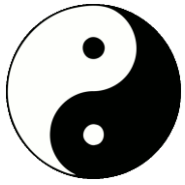


# Excerpts from the *Dao De Jing*

**Daoism** (formerly Taoism) is a philosophical and religious tradition that emphasizes living in harmony with the Dao. The term “Dao” means “way”, “path” or “principle”, and denotes something that is both the source and the driving force behind everything that exists. It is ultimately ineffable: “The Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao.”

While Daoism drew its cosmological notions from the tenets of the School of Yin Yang, its keystone work is widely regarded to be the *Dao De Jing*, a compact and ambiguous book containing teachings attributed to **Laozi** (Chinese: 老子; pinyin: Lǎozǐ; Wade–Giles: Lao Tzu), **c.500 BCE**. Together with the writings of Zhuangzi, these two texts build the philosophical foundation of Daoism. This philosophical Daoism, individualistic by nature, is not institutionalized. (Adapted from Wikipedia)



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There was something featureless yet complete  
born before heaven and earth;  
Silent – amorphous –  
it stood alone and unchanging  
Not knowing its name  
I call it The Way (*The Dao*)\*

---

The great Dao flows everywhere.  
All things are born from it,  
yet it doesn't create them.

---

We join spokes together in a wheel,  
but it is the center hole  
that makes the wagon move

We shape clay into a pot,  
but it is the emptiness inside  
that holds whatever we want

We work with being,  
but non-being is what we use

---

You may temper a sword until it is razor sharp,  
but you cannot preserve the edge for long.  
When gold and jade fill your rooms,  
no one will be able to guard them for you.\*

---

He shapes events as they come.  
He steps out of the way,  
and lets the Dao speak for itself

---

A good traveler has no fixed plans  
and is not intent upon arriving.  
A good artist lets his intuition  
lead him wherever it wants

---

Success is as dangerous as failure.  
Hope is as hollow as fear.

What does it mean that success is as dangerous as failure?  
Whether you go up the ladder or down it,  
your position is shaky.  
When you stand with your two feet upon the ground,  
you will always keep your balance.

---

Act without doing; work without effort,  
think of the small as large and the few as many.  
Confront the difficult while it is still easy,  
accomplish the great task by a series of small acts.

---

*Translations by Stephen Mitchell, except passages marked \*, translated by Victor Mair.*

# The Buddha - Sermon at Benares

*Siddhartha Gautama (c.563-483 BCE) was the son of the ruler of a small Indian state. Legend holds that it was foretold at his birth that he would either be a great monarch or a great Buddha (literally, "an enlightened one") His father, hoping for the former, raised Siddhartha in luxury. But at the age of 29 Siddhartha experienced a vision of human suffering that led him to renounce his worldly status and goods and take to the road as a wandering ascetic. He joined at least two ascetic sects, whose philosophies he quickly mastered but neither allowed him to achieve the highest truth. He finally attained this goal when one night while he was meditating he was able to comprehend his past and future lives. Siddhartha determined to teach the truths he had realized; he gathered disciples and preached a middle way between worldliness and asceticism.*

*His teachings swept through East Asia, becoming the foundation for one of the world's great religions. Buddhist traditions flourished in both India and China. The teachings were recorded by his students and then codified over the next 500 years. Part of his first sermon, the Sermon at Benares, is reproduced here.*

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On seeing their old teacher approach, the five bhikkhus (1) agreed among themselves not to salute him, nor to address him as a master, but by his name only. "For," so they said, "he has broken his vow and has abandoned holiness. He is no bhikkhu but Gautama, and Gautama has become a man who lives in abundance and indulges in the pleasures of worldliness."

But when the Blessed One approached in a dignified manner, they involuntarily rose from their seats and greeted him in spite of their resolution. Still they called him by his name and addressed him as "friend Gautama."

When they had thus received the Blessed One, he said: "Do not call the Tathagata (2) by his name nor address him as 'friend,' for he is the Buddha, the Holy One. The Buddha looks with a kind heart equally on all living beings, and they therefore call him 'Father.' To disrespect a father is wrong; to despise him, is wicked.

"The Tathagata," the Buddha continued, "does not seek salvation in austerities, but neither does he for that reason indulge in worldly pleasures, nor live in abundance. The Tathagata has found the middle path.

"There are two extremes, O bhikkhus, which the man who has given up the world ought not to follow-the habitual practice, on the one hand, of self-indulgence which is unworthy, vain and fit only for the worldly-minded and the habitual practice, on the other hand, of self-mortification, which is painful, useless and unprofitable.

"Neither abstinence from fish or flesh, nor going naked, nor shaving the head, nor wearing matted hair, nor dressing in a rough garment, nor covering oneself with dirt, nor sacrificing to Agni, will cleanse a man who is not free from delusions.

"Reading the Vedas, making offerings to priests, or sacrifices to the gods, self-mortification by heat or cold, and many such penances performed for the sake of immortality, these do not cleanse the man who is not free from delusions.

"Anger, drunkenness, obstinacy, bigotry, deception, envy, self-praise, disparaging others, superciliousness and evil intentions constitute uncleanness; not verily the eating of flesh."

A middle path, O bhikkhus, avoiding the two extremes, has been discovered by the Tathagata—a path which opens the eyes, and bestows understanding, which leads to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom, to full enlightenment, to Nirvana!

"What is that middle path, O bhikkhus, avoiding these two extremes, discovered by the Tathagata — that path which opens the eyes, and bestows understanding, which leads to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom, to full enlightenment, to Nirvana?

"Let me teach you, O bhikkhus, the middle path, which keeps aloof from both extremes. By suffering, the emaciated devotee produces confusion and sickly thoughts in his mind. Mortification is not conducive even to worldly knowledge; how much less to a triumph over the senses!

"He who fills his lamp with water will not dispel the darkness, and he who tries to light a fire with rotten wood will fail. And how can anyone be free from self by leading a wretched life, if he does not succeed in quenching the fires of lust, if he still hankers after either worldly or heavenly- pleasures. But he in whom self has become extinct is free from lust: he will desire neither worldly nor heavenly pleasures, and the satisfaction of his natural wants will not defile him. However, let him be moderate, let him eat and drink according to the needs of the body.

"Sensuality is enervating: the "self-indulgent" man is a slave to pleasure to his passions, and pleasure-seeking is degrading and vulgar.

"But to satisfy the necessities of life is not evil. To keep the body in good health is a duty for otherwise we shall not be able to trim the lamp of wisdom, and keep our mind strong and clear. Water surrounds the lotus-flower, but does not wet its petals.

"This is the middle path, O bhikkhus. That keeps aloof from both extremes.

And the Blessed One spoke kindly to his disciples, pitying them for their errors, and pointing out the uselessness of their endeavors, and the ice of ill-will that chilled their hearts melted away under the gentle warmth of the Master's persuasion.

Now the Blessed One set the wheel of the most excellent law rolling, and he began to preach to the five bhikkhus, opening to them the gate of immortality, and showing them the bliss of Nirvana (3).

The Buddha said:

"The spokes of the wheel are the rules of pure conduct: justice is the uniformity of their length, wisdom is the tire; modesty and thoughtfulness are the hub in which the immovable axle of truth is fixed.

"He who recognizes the existence of suffering, its cause, its remedy, and its cessation has fathomed the four noble truths. He will walk in the right path.

"Right views will be the torch to light his way. Right aspirations will be his guide. Right speech will be his dwelling-place on the road. His gait will be straight, for it is right behavior. His refreshments will be the right way of earning his livelihood. Right efforts will be his steps right thoughts his breath; and right contemplation will give him the peace that follows in his footprints.

"Now, this, O bhikkhus, is the noble truth concerning *suffering*:

"Birth is attended with pain, decay is painful, disease is painful, death is painful. Union with the unpleasant is painful, painful is separation from the pleasant, and any craving that is unsatisfied, that too is painful. In brief, bodily conditions which spring from attachment are painful.

"Now this, O bhikkhus, is the noble truth concerning the *origin* of suffering:

"Verily, it is that craving which causes the renewal of existence, accompanied by sensual delight, seeking satisfaction now here, now there, the craving for the gratification of the passions, the craving for a future life, and the craving for happiness in this life.

"Now this, O bhikkhus, is the noble truth concerning the *destruction* of suffering:

"Verily, it is the destruction, in which no passion remains, of this very thirst; it is the laying aside of, the being free from, the dwelling no longer upon this thirst.

'Now this, O bhikkhus, is the noble truth concerning the way which leads to the destruction of sorrow. Verily! it is this noble *eightfold path*: that is to say:

"Right views; right aspirations; right speech; right behavior; right livelihood, right effort; right thoughts; and right contemplation.

"This, then, O bhikkhus, is the noble truth concerning the destruction of sorrow. By the practice of loving kindness I have attained liberation of heart, and thus I am assured that I shall never return in renewed births. I have even now attained Nirvana."

And when the Blessed One had thus set the royal chariot wheel of truth rolling onward, a rapture thrilled through all the universes. The devas left their heavenly abodes to listen to the sweetness of the truth; the saints that had parted from this life crowded around the great teacher to receive the glad tidings; even the animals of the earth felt the bliss that rested upon the words of the Tagathata: and all the creatures of the host of sentient beings, gods, men, and beasts, hearing the message of deliverance, received and understood it in their own language.

And when the doctrine was propounded, the venerable Kondanna, the oldest one among the five bhikkhus, discerned the truth with his mental eye, and he said: "Truly, O Buddha, our Lord, thou hast found the truth!" Then the other bhikkhus too, joined him and exclaimed: "Truly, thou art the Buddha, thou has found the truth."

And the devas (4) and saints and all the good spirits of the departed generations that had listened to the sermon of the Tathagata, joyfully received the doctrine and shouted: "Truly, the blessed One has founded the kingdom of righteousness. The Blessed One has moved the earth; he has set the wheel of Truth rolling, which by no one in the universe, be he god or man, can ever be turned back. The kingdom of Truth will be preached upon earth; it will spread; and righteousness, good-will, and peace will reign among mankind."

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**(1) Bhikku** – “monk”

**(2) Tathāgata** – a term the Buddha used when referring to himself. Often thought to mean either "one who has thus gone" (*tathā-gata*) or "one who has thus come" (*tathā-āgata*). This is interpreted as signifying that the Tathagata is beyond all coming and going – beyond all transitory phenomena. The precise original meaning of the word is not certain. (Wikipedia)

**(3) Nirvāṇa** - ancient Sanskrit term used in Indian religions to describe the profound peace of mind that is acquired with *moksha* (liberation). In Hindu philosophy, it is union with the Brahman (God). The word literally means “extinguished” or “blown out” (as in a candle flame) and refers, in the Buddhist context, to the imperturbable stillness of mind after the fires of desire, aversion, and delusion have been finally extinguished. (Wikipedia)

**(4) Devas** – supernatural beings that are more powerful and blissful than humans

# Excerpts from the Edicts of Ashoka

*After the emperor Ashoka (or Piyadasi), ruler of the **Mauryan Empire** of India (269-232 BCE), had conquered almost the entire Indian subcontinent, he was sick of all violence (below), and he converted to **Buddhism** and adopted a more pacifist world view. On several places in India and Pakistan (and Bangla Desh and Afghanistan), he left large rock edicts – literally edicts written in stone pillars across his empire, in which he tried to establish **dharma**, (moral order and justice).*

## Fifth edict

The beloved of the gods, king Piyadasi (Ashoka), speaks thus: To do good is difficult. One who does good first does something hard to do. I have done many good deeds, and, if my sons, grandsons and their descendants up to the end of the world act in like manner, they too will do much good. But whoever amongst them neglects this, they will do evil. Truly, it is easy to do evil.

In the past there were no dharma Mahamatras [1] but such officers were appointed by me thirteen years after my coronation. Now they work among all religions for the establishment of dharma [2], for the promotion of dharma, and for the welfare and happiness of all who are devoted to dharma. They work among the Greeks [3], the Kambojas, the Gandharas... and other peoples on the western borders. They work among soldiers, chiefs, Brahmans, householders, the poor, the aged and those devoted to dharma -for their welfare and happiness- so that they may be free from harassment. The dharma Mahamatras work for the proper treatment of prisoners, towards their unfettering, and if the Mahamatras think, "This one has a family to support," "That one has been bewitched," "This one is old," then they work for the release of such prisoners. ...

## Thirteenth edict

The beloved of the gods, king Piyadasi, conquered the Kalingas [4] eight years after his coronation. One hundred and fifty thousand were deported, one hundred thousand were killed and many more died from other causes. After the Kalingas had been conquered, the beloved of the gods came to feel a strong inclination towards the dharma, a love for the dharma and for instruction in dharma. Now the beloved of the gods feels deep remorse for having conquered the Kalingas.

Indeed, the beloved of the gods is deeply pained by the killing, dying and deportation that take place when an unconquered country is conquered. But the beloved of the gods is pained even more by this -that Brahmans, ascetics, and householders of different religions who live in those countries, and who are respectful to superiors, to mother and father, to elders, and who behave properly and have strong loyalty towards friends, acquaintances, companions, relatives, servants and employees- that they are injured, killed or separated from their loved ones. Even those who are not affected by all this suffer when they see friends, acquaintances, companions and relatives affected. These misfortunes befall all as a result of war, and this pains the beloved of the gods.

There is no country, except among the Greeks, where these two groups, Brahmans and ascetics, are not found, and there is no country where people are not devoted to one or another religion. Therefore the killing, death or deportation of a hundredth, or even a thousandth part of those who died during the conquest of Kalinga now pains the beloved of the gods. Now the beloved of the gods thinks that even those who do wrong should be forgiven where forgiveness is possible.

Even the forest people, who live in the beloved of the gods' domain, are entreated and reasoned with to act properly. They are told that despite his remorse the beloved of the gods has the power to punish them if necessary, so that they should be ashamed of their wrong and not be killed. Truly, the beloved of the gods desires non-injury, restraint and impartiality to all beings, even where wrong has been done.

Now it is conquest by dharma that the beloved of the gods considers to be the best conquest. And conquest by dharma has been won here, on the borders, even six hundred yojanas away, where the Greek king Antiochus rules, beyond there where the four kings named Ptolemy, Antigonus, Magas and Alexander rule [5], likewise in the south among the Cholas, the Pandyas, and as far as Tamraparni. Here in the king's domain among the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas, everywhere people are following the beloved of the gods' instructions in dhamma. Even where the beloved of the gods' envoys have not been, these people too, having heard of the practice of dhamma and the ordinances and instructions in dhamma given by the beloved of the gods, are following it and will continue to do so. This conquest has been won everywhere, and it gives great joy - the joy which only conquest by dhamma can give. But even this joy is of little consequence. The beloved of the gods considers the great fruit to be experienced in the next world to be more important.

I have had this dharma edict written so that my sons and great-grandsons may not consider making new conquests, or that if military conquests are made, that they be done with forbearance and light punishment, or better still, that they consider making conquest by dharma only, for that bears fruit in this world and the next. May all their intense devotion be given to this which has a result in this world and the next.

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[1] **Mahamatras** - Teachers and missionaries.

[2] **Dharma** is translated in different ways – it can mean “truth” or “duty” or “moral order.” In these edicts it is used in a way closer to moral order or “justice.”

[3] **Greeks** and Macedonians were settled in Sogdiana and Gandara by Alexander the Great, between 330 and 325 BCE after he had conquered the region (roughly present-day Afghanistan and northern Pakistan)

[4] **Kalingas** lived in eastern India.

[5] These were all rulers of **Hellenistic kingdoms** that sprouted across Alexander's Empire after he died and that empire fell apart. Specifically it is referencing Antiochus II of the Seleucid Empire (261-246), Ptolemy II of Ptolemaic Egypt (282-246), king Antigonus II of Macedonia (283-239), king Magas of Cyrenaica (Libya) (275-249) and king Alexander of Epirus (272-258).

*Introduction and sources from <http://www.livius.org/sh-si/shahbazgarhi/shahbazgarhi2.html>*

## Excerpts from *The Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius

*The Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus who reigned from 161-180 CE, was the only Roman emperor besides Julius Caesar whose writings became part of the canon of Western classics. His Meditations are a loosely-organized set of thoughts relating to the Stoic philosophy which had been popular among the better-educated citizens of Rome for some centuries. It stressed self-discipline, virtue, and inner tranquility. Aurelius was also a social reformer who worked for the improvement of the lot of the poor, slaves, and convicted criminals. He was also a fierce persecutor of Christianity – he felt that the religion threatened the values that had made Rome great.*

### From Book Four:

Men seek retreats for themselves, houses in the country, at the seashore, and in the mountains; and you tend to desire such things very much. But this is a characteristic of the most common sort of men, for it is in your power whenever you will to choose to retreat into yourself. For nowhere either with more quiet or more freedom from trouble does a man retreat than into his own soul, particularly when he has within him such thoughts that by looking into them he is immediately perfectly tranquil; and I affirm that tranquility is nothing other than the proper ordering of the mind.

Do not act as if you were going to live ten thousand years. Death hangs over you. While you live, while it is in your power, be good.

How much trouble he avoids who does not look to see what his neighbor says or does or thinks, but only to what he does himself, that it may be just and pure; or as Agathon (1) says, do not consider the depraved morals of others, but cling to the straight and narrow path without deviating from it.

He who has a powerful desire for posthumous fame does not consider that every one of those who remember him will himself also die very soon; then again also they who have succeeded them, until the whole remembrance shall have been extinguished as it is transmitted through men who foolishly admire and then perish. But suppose that those who will remember are even immortal, and that the remembrance will be immortal, what good will this do you?

What is evil in you does not subsist in the ruling principle of another; nor in any part or transformation of your physical body. Where is it then? It is in that part of you in which has the power of forming opinions about evils. Let this power then not form such opinions, and all is well. And if that which is nearest to it the poor body is burnt, filled with excrescences and decay, nevertheless let the part which forms opinions about these things be quiet; that is, let it judge that nothing is either bad or good which can happen equally to the bad man and the good. For that which happens equally to him who lives contrary to nature and to him who lives according to nature, is neither according to nature nor contrary to nature.

Constantly regard the universe as one living being, having one substance and one soul; and observe how all things have reference to one perception, the perception of this one living being; and how all things act with one movement; and how all things are the cooperating causes of all things which exist; observe too the continuous spinning of the thread and the structure of the web.

You are a little soul carrying about a corpse, as Epictetus (2) used to say.

It is no evil for things to undergo change, and no good for things to come into being as a consequence of change.



Time is like a river made up of the events which happen, and a violent stream; for as soon as a thing has been seen, it is carried away, and another comes in its place, and this will be carried away too.

If any god told you that you shall die tomorrow, or certainly on the day after tomorrow, you would not care much whether it was on the third day or on the next, unless you had a very degraded spirit for how small is the difference? So think it no great thing to die after as many years as you can count rather than tomorrow.

Think continually how many physicians are dead after often fretting over the sick; and how many astrologers after predicting with great pretensions the deaths of others; and how many philosophers after endless discourses on death or immortality; how many heroes after killing thousands; and how many tyrants who have used their power over men's lives with terrible insolence as if they were immortal; and how many cities are entirely dead, so to speak, Helice and Pompeii and Herculaneum, and innumerable others. Add to the total all whom you have known, one after another. One man after burying another has been laid out dead, and another buries him: and all this in a short time. To conclude, always observe how ephemeral and worthless human things are, and what was yesterday a little mucus to-morrow will be a mummy or ashes. Pass then through this little space of time in the way of nature, and end your journey in contentment, just as an olive falls off when it is ripe, blessing nature who produced it, and thanking the tree on which it grew.

Be like the cliff against which the waves continually break, but which stands firm and tames the fury of the water around it.

## **From Book Five:**

Live with the gods. And he does live with the gods who constantly shows them that his own soul is satisfied with that which is assigned to him, and that it does all that the *daemon* (3) wishes, which Zeus has given to every person as his guardian and guide, as a portion of himself. And this daemon is everyone's knowledge and reason.

The best way of avenging yourself is not to become like the wrongdoer.

When we have meat before us and such food we receive the impression that this is the dead body of a fish, and this is the dead body of a bird or of a pig; and again, that this Falernian wine is only a little grape juice, and this purple robe some sheep's wool dyed with the blood of a shell-fish: such then are these impressions, and they reach the things themselves and penetrate them, and so we see what kind of things they are. Just in the same way ought we to act all through life, and where there are things which appear most worthy of our approval, we ought to lay them bare and look at their worthlessness and strip them of all the words by which they are exalted. For outward show is a wonderful perverter of the reason, and when you are most sure that you are engaged in matters worth your while, it is then that it cheats you most. . . .

Most of the things which ordinary people admire have to do with objects of the most general kind, those which are held together by cohesion or natural organization, such as stones, wood, fig trees, vines, olives. But those which are admired by men who are a little more reasonable have to do with the things which are held together by a living principle, such as flocks and herds. Those which are admired by men who are still more enlightened are the things which are held together by a rational soul, not however a universal soul, but rational so far as it is a soul skilled in some art, or expert in some other way, or simply rational so far as it possesses a number of slaves. But he who values a rational soul, a universal soul which is fitted for political life, values nothing else except this; and above all things he keeps his soul in a condition and in activities suitable to reason and social life, and he cooperates in this with those who are of the same kind as himself.

So keep yourself simple, good, pure, serious, free from pretense, a friend of justice, a worshipper of the gods, kind, affectionate, strenuous in performing all proper acts. Strive to be the sort of person which philosophy wishes to make of you. Revere the gods and help others. Life is short. There is only one fruit of this earthly

life: a pious disposition and social acts. Asia, Europe are corners of the universe; all the sea a drop in the universe; Athos (4) a little clod of the universe: all the present time is a point in eternity. All things are little, changeable, perishable. All things come from thence, from that universal ruling power either directly proceeding or by way of sequence. And accordingly the lion's gaping jaws, and that which is poisonous, and every harmful thing, like thorns, like mud, are after-products of the grand and beautiful. Do not then imagine that they are of another kind from that which you venerate, but form a just opinion of the source of all.

He who has seen present things has seen all, both everything which has taken place from all eternity and everything which will be for time without end; for all things are of one kin and of one form.

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**(1) Agathon** – Greek tragic poet who lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. None of his writings have survived, though he is mentioned in other Greek writings such as Plato's *Symposium*.

**(2) Epictetus** - Greek Stoic philosopher who lived in the Roman Empire, about 150 years before Marcus Aurelius. Epictetus taught that philosophy is a way of life and not just a theoretical discipline. To Epictetus, all external events are determined by fate, and are thus beyond our control; we should accept whatever happens calmly and dispassionately. However, individuals are responsible for their own actions, which they can examine and control through rigorous self-discipline. Suffering occurs from trying to control what is uncontrollable, or from neglecting what is within our power. As part of the universal city that is the universe, it is our duty to care for all our fellow men. Those who follow these precepts will achieve happiness (from *Wikipedia*)

**(3) Daemon** - a personal guardian spirit, here equated to the mind.

**(4) Athos** - a tall mountain in northeastern Greece.