it is the ultimate Source of the 10,000 things.

The Tao is working *for* and *with* you, so you needn't remind it of what you crave or what you think it has forgotten on your behalf. Trust the harmony of the Tao. It took care of everything that you needed in your creation as well as your first nine months of life without any assistance from you, and totally independent of any desires you may have had. The Tao will continue to do so if you just trust it and practice not doing.

Inventory your desires and then turn them over to the unnameable. Yes, turn them over and do nothing but trust. At the same time, listen and watch for guidance, and then connect yourself to the perfect energy that sends whatever is necessary into your life. You (meaning your ego) don't need to do anything. Instead, allow the eternal perfection of the Tao to work through you. This is Lao-tzu's message for our world now.

Henry David Thoreau made the following observation in the middle of the 19th century as he wrote at Walden Pond, and I feel that it personifies this 3rd verse of the Tao Te Ching:

Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails. . . . If the engine whistles, let it whistle till it is hoarse for its pains. If the bell rings, why should we run? . . . I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born.

Trust in your essential sageness. Don't let desires obscure your eternal connection to the Tao.

Do the Tao Now

Watch for an opportunity today to notice that you're planning on buying something. Choose to do the Tao and listen for guidance.



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Be grateful that you have the choice to make the purchase, then practice listening to yourself and not doing. Through your feelings, the Tao will reveal the way for you in that moment. Trust it. You might be guided to buy the item and savor it with gratitude, donate it, procure one for you and one for someone else, give the money to a charity instead of getting the item, or refrain from obtaining it altogether.

Practice doing the Tao in everyday situations and you'll know contentment in a deeper sense. As this verse says, "When action is pure and selfless, everything settles into its own perfect place." Now that's my definition of contentment!






4th Verse

*The Tao is empty
but inexhaustible,
bottomless,
the ancestor of it all.*

*Within it, the sharp edges become smooth;
the twisted knots loosen;
the sun is softened by a cloud;
the dust settles into place.*

*It is hidden but always present.
I do not know who gave birth to it.
It seems to be the common ancestor of all, the father of things.*

y



Living Infinitely

The Tao is the Source of all life, yet it is empty and limitless and cannot be constrained, quantified, or measured. This life-giving energy of creation provides a profound Source of joy that's accessible at all times. If you live from an infinite perspective, you'll relinquish the idea that your only identity is the physical body in which you progress from birth to death. In your totality, you're an infinite being disguised as a person existing in the world of "sharp edges" and "twisted knots" that this verse refers to. Coalescing within and around you at all times is the invisible life-giving force of the Tao. It is inexhaustible. It is bottomless. It cannot be depleted.

This 4th verse of the Tao invites you to consider rearranging your thoughts about who you are. It seems to be saying that cultivating an awareness of the infinite aspect of yourself is the way to tap into the limitless Source of creative energy that flows through you. For example, you may want to help less fortunate people improve their day-to-day existence, but you don't believe that you have the time or energy to do so because of who you are and what you presently do. As you relax your hold on the idea of yourself as the job you do or the life you're living and seek to acquaint yourself with the limitless creative energy that's a part of you, the time and energy you require will appear.

Imagining yourself helping others, guided by the infinite aspect of yourself, will generate behavior and actions that complement your vision through the “common ancestor” of the Tao. Ultimately, you’ll cultivate an absolute knowing that whatever assistance you need is right here and right now—in front of, in back of, above, and below you. It is empty, yet very much present. It is, as Lao-tzu reminds you, “inexhaustible, bottomless, the ancestor of it all.”

Awareness of the omnipresence of the Tao means that thoughts of shortages or lack aren’t prevalent. Beliefs such as “There’s no way this will happen,” “It’s not my destiny,” or “With my luck, things could never work out,” cease to be entertained. Instead, you begin to expect that what you imagine for yourself is not only on its way—it’s already here! This new self-portrait based on the cooperative presence of the invisible Tao elevates you to living an inspired life—that is, one of being “in spirit” or in unending touch with the Tao. When you live infinitely, the rewards are a sense of peaceful joy because you know that all is in order.

This is what I imagine Lao-tzu’s ancient words mean in our modern era:

**Consider all things that seem to be a problem
from the perspective of the eternal Tao.**

Believing that there’s a shortage of prosperity is a signal to think in terms of the inexhaustible Source: the Tao. Just like everything else on our planet, money is available in limitless quantities. Know this and connect to the bottomless supply. Do it first in your thoughts by affirming: *Everything I need now is here*. Prosperity thoughts are energetic instructions to access your infinite self, so actions will follow them.

Take this same approach—staying in harmony with the Tao—to all of your problems, for there’s an all-encompassing supply of well-being to partner with. So rather than giving energy to illness and perceived misfortunes, stay with the Tao. Stay with what can never be used up. Stay with that which is the father of all things, the creative Source of all. It will work *with* and *for* you, as you have it in your thoughts, then in your feelings, and finally in your actions.

Be an infinite observer.

When acknowledged as a sign of change, worry is transitory—it's simply part of the world of the changing. If you view your life from the vantage point of an infinite observer, concerns, anxieties, and struggles blend into the eternal mix. From this ageless perspective, picture how important the things you feel depressed about now will be in a hundred, a thousand, a million, or an uncountable number of years. Remember that you, like the infinite Tao from which you originated, are part of an eternal reality.

Rearrange your thoughts to practice thinking in alignment with the Tao. With the assistance of the eternal Tao, all of the sharp edges of life smooth out, the knots loosen, and the dust settles. Try it!

Do the Tao Now

Pick a situation today (any situation will work), and instead of verbally responding, be silent and listen to your thoughts. For example, in a social gathering or business meeting, choose to seek the emptiness found in silence in order to be aware of your infinite self. Invite it to let you know when or whether to respond. If you find your worldly ego interpreting or judging, then just observe that without criticizing or changing it. You'll begin to find more and more situations where it feels peaceful and joyful to be without response . . . just to be in the infinity that's hidden but always present.

You might want to duplicate this advice of my teacher Nisargadatta Maharaj and post it conspicuously so that you can read it daily:

*Wisdom is knowing I am nothing,
love is knowing I am everything,
and between the two my life moves.*

And while you're living, stay as close to love as you can.



5th Verse


*Heaven and earth are impartial;
they see the 10,000 things as straw dogs.
The sage is not sentimental;
he treats all his people as straw dogs.*

*The sage is like heaven and earth:
To him none are especially dear,
nor is there anyone he disfavors.
He gives and gives, without condition,
offering his treasures to everyone.*

*Between heaven and earth
is a space like a bellows;
empty and inexhaustible,
the more it is used, the more it produces.*

*Hold on to the center.
Man was made to sit quietly and find
the truth within.*

y



Living Impartially

The Tao does not discriminate—period! Like heaven and earth, it is impartial. The Tao is the Source of all, the great invisible provider. It doesn't show preference by giving energy to some while depriving others; rather, the basic life-sustaining components of air, sunshine, atmosphere, and rain are provided for *all* on our planet. By choosing to harmonize our inner and outer consciousness with this powerful feature of the Tao, we can realize the true self that we are. The true self is our unsentimental sage aspect that lives harmoniously with the Tao. This aspect doesn't view life in one form as more deserving than another, and it refuses to play favorites. Or, as Lao-tzu states, "He treats all his people as straw dogs."

Lao-tzu uses this term to describe how the Tao (as well as the enlightened ones) treats the 10,000 things that comprise the world of the manifest. In Stephen Mitchell's translation of the Tao Te Ching, he explains that "straw dogs were ritual objects, venerated before the ceremony but afterward abandoned and trampled underfoot." In other words, Taoism reveres and respects existence impartially, as an ebb and flow that is to be revered and then released. With impartial awareness, the sage genuinely sees the sacredness within all the straw dogs in this ceremony we call life.

The 5th verse encourages us to be aware of this unbiased Source and, as a bonus, to enjoy the paradoxical nature of the Tao. The more

rapport we have with the energy of the Tao and the more we're living from its all-creating perspective, the more it is available to us. It's impossible to use it up—if we consume more, we simply receive more. But if we attempt to hoard it, we'll experience shortages ourselves, along with the failure of having even a wisp of understanding. The Tao and its inexhaustible powers paradoxically disappear when we attempt to exclude anyone from its unprejudiced nature.

The varied forms of life are illusory as far as the Tao is concerned, so no one is special or better than anyone else. This sentiment is echoed in the Christian scriptures: “[God] sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45).

Practicing impartiality is a way to incorporate the 5th verse of the Tao Te Ching into your life, and to practice its wisdom in today's world. To that end, this is what I believe Lao-tzu was trying to impart to us from his 2,500-year-old vantage point:

**Stay in harmony with the impartial essence of the Tao
in all of your thoughts and all of your behaviors.**

When you have a thought that excludes others, you've elected to see yourself as “special” and therefore deserving of exceptional favor from your Source of being. The moment you've promoted yourself to this category, you've elevated your self-importance above those whom you've decided are less deserving. Thinking this way will cause you to lose the all-encompassing power of the Tao. Organizations—including religious groups—that designate some members as “favored” aren't centered in the Tao. No matter how much they attempt to convince themselves and others of their spiritual connection, the act of exclusion and partiality eliminates their functioning from their true self. In other words, if a thought or behavior divides us, it is not of God; if it unites us, it *is* of God. Stay centered on this Tao that resides within you, Lao-tzu advises, and you'll never have a thought that isn't in harmony with spirit.

Offer your treasures to *everyone*.

This is what the Tao is doing at every moment—offering to all, the entire spectrum of creation. Think of this as a simple three-step process:

1. Eliminate as many judgments of others in your thoughts as possible. The simplest, most natural way to accomplish this is to see yourself in everyone. Remember that you and those you judge share one thing in common—the Tao! So rather than viewing appearances, which are really nothing more than straw dogs, see the unfolding of the Tao in those you encounter, and your criticisms and labels will dissolve.

2. Remove the word *special* from your vocabulary when you refer to yourself or others. If anyone is special, then we all are. And if we're all exceptional, then we don't need a word like that to define us, since it clearly implies that some are more favored than others!

3. Finally, implement the third step of this process by extending generosity through living the Tao impartially and connecting with the inner space of being the Tao. In this space you'll be able to be unbiased about your possessions, recognizing that they're not exclusively yours but are rather a part of the entirety. By unconditionally sharing and giving, you'll thrill at the experience of living the Tao and being unprejudiced. The Tao is your truth; it resides within you. Quietly be in the peace and joy of connecting with the inexhaustible Tao.

Do the Tao Now

As many times as possible today, decide to approach interactions or situations involving other people with a completely fair mind-set, which you allow and trust to guide your responses. Do this as often as you can for an entire day with individuals, groups, friends, family members, or strangers. Create a short sentence that you silently repeat to continually remind yourself that you're approaching this situation with an unbiased attitude, such as *Guide me right now, Tao*; *Holy Spirit, guide me now*; or *Holy Spirit, help us now*. Keeping this brief sentence on a loop in your mind will prevent judgment from habitually surfacing—but even more appealing is the feeling of relaxation and openness to whatever wants to happen in those moments of impartiality.



6th Verse

*The spirit that never dies
is called the mysterious feminine.
Although she becomes the whole universe,
her immaculate purity is never lost.
Although she assumes countless forms,
her true identity remains intact.*

*The gateway to the mysterious female
is called the root of creation.*

*Listen to her voice,
hear it echo through creation.
Without fail, she reveals her presence.
Without fail, she brings us to our own perfection.
Although it is invisible, it endures;
it will never end.*

y



Living Creatively

In this 6th verse, Lao-tzu refers to an eternal and indescribable force of creation that continuously gives birth to new life. He tells us that this “mysterious female” energy continually reveals itself in perfection, and he invites us to an awareness of that voice of creation echoing throughout life in myriad ways. “Living creatively” is how I describe existing with a conscious awareness of the presence of this feminine principle.

This mysterious female is always birthing, and the Tao Te Ching speaks of the gateway to her as the “root of creation.” It’s telling us that we have the ability to tap into this unlimited field and co-create, or as I’ve said, live creatively through the Tao. The never-dying formative energy is both our heritage and our destiny, functioning whether we’re conscious of it or not. What awareness accomplishes, through practicing the Tao, is to let us participate in the process—which in turn leads us toward the wholeness that is our ultimate earthbound task.

Although his writings are almost 3,000 years old, Lao-tzu is offering 21st-century advice here, with a message that’s as timeless and never-ending as the Tao itself. Words may change, but be assured that the feminine energy can and will bring you to your own perfection. If you choose to be aware of the inherent creativity that resonates deep within you, where the invisible Tao sings the loudest,

you'll assist the birthing of new ideas, new accomplishments, new projects, and new ways of understanding your life.

In Deng Ming-Dao's *365 Tao: Daily Meditations*, the Divine feminine energy is equated with the sound of birds soaring and gliding over a vast landscape:

You can feel this in your life: Events will take on a perfect momentum, a glorious cadence. You can feel it in your body: The energy will rise up in you in a thrilling crescendo, setting your very nerves aglow. You can feel it in your spirit: You will enter a state of such perfect grace that you will resound over the landscape of reality like ephemeral bird song.

When Tao comes to you in this way, ride it for all that you are worth. Don't interfere. Don't stop. . . . Don't try to direct it. Let it flow and follow it. . . . As long as the song lasts, follow. Just follow.

Here are some thoughts for living creatively:

Know that you are a Divine creation birthed, not by your parents, but by the great spiritual Divine Mother, the Tao.

When you're in touch with the energy of your origin, you offer the world your authentic intelligence, talents, and behaviors. You're co-creating with the you that originated in the Tao, with the very measure of your essence.

The Tao is not confused about what to create and how to go about it, as this is your legacy from the mysterious feminine. Listen to your inner callings, ignore how others might want to direct your life energies, and allow yourself to radiate outward what you feel so profoundly and deeply within you. There is a reservoir of talent, ability, and intelligence inside of you that's as endless and inexhaustible as the Tao itself. It must be that way, because you are what you came from, and where you came from is this all-encompassing, endlessly creative Divine Mother, the mysterious feminine of the Tao.

Whatever you feel within you as your calling—whatever makes you feel alive—know in your heart that this excitement is all the evidence you need to have your inner passion become reality. This is precisely how creation works . . . and it's that energy that harmonizes with the Tao.

**Be creative—in your thoughts, in your feelings,
and in all of your actions. Apply your own uniqueness
to everything you undertake.**

Whatever you feel compelled to do—be it write music, design software, do floral arrangements, clean teeth, or drive a taxi—do it with your unique flair. Being creative means trusting your inner calling, ignoring criticism or judgment, and releasing resistance to your natural talents. Reread this 6th verse, paying particular attention to these words: “Without fail, she reveals her presence. Without fail, she brings us to our own perfection.” Then choose to let go of the doubt and fear you’ve harbored within you regarding your capacity to harmonize with the creative power—a power that’s not only greater than your individual life, but *is* life itself.

As the great 14th-century Sufi poet Hafiz reminds all of us:

*Just sit there right now
Don't do a thing
Just rest.*

*For your separation from God,
From love,*

*Is the hardest work
In this
World.*

When you reconnect to your Divine Mother, you’ll be living creatively. You will, in fact, be living the Tao!

Do the Tao Now

Today, notice babies and small children. Look for the mysterious feminine nature in little boys and girls who haven’t yet become so attuned to cultural and societal demands that their true selves are hidden. Can you see some whose inherent nature is intact? Notice what seems to be their natural character, or their gift from the



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Tao. Then try to recall yourself as a child, when the natural, Tao-given self was unaware of the ego-self—the time before you believed that acquisitions or power were important. Who were you? Who *are* you?

Yes, today spend a few moments with a young child and contemplate his or her connection to the Tao and how it unfolds perfectly without any interference.





7th Verse

*Heaven is eternal—the earth endures.
Why do heaven and earth last forever?
They do not live for themselves only.
This is the secret of their durability.*

*For this reason the sage puts himself last
and so ends up ahead.
He stays a witness to life,
so he endures.*

*Serve the needs of others,
and all your own needs will be fulfilled.
Through selfless action, fulfillment is attained.*

y



Living Beyond Ego

The opening line of this 7th verse of the Tao Te Ching is a reminder that the Tao, the Source of heaven and earth, is eternal. By extension, the original nature of life is everlasting and enduring. There is a quality that supports this durability, however, and that quality responds when we live from our Tao center, rather than from our worldly ego center. Identifying exclusively with the physicality of life—and basing our existence on acquiring and achieving things—disregards our infinite nature and limits our awareness of Taoness. In such a finite system, it therefore seems logical to strive for possessions and accomplishments.

Being civilized in most cultures primarily constitutes being consumed with attaining “success” in the acquisition of *power* and *things*, which supposedly will provide happiness and prevent unhappiness. The primary idea is of a self who’s a separate being in a separate body, with a name, and with cultural and biological data that are similar in values and patriotism to others. The Tao, particularly in this 7th verse, is suggesting that we update those notions and choose to exist for more than ourselves or our tribe—that is, to radically change our thoughts in order to change our lives.

Lao-tzu says the secret of the ineffable nature of the eternal Tao is that it isn’t identified with possessions or in asking anything of its endless creations. The Tao is a giving machine that never runs out

of gifts to offer, yet it asks nothing in return. Because of this natural tendency to live for others, the Tao teaches that it can never die. Giving and immortality then go hand in hand.

The sage who grasps the everlasting nature of the Tao has gone beyond false identification with the ego, and instead has a living connection to the Tao. This person puts others first, asks nothing in return, and wholeheartedly serves. In this way, the sage lives the ultimate paradox of the Tao—by giving without asking, he attracts everything that he's capable of handling or needing. By putting himself last, the sage ends up ahead. By putting others before himself, he endures just like the Tao. The sage emulates the natural philanthropy of the Tao, and all of his needs are fulfilled in the process.

The ego is a demanding force that's never satisfied: It constantly requires that we seek more money, power, acquisitions, glory, and prestige to provide the fuel it thinks it must have. Living a Tao-centered life rather than an ego-centered one removes us from that rat race, as it offers inner peace and satisfying fulfillment.

This is what I believe the wisdom of this verse of the Tao Te Ching is saying for the 21st century:

**Make an attempt to reverse ego's hold on you
by practicing the Tao's teaching to
"serve the needs of others, and all your own
needs will be fulfilled."**

Generously thinking of and serving others will lead to matching your behaviors with the perpetual rhythm of the Tao—then its power will flow freely, leading to a fulfilling life. Ego wants the opposite, however, as it tells you to think of yourself first and "get yours" before someone else beats you to it. The main problem with listening to ego is that you're always caught in the trap of striving and never arriving. Thus, you can never feel complete.

As you reach out in thoughts and behaviors, you activate loving energy, which is synonymous with giving. Put others ahead of you in as many ways as possible by affirming: *I see the sacred invisible Source of all in its eternal state of giving and asking nothing in return. I vow to be this, too, in my thoughts and behaviors.*

When you're tempted to focus on your personal successes and defeats, shift your attention in that very moment to a less fortunate individual. You'll feel more connected to life, as well as more satisfied than when you're dwelling on your own circumstances. Imagine what it would be like if you dismissed ego's hold on you. Serve others and watch how all that you give returns to you tenfold.

The poet Hafiz expresses this attitude perfectly:

*Everyone
Is God speaking.
Why not be polite and
Listen to
Him?*

Stop the chase and be a witness.

The more you pursue desires, the more they'll elude you. Try letting life come to you and begin to notice the clues that what you crave is on its way. You're in a constant state of receiving because of the ceaseless generosity of the eternal Tao. The air you breathe, the water you drink, the food you eat, the sunshine that warms you, the nutrients that keep your body alive, and even the thoughts that fill your mind are all gifts from the eternal Tao. Stay appreciative of all that you receive, knowing that it flows from an all-providing Source. Stop the chase and become a witness—soothe your demanding habits by refusing to continue running after more. By letting go, you let God; and even more significantly, you become more like God and less like the ego, with its lifetime practice of edging God out.

Do the Tao Now

Be on the lookout for ego demands for an entire day. Decide to defuse as many of them as you can comfortably, perhaps by assigning them an "intensity grade." Living beyond ego situations that are easy to accomplish get a low number, while those requests that are difficult to quell get a higher number.



For example, let's say that your spouse is driving a car in which you are a passenger. You see the perfect parking space, but your mate drives right on by; or you watch him or her take a different route than you ordinarily do. Silently witness the degree of discomfort with your decision not to say anything. Did ego let you know its preference?

Or if you have a conversational opportunity to display your specialized knowledge or describe a situation wherein you were the recipient of honor or success, note how uncomfortable your decision to remain quiet felt. Again, did ego let you know its preference? As Lao-tzu says in this verse, "Through selfless action, fulfillment is attained." By holding back ego's demands, even for a few moments, you will feel more and more fulfilled.






8th Verse

*The supreme good is like water,
which nourishes all things without trying to.
It flows to low places loathed by all men.
Therefore, it is like the Tao.*

*Live in accordance with the nature of things.
In dwelling, be close to the land.
In meditation, go deep in the heart.
In dealing with others, be gentle and kind.
Stand by your word.
Govern with equity.
Be timely in choosing the right moment.*

*One who lives in accordance with nature
does not go against the way of things.
He moves in harmony with the present moment,
always knowing the truth of just what to do.*

y



Living in the Flow

The Tao and water are synonymous according to the teachings of Lao-tzu. You are water; water is you. Think about the first nine months of your life after conception: You lived in, and were nourished by, amniotic fluid, which is truly unconditional love flowing into you . . . flowing *as* you. You are now 75 percent water (and your brain is 85 percent), and the rest is simply muscled water.

Think about the mysterious magical nature of this liquid energy that we take for granted. Try to squeeze it, and it eludes us; relax our hands into it, and we experience it readily. If it stays stationary, it will become stagnant; if it is allowed to flow, it will stay pure. It does not seek the high spots to be above it all, but settles for the lowest places. It gathers into rivers, lakes, and streams; courses to the sea; and then evaporates to fall again as rain. It maps out nothing and it plays no favorites: It doesn't *intend* to provide sustenance to the animals and plants. It has no *plans* to irrigate the fields; to slake our thirst; or to provide the opportunity to swim, sail, ski, and scuba dive. These are some of the benefits that come naturally from water simply doing what it does and being what it is.

The Tao asks you to clearly see the parallels between you and this naturally flowing substance that allows life to sustain itself. Live as water lives, since you *are* water. Become as contented as is the fluid that animates and supports you. Let your thoughts and

behaviors move smoothly in accordance with the nature of all things. It is natural for you to be gentle, to allow others to be free to go where they're inclined to go, and to be as they need to be without interference from you. It is natural to trust in the eternal flow, be true to your inner inclinations, and stick to your word. It is natural to treat everyone as an equal. All of these lessons can be derived by observing how water, which sustains all life, behaves. It simply moves, and the benefits it provides occur from it being what it is, in harmony with the present moment and knowing the truth of precisely how to behave.

What follows is what Lao-tzu might say to you, based upon his writing of the 8th verse of the Tao Te Ching:

When you're free to flow as water, you're free to communicate naturally—information is exchanged, and knowledge advances in a way that benefits everyone.

Be careful not to assign yourself a place of importance above anyone else. Be receptive to everyone, particularly those who may not routinely receive respect, such as the uneducated, homeless, or troubled members of our society. Go to the "low places loathed by all men," and have an open mind when you're there. Look for the Tao in everyone you encounter; and make a special effort to have acceptance, gentleness, and kindness course through you to others.

By not being irritating, you'll be received with respect. By making every effort to avoid controlling the lives of others, you'll be in peaceful harmony with the natural order of the Tao. This is the way you nourish others without trying. Be like water—which creates opportunities for swimming, fishing, surfing, drinking, wading, sprinkling, floating, and an endless list of benefits—by not trying to do anything other than simply flow.

Let your thoughts float freely.

Forget about fighting life or trying to be something else; rather, allow yourself to be like the material compound that comprises every aspect of your physical being. In *The Hidden Messages in Water*, Masaru Emoto explains that we are water, and water wants to be free. The author has thoroughly explored the ways in which this compound reacts, noting that by respecting and loving it, we can

literally change its crystallization process. If kept in a container with the words *love, thank you, or you're beautiful* imprinted on it, water becomes beautiful radiant crystals. Yet if the words on the container are *you fool, Satan, or I will kill you*, the crystals break apart, are distorted, and seem confused.

The implications of Emoto's work are stupendous. Since consciousness is located within us and we're essentially water, then if we're out of balance in our intentions, it's within the realm of possibility that our intentions can impact the entire planet (and beyond) in a destructive way. As our creator, the eternal Tao, might put it, "Water of life am I, poured forth for thirsty men."

Do the Tao Now

Drink water silently today, while reminding yourself with each sip to nourish others in the same life-flourishing way that streams give to the animals and rain delivers to the plants. Note how many places water is there for you—serving you by flowing naturally. Say a prayer of gratitude for this life-sustaining, always-flowing substance.




9th Verse

*To keep on filling
is not as good as stopping.
Overfilled, the cupped hands drip,
better to stop pouring.*

*Sharpen a blade too much
and its edge will soon be lost.
Fill your house with jade and gold
and it brings insecurity.
Puff yourself with honor and pride
and no one can save you from a fall.*

*Retire when the work is done;
this is the way of heaven.*

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Living Humility

As the eternal Tao is in a continuous state of creating, it knows precisely when enough is enough. Deep within ourselves, we sense that this organizing principle of unconditional supply knows when to stop, so we don't need to question the quantities that the Tao brings forth. The creative Source is beautifully balanced in the principle of humility elucidated in this 9th verse of the Tao Te Ching.

The Tao has the capability to generate everything in amounts that would stupefy an observer, yet its gentle humility seems to know when there are enough trees, flowers, bees, hippos, and every other living thing. Excess is eschewed by the Tao. It doesn't need to show off its unlimited capacity for creating—it knows exactly when to stop. This verse invites us to be in spiritual rapport with this characteristic of the Tao.

Cramming life with possessions, pleasures, pride, and activities when we've obviously reached a point where more is less indicates being in harmony with ego, not the Tao! Living humility knows when to just stop, let go, and enjoy the fruits of our labor. This verse clearly analogizes that the pursuit of more status, more money, more power, more approval, more *stuff*, is as foolish as honing a carving knife after it has reached its zenith of sharpness. Obviously, to continue would just create dullness, and it is obvious that a keen edge represents perfection.

Lao-tzu advises us to be careful about amassing great wealth and storing it away. This practice contributes to a life spent keeping our fortune safe and insured, while at the same time always feeling the need to pursue more. He counsels us to be satisfied at a level that fosters living with humility. If wealth and fame are desired, we must know when to retire from the treadmill and be like the Tao. This is the way of heaven, as opposed to the world that we live in, which is addicted to *more*.

We can heighten our awareness that advertising is primarily designed to sell products and services by convincing us that we need something in order to be happy. Analysts might tell us that the economy is failing if it isn't continuously growing, but we can realize that excessive growth, like cancer, will ultimately destroy itself. We can witness the results of overproduction in the gridlock on most highways: It now takes longer to go from one side of London to the other than it did before the invention of the automobile! We also see this principle at work whenever we shop. I call it "choice overload"—pain pills for backaches, menstrual cramps, headaches, joint pains, in the morning or at night, in a capsule or liquid or powder? And this is true whether we're purchasing toilet paper, orange juice, or anything else.

I believe that Lao-tzu sends the following modern advice from his ancient perspective:

**Come to grips with the radical
concept of "enough is enough"!**

Make this commitment even though you live in a world addicted to the idea that one can never have enough of anything. To paraphrase Lao-tzu, do your work and then step back. Practice humility rather than ostentation and uncontrolled consumption. The obesity crisis in the Western world, particularly in America, is a direct result of not understanding (and living) the simple wisdom of the 9th verse of the Tao Te Ching. Eat, but stop when you're full—to continue stuffing food into a satiated body is to be trapped in believing that more of something is the cause of your happiness. And this is true of overly filling yourself with any artificial symbol of success. Think instead of the infinite wisdom of the Tao, which says, "To keep on filling is not as good as stopping." Enough is not only enough, it is in alignment with the perfection of the eternal Tao.

**Seek the joy in your activities rather
than focusing on ego's agenda.**

Ego wants you to gather more and more rewards for your actions. If you're in a state of loving appreciation in each of your present moments, you're letting go of the absurd idea that you're here to accumulate rewards and merit badges for your efforts. Seek the pleasure in what you're doing, rather than in how it might ultimately benefit you. Begin to trust in that infinite wisdom that birthed you into this material world. After all, it knew the exact timing of your arrival here. It didn't say, "If nine months will create such a beautiful baby, I'll extend the gestation period to five years. Now we'll have an even more perfect creation!" Nope, the Tao says that nine months is perfect—that's what you get, and you don't need any more time.

The next time you're mired in a desire for more, stop and think of the Tao. This creation principle fully grasps the idea that when the work is done, then for God's sake, it's time to stop! As Lao-tzu advises, "This is the way of heaven." Why ever choose to be in conflict with that?

Do the Tao Now

At your next meal, practice portion control by asking yourself after several bites if you're still famished. If not, just stop and wait. If no hunger appears, call it complete. At this one meal, you'll have practiced the last sentence of the 9th verse of the Tao Te Ching: "Retire when the [eating] is done; this is the way of heaven."



10th Verse

*Carrying body and soul
and embracing the one,
can you avoid separation?*

*Can you let your body become
as supple as a newborn child's?
In the opening and shutting of heaven's gate,
can you play the feminine part?*

*Can you love your people
and govern your domain
without self-importance?*

*Giving birth and nourishing;
having, yet not possessing;
working, yet not taking credit;
leading without controlling or dominating.*

*One who heeds this power
brings the Tao to this very earth.
This is the primal virtue.*





Living Oneness

This verse of the Tao Te Ching examines the paradoxical nature of life on Earth. Lao-tzu encourages the attainment of comfort with the seemingly incompatible opposites of body and soul, which form the basis of our daily life. We are connected to the power of the eternal Tao, while simultaneously being in a mortal physique. As we take on this seemingly ambiguous stance, we begin to see the world revealed as flawless. Everything that seems to be absolute is an opportunity to recognize its paradoxical reality.

This teaching takes the form of a series of questions: *Can an adult body with all of the conditions inherent in the aging process—such as stiffness, soreness, limitations caused by aching joints, and so on—be as supple as a newborn’s? Is it possible to be someone who works and struggles and still be the feminine spirit, birthing creation? Can one succeed in these and similar ways and still be free of feelings of self-importance? Is it possible to stay true to the Tao without allowing ego to dominate, yet successfully function in an ego-dominated world?*

This 10th verse promotes a way of living that is guided by the power of “embracing the one” when the illusion of duality appears more powerful. Read Hafiz’s writing on this subject thousands of years after the Tao Te Ching was written:

Only

*That Illumined
One*

*Who keeps
Seducing the formless into form*

*Had the charm to win my
Heart.*

Only a Perfect One

*Who is always
Laughing at the word
Two*

Can make you know

Of

Love.

Our origin cannot be split, yet we're in a world that all too often seems to reject the perfect oneness that is the Tao. We can personally live the Tao by suspending our belief in opposites and reactivating our awareness of its unity—that is, we can surrender ego and be *in* this world, without being *of* it.

This is my interpretation of Lao-tzu's advice from his 2,500-year-old perspective:

**Embrace oneness by seeing yourself
in everyone you encounter.**

Rather than having judgmental thoughts about those whom you regard as separate or different, view others as an extension of yourself. This will diminish self-importance and unite you with what Lao-tzu calls "the primal virtue." Letting go of ego-dominated thoughts lets you sense the oneness that you share with others; thus, you give yourself the opportunity to feel a part of the all-embracing Tao.

Practice inner awareness whenever you feel yourself about to criticize anyone or any group. News reports designed to encourage your sense of separateness or superiority in relation to others can be a perfect time to do this: Find yourself as one of them. In situations where you're expected to hate an assumed enemy, stop yourself from these judgments and walk an imaginary mile (or two) in their shoes. Do so with all forms of life, even the plant world. See yourself in everyone and all creations, noting the Tao in this simple observation: *We are the world.*

**Take pleasure from what you possess without
being attached to these things.**

Let go of your identification with your stuff and with your accomplishments. Try instead to enjoy what you do and all that flows into your life simply for the pleasure of doing and observing the flow itself. You literally own nothing and no one: All that is composed will decompose; all that is yours will leave and become someone else's. So step back a bit and allow yourself to be an observer of this world of form. Becoming a detached witness will put you into a state of bliss, while loosening your tight grip on all of your possessions. It is in this releasing process that you'll gain the freedom to live out what the Tao is always teaching by example.

Do the Tao Now

Today, practice seeing oneness where you've previously seen "twoness" (separation). Feel the invisible energy that beats your heart, and then notice it beating the heart of every living creature all at once. Now feel the invisible energy that allows you to think, and sense it doing the same for every being currently alive.

Contemplate these words from the Gospel of Thomas: "His disciples said to him, 'When will the Kingdom come?' Jesus said, 'It will not come by looking outward. It will not say "Behold, this side" or "Behold, that one." Rather, the Kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it.'" Today, know that practicing oneness thinking will help you see that Kingdom.

11th Verse

*Thirty spokes converge upon a single hub;
it is on the hole in the center that
the use of the cart hinges.*

*Shape clay into a vessel;
it is the space within that makes it useful.
Carve fine doors and windows,
but the room is useful in its emptiness.*

*The usefulness of what is
depends on what is not.*





Living from the Void

In this thought-provoking 11th verse of the Tao Te Ching, Lao-tzu cites the value of an emptiness that often goes unnoticed. He explains this idea with images of the hole in the center of a hub, the space within a clay vessel, and the interior area of a room, concluding that “the usefulness of what is depends on what is not.” In other words, separated parts lack the usefulness that the center contributes. This passage invites us to live from the invisible void that’s at the core of our being; that is, to change how we think about it.

Consider the paradoxical term *nonbeing* as you ponder your own beingness. You’re comprised of bones, organs, and rivers of fluids that are encapsulated by a huge sheet of skin molded to hold you together. There’s definitely a distinctive quality of beingness that is “you” in this arrangement of bodily parts—yet if it were possible to disassemble you and lay all of your still-functioning physical components on a blanket, there would be no you. Although all of the parts would be there, their usefulness depends on a nonbeingness, or in Lao-tzu’s words, “what is not.”

Imagine lining up the walls of the room you’re presently in, with all of the elements present: Without the space of the center, it’s no longer a room, even though everything else is the same. A clay pot is not a pot without the emptiness that the clay encapsulates. A house is not a house if there is no inner space for the exterior to enclose.

A composer once told me that the silence from which each note emerges is more important than the note itself. He said that it's the empty space between the notes that literally allows the music to be music—if there's no void, there's only continuous sound. You can apply this subtle awareness to everything that you experience in your daily life. Ask yourself what makes a tree, a tree. The bark? The branches? The roots? The leaves? All of these things are *what is*. And all of them do not constitute a tree. What's needed to have a tree is *what is not*—an imperceptible, invisible life force that eludes your five senses. You can cut and carve and search the cells of a tree endlessly and you'll never capture it.

In the first line of this verse, that hole in the center that's necessary for the movement of the wheel can be likened to the void that's vital for you to move through in your life. You have an inner state of nonbeing at your center, so take note of what is visible (your body) as well as the invisible essence that your existence depends upon . . . the Tao part of you.

The following is what I hear Lao-tzu saying to you regarding this concept of living in the void in today's world:

Your imperceptible center is your vital essence.

Take the time to shift your attention to the so-called nothingness that is your essence. What does it beckon you toward? The space emanates from the invisibility that's responsible for all of creation, and the thoughts that emerge from your inner self are pure love and kindness.

Your inner nonbeingness isn't a separate part of you, so seek that mysterious center and explore it. Perhaps think of it as a space contained by your physical self, from which all of your thoughts and perceptions flow into the world. Rather than trying to have positive, loving notions, simply be sensitive to the essence of your beingness. The way of the Tao is to *allow* rather than to *try*. Thus, allow that essential center of pure love to activate your unique usefulness. Allow thoughts that emerge to enter your physical self and then leave. Allow and let go, just like your breathing. And vow to spend some time each day just being attentive to the awesome power of your imperceptible vital essence.

Practice the power of silence every day.

There are many individual ways of doing this. For example, meditation is a wonderful tool to help you feel the bliss that accompanies your connection to your inner void, that place where you experience the way of the Tao. Vow to be more aware of the “placeless place” within you, where all of your thoughts flow outward. Find your way to enter the space within you that is clean, pure, and in harmony with love.

The difference between saints and the rest of us isn’t that they have loving, pure beliefs and we don’t; rather, they function solely from their essence, where the way of the Tao flows invisibly through their physical being. This is the primary purpose of learning to meditate, or to be in the silence, inviting your essence to reveal itself and allowing you to live in the void.

Do the Tao Now

Spend at least 15 minutes today living in the void that is you. Ignore your body and your surroundings; let go of your material identifications such as your name, age, ethnicity, job title, and so on; and just be in that space between—that void which is absolutely crucial to your very existence. Look out at your world from “what is not” and appreciate that your very usefulness as a material being is completely dependent upon this void. Work today on befriending this “what is not” part of you.



12th Verse

*The five colors blind the eye.
The five tones deafen the ear.
The five flavors dull the taste.
The chase and the hunt craze people's minds.*

*Wasting energy to obtain rare objects
only impedes one's growth.*

*The master observes the world
but trusts his inner vision.
He allows things to come and go.
He prefers what is within to what is without.*





Living with Inner Conviction

In this passage of the Tao Te Ching, Lao-tzu reminds us that far too much attention is given to the pleasures and experiences of the senses at the expense of our inner vision. Focusing exclusively on sensory data creates a world of appearances, which are ultimately illusions. Since everything comes and goes, the nature of the material world is obviously restricted to transitory status. When our eyes see only the colors before them, they're destined to become blind to what lies beyond the world of appearances. We cannot know the creator if we're focused exclusively on what's been created. In the same way, we lose our own creativity when we're unaware of what's behind all acts of creation.

Sight, scent, sound, touch, and taste are the domains of the senses. If you're locked into a belief that the pursuit of sensory satisfaction is the focus of life, you'll be consumed by what Lao-tzu calls "the chase." This quest for adoration, money, and power is a waste of energy because there's never enough, so striving for more defines your daily regimen. You can't arrive at a place of peace and inner satisfaction when your entire existence is motivated by not having enough. In fact, Lao-tzu states that the relentless chase is a formula for craziness.

The person who lives according to the way of the Tao is referred to as a sage or a master, an enlightened being observing the world but not identifying exclusively with what's visible; being *in* the world, while simultaneously aware of not being *of* this world. The master goes within, where inner convictions replace the chase. In silence, sustenance is enjoyed beyond the dictates of the palate. From an inner perspective, nothing more is needed. Aware of his or her infinite nature, the sage has the realization that this is a temporary world of physical appearances, which includes the body that he or she arrived in and will leave in. The master sees the folly of appearances and avoids the seductive lure of acquisitions and fame.

I believe that our ancient friend and teacher Lao-tzu wanted to convey these simple truths when he dictated the 12th verse of the Tao Te Ching:

Extend your perspective beyond the sensory level.

Your inner conviction knows that a rose is more than a flower, as it offers a pleasant fragrance and velvety petals. Use that knowing to perceive the creative, invisible force that brings an intricate blooming miracle from *nowhere* to *now here*. Experience the essence of the creator who allowed this blossoming masterpiece to emerge from a tiny seed. Note that the seed arrived from what we can only refer to as the world of formless nothingness or spirit. See that spirit animating the colors, scents, and textures; and look at all of life from a transcendent perspective. You'll be less inclined to join the chase and more inclined to live from the inner conviction that your true essence is not of this world.

Discontinue pressuring yourself to perpetually accumulate *more*.

Let others be consumed with the chase if they choose to, while you learn to relax. Rather than focusing outward, turn inward. Cultivate awe and appreciation as inner touchstones, rather than an outer determination for more adoration and accumulation. When you see a beautiful sight, hear an enchanting sound, or taste a mouthwatering delicacy, allow yourself to think of the miracle within these sensory pleasures. Be like the master who "prefers what is within to what is without." Allow things to come and go without

any urgency to become attached to this ephemeral world of comings and goings.

Do the Tao Now

Plant a seed and cultivate it, observing its inner nature throughout its lifetime. Journal what's within the bud, and gaze in awe at what's in that seed that will one day create a flower. Then extend the same awe to yourself and the seed that had *you* contained inside as well. Use this as a reminder of your invisible inner self, which is the Tao at work.

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13th Verse


*Favor and disgrace seem alarming.
High status greatly afflicts your person.*

*Why are favor and disgrace alarming?
Seeking favor is degrading:
alarming when it is gotten,
alarming when it is lost.*

*Why does high status greatly afflict your person?
The reason we have a lot of trouble
is that we have selves.
If we had no selves,
what trouble would we have?*

*Man's true self is eternal,
yet he thinks, I am this body and will soon die.
If we have no body, what calamities can we have?
One who sees himself as everything
is fit to be guardian of the world.
One who loves himself as everyone
is fit to be teacher of the world.*

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Living with an Independent Mind

The essential message of this 13th verse of the Tao Te Ching seems to be that it's crucial to remain independent of both the positive and negative opinions of other people. Regardless of whether they love or despise us, if we make their assessments more important than our own, we'll be greatly afflicted.

Seeking the favor of others isn't the way of the Tao. Pursuing status stops the natural flow of Divine energy to your independent mind. You have a basic nature that is uniquely yours—learn to trust that Tao nature and be free of other people's opinions. Allow yourself to be guided by your essential beingness, the "natural you" that nourishes your independent mind. By contrast, chasing after favored status or lofty titles to display self-importance are examples of living from a mind that depends on external signals rather than the natural inner voice.

The Tao doesn't force or interfere with things; it lets them work in their own way to produce results naturally. Whatever approval is supposed to come your way will do so in perfect alignment. Whatever disfavor shows up is also a part of this perfect alignment. Lao-tzu wryly points out that pursuing favor is alarming, regardless of the outcome. If you gain approval, you'll become a slave to outside

messages of praise—someone else’s opinion will be directing your life. If you gain disfavor, you’ll push even harder to change *their* minds, and you’ll still be directed by forces outside of yourself. Both outcomes result in the dependent mind dominating, as opposed to the way of the Tao, in which the independent mind flows freely.

This 13th verse insists that ego and the need for importance are troublemakers that are energized by your in-the-world self. The way of the Tao is to be aware of your eternal nature and step outside of your *self* or body. No ego means no trouble; big ego equals big trouble. The Tao Te Ching rhetorically inquires, “If we have no body, what calamities can we have?” If you ask *yourself* this question, you’ll discover a Divine, invisible soul that’s independent of the opinions of all the afflicted seekers populating the world. In the spirit of the Tao, your true nature will replace the pursuit of external favor with the awareness that what others think of you is really none of your business!

Practice the following principles in Lao-tzu’s message and gain immeasurable inner peace. You’ll be in balance with the natural law of the universe, living with an independent mind in the spirit of the Tao:

Practice trusting your own inner nature.

Every passionate thought that you have regarding how you want to conduct your life is evidence that you’re in harmony with your own unique nature—your fervent belief is all you need. If you’re tempted to feel insecure because others disagree with you, recall that Lao-tzu counseled that “seeking favor is degrading” and will lead you out of touch with your true self.

Give yourself permission to remember that you’re not only your body, and that others’ opinions about what you should or shouldn’t be doing probably aren’t taking into account your true, eternal being. Those other people are also not only their bodies, so seeking their approval doubles the illusion that the physical is all we are.

Your worldly self isn’t your true identity, so trust your eternal self to communicate with you. It will do so through your inner nature, where you’ll honor it through an independent mind. Respect your vision and trust your natural, passionate thoughts that are aligned with the loving essence of the Tao.

**Practice being the person Lao-tzu
describes in this 13th verse.**

Affirm the following: *I am a guardian of the world and I am fit to be the teacher of the world.* Why? Because you recognize your connection to everyone and everything through an independent mind whose Source is love. By living from your eternal self, you'll become a mystical teacher and guardian. The approval that your worldly self sought will be felt as what it was—the dependent mind's struggle to engage life as if it depended on external approval.

Do the Tao Now

Ask yourself right now, *What's my own nature if I have no outside forces telling me who or what I should be?* Then work at living one day in complete harmony with your own nature, ignoring pressures to be otherwise. If your inner nature is one of peace, love, and harmony as a musical genius, for instance, then act on just that today.



14th Verse

*That which cannot be seen is called invisible.
That which cannot be heard is called inaudible.
That which cannot be held is called intangible.*

*These three cannot be defined;
therefore, they are merged as one.*

Each of these three is subtle for description.

*By intuition you can see it,
hear it,
and feel it.*

*Then the unseen,
unheard,
and untouched
are present as one.*

*Its rising brings no dawn,
its setting no darkness;
it goes on and on, unnameable,
returning into nothingness.*

*Approach it and there is no beginning;
follow it and there is no end.
You cannot know it, but you can be it,
at ease in your own life.*

*Discovering how things have always been
brings one into harmony with the Way.*





Living Beyond Form

Try to imagine the idea of forever: that which has never changed, that which has no beginning or end. It cannot be seen, heard, or touched . . . but you know it is and always has been. Think of that which even now, in this very moment as you read these words, is the very understanding that's within you—that essence that permeates you and everything else, yet always eludes your grasp.

This primordial principle has ruled—and still rules—all beings; all that is or has ever been is a result of its unfolding. Lao-tzu insists that you become aware of this amorphous precept by not relying upon your senses to experience this oneness. In the opening of this verse, you're urged to see without eyes, hear without ears, and hold without touching; these three ways of living beyond form need to be a part of your awareness. These shapeless realms merge into the one world of spirit (the Tao), which creates and rules all life. You're being encouraged to live with a total awareness of this all-encompassing principle.

Some scholars have singled out this 14th verse of the Tao Te Ching as the most significant of all its 81 offerings because it stresses the significance of the single principle that's the underpinning of all existence. Tapping into this invisible, untouchable, immeasurable force will enable you to gain the harmony that comes with being connected to the oneness, and harmony is your ultimate objective in

deciding to live an “in-Spirited” life. You want to learn to abandon your ego—which identifies with the world of things, possessions, and achievements—and reenter the placeless place from which you and all others originated. By doing so you regain the mystical, almost magical powers of your eternal Source of being. Here, you live beyond the world of form.

When you live exclusively “in-form,” you concentrate on accumulating “in-form-ation.” This 14th verse of the Tao calls for you to immerse yourself in inspiration rather than information, to become at one with that which has always been. And as this verse of the Tao concludes so insightfully, “Discovering how things have always been brings one into harmony with the Way.”

The Way has no conflict in it. How could it? There is only the oneness that is a blend of the invisible, inaudible, and intangible. Imagine a world where conflict is impossible, where Lao-tzu says that there is no darkness or light. The nameless Source that has always been gives only the peace and harmony you desire, so recognize this infinite oneness and keep it in your awareness. You’ll know that the Way is simply the Way when you stop questioning why things have been as they have! Free of the fears that attend sole identification with this world of form, you can embrace your infinite nature. That is, you can love your foreverness, rather than dread that life ends with the death of your body. You, your body, and all of life are the result of the unwinding of this eternity.

Here’s what Lao-tzu is relating in this 14th verse of the Tao Te Ching from his 2,500-year-old perspective:

**Use the technique of walking meditation to
obtain knowledge of the absolute.**

Stay in a persistent state of awareness of the eternal principle that animates all of life. By seeing the unfolding of God in everyone you encounter—and in all of your identification with your ego-based world—you’ll come to be more like Him, and less like that which has tarnished your link to Him. This is the alignment that will bring you back into balance and restore the harmony that is your true egoless nature.

**Improve your vision by looking
beyond what your eyes see.**

Whatever you gaze upon, ask yourself, *What is the true essence of what my eyes reveal to me?* Wonder about that magical something that awakens a tree in the springtime and places blossoms where frozen limbs existed only a few weeks before. Inquire, *What is the energy behind the creation of that mosquito—or behind my every thought, for that matter?* Do the same thing with everything you hear as well. Those sounds emerge from, and return to, a silent world—improve your hearing by listening for the “quiet sounds.”

Awe and gratitude will grow when you embrace this forever principle. But even greater than this, you’ll awaken to new possibilities that include your own Divine magnificence. Your mind will free itself from a false identification with the transitory world, and you’ll see the eternal in all things. Yes, Lao-tzu tells you, you’ll transform your life by being in-Spirit. It is here that you will recognize what Rumi poetically offered some 1,500 years after Lao-tzu’s powerful words:

*Every tree and plant in the meadow seemed to be dancing,
those which average eyes would see as fixed and still.*

I urge you to see the dance of “how things have always been” in the unseen, unheard, and untouched present.

Do the Tao Now

Take note of as much invisibleness as you can when gazing at a tree, a distant star, a mountain, a cloud, or anything else in the natural world. Embrace the principle that allows it to be, and then turn it inward and do the same for your own physical existence. It is the principle that expands your lungs, beats your heart, and grows your fingernails—live in this principle for ten minutes today and take note of how you feel connected to your Source of Being.



15th Verse

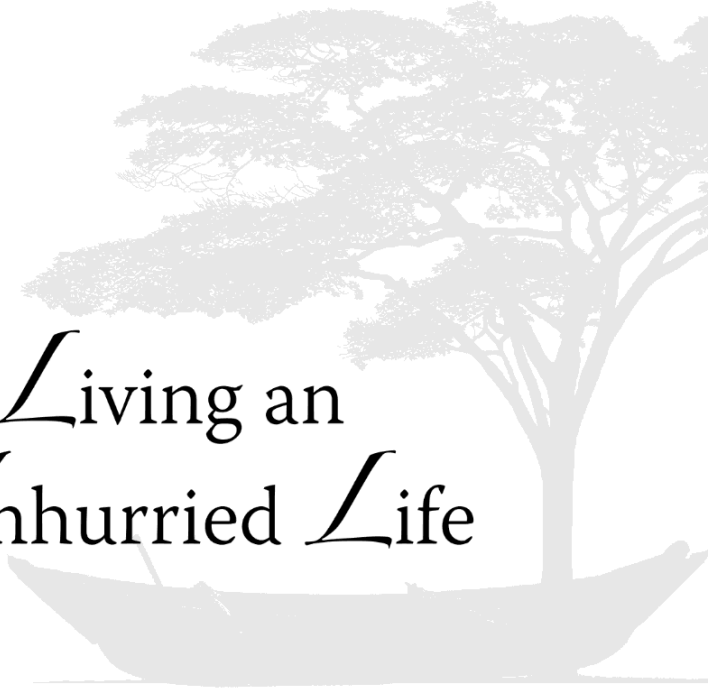
*The ancient masters were profound and subtle.
Their wisdom was unfathomable.
There is no way to describe it.
One can only describe them vaguely by their appearance.*

*Watchful, like men crossing a winter stream.
Alert, like men aware of danger.
Simple as uncarved wood.
Hollow like caves.
Yielding, like ice about to melt.
Amorphous, like muddy water.*

*But the muddiest water clears
as it is stilled.
And out of that stillness
life arises.*

*He who keeps the Tao does not want to be full.
But precisely because he is never full,
he can remain like a hidden sprout
and does not rush to early ripening.*





Living an Unhurried Life

This 15th verse speaks of ancient masters who enjoyed an indescribably profound level of cooperation with their world. Lao-tzu uses similes to dramatize the flexible and peaceful lives of these sages: Imagine crossing an icy winter stream that might crack at any moment, remaining cautious and watchful while at the same time alert to imminent danger. These descriptors paint a picture of those who live unhurriedly but are also in a profoundly aware state.

Consider the two ways of being presented in this verse of the Tao Te Ching: first to meld into, and therefore become at one with, your immediate surroundings; and to then simultaneously stay so relaxed that your stillness allows all things around you to settle, resulting in a deep clarity. Keep alert and subtly aware, yet at the same time stay still within—not rushing or demanding, but totally in charge of your inner world. This passage of the Tao reminds me of these words of the Bible: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).

The place of your origination is stillness, from which all of creation comes. Stay in a creative, simple state, which Lao-tzu describes as “uncarved wood,” symbolizing beginner’s mind and unlimited potential. Have a mind that’s willing to flow with life and be shaped by the eternal forces of the Tao. See yourself as all of these things

mentioned in this 15th verse of the Tao: watchful, yet relaxed and peaceful; alert, yet unhurried and confident; yielding, yet willing to be still and wait for the waters to become clear.

This verse reminds you that through nature, everything ultimately becomes clear. Your purpose is to stay in harmony with nature like the sprout hidden beneath the surface of the ground, waiting unhurriedly to emerge and fulfill its destiny. It cannot be rushed, nor can anything in nature. Creation takes place on its own timetable. The metaphor is clear here for you as well: You are unfolding in Divine order. All that you require will be provided in an unhurried fashion. Let go of your demands and trust in the perfect unfolding of the Tao. Be in a state of watchful gratitude and align with the Way.

In attempting to access the mind and intentions of Lao-tzu through meditation and research on the Tao Te Ching, here's what I believe he would say to us today:

Stop chasing your dreams.

Allow them to come to you in perfect order with unquestioned timing. Slow down your frantic pace and practice being hollow like the cave and open to all possibilities like the uncarved wood. Make stillness a regular part of your daily practice. Imagine all that you'd like to experience in life and then let go. Trust the Tao to work in Divine perfection, as it does with everything on the planet. You don't really need to rush or force anything. Be an observer and receiver rather than the pushy director of your life. It is through this unhurried unfolding that you master your existence in the way of the Tao.

**Get in the flow of life and allow yourself to
proceed gently down its stream.**

Give up struggling and start trusting in the wisdom of the Tao. What is yours will come to you when you aren't trying to push the river. You've probably been encouraged to actively direct and go after your desires all of your life . . . now it's time to trust in the eternal wisdom that flows through you.

The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu, translated by Witter Bynner in 1944, poetically sums up the 15th verse of the Tao in this way:

*How can a man's life keep its course
If he will not let it flow?
Those who flow as life flows know
They need no other force:
They feel no wear, they feel no tear,
They need no mending, no repair.*

Great advice for living an unhurried life.

Do the Tao Now

Set this book down right now. Take ten minutes to sit quietly while contemplating all that you have and all that is flowing into your life on a Divinely orchestrated timetable. Be at peace and give thanks for what is allowing your life to unfold so perfectly. Let go of all other hurried thoughts.



16th Verse

*Become totally empty.
Let your heart be at peace.
Amidst the rush of worldly comings and goings,
observe how endings become beginnings.*


*Things flourish, each by each,
only to return to the Source . . .
to what is and what is to be.*

*To return to the root is to find peace.
To find peace is to fulfill one's destiny.
To fulfill one's destiny is to be constant.
To know the constant is called insight.
Not knowing this cycle
leads to eternal disaster.*

*Knowing the constant gives perspective.
This perspective is impartial.
Impartiality is the highest nobility;
the highest nobility is Divine.*

*Being Divine, you will be at one with the Tao.
Being at one with the Tao is eternal.
This way is everlasting,
not endangered by physical death.*





Living with Constancy

The 16th verse of the Tao Te Ching describes the value of being supremely conscious of the constant cycle of all. Rather than viewing change as a disruptive, unwanted occurrence, you can choose to view the variances in your world as valuable influences in the cycle of a Tao-centered existence.

When you see change as the only constant there really is, you start to recognize it as an expression of ongoing life that's a welcome clue to your own purpose and meaning. In this way, you're returned to the experience of your Source and the peace of an impartial perspective. Begin this process by altering your ego-based thoughts and letting yourself feel the bliss of being at one with the Tao. Then become an acute observer of how your world really works, and allow yourself to be in harmony with the cyclical nature of all living things.

There's an immutable cycle of "no life, life, no life" that we're part of. All things come, and then they go. Life materializes in a variety of forms—it's here, and then at some point it ends in what we call death. This coming and going might seem to be a temporary condition, but it's actually the ultimate constant because it never ceases. Embrace this nature of cyclical change and you'll thrive.

An ending may feel like a reason to mourn, whether it be the closing of a phase in your life, the completion of a project, the termination of a relationship, or death itself. But Lao-tzu invites you to realize

that after things flourish, they “return to the Source . . . to what is and what is to be.” The constancy of the cycles of life is an opportunity to return to your root, where what is and what is to be are located. The ultimate place of peace and enlightenment is in this continuous return to the nameless, placeless site of your origination.

Lao-tzu tells you that a sense of inner peace comes with returning to the Source, where all cycles begin and end. This is the fulfillment of your own personal destiny; that is, you’re here to know and be the Tao, the constant beyond the comings and goings of life. You’ve been in many bodies already, and you’re in a new one every day. You’ve been in and out of many relationships, yet the eternal you survives despite transitions from beginnings back into endings. You’re now being urged to know yourself as a physical creation *and* as a piece of the everlasting Tao.

The Tao that animates all existences, including your own, is totally impartial. It plays no favorites: It brings winter regardless of whether you want it or not. It sends those you love on to other people and then back, irrespective of your desires to have it otherwise. All of life must return to it; there are no exceptions or apologies.

When you’re unaware of this steadying influence, you attach to one element of one cycle in life, leading to what Lao-tzu calls “eternal disaster.” When one person leaves you, it feels like the end of the world. When a business venture fails, you flunk out of school, or you have a painful illness or injury, you feel depressed. If you get trapped in these emotional endings, you’re not permitting them to also be a natural part of life, leading you to feel disconnected from your Source. You become stuck in the “rush of worldly comings and goings,” unable to remember the constancy where “endings become beginnings.”

The reality is that beginnings are often disguised as painful endings. So when you know that there’s a constant beyond the present moment’s disappointment, you can sense that “this too shall pass”—it always has and always will. When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change!

This is what Lao-tzu seems to be telling you in this 16th chapter of the Tao Te Ching:

**Take time to be an impartial observer of life,
particularly when an ending is causing despair.**

Remind yourself that your Source is at work within this event, and then make a decision to connect to that Source with your thoughts. All endings are part of the cyclical process; you're merely returning to a life of constancy, which Lao-tzu taught in this passage. You don't have to learn anything new, change any behavior, or adopt any new strategies—just think about the word *return*, and take comfort in the ever-constant Tao, which brings peace to despair. The Tao never leaves or disappoints, and it is always impartial. Wherever you are in the emotional cycle, you're not being judged. Rather, you're learning to be in all phases, free of judgment and living with constancy.

Write these words and post them in a conspicuous place in your living environment: *This too shall pass.*

This phrase will remind you that change is the only constant in life. Everything you notice is in a cycle of coming and going. Everything! There are no exceptions. Know this and let your thoughts flow in the constancy of change. This is the root, the Source of all cyclical happenings. It is perfect. It is Divine. It is something you can totally rely upon. It brings spring flowers, it brings the aging process, it brings rebirth, it brings new relationships—it is the Tao and it is constant. Return to it and experience your eternal essence here and now, in the temporary container you call your body and all of its dramas. *This too shall pass . . .* you can count on it!

Do the Tao Now

Dedicate a day to consciously seeking situations to practice impartially observing endings as beginnings, challenging yourself to find a specific number by noon. Begin in the morning by being aware that the end of asleep is the beginning of awake. Break your waking time into sections, noticing without judging the endings that make space for beginnings. Start to consciously live with constancy by opening your mind to the fact that change is the only certain thing. Remember to include all of your feelings in its cycle—impartially observing *sad*, for instance, permits its natural ending to transform to a beginning. You're doing the Tao!

17th Verse

*With the greatest leader above them,
people barely know one exists.
Next comes one whom they love and praise.
Next comes one whom they fear.
Next comes one whom they despise and defy.*

*When a leader trusts no one,
no one trusts him.*

*The great leader speaks little.
He never speaks carelessly.
He works without self-interest
and leaves no trace.
When all is finished, the people say,
“We did it ourselves.”*



Your mind continually urges you to strive in spite of the all-providing perfection of the Tao; it prompts you to pursue fame, to look for a groove or purpose. Lao-tzu encourages you to do precisely the opposite: Stay outside the rat race and let your mind be in peaceful harmony with the Tao rather than worrying and fighting. The concluding line of this passage of the Tao Te Ching says it all, instructing you to change how you look at your life by “knowing to take sustenance from the great Mother!”

The following are suggestions coming from Lao-tzu to you in the 20th verse of the Tao:

Practice letting go of thoughts about what’s not here now.

Just allow yourself to meld into the perfection of the universe you live in. You don’t need another thing to be happy; it’s all being provided for you right here, right now. Be in this moment, and free yourself of striving for something more or someone else. This is a mind exercise that will put you in touch with the peace of the Tao. Affirm: *It is all perfect. God’s love is everywhere and forgets no one. I trust in this force to guide me, and I am not allowing ego to enter now.* Notice how free you feel when you relax into this no-fears, no-worries attitude.

Take time to “let go and let God,” every single day.

Say the words over and over to yourself until you can actually tell what the difference feels like. Letting go is a markedly distinct physical and psychological experience, much different from striving. Let go of your demands, along with your beliefs that you can’t be happy because of what is supposedly missing in your life. Insisting that you need what you don’t have is insane! The fact that you’re okay without what you think you need is the change you want to see. Then you can note that you already have everything you need to be peaceful, happy, and content right here and right now! Relax into this knowing, and affirm again and again: *I am letting go and letting God. I am a glorious infant nursing at the great all-providing Mother’s breast.*