

The Tao of Leadership



The Tao of Leadership

Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*
Adapted for a New Age

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Palm Beach, Florida



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Introduction

Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* is one of China's best loved books of wisdom. It was originally addressed to the sage and to the wise political ruler of the fifth century B.C. It comes down to us as a classic of world literature, and many of Lao Tzu's sayings will be familiar to you. For example: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

As a teacher, I have found the *Tao Te Ching* an indispensable text in workshops for group leaders, psychotherapists, and humanistic educators. Students like it. It is simple and it makes sense. But even more important is the fact that *Tao Te Ching* persuasively unites leadership skills and the leader's way of life: *our work is our path*.

My success with using *Tao* led me to see its broader applicability, especially to a new generation so fascinated with the role of the leader and the skillful management of human resources. This adaptation, I believe, will be of value to anyone who aspires to a leadership position, whether within the family or group, church or school, business or military, politics or governmental administration.

Tao Te Ching means the Book (*Ching*) of How (*Tao*) Things Happen or Work (*Te*). The title is pronounced Dow Duh Jing—Dow is like "down" without the "n"; Duh is like the "du" in "duck"; and "jing" rhymes with "ring" or "sing"—and the book itself has three topics:

1. Natural law, or how things happen;
2. A way of life, or how to live in conscious harmony with natural law;
3. A method of leadership, or how to govern or educate others in accordance with natural law.

Lao Tzu's work, as I have noted, was originally directed to the wise political and governmental leaders of ancient China. I do not read Chinese, however; I made this adaptation by comparing many different translations until their apparent contradictions were reconciled and made sense to me. Then I read one or another translation to my students. Afterward I told them what each passage meant to me and how it applies specifically to a group leader and generally to any individual searching for the personal fulfillment of life's potentialities.

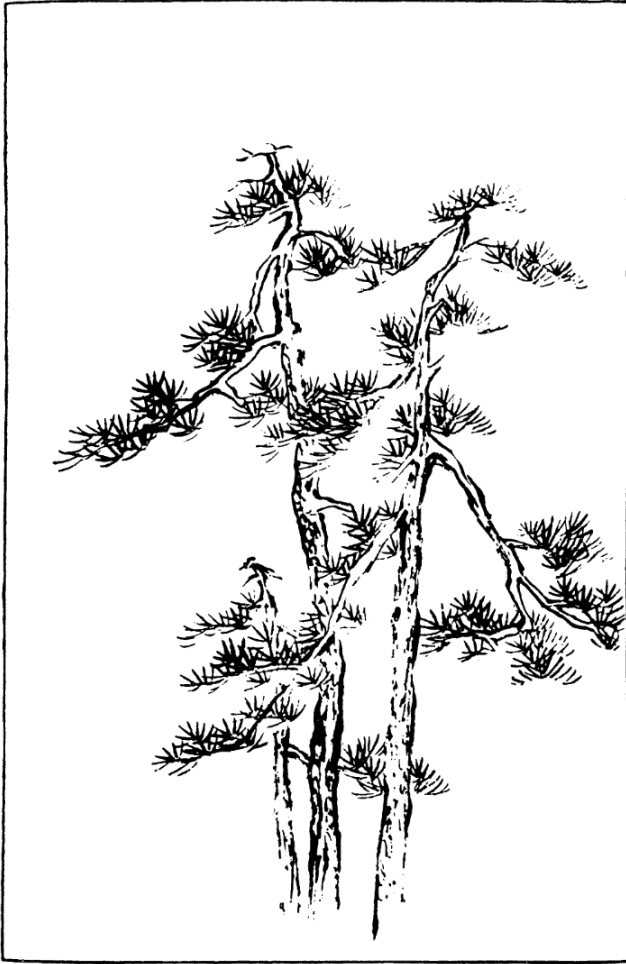
This adaptation of the *Tao* comes from those classes; it is my own version of the meaning of Lao Tzu's own words. Sometimes when the traditional English version is especially beautiful or familiar, however, I have made no changes. In chapter 64, for example, I did not have the heart to alter the classic line noted above.

Thus this version of the *Tao* took form in spoken language. The words, I think, become clearer when read aloud. Try it. Reading aloud is a wholesome custom.

John Heider

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The Tao of Leadership



1. Tao Means How

Tao means how: how things happen, how things work.
Tao is the single principle underlying all creation.
Tao is God.
Tao cannot be defined, because it applies to everything.
You cannot define something in terms of itself.

If you can define a principle, it is not Tao.

Tao is a principle. Creation, on the other hand, is a process.
That is all there is: principle and process, how and what.

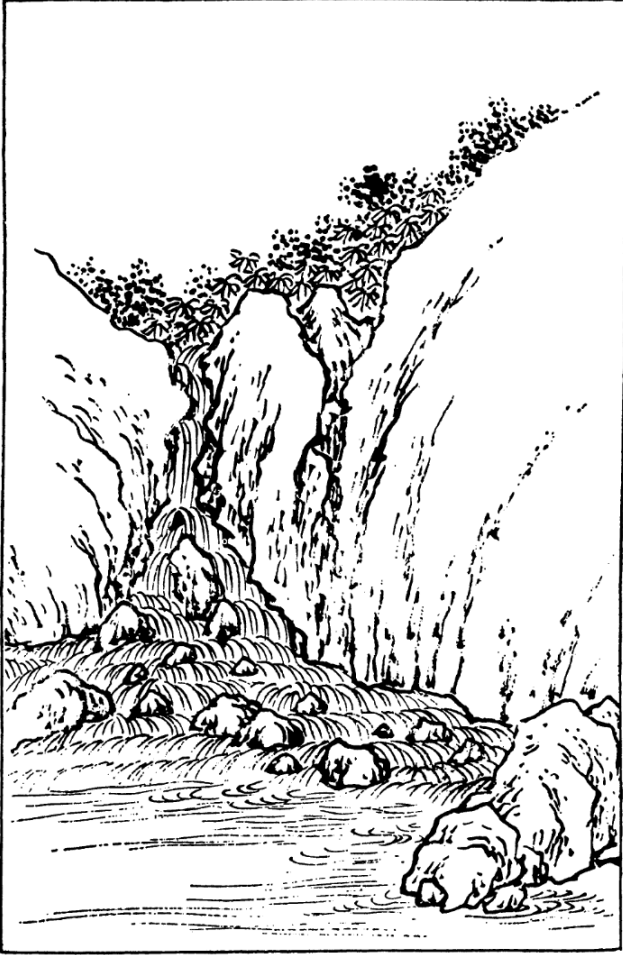
All creation unfolds according to Tao. There is no other way.

Tao cannot be defined, but Tao can be known. The method is meditation, or being aware of what is happening. By being aware of what is happening, I begin to sense how it is happening. I begin to sense Tao.

To become aware of what is happening, I must pay attention with an open mind. I must set aside my personal prejudices or bias. Prejudiced people see only what fits those prejudices.

The method of meditation works, because principle and process are inseparable. All process reveals the underlying principle. This means that I can know Tao. I can know God.

By knowing Tao, I know how things happen.



2. Polarities

All behavior consists of opposites or polarities. If I do anything more and more, over and over, its polarity will appear. For example, striving to be beautiful makes a person ugly, and trying too hard to be kind is a form of selfishness.

Any over-determined behavior produces its opposite:

- An obsession with living suggests worry about dying.
- True simplicity is not easy.
- Is it a long time or a short time since we last met?
- The braggart probably feels small and insecure.
- Who would be first ends up last.

Knowing how polarities work, the wise leader does not push to make things happen, but allows process to unfold on its own.

The leader teaches by example rather than by lecturing others on how they ought to be.

The leader knows that constant interventions will block the group's process. The leader does not insist that things come out a certain way.

The wise leader does not seek a lot of money or a lot of praise. Nevertheless, there is plenty of both.



3. Being Oneself

The wise leader does not make a show of holiness or pass out grades for good performance. That would create a climate of success and failure. Competition and jealousy follow.

Emphasizing material success is the same: those who have a lot become greedy, and those who have little become thieves.

When you reinforce appearances, people scramble to please.

The wise leader pays respectful attention to all behavior. Thus the group becomes open to more and more possibilities of behavior. People learn a great deal when they are open to everything and not just figuring out what pleases the teacher.

The leader shows that style is no substitute for substance, that knowing certain facts is not more powerful than simple wisdom, that creating an impression is not more potent than acting from one's center.

The students learn that effective action arises out of silence and a clear sense of being. In this they find a source of peace. They discover that the person who is down-to-earth can do what needs doing more effectively than the person who is merely busy.



4. Tao Is Not a Thing

Dig as deep as you will, you will never come to a thing called Tao or God. Tao is not a thing. Tao is a principle or law. Tao means how. All things behave according to Tao, but Tao does not behave. Tao is never an object or a process.

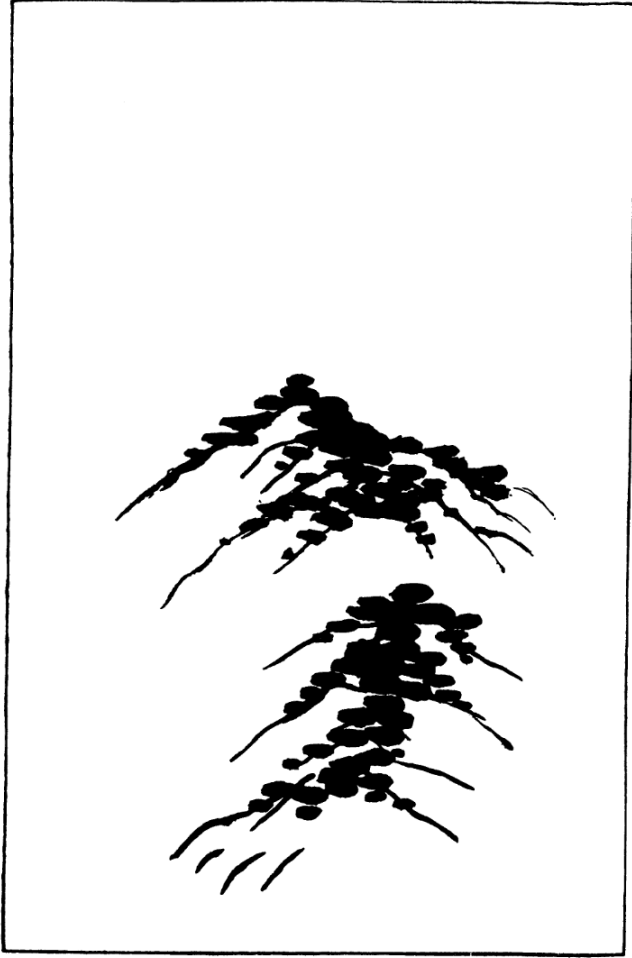
Tao is the law of all things, of all events. Tao is the common ground of all creation.

Creation consists of things and events. All things and events are vibratory. Vibration consists of opposites or polarities. Polarities may cooperate with one another, or they may conflict to varying degrees.

All things and events, whether they are cooperative or conflicting, harmonious or turbulent, take their form and become resolved in accordance with Tao.

But Tao is not a vibratory event. Tao is not, for example, a sound. Tao has no opposites or polarities. Tao is one; Tao is unity.

As far as I know, nothing comes before Tao. Nothing made Tao. Nothing created God.



5. Equal Treatment

Natural law is blind, its justice evenhanded. The consequences of one's behavior are inescapable. Being human is no excuse.

The wise leader does not try to protect people from themselves. The light of awareness shines equally on what is pleasant and on what is not pleasant.

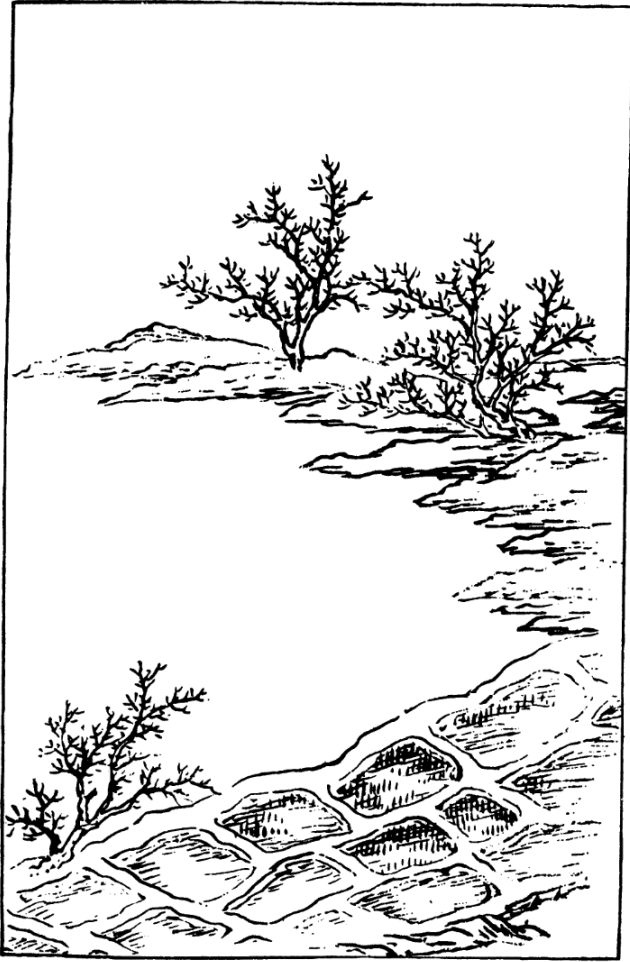
People are not better than the rest of creation. The same principle which underlies human beings underlies everything equally.

Neither is one person or one people better than the rest of humanity. The same principle is everywhere. One person is as worthy as the next. Why play favorites?

Everything demonstrates the law. Just because God is not a thing does not mean that God is nothing. A little humility is in order.

Knowing this, the leader does not pretend to be special. The leader does not gossip about others or waste breath arguing the merits of competing theories.

Silence is a great source of strength.



6. The Pond in the Valley

Can you learn to become open and receptive, quiet and without desires or the need to do something?
Being open and receptive is called *Yin*, the feminine, or the valley.

Imagine that there is a pond in this valley. When no fears or desires stir the surface of the pond, the water forms a perfect mirror.

In this mirror, you can see the reflection of Tao. You can see God and you can see creation.

Go into the valley, be still, and watch the pond. Go as often as you wish. Your silence will grow. The pond will never run dry.

The valley, the pond, and Tao are all within you.



7. Selflessness

T rue self-interest teaches selflessness.

Heaven and earth endure because they are not simply selfish but exist in behalf of all creation.

The wise leader, knowing this, keeps egocentricity in check and by doing so becomes even more effective.

Enlightened leadership is service, not selfishness. The leader grows more and lasts longer by placing the well-being of all above the well-being of self alone.

Paradox: By being selfless, the leader enhances self.



8. Water

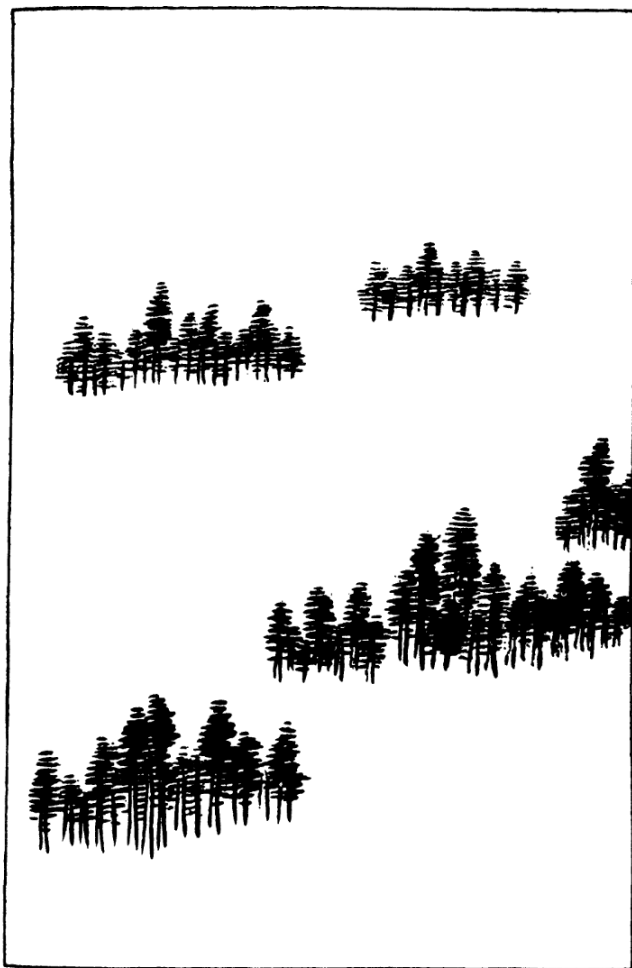
The wise leader is like water.

Consider water: water cleanses and refreshes all creatures without distinction and without judgment; water freely and fearlessly goes deep beneath the surface of things; water is fluid and responsive; water follows the law freely.

Consider the leader: the leader works in any setting without complaint, with any person or issue that comes on the floor; the leader acts so that all will benefit and serves well regardless of the rate of pay; the leader speaks simply and honestly and intervenes in order to shed light and create harmony.

From watching the movements of water, the leader has learned that in action, timing is everything.

Like water, the leader is yielding. Because the leader does not push, the group does not resent or resist.

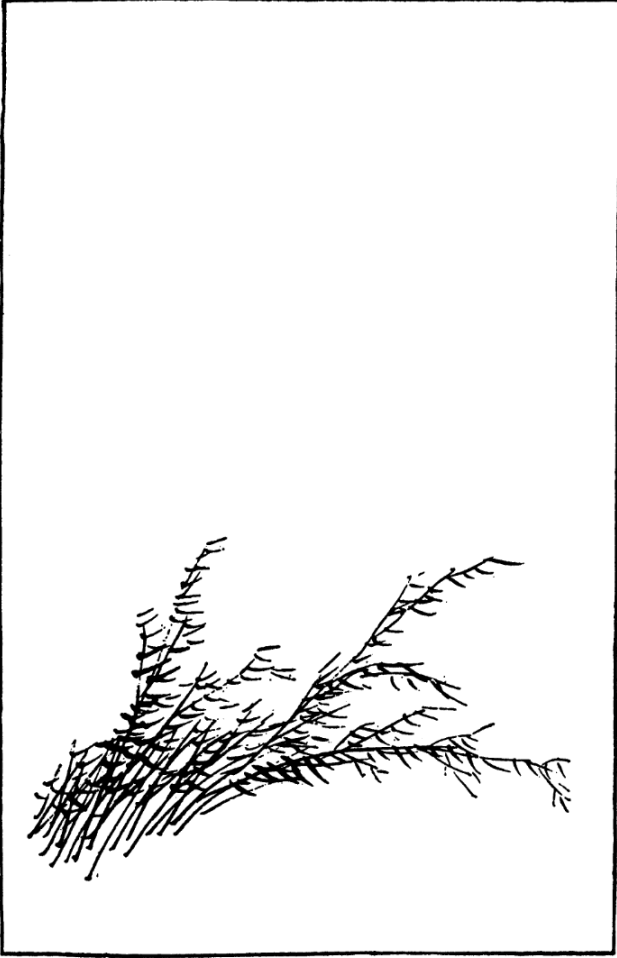


9. A Good Group

A good group is better than a spectacular group.
When leaders become superstars, the teacher outshines the teaching.
Very few superstars are down-to-earth. Fame breeds fame, and before long they get carried away with themselves. Then they fly off center and crash.

The wise leader settles for good work and then lets others have the floor. The leader does not take all the credit for what happens and has no need for fame.

A moderate ego demonstrates wisdom.



10. Unbiased Leadership

Can you mediate emotional issues without taking sides or picking favorites?

Can you breathe freely and remain relaxed even in the presence of passionate fears and desires?

Are your own conflicts clarified? Is your own house clean?

Can you be gentle with all factions and lead the group without dominating?

Can you remain open and receptive, no matter what issues arise?

Can you know what is emerging, yet keep your peace while others discover for themselves?

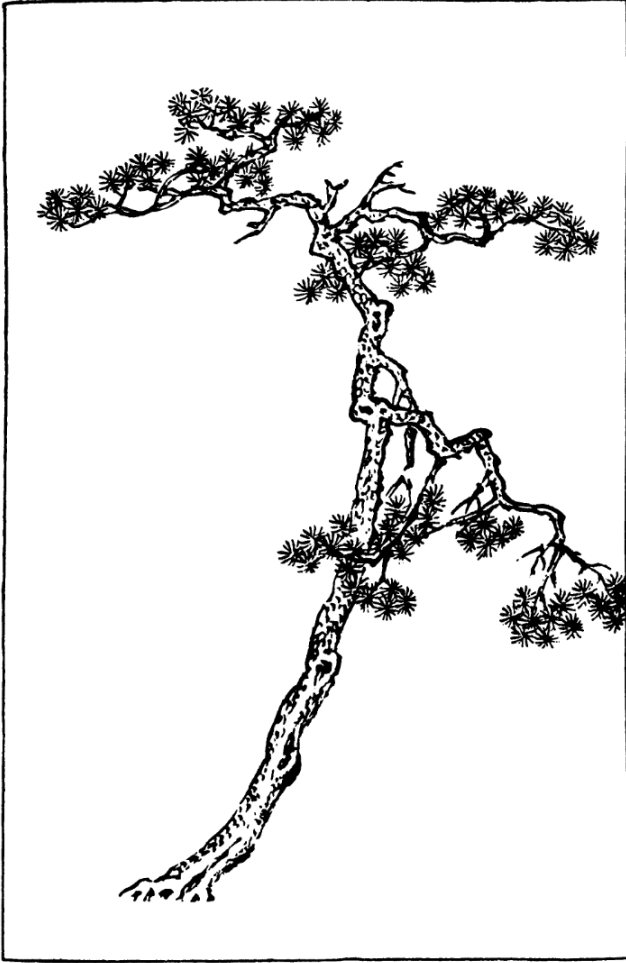
Learn to lead in a nourishing manner.

Learn to lead without being possessive.

Learn to be helpful without taking the credit.

Learn to lead without coercion.

You can do this if you remain unbiased, clear, and down-to-earth.





13. Success

If you measure success in terms of praise and criticism, your anxiety will be endless.

Having a good reputation or becoming well-known for your work can be a hindrance to your further development.

Fame is as burdensome as caring for yourself properly.

What is the problem with praise and criticism?

If the group applauds one thing you do, and then you feel good, you will worry if they do not applaud as loudly the next time. If they are critical, if they argue or complain, you will feel hurt. Either way, you are anxious and dependent.

How can a good reputation be a hindrance?

A good reputation naturally arises from doing good work. But if you try to cherish your reputation, if you try to preserve it, you lose the freedom and honesty necessary for further development.

How is fame like caring for yourself?

In order to do good work, you must take good care of yourself. You must value yourself and allow others to value you also. But if you make too much of yourself, you will become egocentric. Egocentricity injures both self and work.

If you can live with the fruits of success and care for yourself properly, you will be able to foster success in other people.

15. The Leader's Teachers

They practiced meditation. Meditation made them good at seeing how things happen. Meditation grounded them in the infinite. That is why they sometimes appeared deep and inscrutable, sometimes even great.

Their leadership did not rest on technique or on theatrics, but on silence and on their ability to pay attention.

They moved with grace and awareness, and they were able to negotiate complex situations safely.

They were considerate. They did no injury. They were courteous and quiet, like guests. They knew how to yield gracefully and how to be natural and inconspicuous.

They were as open and receptive and available as the valleys that lie among the hills.

They could clarify events for others, because they had done it for themselves. They could speak to the depths of another person, because they had known their own deeper conflicts and blocks.

Because they had given up selfishness, they could enhance others.

They were not trying to become enlightened, because they were enlightened.

18. This Versus That

Do not lose sight of the single principle: how everything works.

When this principle is lost and the method of meditating on process fails, the group becomes mired in intellectual discussion of what could have happened, what should have happened, what this technique or that might do. Soon the group will be quarrelsome and depressed.

Once you leave the path of simple consciousness, you enter the labyrinth of cleverness, competition, and imitation.

When a person forgets that all creation is a unity, allegiance goes to lesser wholes such as the family, the home team, or the company.

Nationalism, racism, classism, sexism: all arise as consciousness of unity is lost. People take sides and favor this versus that.