

1

The speakable Tao
Is not the eternal Tao
The mentionable name
Is not the eternal name.

The nameless
Is the beginning of heaven and earth.
The named
Is the mother of the myriad beings.

And so:
Constant non-desire
Views the most secret.
Constant desire
Views only the limited.

These two are of a common origin
and differ only in name.

In their one-being they are a mystery
The mystery's still deeper mystery
Is the gateway to all mysteries.

2

When everyone knows: beauty is beautiful,
then ugliness is already there.

When everyone knows: goodness is good,
then evil is already there.

For:

Being and nonbeing create one another.

Difficult and easy determine one another.

Long and short measure one another.

High and low define one another.

Sound and voice complement one another.

Before and after follow one another.

And so the wise one:

He dwells during activity in non-action
and lives the wordless teaching.

The myriad beings appear,
and he does not evade them.

He neither creates nor possesses.

He acts but remains unattached.

When the work is done he does not linger.

Indeed, only as he does not linger
does he lose nothing.

3

Not praising the worthy
avoids contention among men.
Not cherishing precious goods
avoids theft among men.
Not regarding what can be desired
avoids men's hearts to be restive.

And so the wise one rules thus:
He empties their hearts,
steadies their centre,
weakens their desires
and strengthens their character.

He constantly leaves the nation
without knowledge, without desires,
and causes that the wisecracks
do not dare to interfere.

He dwells during activity in non-action
and so everything becomes arranged by itself.

4

Tao is empty,
but in its action inexhaustible.
A chasm indeed,
it appears as the origin of the myriad beings.

It softens zealousness,
untangles confusions,
mildens glory
and unites with the dust.

Concealed it may be, but constantly present,
I do not know whence it comes.
It seems to precede even heaven.

5

Heaven and earth know no preference.
To them are the myriad beings
like sacrificial straw dogs.
The wise one knows no preference.
To him are the people
like sacrificial straw dogs.

The space between heaven and earth,
is it not comparable to a bellows?
Empty, but inexhaustible,
the more it is moved,
the more comes forth.

Many words melt quickly away,
how much better, to preserve the essence.