

Daode jing

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1. The Dao that can be followed is not the eternal Dao

The Dao that can be followed is not the eternal Dao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the origin of heaven and earth
While naming is the origin of the myriad things.
Therefore, always desireless, you see the mystery
Ever desiring, you see the manifestations.
These two are the same—
When they appear they are named differently.

This sameness is the mystery,
Mystery within mystery;
The door to all marvels.

2. All in the world recognize the beautiful as beautiful

All in the world recognize the beautiful as beautiful.
Herein lies ugliness.
All recognize the good as good.
Herein lies evil.

Therefore
Being and non-being produce each other.
Difficulty and ease bring about each other.
Long and short delimit each other.
High and low rest on each other.
Sound and voice harmonize each other.
Front and back follow each other.

Therefore the sage abides in the condition of *wu-wei* (unattached action).
And carries out the wordless teaching.
Here, the myriad things are made, yet not separated.

Therefore the sage produces without possessing,
Acts without expectations
And accomplishes without abiding in her accomplishments.

It is precisely because she does not abide in them
That they never leave her.

3. If you do not adulate the worthy...

If you do not adulate the worthy, you will make others non-contentious.
If you do not value rare treasures, you will stop others from stealing.
If people do not see desirables, they will not be agitated.

Therefore, when the sage governs,
He clears peoples minds,

Fills their bellies,
Weakens their ambition and
Strengthens their bones.

If the people are kept without cleverness and desire
It will make the intellectuals not dare to meddle.

Acting without contrivance, there is no lack of manageability.

4. The Dao is so vast...

The Dao is so vast that when you use it, something is always left.
How deep it is!
It seems to be the ancestor of the myriad things.
It blunts sharpness
Untangles knots
Softens the glare
Unifies with the mundane.
It is so full!
It seems to have remainder.

It is the child of I-don't-know-who.
And prior to the primeval Lord-on-high.

5. Heaven and Earth are not humane...

Heaven and Earth are not humane,
And regard the people as straw dogs.
The sage is not humane,
And regards all things as straw dogs.
The space between Heaven and Earth is just like a bellows:
Empty it, it is not exhausted.
Squeeze it and more comes out.

Investigating it with a lot of talk
Is not like holding to the center.

6. The valley spirit never dies...

The valley spirit never dies.
It is called "the mysterious female."
The opening of the mysterious female
Is called "the root of Heaven and Earth."
Continuous, seeming to remain.

Use it without exertion.

7. Heaven and Earth last forever...

Heaven and Earth last forever.

The reason that Heaven and Earth are able to last forever
Is because they do not give birth to themselves.
Therefore, they are always alive.
Hence, the sage puts herself last and is first.
She is outside herself and therefore her self lasts.

Is it not through her selflessness
That she is able to perfect herself?

8. The highest goodness is like water...

The highest goodness is like water.
Water easily benefits all things without struggle.
Yet it abides in places that men hate.
Therefore it is like the Dao.

For dwelling, the Earth is good.
For the mind, depth is good.
The goodness of giving is in the timing.
The goodness of speech is in honesty.
In government, self-mastery is good.
In handling affairs, ability is good.

If you do not wrangle, you will not be blamed.

9. To hold until full is not as good as stopping...

To hold until full is not as good as stopping.
An oversharpened sword cannot last long.
A room filled with gold and jewels cannot be protected.
Boasting of wealth and virtue brings your demise.
After finishing the work, withdraw.

This is the Way of Heaven.

10. Pacifying the agitated material soul...

Pacifying the agitated material soul and holding to oneness:
Are you able to avoid separation?
Focusing your energy on the release of tension:
Can you be like an infant?
In purifying your insight:
Can you un-obstruct it?
Loving the people and ruling the state:
Can you avoid over-manipulation?
In opening and closing the gate of Heaven:
Can you be the female?
In illuminating the whole universe:
Can you be free of rationality?

Give birth to it and nourish it.
Produce it but don't possess it.
Act without expectation.
Excel, but don't take charge.

This is called Mysterious Virtue.

11. Thirty spokes join together in the hub...

Thirty spokes join together in the hub.
It is because of what is not there that the cart is useful.
Clay is formed into a vessel.
It is because of its emptiness that the vessel is useful.
Cut doors and windows to make a room.
It is because of its emptiness that the room is useful.
Therefore, what is present is used for profit.

But it is in absence that there is usefulness.

12. The five colors blind our eyes...

The five colors blind our eyes.
The five tones deafen our ears.
The five flavors confuse our taste.
Racing and hunting madden our minds.
Possessing rare treasures brings about harmful behavior.
Therefore the sage regards his center, and not his eyes.

He lets go of that and chooses this.

13. Accept humiliation as a surprise...

Accept humiliation as a surprise.
Value great misfortune as your own self.

What do I mean by "Accept humiliation as a surprise" ?
When you are humble
Attainment is a surprise
And so is loss.
That's why I say, "Accept humiliation as a surprise."

What do I mean by "Value great misfortune as your own self" ?

If I have no self, how could I experience misfortune?

Therefore, if you dedicate your life for the benefit of the world,
You can rely on the world.
If you love dedicating yourself in this way,
You can be entrusted with the world.

14. Look for it, it cannot be seen...

Look for it, it cannot be seen.

It is called the distant.

Listen for it, it cannot be heard.

It is called the rare.

Reach for it, it cannot be gotten.

It is called the subtle.

These three ultimately cannot be fathomed.

Therefore they join to become one.

Its top is not bright;

Its bottom is not dark;

Existing continuously, it cannot be named and it returns to no-thingness.

Thus, it is called the formless form,

The image of no-thing.

This is called the most obscure.

Go to meet it, you cannot see its face.

Follow it, you cannot see its back.

By holding to the ancient Dao

You can manage present existence

And know the primordial beginning.

This is called the very beginning thread of the Dao.

15. The ancient masters of the Dao...

The ancient masters of the Dao

Had subtle marvelous mystic penetration

A depth that cannot be known.

It is exactly because that they are unknowable

That we are forced to pay attention to their appearance.

Hesitant, like one crossing an ice-covered river.

Ready, like one afraid of his neighbors on all sides.

Dignified, like a guest.

Loose, like ice about to melt.

Straightforward, like an uncarved block of wood.

Open, like a valley.

Obscure, like muddy water.

Who can be muddled, and use clarity to gradually become lucid?

Who can be calm, and use constant application for eventual success?

The one who holds to this path does not crave fulfillment.

Precisely because he does not crave fulfillment

He can be shattered

And do without quick restitution.

16. Effect emptiness to the extreme...

Effect emptiness to the extreme.

Keep stillness whole.

Myriad things act in concert.

I therefore watch their return.

All things flourish and each returns to its root.

Returning to the root is called quietude.

Quietude is called returning to life.

Return to life is called constant.

Knowing this constant is called illumination.

Acting arbitrarily without knowing the constant is harmful.

Knowing the constant is receptivity, which is impartial.

Impartiality is kingship.

Kingship is Heaven.

Heaven is Dao

Dao is eternal.

Though you lose the body, you do not die.

17. From great antiquity forth they have known and possessed it...

From great antiquity forth they have known and possessed it.

Those of the next level loved and praised it.

The next were in awe of it.

And the next despised it.

If you lack sincerity no one will believe you.

How careful she is with her precious words!

When her work is complete and her job is finished,

Everybody says: "We did it!"

18. When the great Dao perishes...

When the great Dao perishes

There is *humaneness* and rightness.

When intelligence is manifest

There is great deception.

When the six relationships are not in harmony

There is filial piety and compassion.

When the country is in chaos

Loyal ministers appear.

19. Get rid of "holiness" ...

Get rid of "holiness" and abandon "wisdom" and the people will benefit a hundredfold.

Get rid of "humaneness" and abandon "rightness" and the people will return to filial piety and compassion.

Get rid of cleverness and abandon profit, and thieves and gangsters will not exist.

Since the above three are merely words, they are not sufficient.

Therefore there must be something to include them all.

See the origin and keep the non-differentiated state.

Lessen selfishness and decrease desire.

20. Get rid of "learning" ...

Get rid of "learning" and there will be no anxiety.

How much difference is there between "yes" and "no" ?

How far removed from each other are "good" and "evil" ?

Yet what the people are in awe of cannot be disregarded.

I am scattered, never having been in a comfortable center.

All the people enjoy themselves, as if they are at the festival of the great sacrifice,

Or climbing the Spring Platform.

I alone remain, not yet having shown myself.

Like an infant who has not yet laughed.

Weary, like one despairing of no home to return to.

All the people enjoy extra

While I have left everything behind.

I am ignorant of the minds of others.

So dull!

While average people are clear and bright, I alone am obscure.

Average people know everything.

To me alone all seems covered.

So flat!

Like the ocean.

Blowing around!

It seems there is no place to rest.

Everybody has a goal in mind.

I alone am as ignorant as a bumpkin.

I alone differ from people.

I enjoy being nourished by the mother.

21. The form of great virtue...

The form of great virtue is something that only the Dao can follow.

The Dao as a "thing" is only vague and obscure.

How obscure! How vague! In it there is form.

How vague! How obscure! In it are things.

How deep! How dark! In it there is an essence.

The essence is so real—therein is belief.

From the present to antiquity, its name has never left it, so we can examine all origins.
How do I know the form of all origins?

By this.

22. The imperfect is completed...

The imperfect is completed.
The crooked is straightened.
The empty is filled.
The old is renewed.
With few there is attainment.
With much there is confusion.
Therefore the sage grasps the one and becomes the model for all.

She does not show herself, and therefore is apparent.
She does not affirm herself, and therefore is acknowledged.
She does not boast and therefore has merit.
She does not strive and is therefore successful.
It is exactly because she does not contend, that nobody can contend with her.

How could the ancient saying, "The imperfect is completed" be regarded as empty talk?

Believe in the complete and return to it.

23. To speak little is natural...

To speak little is natural.
Therefore a gale does not blow a whole morning
Nor does a downpour last a whole day.
Who does these things? Heaven and Earth.
If even Heaven and Earth cannot force perfect continuity
How can people expect to?

Therefore there is such a thing as aligning one's actions with the Dao.
If you accord with the Dao you become one with it.
If you accord with virtue you become one with it.
If you accord with loss you become one with it.

The Dao accepts this accordance gladly.
Virtue accepts this accordance gladly.
Loss also accepts accordance gladly.

If you are untrustworthy, people will not trust you.

24. Standing on tiptoe, you are unsteady...

Standing on tiptoe, you are unsteady.

Straddle-legged, you cannot go.
If you show yourself, you will not be seen.
If you affirm yourself, you will not shine.
If you boast, you will have no merit.
If you promote yourself, you will have no success.

Those who abide in the Dao call these

Leftover food and wasted action
And all things dislike them.

Therefore the person of the Dao does not act like this.

25. There is something that is perfect in its disorder...

There is something that is perfect in its disorder
Which is born before Heaven and Earth.

So silent and desolate! It establishes itself without renewal.
Functions universally without lapse.
We can regard it as the Mother of Everything.

I don't know its name.

Hence, when forced to name it, I call it "Dao."
When forced to categorize it, I call it "great."

Greatness entails transcendence.
Transcendence entails going-far.
Going-far entails return.

Hence, Dao is great, Heaven is great, the Earth is great
And the human is also great.

Within our realm there are four greatnesses and the human being is one of them.

Human beings follow the Earth.
Earth follows Heaven
Heaven follows the Dao
The Dao follows the way things are.

26. Heaviness is the root of lightness...

Heaviness is the root of lightness.
Composure is the ruler of instability.
Therefore the sage travels all day
Without putting down his heavy load.
Though there may be spectacles to see
He easily passes them by.

This being so
How could the ruler of a large state
Be so concerned with himself as to ignore the people?

If you take them lightly you will lose your roots.
If you are unstable, you will lose your rulership.

27. A good traveler leaves no tracks...

A good traveler leaves no tracks.
Good speech lacks faultfinding.
A good counter needs no calculator.
A well-shut door will stay closed without a latch.
Skillful fastening will stay tied without knots.

It is in this manner that the sage is always skillful in elevating people.
Therefore she does not discard anybody.

She is always skillful in helping things
Therefore she does not discard anything.
This is called "the actualization of her luminosity."

Hence, the good are the teachers of the not-so-good.
And the not-so-good are the charges of the good.

Not valuing your teacher or not loving your students:
Even if you are smart, you are gravely in error.

This is called Essential Subtlety.

28. Know the Masculine, cleave to the Feminine...

Know the Masculine, cleave to the Feminine
Be the valley for everyone.
Being the valley for everyone
You are always in virtue without lapse
And you return to infancy.

Know the White, cleave to the Black
Be a model for everyone.
Being the model for everyone
You are always in virtue and free from error
You return to limitlessness.
Know Glory but cleave to Humiliation
Be the valley for everyone.
When your constancy in virtue is complete
You return to the state of the "uncarved block."

The block is cut into implements.
The sage uses them to fulfill roles.

Therefore the great tailor does not cut.

29. If you want to grab the world and run it...

If you want to grab the world and run it
I can see that you will not succeed.
The world is a spiritual vessel, which can't be controlled.

Manipulators mess things up.
Grabbers lose it. Therefore:

Sometimes you lead
Sometimes you follow
Sometimes you are stifled
Sometimes you breathe easy
Sometimes you are strong
Sometimes you are weak
Sometimes you destroy
And sometimes you are destroyed.

Hence, the sage shuns excess
Shuns grandiosity
Shuns arrogance.

30. If you used the Dao as a principle for ruling...

If you used the Dao as a principle for ruling
You would not dominate the people by military force.

What goes around comes around.

Where the general has camped
Thorns and brambles grow.
In the wake of a great army
Come years of famine.
If you know what you are doing
You will do what is necessary and stop there.

Accomplish but don't boast
Accomplish without show
Accomplish without arrogance
Accomplish without grabbing
Accomplish without forcing.

When things flourish they decline.

This is called non-Dao
The non-Dao is short-lived.

31. Sharp weapons are inauspicious instruments...

Sharp weapons are inauspicious instruments.
Everyone hates them.
Therefore the man of the Dao is not comfortable with them.

In the domestic affairs of the gentleman
The left is the position of honor.
In military affairs the right is the position of honor.
Since weapons are inauspicious instruments, they are not the instruments of the gentleman
So he uses them without enjoyment
And values plainness.

Victory is never sweet.

Those for whom victory is sweet
Are those who enjoy killing.
If you enjoy killing, you cannot gain the trust of the people.

On auspicious occasions the place of honor is on the left.
On inauspicious occasions the place of honor is on the right.
The lieutenant commander stands on the left.
The commander-in-chief stands on the right.
And they speak, using the funerary rites to bury them.

The common people, from whom all the dead have come
Weep in lamentation.
The victors bury them with funerary rites.

32. The Dao is always nameless...

The Dao is always nameless.
And even though a sapling might be small
No one can make it be his subject.
If rulers could embody this principle
The myriad things would follow on their own.
Heaven and Earth would be in perfect accord
And rain sweet dew.

People, unable to deal with It on its own terms
Make adjustments;
And so you have the beginning of division into names.
Since there are already plenty of names
You should know where to stop.
Knowing where to stop, you can avoid danger.

The Dao's existence in the world
Is like valley streams running into the rivers and seas.

33. If you understand others you are smart...

If you understand others you are smart.

If you understand yourself you are illuminated.

If you overcome others you are powerful.

If you overcome yourself you have strength.

If you know how to be satisfied you are rich.

If you can act with vigor, you have a will.

If you don't lose your objectives you can be long-lasting.

If you die without loss, you are eternal.

34. The Dao is like a great flooding river...

The Dao is like a great flooding river. How can it be directed to the left or right?

The myriad things rely on it for their life but do not distinguish it.

It brings to completion but cannot be said to exist.

It clothes and feeds all things without lording over them.

It is always desireless, so we call it "the small."

The myriad things return to it and it doesn't exact lordship

Thus it can be called "great."

Till the end, it does not regard itself as Great.

Therefore it actualizes its greatness.

35. Holding to the Great Form...

Holding to the Great Form

All pass away.

They pass away unharmed, resting in Great Peace.

It is for food and music that the passing traveler stops.

When the Dao appears from its opening

It is so subtle, it has no taste.

Look at it, you cannot see it.

Listen, you cannot hear it.

Use it

You cannot exhaust it.

36. That which will be shrunk...

That which will be shrunk

Must first be stretched.

That which will be weakened

Must first be strengthened.

That which will be torn down

Must first be raised up.

That which will be taken
Must first be given.

This is called "subtle illumination."

The gentle and soft overcomes the hard and aggressive.

A fish cannot leave the water.

The country's potent weapons
Should not be shown to its people.

37. The Dao is always "not-doing" ...

The Dao is always "not-doing"
Yet there is nothing it doesn't do.
If the ruler is able to embody it
Everything will naturally change.

Being changed, they desire to act.

So I must restrain them, using the nameless "uncarved block (original mind)."

Using the nameless uncarved block
They become desireless.
Desireless, they are tranquil and
All-under-Heaven is naturally settled.

38. True virtue is not virtuous...

True virtue is not virtuous
Therefore it has virtue.
Superficial virtue never fails to be virtuous
Therefore it has no virtue.

True virtue does not "act"
And has no intentions.
Superficial virtue "acts"
And always has intentions.
True *humaneness* "acts"
But has no intentions.
True rightness "acts"
But but has intentions.
True propriety "acts" and if you don't respond

They will roll up their sleeves and threaten you.

Thus, when the Dao is lost there is virtue
When virtue is lost there is *humaneness*
When *humaneness* is lost there is rightness

And when rightness is lost there is propriety.

Now "propriety" is the external appearance of loyalty and sincerity
And the beginning of disorder.

Occult abilities are just flowers of the Dao
And the beginning of foolishness.

Therefore the Master dwells in the substantial
And not in the superficial.
Rests in the fruit and not in the flower.

So let go of that and grasp this.

39. These in the past have attained wholeness...

These in the past have attained wholeness:

Heaven attains wholeness with its clarity;
The Earth attains wholeness with its firmness;
The Spirit attains wholeness with its transcendence;
The Valley attain wholeness when filled;
The Myriad Things attain wholeness in life;
The Ruler attains wholeness in the correct governance of the people.

In effecting this:
If Heaven lacked clarity it would be divided;
If the Earth lacked firmness it would fly away;
If the spirit lacked transcendence it would be exhausted;
If the valley lacked fullness it would be depleted;
If the myriad things lacked life they would vanish.
If the ruler lacks nobility and loftiness he will be tripped up.

Hence
Nobility has lowliness as its root
The High has the Low as its base.
Thus the kings call themselves "the orphan, the lowly, the unworthy."

Is this not taking lowliness as the fundamental? Isn't it?

In this way you can bring about great effect without burden.
Not desiring the rarity of gems
Or the manyness of grains of sand.

40. Return is the motion of the Dao...

Return is the motion of the Dao.
Softening is its function.
All things in the cosmos arise from being.
Being arises from non-being.

41. When superior students hear of the Dao...

When superior students hear of the Dao

They strive to practice it.

When middling students hear of the Dao

They sometimes keep it and sometimes lose it.

When inferior students hear of the Dao

They have a big laugh.

But "not laughing" in itself is not sufficient to be called the Dao, and therefore it is said:

The sparkling Dao seems dark

Advancing in the Dao seems like regression.

Settling into the Dao seems rough.

True virtue is like a valley.

The immaculate seems humble.

Extensive virtue seems insufficient.

Established virtue seems deceptive.

The face of reality seems to change.

The great square has no corners.

Great ability takes a long time to perfect.

Great sound is hard to hear.

The great form has no shape.

The Dao is hidden and nameless.

This is exactly why the Dao is good at developing and perfecting.