

Lao Tzu and The Bible

A Meeting Transcending Time and Space

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Translated by Chen Shangyu

To LOVE
in Heaven and on Earth

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Preface

Yuan Zhiming is correct. I knew it as soon as I started reading this extraordinary book, *Lao Tzu and The Bible*—Lao Tzu paved the way for Christ.

The comparison makes perfect sense. Lao Tzu, who lived during the 500's BC, was one of the most profound observers of nature and human life. The Bible itself is rooted in the East and loaded with eastern irony and paradox, and thoroughly suspicious of all self-righteous and moralistic religious teaching, as was Lao Tzu. Why not see Lao Tzu as another Isaiah, his close contemporary—or Isaiah as another Lao Tzu—dramatically paving the way for the coming Holy One? Why not recognize Lao Tzu's prophetic exposure of religious pretense and corrupt self-righteousness as thoroughly consistent with Biblical content?

Once Yuan Zhiming highlights dramatic similarities, the evident prophetic examples in *Tao Te Ching (Lao Tzu)* seem to multiply. Does Christ answer the deep-seated longing of the people of China? Yuan Zhiming makes the answer clear. Is Christ the Tao who fulfills the hopes of all people? Yuan Zhiming enlightens the reader for the Way.

How does this work? The light of God's truth shines throughout his World so that even the Apostle Paul says that we are all without excuse. While the fullness of the Gospel is found only in the New Testament, there are evidences of partial themes of the Gospel in the Hebrew Scriptures, in Confucius' *Analects*, in the Hindu texts like the *Veda*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*, and in the writings of Heraclitus, Plato and Aristotle in Greek philosophy, among others. No special divine revelation may have been operative in each of these cases, but they are simply the profound products of sensitive people carefully observing human life in the LORD's creation and drawing wise conclusions that were recognized, honored and treasured by others.

Yuan Zhiming's vibrant, positive comparison of established spiritual texts has two sides. On the one hand, since there is no human experience outside of the LORD's creation, we should expect to find content and perspectives that partly overlap the Gospel—more or less. On the other hand, since the Gospel fulfills the longings of our hearts, we should expect that the wisest and most observant writers would especially strongly articulate some Gospel-like themes of longing and hope that Christ fulfills. As a result, the conjunction of similar ideas and themes can be so great as to invite the speculation that these other authors, outside of the Jewish spheres, had some knowledge of even a portion of the Bible, or some awareness of the leading of the Holy Spirit. Such sensible speculations of direct influence may be groundless, but the overlapping content, perspective, longing and hope are measurable—especially with *Lao Tzu*.

In terms of what other ancient writings are closest to the Biblical content, each person may have favorites—in part related to what writings or teachings were instrumental in receiving the fullness of the Gospel. Because of a world-wide access to the classics of every culture and spiritual path, this influence is not limited to one's own ethnic heritage.

Personally, Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* gave me a tremendous spiritual boost when I first read it in my mid-20s. Studying it gave me renewed appreciation of the comprehensive power of divine paradox and spiritual irony that I had found especially in the Bible, including:

- ✚ How dramatically the act of learning the laws fails to lead to the needed reformation of character and merely provides a kind of smoke-and-mirrors cover for continued egoism.
- ✚ How easily moralism backfires, causing more harm than good, when the existence of a law or rule only magnifies a temptation or moral error.
- ✚ How tragically people from the earliest generations have repeatedly chosen versions of good laws or principles in the futile attempt to fulfill the deeper need for spiritual relationship with the living LORD.

✚ How intensely we need the Holy One to teach us the way and redeem us from our sins.

And the comparisons between the two works keep coming.

The *Tao Te Ching* is a treasury of few words but abundant wisdom and stellar insight. I have often wished I had the time to write about how Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* paves the way for the Gospel, preparing the heart and mind for the Christ in ways similar to the writings of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah and some of the other Hebrew prophets. However, I never took the time to write that book. *Thankfully*, Yuan Zhiming has written that book, the one you hold in your hands.

Perhaps it also should be known that the famed and intensely influential writer Watchman Nee (1903-1972)—one of the most significant spiritual writers of the 20th century—also had been personally inspired by the deep wisdom of Lao Tzu recorded in the *Tao Te Ching*. Although the last 20 years of his life he suffered in a prison in the People's Republic of China because of his Christian faith and leadership, Watchman Nee wrote more than 50 books that deeply influenced millions of people all over the world. His most famous book was translated into English in 1957 as *The Normal Christian Life*, based especially on the teachings of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome, Chapter 6. This book sold over one-million copies and very positively fed many people's hunger for the LORD—including my own.

Similar to both Lao Tzu and Isaiah, Watchman Nee often spoke against lifeless religiosity based on laws or on impersonal knowledge, but devoid of divine light and truth. His strong Gospel teaching brought thousands to Christ, and he drew them into the approximately 400 churches he helped raise up in China through his life and ministry before imprisonment. Then in 1952, he was arrested because the Communist leaders thought that Watchman Nee's influence was a threat to their Communist power. While confined for the rest of his life, his influence only grew through the Gospel ideas and writings others were able to access or smuggle

from his prison cell. Finally, a brief note was found on a scrap of paper next to his deathbed:

Christ is the Son of God who died for the redemption of sinners and was resurrected after three days. This is the greatest truth in the universe. I die because of my belief in Christ. Watchman Nee.

Why do the writings of Lao Tzu—and of Watchman Nee—appeal to so many? They are not about Taoism—a naturalistic religion that has claimed Lao Tzu as a source—but about the deep spiritual awareness and mysteries to which Lao Tzu testified, long before Taoists existed.

What are the enduring deep mysteries in all of our lives? Why are these questions so persistent? Why are people everywhere concerned about these questions—even if some become convinced that these questions should be ignored or suppressed? Where can I turn to find authentic, lasting answers?

- ✚ Why do we humans exist at all?
- ✚ From where did my life come? Whom should I thank, and to whom should I complain?
- ✚ For what purpose do I exist?
- ✚ How do I fill the pesky spiritual vacuum within me?

We know that people are not casual mutations of accidental chemical mixes. People matter more than mere matter—because there is more than matter in all of our lives.

- ✚ Where do we satisfy the hunger for relevance?
- ✚ Why do we desire significance and how can we achieve it?

The persistent presence of religion in every human group and location—in every ethnicity and environment—is objective evidence of the inner longing we all know so well by experience. Even though the “irreligious” may try to suppress the universal human inclination for the big questions and the big answers, all of us are *incurably religious*.

In the same paragraph in which African philosopher St. Augustine questions how we can ever recognize our Creator, he powerfully articulates to the Creator this very same inner longing that we all recognize and partly understand: *You made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in You.*

On the human side, we all have this longing. On the other side, the Creator is reaching out to us at the same time. Anything else in religion—other than this personal, vibrant divine connection—is harmful, distorting and distracting. *Lao Tzu provided an early awareness of this spiritual understanding, while the Bible declares the full perspective.*

Sadly, the story of religion is mostly the history of incompleteness and distortions in our divine encounters. Beginning with the momentous choices of our very earliest ancestors, we people have selected creative mixtures of awareness and avoidance in the face of the Creator, the Almighty—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Consequently, the story of religion is the saga of both sanctity and sin, both longing and lostness, both divine encounters and disastrous exploitation. As the prophet Isaiah observed profoundly thousands of years ago: *All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.*

In fact, the Bible consistently warns us against religions of moralization and self-righteousness as disappointing replacements for a wholesome knowledge of the LORD and a vibrant relationship with Him. It starts in Genesis 2 where the dangerous alternative to a relationship with the Creator, walking with him in the cool of the day—is moralistic knowledge of good and evil. Moralism is the main cause of humanity's problems, not the solution. And even good moralistic learning cannot satisfy our deep yearning; it cannot begin to fill the gnawing God-shaped vacuum within each of us. Moralistic religion cannot provide significance and purpose in our lives—because it is dead. *Lao Tzu was profoundly alert to this tragic irony of moralism*, while the Bible describes the full moral conditions and alternatives, close at hand. Yuan Zhiming's *Lao Tzu and The Bible* profoundly explores these central discoveries of Lao Tzu and the difference they make for us now.

What a heartbreaking irony that much of contemporary Christianity, East and West, is merely warmed-over moralism. Tragically, so much of what is done now in the name of Christ would make even the Pharisees proud! With Sunday schools focused on curricula of good vs. evil, churches now as centers of moral movements, and Christian social and political efforts focused on moral reform, but not authentic relationship with the LORD—perhaps someone owes an *apology to Adam and Eve* for the penalty they experienced for exercising their taste for moralistic religion, back in the Garden!

Most importantly, moral efforts that are self righteous do harm to communities and detract from the imminent and living divine presence we need and seek. Too many moral improvements end as tragic failures in which “moral judgments” demean and alienate others and misguided legalism serves only to magnify the temptations of the forbidden fruit. *Lao Tzu understood this partly but profoundly*, while the Bible reveals the full alternatives in vibrant, divine awareness. Yuan Zhiming wisely maps these points out in *Lao Tzu and the Bible*.

Here is the spiritual journey I recommend. Through this precious book, go back to Lao Tzu to re-explore and re-discover the most elemental human longings and the most objective and satisfying spiritual truth and fulfillment. In the process, discerning readers will find again the Christ, who has been close at hand all along.

Christmas 2009—celebrating the day the Infinite became the Infant

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Author's Preface

To the best of my knowledge, more than one hundred English translations of the sage Lao Tzu's work *Tao Te Ching*, also referred to as *Lao Tzu*, are extant, along with thousands of various *Lao Tzu* interpretations in the Chinese language. I trust, however, that my translation is the first attempt to decipher this Chinese classic of antiquity with references to the ancient Hebrew and Christian Bible.

Lao Tzu is an exceptionally refined example of the classic Chinese language, with a meaning at once both profoundly mysterious and expansive. It is difficult to clearly grasp Lao Tzu's original intention and even more impossible to reach consensus with other interpreters. From a historic point of view, significant differences have been noted between one interpretation and the next, each tinted with the individual interpreter's specific worldview, mostly from the perspectives of Confucianism, Buddhism, Legalism, Militarism, Yin and Yang, Neo-Confucianism, Marxism, and so on.

Lao Tzu is considered the founder of Taoism. Although interpreting Tao from the vantage point of Taoism seems natural, the Tao of Lao Tzu and the Tao of Zhuang Tzu, for example, are far apart in purpose and tone. Since the time of Wang Bi, another Taoist at a later time, Lao Tzu's original intention has become indiscernible. Even so, the interpretation of Zhuang Tzu and Wang Bi are much more convincing than that of others.

Why is there such difficulty in interpreting *Lao Tzu*? The answer is that Lao Tzu himself did not totally understand Tao and thus was unable to express Tao with great clarity. Moreover, Lao Tzu did not believe that human rationality could comprehend Tao or that Tao could be explained by human language.

Finally, today, in an age when the Christian faith has spread widely throughout China, we finally have come to realize that there was such an event as "the Incarnation"—that Tao became a human—and

thus Tao became visible, touchable, explicit, and comprehensible. When I myself entered into Tao and experienced Tao's magnificent, miraculous divinity revealed through the life of Jesus, a ray of brilliant light seemed to illuminate *Lao Tzu*, enabling me to recognize the inner meaning behind each word.

Before becoming a Christian, I had written a book named *Heavy Subject* (China: People's Publishing House, 1987), an examination of traditional Chinese culture. One part of the book focuses on *Lao Tzu*. I now frankly admit that at that time, I did not really understand *Lao Tzu*.

It is my firm belief that there must be a spiritual source linking ancient Hebrew civilization with ancient Chinese civilization, and with all other ancient civilizations. Even those who established these ancient civilizations might not recognize this internal source. Nevertheless, the origin of this source is unquestionably from the One who set all nations on one planet (Earth), and that One is the *Logos*, also known as Tao.

Through reading Lao Tzu and other Chinese ancient classics, Western readers could discover the common root between this unique Eastern Empire and Western civilization, and China would cease to be a nation to be feared. In fact, they would discover that China and other cultures both live under the same blue sky. Ultimately, China yearns for the same things all peoples do.

Our work on *Lao Tzu* contains two parts: translating Lao Tzu's original text, *Tao Te Ching*, and explaining its meaning. Both are indispensable for readers new to *Lao Tzu*. Once the reader understands the thick explanatory volume, *Lao Tzu and the Bible*, he would only need to focus on *Tao Te Ching*, the thin volume.

With the translation and the publication of my book *Lao Tzu and the Bible* in English, I would like to point out that in order to examine the relationship between *Lao Tzu* and *the Bible*, one must consider three questions: (1) what does Lao Tzu originally intend to express?; (2) what is the relationship between Lao Tzu's expression and the

Bible?; and (3) how is this relationship characterized in terms of the nature and the role of *Lao Tzu*?

My book focuses on the first two questions. I hope that my readers, especially those who have not grasped *Lao Tzu* deeply, would do the same. It is best to hand over the third question to history, and eventually to God.

Even so, based on the debate and discussion that the Chinese version of my book triggered, I think clarification of the following points is in order:

1. *Lao Tzu and the Bible* could be considered an academic monograph concerning the connections between *Lao Tzu* and *the Bible*. Various opinions are presented, but they do not interfere with the author's genuine faith in Jesus Christ.
2. This book provides an in-depth discussion of Lao Tzu, who is traditionally regarded as the founder of Taoism. However, the book covers neither Taoism in general nor various naturalistic and mystical religions related to Taoism. The historian Bo Yang compares the difference between Taoism and naturalistic and mystical religions related to Taoism to that of dogs and hot dogs.
3. This book displays the miraculous cultural connection between *Lao Tzu* and *the Bible*. Connection is no equation. *Lao Tzu*, in the author's view, testifies to *the Bible*, rather than replacing or supplementing it.
4. The original doctrine of *the Bible* is very clear: God is the Lord of the universe, the light of all nations. The revelation of God goes out into the earth, and His words to the ends of the world (Psalm 19:1-4). It seems self-evident that God has brought revelatory enlightenment to the five-thousand-year-old Chinese culture. As a result, these profound questions are raised: "Upon what is the heavenly light cast?" and "What kind of light is this?" The answers to these questions need to be explored.

5. More and more, it seems that today, Christianity is becoming marginalized in the West, yet it is just starting to spread in China. The publication of the English edition of *Lao Tzu and the Bible*, which reveals the discovery of God's extraordinary accomplishments in ancient China, is not an accident. This discovery already has greatly amazed the writer, the translator, and the editors, bringing to them a deepened sense of awe and gratitude to the Lord.

Thinking about the future of Biblical faith in Jesus the Holy One, I believe that more and more Chinese people will realize that the God of Abraham is also the God of the Chinese, as they focus their eyes on the time and space of China's five-thousand year history. Such a realization, in turn, will lead more and more people, in both the East and the West, to revere, praise, and give glory to the living God.

Yuan Zhiming
January 2010

Translator's Note

Translating this book has been a literal dream come true. On Thanksgiving night of 2007, I dreamed of going with my good friend Yuan Zhiming to a roomful of people eating in darkness. Disturbed by the sight, I started to change the broken light bulbs in the room so that people would be able to eat in the light. One year later, when I was translating *Lao Tzu and the Bible*, the words in the book seemed to dance as if alive, and I felt an urge to eat each word and hold them in my stomach. At that moment, Lao Tzu's phrase "*eating Mother*" entered my heart and soul, and its meaning was vividly revealed to me. At the same time, Jesus' words dawned on me like daylight: "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:54).

In the Summer of 2008, I had resigned from my post as Chief Librarian of The Mid-Manhattan Library of The New York Public Library to become a full-time student at the Alliance Theological Seminary (ATS) in Nyack, NY. Dr. Joshua Perez, who taught my first class at ATS, allowed me to review a Chinese book for his Systematic Theology assignments. While reading *Lao Tzu and the Bible* by Yuan Zhiming, I wondered why such an enlightening and intriguing book had not been translated into English. It was a great delight to see that Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, one of the most renowned Chinese classics, had been illuminated in the light of the Bible. By interpreting Lao Tzu from the perspective of the Bible, Yuan Zhiming demystified a 2,600-year riddle.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to Yuan Zhiming for the privilege of translating his book. My gratitude also goes to my friend Tai Kam, who helped turn on a big lamp that was too high for me to reach in the dream of that Thanksgiving night. Tai miraculously introduced me to Dr. de Vries, President of New York Divinity School, and his wife, Victoria de Vries, a former editor at Tyndale Publishing House. Both have been instrumental in bringing this book to fruition. Dr. de Vries provided theological guidance,

and Victoria de Vries edited my translation. Dr. de Vries, a scholar of Oriental Philosophy and Theology who taught at Wheaton College for years, firmly believes the Western world, as much as the East, needs Lao Tzu's teaching for a spiritual renewal. Victoria de Vries' countless hours of editing made this book much more readable for English-speaking readers. I thank my husband, Sean Jing, for his full support of this project and my precious 13-year-old daughter, Felicia, for offering to "illustrate Mommy's book."

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Chen Shangyu
January 2010

Note:

Many verses (in italics) were cited from *Tao Te Ching: Original Text and a Modern Translation* by Yuan Zhiming, which was initially translated into English by Pastor Daniel Baida Su, footnoted and revised by Dr. Chen Shangyu and edited by the lead editors.

All Bible verses cited in this book are according to the *New International Version*, and also have been put in italics to highlight their importance.

Pingyin, the standard Romanization scheme, is used for all Chinese titles, names, and locations. Whenever possible, the Chinese titles cited in the footnotes are accompanied by the English translation.

INTRODUCTION

THE MAJESTY OF ANCIENT TAO

I. The Waning Years of the Spring and Autumn Period: Lao Tzu, Confucius, and Mo Tzu Lamenting the Lost Tao

The end of the Spring and Autumn Period—around 600 B.C.—was a glorious time for which the Chinese people feel justifiable pride. That is because of the enduring treasures a group of sages—Lao Tzu, Confucius, and Mo Tzu—gave China when they laid down the foundation for Taoism, Confucianism, and Mohism, respectively, as well as the so-called “a hundred schools of thought.”¹ During their lifetime, they gave birth to Chinese culture as we now know it. In fact, the unique spiritual food that these ancient giants of philosophy and thought produced continues to feed China more than 2,600 years later.²

One fact about the Spring and Autumn Period, however, is not especially glorious. According to Lao Tzu, Confucius, and Mo Tzu, something crucial was missing, a true treasure that had been lost to them. They lamented the loss of Tao in their culture. Although they assiduously tried to recover the lost Tao, they remained regretfully unsuccessful.

Section A. Confucius

According to tradition, Confucius attended a year-end sacrificial ritual ceremony. While standing on top of a mountain looking far into the sky, he bemoaned:

¹ There are no accurate records for the birth and death of Lao Tzu and Mo Tzu. One is believed to have lived before Confucius, and the other after Confucius (551-479 B.C.). At the time, Mohism was an eminent school of thought, as noted in *Han Fei Tzu/Xian Xue* and *Hui Nan Tzu/Shu Zhen Xun*.

² The rulers of China applied Taoism internally and Confucianism externally or talked about Confucius while in the court and discussed Tao Tzu outside of the court. Common people, according to the parable of Nan Huaijin 南懷瑾, treated Confucianism as the grocery store and Taoism as the pharmacy.

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I have missed the time when Tao was pervasive.
That time was recorded in ancient books. When Tao
was in motion, the land was ruled by capable and
unselfish men. People were honorable, living in
harmony.... Tao has concealed itself today. People
care only about their own self-interest....³

Confucius admired ancient Tao and expressed his admiration repeatedly: “How noble and great was Yao, who respected and followed Tao whole-heartedly! How righteous! Yao and Yu ruled the land but did not possess it.”⁴ His earnest comment sums up his feelings: “If only I could hear Tao in the morning, I would be happy to die at night!”⁵

Because of the lost Tao, Confucianism, as Confucius established it, designed a set of rules for the hearts of people in the dark to help avoid falling into the mud of contradictions and fights and to bring light and order into society and personal living. These rules dealt with humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, trust, kindness, respect, frugality, conciliation, and so on. Confucius and his followers optimistically believed that these rules would work by self-examination and self-discipline.

If that were true, Confucius ideals should have been fulfilled. Why is it that more than 2,600 years later, they are still unfulfilled ideals? Confucius was fully aware of the reason: the loss of Tao.

Unlike his followers, Confucius never regarded his ideals as a recipe for reviving Tao and saving the world. He believed that he had no choice but to pursue something less grand since Tao had been concealed. Once lost, Tao was gone forever, he thought, and could not be recovered. That was why he gave up Tao and pursued morality, hoping to straighten people’s crooked hearts and amend the chaotic world with humaneness, morality, propriety, and justice.

³ *Li Ji/Li Yun* 《禮記/禮運》.

⁴ *Lun Yu/Tai Bo* 《論語/泰伯》.

⁵ *Lun Yu/Li Ren* 《論語/裡仁》.

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What a mistake to chase morality, which is really the tail end, as if it is at the center of Tao! That was the reason why Confucius and his followers repeatedly tasted bitter failure in advocating their ideals.

Later generations, especially those after the Han Dynasty when Confucianism had been upgraded as the sole guiding principle, worshipped Confucius in crowds and followed him as a vogue, totally disregarding what had been lost to Confucius and what he had admired. They treated Confucius' replacement ideals as the utmost treasure and completely discarded the Tao of antiquity. The real jewel that Confucius had dreamed about was connection with the Tao of antiquity. That this connection had been severed became the greatest regret of his entire life!

Section B. Lao Tzu

Take a look at the world that Lao Tzu experienced:

*"What a vast deserted land! Crowds of people hustle and bustle, as if enjoying a feast or being on the stage. I alone do not share the feeling...exhausted and sad, I do not know where to return."*⁶

Where did Lao Tzu wish to return? What had been lost? Lao Tzu knew clearly that Tao had been lost:

*The great Tao is of great peace, but men prefer by-paths. The court is corrupt; the fields are full of weeds; the granaries are all empty. Aren't they robbers indeed—those wearing fine robes, those bearing sharp swords, those indulging in delicacies, those storing too much wealth. This is rebellion against Tao!*⁷

Lao Tzu was so convinced that nothing could replace Tao that he firmly declared:

⁶ 20:2-5.

⁷ 53:2-3.

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*When the great Tao is rejected, there arise humanity and justice. Therefore, morality is required when Tao is lost; benevolence is emphasized when morality is lost; justice is sought after when benevolence is lost; propriety is obligatory when justice is lost. So-called propriety is needed when there is little loyalty and faithfulness left. This is a sign of disorder.*⁸

Section C. Mo Tzu

Like Confucius and Lao Tzu, Mo Tzu had no doubt that the Tao of antiquity was missing.⁹ He said:

Since the passing of the earliest rulers who governed by Tao, the world has lost its great way. Humanity, royalty, love, filial piety are no longer to be found. The world is full of adulterers, robbers, bandits, thieves, killing, and chaos. What has happened?

Mo Tzu asked in distress: “Is it because nobody believes in God any more?! If people had trusted in God, believing in his righteousness, knowing that God punishes and rewards, no one would dare to act wickedly. The world would not have been in chaos.” He took the time to record the sacrificial ceremonies that the ancient rulers had conducted. These instructions had been written on bamboo and silk and carved in stone for preservation.

Even though the seriousness of these ancient rulers came out in their writings and carvings, people still questioned the existence of God, just as people do today. Lamented Mo Tzu: “This is not a route a noble man should take!”¹⁰

⁸ 18:1; 38:5

⁹ The difference between Tao and the orthodoxy of Tao: Tao is Spirit, Heaven, God, referring to “the great Tao of the ancestors.” The orthodoxy of Tao is a tradition of believing in the Spirit, revering Heaven, and worshipping God. See more details in the next section.

¹⁰ *Mo Tzu/Ming Gui Xia* 《墨子/明鬼下》.

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In conclusion, Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Mo Tzu all agreed that the loss of Tao was a sad reality. Their writings conveyed their disappointment, regret, and helplessness about the concealment of Tao during their time. The questions are: “What is the lost Tao, and why should they have been so disturbed by the loss of Tao?”

II. The Great Tao in Practice: Emperor Succession, Ritual Ceremonies, Government Affairs, Life Values, and Etymology

The orthodoxy of Tao for the ancient Chinese ancestors was summed up in the phrase “trusting in God.”¹¹ They used the words *Heaven*, *Tao*, *Spirit*, and *God* interchangeably, with only occasional deviation; each word referred to the same general meaning, God: “God is Heaven”¹²; “Heaven is God. Heaven is trustworthy though wordless; God is mighty even when not in anger”¹³; “That beyond form is Tao; that below form is implementation”¹⁴; and “What is Tao? Be honorable to people and be faithful to God.”¹⁵ *Respecting Heaven, following Tao, trusting in Spirit, and fearing God* are synonyms pointing to the same governing principle that existed in antiquity.

To help illustrate the point, please note the following vivid and concrete examples.

Section A. Non-hereditary Emperor Succession

Rather than handing down the emperor’s seat to his son, Yao passed it to Shun; Shun selected Yu, instead of his own son, to succeed him. These stories historically are called examples of “non-hereditary emperor succession” (禪讓). Why? Such succession was considered unimaginable to those who lived in open strife and veiled struggle for power and position.

¹¹ *Zuo Zhuan/Huan Gong Liu Nian* 《左傳/桓公六年》.

¹² Footnote of Pei Song 裴鬆 *Shi Ji/Feng Chang Shu* 《史記/封禪書》.

¹³ *Li Ji/Yue Ji* 《禮記/樂記》.

¹⁴ *Yi Jin/Ji Ci Shang* 《易經/系辭上》.

¹⁵ *Zuo Zhuan/Huan Gong Liu Nian* 《左傳/桓公六年》.

According to *Shiji* 《史記》 and *Shangshu* 《尚書》, the true reason for this type of atypical succession was their respect and awe for God. Consider the conversation that took place between Wan Zhang and Meng Tzu generations later:

Wan Zhang asked Meng Tzu: “Yao gave his land under Heaven to Shun. Was there such a thing?”

Meng Tzu replied: “No. The son of Heaven would not give his land to others.”

“Yet Shun got the land. Who gave it to him?”

“Heaven.”¹⁶

Section B. Ritual Sacrifice

China was once regarded as “the land of ritual etiquette.” Confucius dreamed of “suppressing selfish desires and returning to propriety.” What is the most significant rite in China? It is the sacrificial rite, such as Border Sacrifice (郊祭), Emperor Sacrifice (帝祭), Burnt Sacrifice (燔祭), and Item Sacrifice (類祭).¹⁷

The earliest records show that sacrificial ceremonies started before 2,000 B.C. One legend of the Zhou Dynasty claims that the Chinese ancestor Hou Ji 後稷 (farmer) was born as a result of the burnt offering to God by Jiang Yuan 薑嫫 (shepherdess).¹⁸ In the *Story of Rites* 《禮記》 compiled by Confucius is a catalogue of sacrificial rites during the Zhou Dynasty that had been inherited from the Xia

¹⁶ Meng Tzu/Wang Zhang Shang 《孟子/萬章上》.

¹⁷ Border Sacrifice: An altar is built on the country’s border or in the suburb of the capital for offering animal’s blood. Emperor Sacrifice: The emperor, acting as a priest, presides over this rite. Through this rite, the emperor pays respect to the origin of his ancestors. Burnt Sacrifice: Animals are placed on burning firewood, sending aroma to Heaven, pleasing God. Item Sacrifice: Offerings are presented to God for specific matters.

¹⁸ *Shi Jing/Da Ya/Sheng Ming* 《詩經/大雅/生民》.

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and the Shang periods.¹⁹ The central theme of the book's 49 chapters is ritual etiquette. Recorded are details about the stately atmosphere, regulations, and requirements regarding food, utensils, attire, servants, poetry, music, and moods, along with guidelines about ancestral rites, housekeeping, marriage, funeral, and table manners. The details surpass the laws and regulations for the Jewish people in the Old Testament texts.

Wu Shi commented that Chinese culture has been greatly influenced by sacrificial rites toward Heaven.²⁰ It is said that ritual sacrifices lasted in China until 1911.²¹

Section C. Guiding Principles of Government Affairs

The earliest book regarding state-governing principles is *Shang Shu* 《尚書》. *Shu*, means “record of governing,” while *Shang Shu* means “a book of ancient emperors.”²² This book provides an account of the ideals and guidelines for governmental affairs during the period of emperors Yao, Shun, and Yu and the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, spanning over 1,500 years.²³

The main thread of *Shang Shu* is “being faithful to people and trusting in God.” This simple and basic principle is the benchmark for measuring kindness vs. wickedness and righteousness vs. sinfulness, as well as the country's fate in times of prosperity or declination and success or failure in government affairs. Here are some examples: “God supervises people and endorses righteous

¹⁹ Lun Yu/Ba 《論語/八佾》

²⁰ Joseph M. Kitagawa, *Dong Fang Zhu Zhong Jiao (Various Religions in the East)*, 41.

²¹ *Shang Shu/Da Yu Mo* 《尚書/大禹謨》.

²² *Xun Tzu/Qing Xue Pian* 《荀子/勸學篇》, Chong Wang 王充 *Lun Heng/Zheng Pian Shuo* 《論衡/正說篇》.

²³ The content of *Shang Shu* is believed to have genuine and fake elements. This citation is from the commonly trusted 28th chapter, *Jin Wen Shang Shu* 《今文尚書》. The translation is according to *Bai Hua Shang Shu* 《白話尚書》 by Zhou Pinyun 周秉均, Yue Lu Shu She, 1990.

behaviors”²⁴; “God disapproves arrogance, extravagance, obscenity, and laziness”²⁵; “Whoever sins must be punished by God. Sinners do not last long”²⁶; “God is a compassionate, righteous, and wise God. God shows his mercy toward his people and cares about their lives. For that reason, he replaced the tyrant Zhou”²⁷; and “God does not favor wicked and immoral people.”²⁸

Section D. Life Values

Tao not only is reflected in non-hereditary emperor successions, ritual sacrifices, and state-governing principles, but also is deeply rooted in the personal value of our ancient Chinese ancestors. Both *I Ching* 《易經》 and *Shi Jing* 《詩經》 fully reveal these values.

Although *I Ching* focuses on *yin* and *yang*, studies divination, and tells fortunes, it exposes a basic “heavenly mystery,” which is that Heaven and humankind interact and work together, which is the root of everything, and that the harmony between Heaven and human beings surpasses all other matters.

Therefore, the first principle of *I Ching* is “accept your fate peacefully.”²⁹

The second principle is “be obedient to what fate delivers and be at peace with it.”

In this way, Heaven provides protection, and no harm comes one’s way.³⁰ *I Ching* conveys a message more profound than one that reduces it to mere astrology.

²⁴ *Shang Shu/Gao Zhong Tong Ri* 《尚書/高宗彤日》.

²⁵ *Shang Shu/Duo Shi* 《尚書/多士》.

²⁶ *Shang Shu/Pan Gen* 《尚書/盤庚》.

²⁷ *Shang Shu/Zhao Hao* 《尚書/召浩》.

²⁸ *Shang Shu/Duo Shi* 《尚書/多士》.

²⁹ *I Ching/Ji Ci Shang* 《易經/系辭上》.

³⁰ *I Ching /Shang Jing* 《易經/上經》.

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Most chapters in *Shi Jing* are earnest prayers:

Praise: “Radiant Heaven illuminates earth. Glorious God begets majesty. Eternal and boundless, God is the king of all nations.”³¹

Gratitude: “O Heaven raises people, supports life, creates world, and formulates law”; “How wonderful! Barley and wheat are ripening. God bestows an abundant year.”³²

Petition: “I offer cattle and sheep, praying for God’s blessings; untiringly I am revering the might of Heaven.”³³

Foreboding: “The mighty Heaven bursts out furious death and chaos. The whole world is in desolation.”³⁴

Sobbing: “Eternal God! My parents! Since I committed no crime, why am I in such despair?”³⁵

Sighing: “Since God penetrates everything, knowing that I am in misery, why doesn’t he show pity on me?”³⁶

Description: “God reveals to Emperor Wen. Do not assume, but follow the law of God.”³⁷

Persuasion: “God has eyes and watches your behavior; God has a heart and knows your sins”; “God is unknowable. He reveals anytime. Be alert!”³⁸

Warning: “Be respectful, be courteous! Heaven’s path cannot be hidden; Heaven’s order must be observed. Do not say that

³¹ *Shi Jing/Xiao Ya/Da Ya* 《詩經/小雅/大雅》.

³² *Shi Jing/Da Ya/Zhou Song* 《詩經/大雅/周頌》.

³³ *Shi Jing/Xiao Ya/Da Ya/Zhou Song* 《詩經/小雅/大雅/周頌》.

³⁴ *Shi Jing/Da Ya* 《詩經/大雅》.

³⁵ *Shi Jing/Wang Feng/Xiao Ya* 《詩經/王風/小雅》.

³⁶ *Shi Jing/Bei Feng/Da Ya* 《詩經/邶風/大雅》.

³⁷ *Shi Jing/Da Ya/Zhou Song* 《詩經/大雅/周頌》.

³⁸ *Shi Jing/Da Ya* 《詩經/大雅》.

Heaven is too far away to reach. It supervises day and night. It goes up and down, punishing and rewarding accordingly.”³⁹

Confucius concluded: “To use one phrase to describe *Shi Jing*, the phrase is: *think no iniquity*.”⁴⁰ Why do people’s hearts harbor no iniquity? It is because righteousness fills their hearts! Why do they have righteous hearts? Confucius knew exactly: “Tao is in practice!” Such people who believed in God, feared God, obeyed Tao, and respected Tao could have nothing but simple hearts!

Section E. The Mystery of Words

Chinese words are, undoubtedly, the oldest and the most accurate evidences of Chinese culture. Emperor Huang’s historian Cang Jie 倉頡 sorted out and compiled the words in about 2,600 BC.⁴¹ The original formulation of these words would have to be much earlier. Clearly, the tradition of the Han people is deeply rooted in words and can be traced far back. The pictographic nature of Chinese characters and the relationship among the pronunciation, form, and meaning of these characters provide a wonderful opportunity for decoding the cultural implications of these words.

When the ancients referred to “I AM” (I am taking the term from the Bible about how God describes Himself), they used *Heaven*, *God*, *Spirit*, and *Tao*. These words describe the essence of “I AM” from different angles:

Heaven emphasizes a world beyond earth, sublime and transcendent, clear, bright, boundless, and trustworthy as the four seasons; righteous as the nourishing spring and withering fall; and loving as sunshine, rain, and dewdrops.

God focuses on the almighty power of God, the king of the universe with supreme authority, a person with omnipotence.

³⁹ *Shi Jing/Xiao Ya/Da Ya/Zhou Song* 《詩經/小雅/大雅/周頌》.

⁴⁰ *Lun Yu/Wei Zheng* 《論語/為政》.

⁴¹ *Xun Zi/Jie Bi* 《荀子/解蔽》.

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Spirit emphasizes an entity beyond human comprehension and measurement, whose wisdom is largely unknowable, whose ideas are ingenious and unspeakable, and whose behavior is miraculous and unpredictable.

Tao highlights a sense of formless, yet penetrating existence that permeates all life and the whole universe. In oneness, Tao's power is spread out in people's bearing, conduct, how a country is run and how a being is developed. Thus, Tao is the command of the sky and the earth, executing God's will on the earth as in the sky.

To sum up, *Heaven* indicates boundlessness, transcendence, reliability, justice, and benevolence; *God* signals supreme sovereignty and personality; *Spirit* describes mysterious wisdom and capability; and *Tao* marks the transforming and nourishing power over all life and people. The connotation of all these words is close to the meaning of the Biblical "I AM."

With regard to the form of Chinese characters, many amazing studies have been done about the ancient pictographic Han characters. Some are difficult to explain by looking at the pictographic forms. However, once they are put in the storyline of the Bible, their meanings are easily revealed:

Take the word 休 (peace), for example. Why is it formed with a person at the side of a tree instead of a stone or earth? If we relate this word to the ancient meaning of *blessings* in the Bible, it reminds us of the call to return to peace, back to the time when Adam and Eve lived peacefully in the Garden of Eden at the very beginning of human existence.

The word 婪 (greed) pictures a woman under two trees implying the story of Eve eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it" (Genesis 3:6). Is this not greed expressed in appetite, feelings, and wisdom?

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Another word is 單 (single), which pictures two people leaving a farmland. How could that mean “single”? The word seems to signal Adam and Eve becoming disconnected from their Creator and growing lonely after being driven away from the Garden of Eden.

The word 船 (boat) describes eight people in a boat, echoing Noah’s ark with a family of eight. According to some research, the flood was in 3,000 BC. The word for *boat* was formed at about the same time by Cang Jie.

The word 義 (justice) is formed with “I” under a “lamb.” What is the connection between a person and a lamb? How do I become righteous under a lamb? It seems to indicate a lamb being sacrificed for my sin so that I might become righteous in front of God.

There is a monograph specifically devoted to the analysis of more than 130 Han characters.⁴² Someone even dared to consider the blood relationship between the ancient Chinese and Noah and compare the cultural background.⁴³ Topics like this are, of course, beyond the realm of pure scholarship. Only those with special goals would be interested in pursuing such questions in an attempt to explore pre-history.

Chinese culture is like a magnificent tree rooted in the creation of the Han characters, which span over 2,000 years. From the emperors Yao, Shun, Yu, Xia, Shang, and Zhou, there has been one main thread in governing, rites, poetry, and words: trusting in Spirit, revering Heaven, obeying Tao, and worshiping God. The signs and evidences are everywhere.

By the Spring and Autumn period, the era of Lao Tzu, Confucius, and Mo Tzu, Tao had been concealed. During that period, arrogant human wisdom was on the rise, and human desires dominated. Most people no longer trusted in the Spirit, no longer revered Heaven, no

⁴² Li Liji and Bao Borei, *Kongzi Wei Jie Kai De Mi (The Unsolved Puzzle of Confucius)* (Huo Shi Chu Ban She, 1981).

⁴³ Duan Yonghui, “Yu Yan Ji” (“Burnt Sacrifice”) (*Hai Wai Xiao Yuan*), no. 6.

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longer obeyed Tao, and no longer worshiped God. They regarded profits as Heaven, ingenuity as the Spirit, power as Tao, and self as God. It was a time when human wisdom thrived and God's way declined. Ever since Emperor Qin, who called himself "God," Chinese emperors, for generations upon generations, have tried to "replace" God.

III. Salvation at the End of the Spring and Autumn Period: Lao Tzu Proclaiming Tao

Lao Tzu himself is like a mysterious legend. No one can be sure about his name, birthplace, career path, age, family, or whereabouts. There are records but no proof about Lao Tzu in literature produced before the early Qing and West Han periods.⁴⁴ *Shi Ji* by Sima Qian (second century B.C.) guessed Lao Tzu was Lidan 李丹, a West Zhou emperor's archivist, but also listed other names such as Laolaitzu, Taizizhan, Shuoshiren, and finally settled on: Lao Tzu, "a hermit."

In *Confucius's Family History and Biography of Confucius*, Sima Qian recorded Confucius's visit to Lao Tzu, during which Lao Tzu told Confucius that the person he inquired about no longer existed, his bones had rotted away, and only his words remained. At the right time, this person would descend from the sky; when it is not the right time, he flows like the wind. Lao Tzu told Confucius: "Great virtue appears like foolishness. Arrogance, desire, lust, and ambition do not benefit. As someone's son, he establishes himself with selflessness; as a subordinate, he gains independence by treating himself as nobody." After Confucius left Lao Tzu, he told his followers: "This man is truly a dragon riding on the wind and clouds."

Legend says that Lao Tzu left Zhou, heading west. When going through the Hangu Mountain Pass, the guard Yixi refused to let him pass unless he wrote down his thoughts. Under these circumstances,

⁴⁴ Yang Jialu, *Lao Tzu Bai Hua Ju Jie (Interpretation of Lao Tzu)* (Taiwan Wen Yuan Shu Ju, 1969), Preface.

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Lao Tzu wrote down his 5,000 words. No one knows where he went.⁴⁵ Some have guessed that he went to the Middle East or India.⁴⁶ I dare not further speculate about this.

Fortunately, although Lao Tzu as a person is as mysterious as a shadow, his book *Tao Te Ching*, also known as *Lao Tzu*, indeed, has been passed down to the world. Could this be what Great Tao is supposed to be?

Although the book *Lao Tzu* is divided into two parts, Tao and Morality, the main theme is the proclamation of Tao, or what could be called “The Preaching of Tao.”

Is Lao Tzu’s Tao the same Tao practiced during ancient times? Is Lao Tzu’s Tao the same Tao mentioned by Confucius? My answer is yes.

First of all, Lao Tzu declared Tao at the time when both Lao Tzu and Confucius bemoaned the abandonment of Tao. They were talking about the same Tao.

Secondly, the Tao described by Confucius to the rulers of his time provides supporting evidence to Lao Tzu’s Tao:

Lao Tzu: *Make no efforts, and there will be no lack of order* (3:6).

Confucius: Shun governed effortlessly. How did he do it? He simply sat respectfully facing south.

Lao Tzu: *He who gives up his life for the world is trusted by the world; he who gives up his life for loving the world is relied on by the world.* (13:4)

⁴⁵ Sima Qian, Shi Ji/Confucius Shi Jia/Lao Tzu Han Fei Lie Zhuan 《史記/孔子世家/老之韓非列傳》.

⁴⁶ Nan Haijin 南懷瑾, *Lao Tzu Ta Shuo (Legend of Lao Tzu)* (Guo Ji Wen Hua Chu Ban Gong Si, 1991), 32.

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Confucius: How great! Shun and Yu governed their land with no disturbance.

Lao Tzu: *To know eternity is to embrace whatever comes; to embrace whatever comes is to be just.* (16:8)

Confucius: When the three Emperors (Huang, Yao, and Shun) followed Tao, the world was righteous.⁴⁷

The most obvious evidence is that Lao Tzu points to the Tao of antiquity directly; for example: “*Maintaining ancient Tao will help grasp today’s mystery and understand the beginning and ending of Tao*”; “*Those good at practicing Tao in ancient times were mysteriously well connected, and they are too profound to understand*”; “*What the ancient people possessed was oneness (Tao)*”; “*No competing and no fighting match heavenly Tao. It was so in ancient times*”; and “*Practicing Tao does not make people smarter (to fulfill their own will) but to make them simpler (to obey true Tao). In ancient times, why did people pursue Tao? Because when they looked for something, they would surely find it. They would repent of their sins. Tao is the most precious!*”⁴⁸ All of these verses point to the truth that Lao Tzu’s Tao is the same Tao of antiquity.

IV. Tao Speaks: The Original Tao, The Holy One, and Spiritual Fulfillment

Section A. Tao Can Be Spoken

Scholars generally translate the first sentence of *Lao Tzu* as: “*Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao*” (1:1), thus emphasizing the nature of Tao as unspeakable. They also use a famous expression “Those who know do not speak, those who do not know speak” to prove their point. This interpretation deprives Lao Tzu of

⁴⁷ Lun Yu/Heng Lin Gong/Tai Bo 《論語/衡靈公/太伯》，Li Ji/Li Yun 《禮記/禮運》。

⁴⁸ See *Lao Tzu*: 14:1; 15:1; 39:1; 68:2; 65:1; 62:5, and so on.

the right to proclaim the true Tao and also denies the possibility and reliability of Lao Tzu's declaration of the eternal Tao. As a result, it contradicts the theme of Lao Tzu's entire book; such a translation is thus not appropriate. The great poet Bai Juyi in the Tang Dynasty asked: "If the one who speaks does not know and the one who knows does not speak, and if this is what Lao Tzu means, why did he write five-thousand words to express what he knows?"

In the expression "The one who knows does not speak (言); the one who speaks does not know," the word *speak* is actually an adjective, meaning the one who knows Tao does not need to talk much and the one who talks a lot does not know Tao. Is this not true? Lao Tzu gave us only 5,000 words, and Jesus left us only a few hundred words! Do they not know Tao better than those who have written for a whole lifetime and produced a gigantic pile of books?

Lao Tzu's first sentence could be understood like this: "Tao can be spoken, but it is not the Tao usually referred to." This expression conveys the mysterious nature of Tao and avoids having arbitrarily to declare that Tao cannot be spoken. The word *chang* 常 appears frequently in *Lao Tzu* and means "usual" or "eternal," with the most frequent meaning being "usual."

The word *Tao* during ancient times, according to Feng Youlan, was usually referred to as *human principles* until Lao Tzu gave it a metaphysical dimension.⁴⁹ That is why Lao Tzu must clarify from the start what he means by Tao, emphasizing the difference between his Tao and the "usual" Tao. What is Lao Tzu's Tao? Let us hear from Lao Tzu.

Section B. Speaking of Tao

Lao Tzu's approach to Tao is extremely humble. He used only 5,000 words, knowing that "*many words lead to failing*" (5:3). His emphasis was on Tao's boundless nature and his own limitation,

⁴⁹ Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, *Zhong Guo Zhe Xue Shi* (*The History of Chinese Philosophy*) (Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 1961), 218.

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using words such as “*shadow*” (21:2, 3), “*mysterious*” (1:4, 5), “*who knows*” (73:2), “*I do not know*,” (4:3), “*barely*” (25:4).

Lao Tzu’s Tao will be discussed in full detail in later chapters. Let us survey the nature of Tao briefly here.

1. The Nature of Tao

What is the nature of Tao?

- a. Tao exists alone, and is self sufficient, replying on no other laws.⁵⁰
- b. Tao creates and is the mother of everything. Tao loves and preserves everything.⁵¹
- c. Tao transcends all matters. No one can see or hear Tao.⁵²
- d. Tao gives life. Tao is the door of all miracles; and though the body is dead, the spirit lives forever in Tao.⁵³
- e. Tao reveals and teaches without speaking, showing its light to all.⁵⁴
- f. Tao is righteous. Tao has no bias and treats kindness with kindness.⁵⁵
- g. Tao saves. Tao is good at salvation and forgives sins.⁵⁶

2. Lao Tzu Portrayed the Incarnation of Tao, “the Holy One”

In chapters 29 and 81, Lao Tzu described the Holy One 29 times. After describing the Holy One’s substance, image, and ways, he followed his descriptions with “*therefore*,” leading to the characterization of how the Holy One practices Tao in the world. The Holy One exists, undoubtedly, right next to us, and is the manifestation of Tao.

⁵⁰ Tao models after itself: 25:7; 6:1; 21:4, and so on.

⁵¹ 1:2; 4:1; 5:2; 34:1, 2, and so on.

⁵² 1:1; 41:7; 14:1, and so on.

⁵³ 1:5; 16:3-4, 10; 20:7, and so on.

⁵⁴ 2:3; 21:4-5; 35:3; 41:1; 43:2, and so on.

⁵⁵ 79:3; 77:2; 73:2, 4; 5:1, and so on.

⁵⁶ 27:3; 62:1-4; 67:5; 44:3, and so on.

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The duty of the Holy One: as the vehicle by which people recognize Heaven; as the shepherd of the world; possessing knowledge without pursuing, seeing without looking.⁵⁷

The essence of the Holy One: omniscient and invisible; governing the universe and reaching everywhere, causing no harm, and spreading peace and prosperity.⁵⁸

The mission of the Holy One: saving people, bearing people's sins, and inheriting light.⁵⁹

The love and humility of the Holy One: staying in the dark in spite of his own radiance; knowing his glory and enduring humiliation; knowing the debt of the people without demanding payment.⁶⁰

The suffering and accomplishment of the Holy One: sacrificing his life yet forever living; paying the penalty for people's sins and becoming the king of the world.⁶¹

3. Lao Tzu's Incisive Teaching on Practicing and Cultivating Tao

In this book, I explain Lao Tzu's principle of cultivating Tao: return to the root and revive life; guard Mother and inherit eternal light; and reverse, humble oneself, be tranquil, and inherit.⁶²

I also discuss Lao Tzu's art of cultivating Tao through renouncement, calmness, humility, non-interference, and reconciliation.⁶³

Lao Tzu's "parables" of cultivating Tao use the metaphors of light, water, Mother, and infant,⁶⁴ which I also discuss.

⁵⁷ 22:2 (see also the excavated Mawangdui version); 47:2; 2:3; 49:4, and so on.

⁵⁸ 35:1; 2:4-5; 72:3, and so on.

⁵⁹ 27:3-4; 64:5; 48:2, and so on.

⁶⁰ 28:1-5; 70:4; 63:4; 79:2; 81:4, and so on.

⁶¹ 7:2; 13:4; 78:3; 81:4, and so on.

⁶² Chapters 16, 52, 62; 40:1; 65:4; 48:1-2; 56:2, and so on.

⁶³ Chapters 3, 9, 19; 10:3; 8:2; 15:3; 22:1, 5; 10:1; 21:1; 55:1-3, and so on.

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V. Decoding Lao Tzu: Missing Tao in the Concealment of Tao, Gaining Tao in Practicing Tao

Section A. Missing the Point: Using Scholarship in Interpreting the Great Tao

To interpret Tao with only scholarship veers off the mark. *Lao Tzu*, in contemporary commentaries, is viewed as an example of atheism, naturalism, counter-reaction, declination, concept pre-establishment, fragmentation, and obscurantism—such is the contemporary perspective on Lao Tzu!

What has happened? Lao Tzu said: “*Those who follow Tao identify with Tao; those who have virtue identify with virtue; those who are lost identify with loss*” (23:3). In a time when Tao is hidden, it is difficult to experience and recognize Tao; even people who are morally superior can be in agreement only with morality. When one is not in Tao, it is truly impossible to appreciate the subtle mystery of Tao.

The problem with the current misunderstanding of Lao Tzu is that Tao is treated as an object of scholarship. The pursuit of knowledge makes people conceited, whereas the pursuit of Tao cultivates humility. These are two opposite paths!

The great essential Tao, as described by Lao Tzu, creates Heaven and earth, preserves all things, teaches and transforms, enters the human world, advances reasoning, cultivates the Holy One, and is in the doing of everything. This Tao is not a mere concept, but a vital, living existence.

To treat *Lao Tzu* purely as rational scholarship would sacrifice Tao’s transcendent nature, turning the live Tao into a dead concept.

Treating Tao as an object of scholarship will mislead and produce a shallow understanding of *Lao Tzu*. For example, the following

⁶⁴ Chapters 1, 20, 25, 52, 59; chapters 10, 20, 28, 55; chapters 8, 28, 78; chapters 4, 14, 52, 56, 58.

words would not have made sense by using common scholarly methodology: *eat mother* (食母), *guard mother* (守母), *inherit light* (襲明), *inherit eternity* (襲常), *the Holy One* (聖人), *infant* (嬰兒), *yi xi wei* (夷，希，微), *return to life* (複命), *know eternity* (知常), *gain conformity in differentiation* (玄同), *beyond death* (無死地), *live beyond the physical body* (外其身而身存), *arrival of great might* (大威致), *vehicle* (式), *guard* (保), *forgive sins* (免罪), *hold the contract of the one who owns debt* (執左契), and so on.

The profound heavenly source, the splendid spiritual rainbow, and the miraculous rhythm of Tao in *Lao Tzu* cannot be matched by any dry or dead philosophical principles!

Section B. Those Regarding Themselves Knowledgeable Do Not Know Me

Having predicted this incorrect approach, Lao Tzu said: “*My words are easy to understand and not difficult to put into practice. The world, however, cannot understand nor practice. My words have roots and my work has a master. Those who regard themselves knowledgeable cannot grasp my words and my work. The fewer who understand my words and my work, the more precious my words and my work are.*”⁶⁵

The great heavenly Tao is far beyond the ability of human wisdom and knowledge to grasp. To approach Tao, one must give up arrogant human intelligence, rely on spiritual guidance, forsake scholarship, and unload the burden of worries (19:2, 3). Lao Tzu says: “*Block your passage to senses and shut your door to intelligence*” (52:4); “*[Be] humble to the utmost and stay tranquil*” (16:1). Indeed, as Jesus also stated: “*[T]he true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks*” (John 4:23; see also 24).

⁶⁵ 70:1-3.

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What Lao Tzu said is correct: his words have roots, and his undertaking has a master. Without knowing the roots and recognizing the master, how could it be possible to understand his words and carry out his work? His words would be easy to understand and put into practice if the roots were revealed and the master was acknowledged. Where are the roots, and who is the master? Tao is the root, and the Holy One is the master who is the manifestation of Tao.

Section C. Divine Light Illuminates and Great Tao Alleviates

I have to admit that such requirements may not seem fair to many Lao Tzu scholars and specialists. That is not to say that we should not bring them up. These requirements are an intrinsic part of Lao Tzu's teaching, and no one can add to them or obliterate them. The only thing worth mentioning is that everything has its timing. Birth is timed, death is timed; there is a time for sowing, a time for harvesting; a time for silence and a time for declaration (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). The time for the Chinese to truly grasp Lao Tzu is the time when what he declared and hoped for has become a reality.

Remember what Lao Tzu said to Confucius? At the right time, the Holy One will descend on this world; when it is not the right time, the Holy One conceals himself in the wind. When the Holy One had not yet come to this world in his incarnation, to be more specific, when the Gospels had not yet traveled from Europe and America and reached China on a large scale, Lao Tzu's Tao and the incarnated Holy One could be only a mysterious riddle for people to guess. Today, when God illuminates our heart and we recognize that light, then with that light, we are able to re-read *Lao Tzu* and realize how obvious it is that the light has come from God.

I am not alone in putting Jesus adjacent to Lao Tzu. Lin Yutang, who was converted to Christianity in his later years, said illusively: "Spiritually, Lao Tzu and Jesus are brothers."⁶⁶ He stopped at that and did not explore further.

⁶⁶ Lin Yutang, *Xin Yang Zhi Lu (From Pagan to Christian)* (Beijing: Xin Hua Chu Ban She, 2002), 243.

VI. Lao Tzu and I Met in Christ

After I became a Christian in 1991, I had a serious question: “Once a Chinese person becomes a Christian, is he or she still Chinese?” I found that some Chinese Christians are often quite familiar with the history of Israel, yet seem to have lost interest in their 5,000-year-old Chinese history. As a result, I could not help but ask myself, “Is the God we believe in also the God of 5,000-year-old China? Does God have sovereignty over Chinese history during the past 5,000 years? Has God acted on behalf of China?” According to the Bible, I believed, the answers were positive, yet where were the evidences? Had God left any imprints? Chinese Christians seemed to have no answers to these questions.

Then, one day, the Holy Spirit guided me when I was studying the Bible at Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS). While reading Paul’s paragraph about the spiritual fruits of benevolence, joy, peace, and so on surpassing the laws (Galatians 5:16-23), I suddenly recalled a sentence from *Lao Tzu*: “A man of high morality needs no moral commands because he has them within; a man of low morality seeks morality, his morality has ulterior motives” (38:1). In other words, a person in Tao does not need to pursue rules and laws because the rules and laws are already internalized; those who have to abide by regulations and laws are not inside Tao. It occurred to me that this is a perfect interpretation of Paul’s letter. Immediately, I was illuminated.

At one time, I wrote a book titled *The Heavy Subject* 《沈重的主體》, which was published by the People’s Publishing House in China. One of the chapters focused on Lao Tzu. When I re-read *Lao Tzu* in the light of the Bible, Tao and the Holy One became amazingly familiar and intimate to me. I felt a strong urge to share my enlightened understanding of *Lao Tzu* with everyone.

It goes without saying that Tao is the cosmic Tao who runs through human history. Tao dawned on Lao Tzu more than 2,600 years ago. It should be no surprise that his words shine today with the radiance

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of the Holy Spirit in China, where the Gospel of the Incarnate Jesus is spreading like wildfire.

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PART ONE: THE SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF TAO

Chapter 1: The “*I AM*”

Those familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and their translation into what has been called the Greek *Septuagint* are well aware of the term *I AM*, the name of the Holy One, who revealed Himself to Moses. This term signifies great power and majesty—and deep simplicity. In this and succeeding chapters, we will learn more about the meaning of the *I AM* and all that surrounds a profound understanding of the characteristics of the *I AM* as perceived through the lens of Lao Tzu.

Section A: As Tao Is (*Ziran*)

1. The Meaning of “Tao As It Is”

One of Lao Tzu’s well-known statements has been the source of misinterpretation in two ways: “*Human beings emulate earth; the earth emulates the heavens; the heavens emulate Tao; Tao emulates what is as it is*” (25:6-7). It has been frequently used to label Lao Tzu as a naturalist, one who treats nature as total reality—without a supreme God—and defines human beings as having no [eternal] spirit. In modern terminology, naturalists treat everything, including human beings, as if they are merely matter and energy.

The first misinterpretation is found in the clause “*as it is*” (自然) in “*Tao emulates what is as it is*,” and is often mistakenly interpreted as “nature.” That is not Lao Tzu’s intended meaning. *Nature* refers to natural phenomena on the earth and in the sky. In the previous clauses “the earth emulates the heavens; the heavens emulate Tao,” Lao Tzu implies that the earth and the heavens reside under Tao. These are below Tao; so, how is it possible for Tao to emulate something below it?

When we come to the second misinterpretation, we find that it revolves around interpreting “*Tao emulates what is as it is*” as “Tao lets everything be,” which does not make sense either. The word *emulate* in Lao Tzu’s original sentence means “model after,” rather than “let it be.” Lao Tzu says: “*Tao of heaven shows no favoritism; he is always with good people*” (79:3) and “*The net of heaven is vast; its meshes may not be fine yet nothing slips through*” (73:4). Without any bias, Tao selects good people, and nothing escapes Tao’s inclusive mastery. How, then, can Tao allow everything to exist without guidance and discipline?

The first misinterpretation promotes the prevalent belief that Lao Tzu is a “naturalistic atheist,” whereas the second interpretation makes Lao Tzu a “do-nothing naturalist.”

According to Lao Tzu’s original meaning, the Chinese word *ran* is an adverb meaning “as,” while the word *ziran* suggests the meaning of self-sufficiency, self-existence, self-sustaining, and self-imaging.⁶⁷ Before saying that “*Tao emulates what is as it is*,” Lao Tzu reverently describes Tao as the mother of everything on earth and in heaven. He then points out that Tao, heaven, earth, and human beings are all important, while Tao alone embraces and surpasses everything. Heaven, earth, and human beings “consider” themselves important; each of them, however, must follow Tao.

Lao Tzu taught that human beings come from the earth and return to the earth. Their life and death do not bypass the patterns of the earth; the earth comes from the heavens and blends into the heavens. Earth’s existence and disappearance do not escape the dictates of the heavens; Tao created the heavens, which function within the limit of Tao’s commands. Tao initiates from nothing, belongs to nothing,

⁶⁷ The word *ziran* (自然) appears four times in *Lao Tzu*: “Yet when the great work is completed, people say the occurrence is natural” (17:3); “To speak little is natural” (23:1); “Tao is worthy of reverence and his virtues worthy of honor. Not because Tao decrees it, but because this is naturally so and forever so” (51:3); “Therefore, the Holy One appreciates what men abandon; he depreciates what men value. He learns what men do not want to learn; he leads men back from their transgressions. This is in accordance with the nature of all things” (64:5).

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and pursues nothing. Tao is as Tao is. That is why Lao Tzu says: Tao models after Tao, or “*Tao models after what is as it is*” (*ziran*). Tao makes the ultimate law and creates order for every existence.

In other words, Tao is what Tao is and does what Tao does. This self-sufficient, self-reliant, self-generating, self-functioning Tao is the only self-existent being.

2. The Original Meaning of *Jehovah*

Lao Tzu’s description of Tao brings to mind the Hebrew name for God in the Bible—*YHWH*, or *Jehovah*, which is a Hebrew word based on the verb *I am*. When Moses, the liberator of the Israelites, received God’s call to lead his people out of Egypt, Moses had doubts about his own ability. God said to Moses, “*I will be with you*” (Exodus 3:12). When Moses’ doubts persisted, he asked for God’s name, and God’s response to Moses was: “*I AM WHO I AM*” (Exodus 3:14).

The Chinese translation of this special name is “I am the self-existent and eternal one.” God told Moses: “*This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you...’*” (Exodus 3:14-15). Since then, God in the Old Testament has been called *YHWH*, or *Jehovah*, a name with a clear and dramatic meaning.⁶⁸

The meaning of “*Tao emulates what is as it is*” and the meaning of “*I AM WHO I AM*” match perfectly.

⁶⁸ When sked about who he was, Jesus replied many times using “*I AM*.” For example: “If you do not believe that I AM, you will indeed die in your sins” (John 8:24); “When you have lifted up [crucified me on the cross] the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM and that I do nothing on my own” (8:28); and “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). Uncomfortable with this strong, unequivocal language, English Bible translators often add “he” or “the one I claim to be” after the “I AM” in such passages; however, these editorial additions to the Bible are both inaccurate and distracting. Even the arresting soldiers understood enough to fall to the ground when Jesus told them, “I AM” (John 18:5-8). The Pharisees sought to arrest Jesus when He told them, “Before Abraham was, I AM,” because they thought he was blaspheming when, in fact, He was speaking the truth.

3. About “夷 Yi, 希 Xi, 微 Wei”

According to textual scholarship, the words “Yi, Xi, Wei,” which are found in Chapter 14 of Lao Tzu’s book, have a pronunciation similar to *Jehovah*. (Note that *V* and *W* are the same letter in Hebrew, and the letter *X* in Chinese sounds like *H* in English.)

What can be seen but not comprehended is called “Yi”; what can be heard but not understood is called “Xi”; what can be touched but not grasped is called “Wei.” These three qualities are beyond comprehension⁶⁹—together they become one. “*Above the One, there is no light; beneath the One, there is no darkness*” (14:1-3).

G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), the 19th-century German philosopher, once commented on these three words “Yi, Xi, Wei.” According to him, their three sounds *I-hi-wei*, or *IHW*, appear in the Greek term “*I-a-o*,” the short name of a Greek Gnostic deity who helped to create the world. In some African languages, these letters also refer to “God.” In the Hebrew language, God is named “*Jehovah*.” The Romans called their god of beginnings and endings “Janus,” from which we get January—the beginning of the year.

Also, at the time of Hegel, the French scholar of Chinese culture Jean Pierre Rmusat (1788-1832) pointed out that YiXiWei was the Chinese word for *Jehovah*.⁷⁰ *YiXiWei* would sound like *Yi, Shi, Wee* in English. The older pronunciation of *Jehovah* is “*YHWH*,” translated into Chinese as “*Yewei*,” or “*Yawei*.” The beginning and ending sounds of *YHWH* are even closer to *YiXiWei*.

The meaning and the tone in Lao Tzu’s original text are intriguing. Let us take a look:

- a. “*Be seen but not comprehended, heard but not understood, and touched but not grasped*” (*Tao Te Ching*, 14:1). From

⁶⁹ Translating the footnote of De Qing: “Impossible to investigate and difficult to comprehend.”

⁷⁰ Karl Hegel, *Zhe Xue Shi Jiang Yi Lu* (Shang Wu Yin Shu Guan, 1983), Vol. 1, 129-130.

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the text, it is obvious that Lao Tzu wishes to emphasize *Yi*, *Xi*, *Wei*—such an emphasis also indicates that these are enduring words. However, their meaning needs clarification.

- b. In the *A* and *B* silk manuscripts excavated from Mawangdui, as well as in the widely acknowledged Wang Bi and other manuscripts, the words *Yi*, *Xi*, *Wei* are placed inaccurately, and their sequence is mixed. Nevertheless, this is an indication that while the meaning of these words was not clear, the sounds were articulated in ancient times.
- c. Lao Tzu uses the words *Yi*, *Xi*, *Wei* to give an image to the invisible Tao.

A similar description can be found in many Biblical passages; for example, God commands Isaiah: “*Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving’*” (Isaiah 6:9).

Jesus also used this expression before quoting Isaiah directly: “*Though seeing they do not see; though hearing they do not hear or understand*” (Matthew 13:13).

- d. Why does Lao Tzu emphasize the ineffable nature of these three distinct words? It would not have been difficult to understand if these three words were not independent and were a phrase with linked pronunciation. One cannot tell the difference between each word; thus, they become one, implying that the three words *Yi*, *Xi*, *Wei* have already blended into one. Lao Tzu only confirms an extraordinary, existing linguistic phenomenon.
- e. Lao Tzu continues: “*Above the One, there is no light; beneath the One, there is no darkness*” (14:1-3).

The Bible says: “*The Lord is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens*” (Psalm 113:4); and “*The light*

shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (John 1:5).

As we can see, not only is the pronunciation of *Yixiwei* similar to *Jehovah*, but so is the meaning.

If it is true that the sound of *Yixiwei* is *Jehovah*, then God’s name was, indeed, ingrained in the memory of the Chinese language and literature. It is consistent with the words mentioned in the Introduction, such as 休 (peace) , 婪 (greed) , 單 (single) , 船 (boat) , 義 (justice), and so on, which also carry a spiritual and supernatural meaning in the Bible.

Actually, many words in Chinese and other languages have meanings with spiritual implications, for example:

“石忽” (*Shihu*): from Persian, *Jahud* (Israelites).

“一陽樂業” (*Yiyangleye*) or “一賜樂業” (*Yicileye*): Israel.

“女媧” (*Nuwa*): Eve (夏娃).

“安登” (*Andeng*), other variations, 盤古, 阿丹, 阿耽, appearing in Qu Yuan’s *Ask Heaven*: “Deng was established as the king; who made him so? Nuwa had a body; who created her?” *Andeng* is the transliteration of *Adam*.⁷¹

Hidden in these examples is a profound riddle, which is beyond the power of mere ink and paper to solve. However, we can be sure that *Yixiwei* not only sounds similar to *Jehovah*, but also that the implied meaning of *Yixiwei* points to *Jehovah* in the Bible, or Tao in *Lao Tzu*.

⁷¹ See a report on Hong Kong Wen Hui Bao by Gong Fangzhen from Shanghai Social Sciences Institute, Department of Religion, on Jewish descendants in Kai Feng, He Nan, applying for minority status. Also, Su Xuelin, *Wen Tian Zheng Jia*, (Taiwan Guang Dong Chu Ban She, 1974), 174-177.

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4. The One Who Stands Alone

Another characteristic of Tao is independent immutability, which Lao Tzu underscores in Chapter 25, verses 1 and 2:

An integrated being exists before the birth of heaven and earth. How still! How void! Standing by himself and never changing, he moves in and through all and is never weary, worthy to be the mother of heaven and earth. I do not know his name. If I must identify him, I will name him "Tao" and call him "the Great."

Everything in the physical world must transform into something else. The earth sprouts corn; human beings return to dust; the earth will disappear. Only Tao who creates all and surpasses all stands independently, moving in and through everything without ever growing weary. Both Lao Tzu and the Bible are in agreement on this point. For example, the Psalmist in the Bible says:

In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end. (Psalm 102:25-27)

Also, Jesus says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, and Luke 21:33).

All things in heaven and earth rely on one another. Birds cannot live without air; human beings cannot survive without food; the earth cannot exist without the sun. Only the supreme Tao who creates everything is self-reliant and self-sufficient. Lao Tzu expresses this truth by saying: "She is what seems not. She gives and never exhausts" (6:3); and "The most bounty seems lacking, yet his provision is boundless" (45:1).

According to Lao Tzu, everything in the universe follows a certain order: human beings live within the order of the earth; the earth revolves in the order of the heavens; and the heavens operate in the order of Tao. Only the supreme Tao creates Tao's own order.

The Bible expresses a similar concept: "*For from him and through him and to him are all things*" (Romans 11:36), which refers to the eternal Christ, who predates human history.

5. Aristotle's Prime Mover

Lao Tzu's statement about the progressive order of the universe and the self-reliant Tao is similar to Aristotle's metaphysical inference to God, the uncaused Cause.

According to Aristotle, there is a reason for every existence. One event is the result of its previous event, and at the same time, the cause for the next one. The universe functions like a giant chain of causes and effects, one linking to the other, ever generating and ever changing. If we follow this logic, there must be a "first cause," which is self-caused; this first cause is the "Prime Mover." He does not need anyone to move him; there must be an unmoving mover; he is the only one who is not moved by others.

Aristotle believes that this first cause, the Prime Mover, or the Unmoved, is God.⁷² As we know, the great scientist Isaac Newton uses the same "logic" to explain the existence of God. (See Newton's *General Scholium* first published as a section of his *Mathematical Principles*.)

Of course, Aristotle's self-existing being induced by human logic is a hypothesis at best. Lao Tzu's self-existing being is a spiritual intuition, a direct encounter with the light from God. Aristotle's self-existing being is a dry, rigid, and lifeless being because Aristotle merely touches upon the inevitability of God's existence. On the other hand, Lao Tzu's God is a rich, vivid, and lively being, because

⁷² See Aristotle, *Xing Er Shang Xue*, Vol 12, VI-VII.

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Lao Tzu experiences God's reality. Jesus Himself, the self-existing being in the Bible, declares and demonstrates his self-existence. Look at the differences:

1. Aristotle makes a determination according to human wisdom: "There must be a self-existent being";
2. Lao Tzu testifies in the light of the great Tao: "*Look at this self-existent being*";
3. The Lord in the Bible directly pronounces: "*I AM WHO I AM.*"

Section B. The Infinite Tao: One

1. Tao as One: The Originator, the Unifier, and the Sole Being

The word *the One*, or *One*, appears in five chapters of *Lao Tzu*:

- (a) "*Who can embrace the One to achieve a seamless union with Tao?*" (10:1)
- (b) "*These three Yi, Xi, Wei are beyond comprehension; together they become the One.*" (14:1-3)
- (c) "*Therefore, the Holy One unites with a sage to be the vehicle for showing Tao to all people.*" (22:2)
- (d) "*What the ancients attained is the One (Tao).*" (39:1-2)
- (e) "*Tao begat the One.*" (42:1)

What is Tao the One? One as a number represents Tao. To embrace the One means unification with Tao. The One that the ancients recognized was Tao, who was lost to Confucius and other thinkers in antiquity. "*Tao begat the One.*" The One is Tao itself.⁷³ *Yi, Xi, Wei*, the three paradoxically becoming one, as stated previously, are the self-existent Tao.

Why is Tao "the One," or simply "One"? One as a number has three obvious meanings:

⁷³ Zhuang Tzu says in *Qi Wu Lun*: "Once one is spoken of, one becomes two."

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The first meaning is that One is the originator, the beginning and the root of all numbers. Tao is the same: “*He precedes heaven and earth*” (1:2), and “*Tao is the root of heaven and earth*” (6:2).

The second meaning is that One is the unifier. Paradoxically, the largest number is the number one. Everything in the “universe” is One. (Note that *uni* in the word *universe* means “one.”) Tao is the One that unites everything.

The third meaning is that One is the sole being. One is not two.

Tao is absolute. There is only one Tao: “*Tao is the Lord of all things*” (62:1).

Originator, unifier, and the sole being—these three are one.

Lao Tzu is not alone in using the number one to describe the root of the universe. A few examples come to mind. The ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras states: “The origin of all things is one.”⁷⁴ Several passages from the Bible further add to our understanding; for example, “*The Lord is one*” (Deuteronomy 6:4); Jesus said: “*I and the Father are one*” (John 10:30), and later on, he prayed:

“*[T]hat all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me.*” (John 17:21-23)

What Jesus said is similar to Lao Tzu’s expressions: “*embracing the One*” and “*returning to the One.*”

2. One Is Infinity: A Paradoxical Parable in Geometry

People may wonder how the One can be limitless. One is the smallest number of all, is it not? True, common sense says so.

⁷⁴ Beijing University, Department of Philosophy, *Xi Fang Zhe Xue Yuan Zhu Xuan Du (Selected Readings of Western Original Works of Philosophy)* (Shang Yu Yin Shua Shu Guan, 1982), Vol. 1, 20.

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However, when the smallest transcends all things, it enters into limitlessness. The same is true with the biggest. The smallest and the biggest transcend all differences, all limitation, and all relativity. To cite an example in geometry, there are many shapes, such as a line, a triangle, a square, and a circle, each with its own unique formula. However, if they are restored to their original state, they then return to their starting point—the One. All differences disappear. Looking from a distance, a person will see all shapes on a piece of paper blur into, as it were, a mist, and become a whole.

In the geometrical sense, anything that can be divided is limited; only the smallest—“one”—is indivisible, or infinite. It permeates all shapes and contains all forms. Also, only “one” has the ability to form various shapes.

The same is true with the universe. The universe is made of atoms. An atom is formed by even smaller particles. A quark is the smallest entity that scientists now can find in the universe. Suppose there are even deeper and more refined levels of composition of matter tentatively called “spirit.” Does not the whole universe converge into “spirit,” the one smallest element of existence? This “spirit” is at the same time the limitless One, containing all beings, wisdom, and life.

The infinite One embodies at least three characteristics. We will discuss these in the following section and see that the One is omnipresent, omnipotent, and all-encompassing.

3. The Infinite Tao: Omnipresent, All-encompassing, and Omnipotent

First, Tao is omnipresent—existing everywhere. Tao is small yet fills everything. Tao is among people, inside human bodies and hearts, yet unnoticeable as if not there at all. Passages from Lao Tzu that illustrate this characteristic include:

The great Tao flows and fills the universe—to the left and to the right. (34:1, 2)

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Tao overflows with abundance, yet looks as if lacking.
(34:1)

*The net of heaven is vast; its meshes may not be fine
yet nothing slips through. (73:4) ⁷⁵*

Second, Tao is all-encompassing. That is to say, Tao is so large that Tao contains everything. Moreover, within Tao, all things become one. Passages from *Lao Tzu* illustrating this characteristic include:

*Approaching from the front you cannot see the face;
approaching from the back you cannot see the back.*
(14:6)

*The infinity of the One is ineffable, returning to the
intangible non-being. (14:4)*

*The great room is too large to have corners; the
great voice is too loud to be heard; the great image is
too grand to be seen. Tao is such that it is often
hidden from people. (41:5-7)*

However, Lao Tzu also says:

*When you block your passage to senses, close your
door to external temptations, blunt your sharp edges
and soften your glare, be united with the light of life,
accept your dust origin, you will enter into a
mysterious realm of unification with Tao. Thus, there
is no intimacy or alienation, no benefit for harming,*

⁷⁵ The Bible: “Am I only a God nearby,” declares the LORD, “and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the LORD. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” (Jeremiah 23:23-24); “...One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6); “...He is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:27-28).

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*no ennobling or debasing. This is a truly precious sphere. (56:2-3)*⁷⁶

Third, Tao is omnipotent. Tao is the smallest and the biggest, the most gentle and the most resolute, the weakest and the strongest. Here are some passages in *Lao Tzu* that illustrate this characteristic:

The origin of existence is small, yet there is no authority above it. (32:2)

Tao often looks idle, but it is in the doing of everything. (37:1)

*The softest in the world overcomes the hardest; that which has no substance penetrates into that which has no cracks. (43:11)*⁷⁷

4. The Mysteries of Attaining the One

In Chapter 39, verse 2, Lao Tzu makes the poetic observation:

*By attaining the One,
Sky becomes clear;
Earth remains stable;
Gods work wonders;
Rivers flow;
All living things grow;
Lords and princes establish their rule.*

⁷⁶ The renewed Biblical teaching after the Reformation emphasizes that human beings in the infinite God are in absolute union; human beings are all the same—small, sinful, and limited, yet, at the same time, are endowed with dignity because all are created by God in his image. Therefore, all believers enter into a union with God—united, equal, and identical—and become one.

⁷⁷ The LORD appeared to Abraham and said, “I am God Almighty” (Genesis 17:1). John thus called God “Lord God Almighty” (Revelation 19:6). The prophet Jeremiah praised: “Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you” (Jeremiah 32:17). Jesus said: “...[W]ith God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

All living things in the universe originate from the One, convert to the One, and submit to the One. Everything benefits from the One. The One contains everything, and is capable of doing anything. Things belong to their own category; each thing has its own traits; each plays its own role. Everything finds its meaning and value in Tao.⁷⁸

As a person living inside Tao, Lao Tzu witnesses the clear sky, the peaceful earth, the flowing rivers, and the energy of life submerged in Tao, bathing in Tao's grace and kindness, becoming one harmonious symphony of gratitude and praise. In humility and piety, Lao Tzu feels a kind of nameless joy and exhilaration. He says with obvious admiration:

The creator and sustainer of the universe does not impose his ownership. He works in all things without claiming his power. The ruler of all does not govern capriciously. What profound grace and virtue! (10:7)

5. "Spirits" (神) and "Gods" (帝) in *Lao Tzu*

We must point out that the word *gods* in *Lao Tzu* is not the same as "*Tao*," but refers to various deities in general, such as in "*gods become efficacious when they attain one*" and the sentence in Chapter 4: "*I do not know whose child he is, for he is before all visible gods.*" The ancients not only respected the supreme God, but also believed in deities and spirits in general, whom they also held in awe. For example, *Shi Ji* commented that Emperor Shun was capable of arguing with various spirits.

During Lao Tzu's time, the word *gods* meant "demons and spirits," such as in Confucius' famous saying: "I do not talk about ghosts, monsters, demons, and spirits." He Yan (何晏) explains that *spirits*

⁷⁸ "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them... See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these" (Matthew 6:26, 28). Jesus' words vividly demonstrated God's presence and grace in everything.

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refers to ghostly and supernatural events. Confucius also said: “Respect and stay away from ghosts and spirits.”

The word *god* also is casually used to mean “deities.” For example, in *Yin Di Wang*, Zhuang Tzu (370-301 B.C.) says: “The gods in the southern sea are fast; the gods in the northern sea are quick, the gods in the center are a mass of chaos.” Obviously, the so-called spirits of four directions and gods of three corners are gods with limitations. They are quite different from God in the Bible and the Supreme Only One in *Lao Tzu*.

Many critics have tried to prove that Lao Tzu uses Tao to deny the existence of God by citing this sentence: “*I do not know whose child Tao is, for he is before all visible gods* (象帝之先).” They misinterpret “*he is before all visible gods*” as meaning that “he is before God.” That is an obvious mistranslation. The reason Lao Tzu does not use the word *supreme* (上) to describe gods (帝) is because these deities are not qualified to be the Supreme Only One. “Xiang” (象) in this sentence means “image,” not “supreme,” as some people have suggested. These two words are not interchangeable since Lao Tzu clearly defines *supreme* in his other texts.

The Bible also uses the word *gods* to represent non-believers’ idols (Exodus 20:3-4). However, Moses represented the one God: “*See I have made you like God to Pharaoh*” (Exodus 7:1). Jehovah is the supreme God above everyone (Luke 8:28). The usage in the Bible is similar to that in the ancient Chinese language. Lao Tzu’s Tao surpasses all spirits and gods, but Lao Tzu does not deny the existence of spirits and demons. Instead, he regards Tao as “*the door to all mysteries*” (1:5), assuming the role of a supreme God, just like the Hebrews’ Jehovah.

Lao Tzu repeats the concept of spirits and gods gaining power when attaining the One in Chapter 60: “*When the state is ruled under Tao, ghosts will trouble no one; not only do ghosts harm no one, even gods harm no one; not only do gods harm no one, even saints will not harm anyone.*” That is to say, Tao is above everything and rules

over all ghosts and gods and their power, including their wicked as well as virtuous deeds.

Section C. The Eternal Tao: 常 Chang

The word *chang* (常), which appears in 18 chapters of *Lao Tzu*, means “often” or “in general” in 15 chapters, such as “often have, often have not”; “generality often produces ignorance”; and “frequently making people afraid of death,” and so on. In chapters 16, 52, and 55, however, the word describes the state of Tao, meaning “eternity.”

1. Eternity in Tao: His Being and His Name Existing Forever

Let us examine the eternal characteristics of Tao. Lao Tzu says: “*The unfathomable Tao is immortal*” (6:1). Nothing in the universe is immortal except the One who creates everything. All shapes dissolve; only the shapeless God lives forever. All numbers change except the only One; all limited beings die but Tao never evaporates.

Lao Tzu also says: “*From antiquity till now, his name has never vanished*” (21:4), and “*Your descendants ought never cease to offer sacrifices to the perfect One*” (54:2).

It is worth mentioning that Lao Tzu once said: “*Tao is hidden and nameless, yet only Tao excels in giving and bringing all to wholeness*” (41:7), and “*Tao normally does not reveal his name*” (32:1). How does one begin to explain this? Tao is, indeed, difficult for people to understand. Even today, those who recognize the self-existent Tao are still in the minority because Tao “*can be seen but not comprehended; can be heard but not understood; can be touched but not grasped*” (14:1). When Lao Tzu says, “*The hidden Tao is nameless*,” he is really saying that although he recognizes Tao and trusts in Tao, it is rare for people in the secular world to recognize and trust in Tao.

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2. Knowing Eternity: Light and Forgiveness

Why do human beings need to know eternity? Lao Tzu says: *"To know eternity is to see the light"* (55:3; 16:6). Why does he make a connection between eternity and light?

With light, one is able to see a long distance. In natural light, our eyesight can reach farther, and with the light of wisdom, our mind's eye can perceive further. Human beings are usually short sighted. In the physical universe, we can glimpse quarks and the starting point of the Big Bang. What is behind quarks? What is before the starting point of the Big Bang? Human intelligence still cannot answer these questions.

What we experience is limited physical existence. When we look at our own life, we cannot see even the next step, let alone have an idea of what will happen tomorrow. We do not know when and how we will die and what will happen after death. The light of life and the light of wisdom that we gain by ourselves are so very limited. If we are able to see the light of eternity and recognize the eternal Tao, with the help of the eternal light, how bright will our vision be? The eternal light illuminates the whole sphere. That is the reason Lao Tzu equates eternity with light.

What does the Bible say about light? For example, John 1:1, 4 (see also verse 9) tells us:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

In a similar vein, Lao Tzu says:

The Holy One is good at saving people, and no one is abandoned. He is good at saving all things, and nothing is forsaken. This is called following the light. (27: 3-4)

Jesus Christ, whom the prophet Isaiah called “the Holy One” (Isaiah 30:12), entered the world and announced: “*I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness*” (John 12:46). When Jesus saw unrepentant human beings in his eternal light, he called them blind people.

Lao Tzu also points out: “*One is able to tolerate when he is acquainted with eternity*” (16:8). Knowing eternity helps people understand the truth of life. Life is short and temporary, just like a fleeting bubble that pops at any moment. “[*T*hey admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth,” as the Bible says in the book of Hebrews, verse 11:13.

Keeping eternity in view, one will not become bogged down with vain ambitions, stubborn opinions, immediate benefits, and meaningless resentment. If people do not understand eternity, they tend to treat this life as the only chance to bet, and thus they have no choice but to try to win. With such an attitude, how can it be possible to forgive? No wonder so much fierce competition and total indulgence in pleasures exist. So-called tolerance is just a crack in a world full of hatred. Lao Tzu says: “*Contrary to the way of eternal Tao, one acts arbitrarily, and that is to court disaster*” (55:3).

3. Inherit Eternity: Life beyond Death, Life without Calamities

For Lao Tzu, to recognize eternity is to follow and enter eternity:

To know eternity is to embrace whatever comes into life; to embrace whatever comes into life is to be tolerant; to be tolerant is to be complete; completeness is heaven-like; to be heaven-like is to be united with Tao; to be united with Tao is to endure; even though one's body falls away, he still lives in peace. (16:8-10)

The eternal Tao is clearly not a regular object for recognition. Whoever knows Tao is inside Tao and exists within Tao. It is

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absolutely true, according to Lao Tzu, that “*following the light of Tao, returning to its brightness, one will stay away from calamities. Thus is to inherit eternity*” (52:6). By following the light of Tao, a person not only “knows eternity,” but also “returns to the light,” and anyone who acknowledges the light also walks inside the light. To walk inside the light is to “*inherit eternity*.” For human beings, the eternal Tao is the Tao of eternal life. Jesus Christ clearly says: “*I tell you the truth, he who believes [in Me] has everlasting life*” (John 6:47). His disciple Peter later responded: “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*” (John 6:68).

Lao Tzu has many references to eternal life, for example:

He who dies without perishing has longevity. (33: 6)

Those who are not avid of this life have gained true life, have risen above the realm of death. (50:4)

Those who base their life upon love will eventually be rooted deeply and firmly in Tao, who grants eternal life and enduring hope. (59:1, 8)

Wealth is not more important than life.... Know when to stop and thus avoid danger; then one can live long. (44:1, 3)

Unfortunately, people took Lao Tzu’s eternal Tao and turned it into a kind of “immortality techniques” manual. This error was due to a profound misunderstanding of Tao and also because the time had not yet arrived for the Chinese people to grasp the subtle essence of Tao.

Additional Remarks: Self-existence, Limitlessness, and Eternity

1. The Meaning of *Self-existence*, *Limitlessness*, and *Eternity*

Self-existence, *limitlessness*, and *eternity* are familiar terms, especially to anyone who considers the deeper questions of life.

When we use these terms, do we understand their meaning as they apply to our own life?

For example, when we talk about Tao and describe Tao as self-existent, limitless and eternal, and when we truncate Tao as the limitless Tao, do we realize that we human beings are just the opposite? Ironically, we are extremely limited, but at this moment we are discussing Tao in Tao's limitlessness.

When we talk about the eternal Tao, do we realize that our existence is but a fleeting moment, one that is nearly non-existent as compared to Tao's eternity?

When we talk about the self-existent Tao, do we realize that we belong to Tao and cannot exist independently of Tao?

When we examine and write about our "subject matter"—the self-existent, limitless, and eternal Tao, are we conscious of the fact that we are insignificant, ignorant, limited, and temporary, and that in the presence of Tao we should be naturally filled with awe, humility, praise, and gratitude? Facing such a being, how can we be so confident and full of ourselves? If we are, then I am sure that we have not yet truly grasped Tao's self-existent, limitless and eternal being; in that case, we are only fooling ourselves.

When an investigator has witnessed the self-existent, limitless, and eternal being, he cannot help but pause, just as Lao Tzu does, and be overcome with admiration, thinking, *"Boundless ability! Supreme grace! How remarkable and miraculous! It's beyond explanation! Words are powerless to truly describe Tao!"* At that moment, an "investigator" has become, at the same time, a "believer."

2. Paradox: Self-existent, Limitless, Eternal God—An Object of Investigation

To do research, which is to turn a subject into an object, one must employ reasoning. One must place the object in front of one's eyes in order to examine it; this behavior is akin to an infant who grabs

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an object, puts it into his mouth and then sucks it. However, it is impossible for a human being to place God and Tao, a self-existent, limitless, and eternal existence, in front of his eyes, not to mention, grasp God and Tao in his hands. The researcher has been created by Him, lives in Him, and is nurtured in his grace.

The absurdity of arrogant human rationality forces people to overstep and turn every imaginable thing into an object; otherwise, it would be impossible to conduct research. German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) reveals this paradox when he talks about the antinomies of human rationality. Probing that relies on rationality always leads one back to questions that are beyond one's comprehension. Human beings have a limitless urge for knowledge, yet have a limited capability that often causes them to sink into a mud of obscurity and confusion. For this world, human rationality is an effective tool; however, for the world beyond, human rationality is often helpless, and leads wise people to rely on faith. Obviously, "the world beyond" that Kant referenced is a world ruled by the self-existent, limitless, and eternal being. Human rationality on its own cannot reach the world beyond because it exists beyond the grasp of the visible physical world. There is no way to make the world beyond an object. Without objectification, rationality is blind.⁷⁹

In western philosophy of the early 20th century, Logical Positivism led by Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), A. J. Ayer (1910-1989), and the early stage of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) passively proves this point. They treat human rationality as the absolute yardstick and oppose probing into any metaphysical subjects, such as the self-existing, limitless, and eternal being, declaring that such efforts are "meaningless." Rationality cannot prove or disprove things that are beyond the scope of reasoning. They are wrong, however, to assume that questions beyond rational comprehension are meaningless. To avoid discussing such things does not make problems go away, and thus in regard to this point, Logical Positivism reveals its own foolishness. The logic of these "brilliant"

⁷⁹ See Kant, *Xing Er Shang Xue Dao Lun*, and so on.

leaders of western philosophy was quickly submerged in their own emotions and became lost in broader humanity's spiritual journey.

French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) advocates a more positive methodology. If we want to grasp something without being limited by rational thinking and avoid being swayed by presuppositions, he says that we should stop analyzing and objectifying the subject matter. Instead, we should enter the subject matter and become one with it. Analyzing "biological anatomy" is not an appropriate method for comprehending the meaning of life; the correct method for understanding the meaning of life is by experiencing it. Bergson's intuitive approach later was called "life philosophy," which unfortunately, failed to impress his own discipline. However, it created such a sensation in the literary world that he won the 1927 Nobel Prize in literature.⁸⁰

3. The Return of The Wanderers

While Bergson's intuitive method, which allows the researcher to enter into his subject of study, is inspiring, the researcher's targets are, however, only ordinary matters. Facing a "subject" as serious as Jehovah, we must realize that the first important thing is not to "enter into the subject," but to repent. Human beings reside within God, yet they try to grasp God with human rationality and measure Him with human criteria. Such behavior is like that of a foolish, blind person—or a rebellious child.

If a person is taught to have no parents and believes he is an accidental existence, does that mean that he has no parents? His parents still call to their child, "Where are you?" reminiscent of Genesis 3:9, as God did after Adam and Eve sought to objectify God's moral knowledge. Even if rebellion is not the child's own fault, repentance is his responsibility. When a child's knowledge is not sufficient for him to make a correct judgment, it is better for him to listen to his parents' call and return to their guidance.

⁸⁰ Hong Qian, ed., *Xi Fang Xian Dai Zi Chan Jie Ji Zhe Xue Lun Zhu Xuan Du* (*Selected Readings of Western Modern Capitalist Philosophy*) (Shang Wu Yin Shu Guan, 1982), 134-148.

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Why is it irrational to objectify Jehovah? True rationality leads a person to acknowledge the limited nature of his own capabilities. In so doing, a person admits the existence of the emotional and spiritual dimension of his being and recognizes the unknown aspects of the universe. Rationality on this level is in its mature stage. With such maturity, a person will return his surging rationality back to its proper place and step back in humility and peace. He then will be able to live in an awareness of his emotions and spirituality; feel the divine flow in his body and soul; and enjoy the peace, stability, truth, and wholeness found within Jehovah.

This mature response is called “*repentance and return.*” To use Lao Tzu’s words, that is the same as: “*return to the light,*” “*return to wait on mother,*” and “*return to roots.*” Lao Tzu also says: “*Return to being infants...return to the infinite...and return to the original state of being*” (28:2, 4, 6). In other words, know one’s limits without trespassing the One: “*Knowing when to stop and thus avoid dangers. Then you will live long*” (32:4; 44:3).

When our ancestors rebelled against God’s will by grasping and then eating the fruit from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God’s first word was a call for them to return to him (Genesis 3:9). When Jesus came to the world in his incarnation, the first word he uttered was “*Repent!*” (Matthew 4:17).

Lao Tzu’s contemporary, the great prophet Isaiah said: “*In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it*” (Isaiah 30:15). Surely that sounds like parents urgently calling their wandering, rebellious children home.

PART ONE: THE SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF TAO

Chapter II. About The Creator

What is the basic relationship between Tao and human beings? In its most elemental form, the relationship from Tao's perspective is one of creating and sustaining. The concept of "Creator/Sustainer" (造化者) first appears in Zhuang Tzu's *Da Zhong Shi*: "I was created as a person. If I am quite arrogant and keep on claiming: 'I am a person! I am a person!' my Creator must regard me adversely."⁸¹ Although the precise term "*Creator/Sustainer*" does not appear in the works of Lao Tzu per se, the essence of the meaning of this term is embedded throughout Lao Tzu's writings.

Section A. Tao: The Creator

1. Name: Father and Mother

Lao Tzu uses several terms that indicate the nature of the Creator and capture the meaning of "*Creator/Sustainer*": *Mother*, *originator*, *root*, and *Father*. These are found throughout his *Tao Te Ching*:

Mother: "*Mother of everything*" (1:2); "*Everlasting, she is immortal and she is the Mother of all mysteries*" (6:1); "*I differ from all people because I value nourishment from Mother*" (20:7); "*Mother of heaven and earth*" (25:3); "*Mother of everything under the sky*" (52:1); and "*return to wait on Mother*" (52:3).

Originator: "*Deep like an abyss, he appears as the progenitor of all things*" (4:1).

⁸¹ See *Da Zhong Shi*.

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Root, or origin (female body): *“From the gate of this motherly being come heaven and earth” (6:2) and “All return to their roots” (16:2).*

Father: *“From antiquity to present, his name has never vanished so that people may see the Father of all” (21:4).*

These expressions in *Lao Tzu* possess an authoritative primacy that concurs with the meaning of *Jehovah* in the Bible. The original meaning of *Jehovah* is a “self-existent being,” or “Creator.” *Tao* has the same meaning. The Chinese word “*zaohua*” (creating and sustaining 造化) carries two layers of meaning: creating, as well as the transforming and nourishing aspect of the Creator in a fuller expression than merely “one who creates.”

Interestingly, *Lao Tzu* infrequently uses “*Father*” to describe *Tao*, while the Bible uses “*Mother*” less often to refer to *Jehovah*: “*But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother*” (Psalm 131:2). Also, in Isaiah 66:13, the prophet reports God saying, “*As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.*” Jesus even compares himself to a mother hen, when he says:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”
(Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34)

From the very beginning, God showed a mothering aspect to His character as the Spirit hovering like a mother hen over the earth (Genesis 1:2). An especially telling daily reminder of the masculine and the feminine aspects of God is that each man and each woman is an image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). It is true that the Israelites often called the Creator “*Father*”; however, *Lao Tzu* prefers the term “*Mother*.”

The difference in naming the Creator “*Father*” or “*Mother*” reflects a cultural preference. Human language is a severely limited medium for describing God. The naming of Tao is naturally influenced by different cultures. It has been pointed out from early on that Chinese culture is mostly matriarchal, emphasizing tenderness and obedience, while Western culture is mostly patriarchal, placing more value on firmness and boldness. This may be an arguable statement; however, it merits serious consideration.

As a matter of fact, both a mother and a father are parents; they are life-givers and life-sustainers. God, or Tao, is one; he is wholly Spirit; he is genderless. “*From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth*” (Acts 17:26). The terms “*Father*” and “*Mother*” are applied to God, or Tao, for their metaphorical meaning to express a sense of respect. Also, they are based on the same reality: God creates and nurtures human beings.

2. The Process: Birth and Creation

Lao Tzu’s depiction of a time before creation is most clearly shown in Chapter 25:

An integrated being existed before the birth of heaven and earth. How still! How void! Standing all by himself and never changing, he moves in and through all and is not wearied, worthy to be the mother of heaven and earth. (25:1)

The Hebrew Scriptures likewise talk about God as never being weary: “[H]e who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:4) and Isaiah 40:28, which reads:

*Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.*

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Let us compare Lao Tzu's description of creation with the opening chapter of the Bible in five ways:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light...
(Genesis 1:1-3)

First, consider the time of creation: "*Before heaven and earth*" in Lao Tzu compares to "*in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" in the Bible.

Secondly, let us note the Creator: "*The integrated being*" in Lao Tzu compares to the God in the beginning, or the Word, in the Bible. Is the God "*in the beginning*" the same as the Word?⁸²

Thirdly, I would like to point out the period before the creation. Lao Tzu says, "*How still! How void!*" It is just like the description in the Bible: "*The earth was formless and empty; darkness was over the surface of the deep*" (Genesis 1:2).

The fourth thing to consider is the movement of the Creator: "*Standing all by himself and never changing, he moves in and through all and is not wearied*" in Lao Tzu; the Creator is similar to "*the Spirit of God hovering like a mother hen*" in Genesis 1:2 and to the prophet Isaiah's description of "*the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary*" (Isaiah 40:28).

⁸² God the Word—the Logos or Logic of the universe—is introduced by the Apostle John in the first chapter of his Gospel. For centuries, writers in both the Greek and the Hebrew cultures used "Word" to refer to the deep, integrating truths of the Creator. John merely adds the unique truth that the integrating Word became a full human being in Jesus Christ (John 1:1-14). Others agree with John, for the Creator holds the creation together "by his powerful Word," who is the Son of God (Hebrews 1:1-3).

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Lastly, the fifth point of comparison is the name of the Creator. When Lao Tzu says that the Creator is “*worthy to be the mother of heaven and earth*,” Lao Tzu pauses and admits that he does not know the Creator’s name (25:3). Later, he observes that Tao is nameless (41:7; 57:3). From the start, Tao is not really a name (1:1). Similarly, in the Bible, the name of the Lord is a name unlike any other name. God’s name is a kind of “No-Name.” When someone introduces himself, we may expect him to say something, such as “I am John.” Only the Lord God says, “*I AM*,” as He does to Moses in Exodus 3.

The Bible speaks about the creative Word in the Book of John (1:1-4):

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life....

Obviously, the Word in the beginning is the “Spirit” who “*moves in and through all, never changing and never wearied*,” as Lao Tzu describes Tao. In fact, Spirit, Tao, and Word are all One, the only One who moves on the formless, empty, dark surface of the deep in the beginning.

Lao Tzu uses the word *birth* to describe the act of creation: Tao gives birth to all. Some critics consider birth as a natural process rather than a creative process; however, this view actually reflects a misunderstanding. The Bible uses the concepts of birth and creation to describe the process of making human beings. For example, “*We are his offspring. Therefore since we are God’s offspring...*,” we cannot make God into an idol that we create (Acts 17:28-29).

Lao Tzu implies a process from non-existence to existence, one in which Tao creates everything from nothing. To create something from nothing is a matter of creating and birthing, just as having

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children is a matter of creating and birthing. Children are created by parents and are born from their mothers. It is natural for Lao Tzu to use the word “*birth*” in his cultural context, which is in agreement with the word “*Mother*” he uses in reference to the Creator. God as Father is more in line with the world of the Bible. Later, Zhuang Tzu introduces the term “*Creator/Sustainer*” to identify Tao, rising above the superficial difference between giving birth and sustaining life.

3. Analysis: “One, Two, Three”

Lao Tzu, in a literal translation, says: “*Tao begat one; one begat two; two begat three; three begat all things.*” A fuller translation reads as follows: “*Tao exists before all things—that is one; Tao speaks of Tao, establishing Tao’s name—that is two; the truth of Tao is spoken of because it can be manifested in reality—that is three.*” This sentence is often regarded as Lao Tzu’s explanation of Tao’s creation process, but it has had several other interpretations.

Some claim: “Tao unites everything. The united matters split into two opposite sides, giving birth to a third new matter, thus creating various different things.”⁸³

Others declare: “Tao is a unique existence. It contains Yin and Yang, two aspects. The two opposite types of energy (‘*qi*’) intersect, forming a harmonious source, which generates everything in the universe.”⁸⁴

A third theory says: “Tao created a mass of chaos in the beginning (one), from which appeared heaven and earth (two). Heaven and earth generated Yin, Yang, and Qi (three).”⁸⁵

⁸³ Ren Jiyu 任繼愈, *Lao Tzu Quan Yi (The Complete Translation of Lao Tzu)* (Ba Zhu Shu She, 1992), 49.

⁸⁴ Chen Guyin 陳鼓應, *Lao Tzu Zhu Shi Ji Ping Jie (Interpretation and Commentaries on Lao Tzu)* (Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 1984), 235.

⁸⁵ Beijing University, Department of Philosophy, *Zhong Guo Zhe Xue Shi Jiao Xue Zi Liao Xuan Ji (Selected Pedagogical Material on the History of Chinese Philosophy)* (Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 1981), 79.

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However, these three interpretations are based on materialistic dialectics, better known as *Yin and Yang* theory, which is far from Lao Tzu's original meaning. No evidence can be found in the entire book of *Lao Tzu* to support any of these three theories.

Zhuang Tzu has provided a great exegesis: Since there is One, what else can be said? Once One has given One a name, has not One uttered "One"? The original One and what the original One says about the original One become two. These two plus the original One are three. From nothing to something, it stops at three.⁸⁶ Zhuang Tzu's philosophical explanation about the three "one" may not be very clear to many. To put it simply, what he says of one, two, and three represents Tao itself, the name of Tao, and the manifestation of Tao. (The noted scholar Wang Bi gives an explanation of Lao Tzu's meaning that is also similar to Zhuang Tzu's explanation.)

To use Tao to explain Tao, I venture to put it this way: Tao exists by itself before everything, which is the substance of Tao as one. Tao is called Tao; his revealed name and his substance make two. The substance of Tao and the revealed name of Tao manifest in a form; thus, the substance of Tao, the name of Tao and the manifested form of Tao make three. Tao, which is three in one, gives birth to everything and sustains everything.

Lao Tzu touches upon the relationship among the substance, the name, and the form of Tao in chapters 4, 6, 9, 14, 21, 25, 33, 41, 43, and thereafter.⁸⁷

The opening sentences in Genesis and the Gospel of John imply the unity of name (Jehovah), of substance (Spirit), and of form (Jesus the Word). God creates; Spirit moves; The Word is God, and so on.

Any discussion about the "Trinity" is not a light and easy subject, even to theologians. Nevertheless, we will try to treat this difficult

⁸⁶ *Da Zhong Shi*.

⁸⁷ Please refer to Part One, Chapter V, Section B on the oneness of name, substance, and form.

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topic in the chapter on “revelation” in a somewhat more relaxed and understandable manner.

4. The Origin: Have and Have Not

Lao Tzu clearly points out:

He [Tao] can be called non-being because he preceded heaven and earth. (1:2)

The world has a beginning. (52:1)

All philosophical discussions about materialism and the theory of evolution presuppose that the natural world has neither a beginning nor an ending. The original, unchanging elements that form the universe are filled with energy. From the viewpoint of pantheism, energy has an everlasting existence; the universe evolves from this energy.⁸⁸ Modern science largely had supported such a presupposition until the theory of Big Bang seemed to prove that the universe, indeed, has a beginning, thus forcing people to ask questions beyond their finite rational thinking.

As these questions have become more and more prevalent, science has had no choice but to overcome embarrassment and return to various ancient “creation myths.” Lao Tzu’s statement “*The world has a beginning*” means that the world was created and that time and space have been designed with a purpose. Twenty-six hundred years ago, Lao Tzu calmly, clearly, and firmly declared the truth, just as Isaiah also reminds us of the dawn of light from God:

*Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you.
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
(Isaiah 58:8)*

⁸⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*. Translated by Zhao Zhonghui 赵中辉 (Ji Du Jiao Gai Ge Zhong Fan Yi She, 1989), 142.

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*Nations will come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your dawn.
(Isaiah 60:3)*

Lao Tzu also asserts: “*All things under heaven are born of beings; beings are born of non-being*” (40:2). This brave assertion is beyond human comprehension.⁸⁹ Basically, if we rely solely on human rationality, this statement seems puzzling. How can it be possible for non-being to create being?

Pay close attention to Lao Tzu: “*Non-being and being are merely two terms for one source; that the two are one is a mystery*” (1:4). A thorough metaphysical approach will reach the same conclusion. Hegel once said: “Have and have not is the same thing.”⁹⁰ If human beings are not willing to give up their own cleverness to allow God’s light to illuminate the truth, they will have no chance to enter the gate to all mystery.⁹¹

Since the universe has a beginning, it is inevitable that it will have an end. Since time and space are an instant snapshot in eternity, their destination is predetermined. Moreover, since all beings are created by non-being, all beings must return to non-being. Since the coming together of have and have-not is Tao, for those who know Tao and reside in Tao, there is no division between have and have-not. The eternal is “already but not yet.” Our experience is a partial process in the midst of the fullness of eternal reality.

⁸⁹ The Bible says: “What is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Hebrews 11:3). Genesis directly manifests the process of God’s creation: “He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Psalm 33:9); God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light (the first day) and there was “sky” and there was evening and there was morning (the second day)... vegetation (the third day) and God said, “[Let us make man in our image (the sixth day)...” (Genesis 1:3-27).

⁹⁰ Hegel, *Logic* (Shang Wu Yin Shu Guan, 1977), Vol. 1, 70.

⁹¹ The starting point of Hegel’s “absolute logos” is very close to Lao Tzu’s Tao. However, Hegel, relying on his own rationality, was trapped in a maze of a hundred thousand words of “objective idealism,” which he himself hardly understood and which causes headaches for his readers.

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Section B. Tao: Nurturing Grace

1. Omnipotent Loving Care

In one statement, Lao Tzu summarizes the creative, nurturing nature of Tao, who both transcends and moves through time and space:

*All things are created by Tao, nurtured by its grace,
formed into matter, and completed in its care.
Therefore, all things revere Tao and honor its grace.
Tao is revered and honored because Tao never acts
by impulse or decree; it is naturally so and forever so.
(51:1-3)*

From this passage, Lao Tzu makes several points:

- (1) Tao creates everything;
- (2) Tao nurtures, shapes, and grows things. In an earlier chapter, Lao Tzu suggests a reason for this nurturing quality, which is because “*only Tao excels in giving and bringing all to completion*” (41:7);
- (3) Tao is revered by all and Tao’s grace is honored by all; and
- (4) Tao is worthy of reverence, grace and honor, never acting impulsively or by decree. That is the way Tao is naturally and forever. In other words, Tao is reliable in his nature. Moreover, Tao’s creative power and nurturing grace are neither forced nor temporary.

Lao Tzu also mentions Tao’s nurturing grace in several other chapters:

*The highest good is like water, nourishing all things
and not contending with them. (8:1)*

What profound grace and virtue! (10:7; also 51:4)

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[Tao makes] Heaven and earth in harmony and sweet dew would fall; it falls naturally and equally without being distributed. (32:3)

He loves and sustains all things, yet he claims no lordship. (34:3)

What supreme great virtues! How mysterious! How profound! (65:4)

The Tao of heaven is benevolent, causing no harm. (81:5)

In the Psalms, we can find many Scripture verses praising God for his nurturing grace. Psalm 8, for example, is among the most well known. When the first American astronauts took their inaugural launch into outer space, the earth looked like a moon floating far away and earth's population was not visible at all. At that awe-inspiring sight, the astronauts expressed their keen admiration as they recited the majestic Biblical words from Psalm 8:1; 3-4:

“O Lord, our Lord, ...when I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”

Such words capture the same sense of wonder that Lao Tzu reveals.

2. Interconnections: Straw Dogs, Mud, and the Potter

The following passage in Lao Tzu often has been misunderstood to say what is untrue about Tao:

Heaven and earth have no regard for benevolence; they view all creatures as straw dogs offered to gods. Nor does the Holy One have regard for so called benevolence; he likewise views common people as

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straw dogs. The space between heaven and earth—is it not like a smelting bellows? Still and inexhaustible, the more it moves, the more wind it causes. Many words lead to failing; it is better to be restrained.
(5:1-3)

Because Lao Tzu compares human beings to straw dogs, many people use this comparison to prove that Lao Tzu's Tao lacks benevolence and is heartless—just like a nature god without much personal relationship with human beings. Such an interpretation is strikingly not in accordance with Lao Tzu's emphasis on the essence of Tao. Tao nurtures all things with loving kindness, bringing completion to all things, treating people with endless blessings, granting favor and forgiving sins. To say that Tao lacks benevolence does not do justice to Lao Tzu's book about Tao, nor does it capture the true meaning of this passage.

Let us examine "*straw dogs*," a kind of sacrificial offering to God. Of what value are straw dogs? Their value lies in their relationship to God. As we know, the ancients considered making ritual sacrifices to gods and showing respect to Heaven as the most important things in life. Straw dogs as sacred objects are, therefore, full of value. However, if not used for sacrifices to gods, straw dogs are nothing but straw dogs.

The same is true with people and events, whose value cannot be separated from Tao. Otherwise, human beings and other created things are valueless; this is what the "*straw dogs*" metaphor means.

It is true that the meaning of the parts lies in the whole; the worth of elements is in their system; the life of the branches is in the tree. Indeed, of what use is a drop of water, which dries quickly? However, if it returns to its home—the vast ocean—it does not dry up. What is the value of "*the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire*" (Matthew 6:30)? These examples from nature obviously demonstrate the life force of the universe. When they are linked with their Life-giver, their value cannot be diminished. "*If that is how God clothes the grass of the*

field, will he not much more clothe you?” (Matthew 6:30). Is not human life just like grass? The Psalmist reminds us: “[T]hough in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered... All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan” (Psalm 90:6;9).

What is the point here? It is that the image of God, or Tao, is in the spirit of human beings. Whoever knows Tao and lives in Tao will manifest Tao’s dignity, equality, virtue, justice, peace, good-will (or benevolence), and joy. Whoever does not know God and is isolated from God is like a blind person who struggles in the dark with sin and desire and then ultimately dies. Without Tao, what is the benefit of a worldly teaching about righteousness? When Tao is lost to people, nothing can replace Tao. Such is Tao in Lao Tzu’s vision.

As we can see, Tao does not judge people by morality alone or by standards human beings create, but by whether human beings have or do not have a relationship with Tao. To God, human morality and actions have no relevance with regard to their salvation (God knows that no one is worthy before Him, because no one is sinless and holy), but their relationship with Jesus Christ determines everything (how simple!). God’s way is miraculously plain, and transcends all moral laws. That is why Lao Tzu says: “*Heaven and earth have no regard for benevolence; they view all creatures as straw gods offered to gods*” (5:1). We human beings are especially valuable to God; however, when we are separated from God, it is as if we are merely dust.

Lao Tzu continues: “*The space between heaven and earth is like a smelting bellows*” (5:1-3). This statement seems to lack any relationship with the previous sentences. As a matter of fact, “*smelting*,” with its overlapping meanings such as “melting,” “fusing,” and “refining,” conveys a sense of creating. The space between heaven and earth is the “bellows” where Tao creates and nurtures all people and all things. The value of human beings and all other created things is achieved in Tao’s creative, nurturing work.

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Lao Tzu goes on to say: *“Still and inexhaustible, the more it moves, the more wind it causes.”* A fuller translation reads: *“Do not regard the space between earth and heaven void; it is filled with power”* (5:1-3). At this point, Lao Tzu seems to feel that he has not understood something or not expressed his thought clearly enough and finds it difficult to make it clear, because he pauses and says: *“Many words lead to failing; it is better to be restrained”* (5:1-3).

Zhuang Tzu also illustrates this point in his story from *Da Zhong Shi*:

There were four people named Zi Ji, Zi Xin, Zi Li, and Zi Lai, respectively, who realized that life, death, existing, and perishing were the same. They became friends.

One day, an evil force overcame Zi Xin and caused his waist to bend over. His face stooped to his belly, and his shoulders protruded above his head. He had five large skin ulcers. When Zi Xin saw his reflection in the well, he exclaimed: “Great Creator! He has turned me into a feeble person!” However, he did not complain.

Sometime later, Zi Lai became ill. He could barely breathe and was dying. When Zi Li came to comfort him, Zi Lai said:

“When parents wish a son to do something, he must do it no matter which direction he has to take. The Life-giver has a plan for my life and also a plan for my death. When a blacksmith is making a utensil, if the metal suddenly jumps out of the furnace and says: ‘You must make me into a sword,’ the blacksmith must consider this piece of metal ominous. It is the same with people. I was created as a person. If I am quite arrogant and keep on claiming: ‘I am a person! I am a person!’ my Creator will regard me adversely. Now I see heaven and earth as a furnace. No matter what the Creator wishes to make me into, how can I not obey?” After saying that, Zi Lai fell asleep. When he woke up a little while later, he felt refreshed.

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In this fable, Zhuang Tzu compares heaven and earth to a furnace and people to material in the furnace. Only with absolute obedience does their life have a meaning. Otherwise, it becomes an absurd thing. When the human heart and soul submit to the Life-giver's will, human beings will find consolation and gain peace. Otherwise, they will sink into a pit of suffering and despair.

Zhuang Tzu's fable naturally reminds us of Job in the Bible. Job was suddenly attacked by Satan, his family was destroyed, and his body was covered with ulcers; however, he did not lose faith in God. He tore his robe and shaved his head; falling to the ground in worship, he said: *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised"* (Job 1:21).

When the Bible compares God to a potter and human beings to clay, it makes the same comparison that Zhuang Tzu makes in his fable, only in a different way. What is revealed here is the same relationship between the Creator and the created, between God and human beings:

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.
(Isaiah 64:8)

Does the clay say to the potter, "What are you making?" ... Woe to him who says to his father, "What have you begotten?" (Isaiah 45:9-10)

"O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel." (Jeremiah 18:5)

The worth of the clay is in the use by the potter who shapes it into a vessel, perhaps even a precious vessel. If the clay is not in the hands of the potter, it is only mud and remains mud. Similarly, the value of a person is in Tao. At any time, even in miserable situations, such

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as those experienced by Job, Zi Xin, and Zi Lai, a human being in Tao still has peace, faith, and hope. However, a person who is separated from God is like a straw dog that is not being used for sacrifices to God. He is valueless. Lao Tzu says: “*Apart from Tao, he is doomed to die*” (30:5).

The implication is clear: Everyone is being molded by Tao, the Potter; Tao is shaping each of us every second and every minute; in all of our lives, Tao is nurturing us. When we realize that we are being sustained, we will understand our relationship with our Life-giver and come to revere and obey Tao, unite with Tao, and pray to Tao.

As a result of being in this relationship, people seem gentle and submissive, yet are full of life force. In fact, such a person may appear to be simple and ignorant, yet possesses the source of wisdom. Why is this so? Because at that very moment, the branch

is linked with the tree; the drop of water is merged with the ocean; the clay is in the hands of the potter; the straw dog is offered on the altar; a person returns to his roots and his life is revived, guarding his mother, inheriting light. Even though his body is failing, he lives with no regrets and fears no calamities. That is the answer to the “why” question.

3. In the Vast Net of Heaven, Nothing Slips Through

Tao observes, supervises, rewards, and punishes. Although Lao Tzu does not devote too much ink on this point, he expresses it with firmness and clarity. Even atheists could not deny Lao Tzu’s position and could only comment: “Lao Tzu’s theory carries the superstition that Tao has knowledge and heaven has wills. It rewards and punishes. This is a privilege granted to God by human beings.”⁹²

⁹² Ren Jiyu 任繼愈, *Lao Tzu Quan Yi (Complete Interpretation of Lao Tzu)*, 5.

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Supervision and discipline manifest Tao's continuing grace after creation. Without rewards and punishments from heaven, which is beyond human power, human beings would readily give up their reverence for the mysterious supernatural force of Tao and become unscrupulous. The nurturing grace of God includes supervision and discipline in order to tame the corrupted human mind, cleanse the human heart, and direct human beings to a righteous path on which they may enjoy peace and blessings.

Lao Tzu writes:

Fear what people fear. (20:1)

*Of what heaven hates, who can know the reason?
The Tao of heaven wins without contention, responds
eloquently without words, shows up without being
summoned, and fulfills his plan without being noted.
The net of heaven is vast; its meshes may not be fine
yet nothing slips through. (73:2-4)*

*The Tao of heaven shows no favoritism; he is always
with good people. (79:3)*

The Bible, of course, even more clearly reveals such an omnipotent, omniscient, and loving God who is true and alive:

*From heaven the LORD looks down and sees all
mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who
live on earth—he who forms the hearts of all, who
considers everything they do.... But the eyes of the
LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose
hope is in his unfailing love. (Psalm 33:13-15, 18)*

Human history is filled with instances of evil power seeming to prevail, but evil rule has never lasted long. By contrast, kindness and virtue have always borne good fruit. Why is that? Why do people firmly believe in their heart that wickedness will be punished and kindness will be rewarded? What is the origin of the human

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heart's innate sense of justice, which can be seen in human history? What force guarantees such justice? Although evil-doers are elated about their wrongdoing, why do they wake up in the middle of the night with a start? Kind people may suffer, yet why is their conscience at peace? Why should you fear when the earth shakes? Why should you be uneasy when human beings commit evil deeds?

Since the beginning of time, reverence toward the Spirit has been the basis of ethics and morality. This bottom-line gives human hearts certain standards without which their souls would have no precaution or fear. Sin would flow out from the inner person like a flood, and no amount of punishments or law could prevent such a flood from spreading.

Imagine how alert and sensitive to sin a person is if he or she believes in an omniscient and omnipotent God who loves and rewards but also punishes. That person would have strong self-discipline and the ability to stay away from evil and to follow virtue. That is why Lao Tzu says a person holding Tao *"can renew himself in death"* (15:4); a person can offer the sacrifice of self and can experience Romans 12:32 which says: *"be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* Such is the nurturing grace of God, or Tao.

Section C. Tao: The Hidden Nature

1. Tao of Heaven: Establishes Name, Accomplishes Work, Then Steps Back

"To retire after winning success and reputation is the way of heaven" (9:5). Lao Tzu's idea of stepping back was often used to prove that Tao is a nature God, or a God of retirement. However, this is a twisted interpretation that takes the sentence out of its context. The work of creation in the beginning and the ongoing nurturing grace are an inseparable and perfect union. This union has a hidden nature.

Lao Tzu further describes the way Tao acts: *"With the highest and best ruler, people do not seem to know his presence. Tao moves*

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freely as he wishes; he has no need to give commands. Yet when the great work is completed, people say the occurrence is natural” (17:1-3). The authority of the supreme Tao is so absolutely perfect and kind that his actions are hardly noticeable. That is why Tao’s authority looks so “*natural*” (*ziran*).

In Chapter 34, Lao Tzu emphasizes Tao’s hidden nature and praises his nurturing grace:

He upholds all things, yet he does not boast; he accomplishes great work, yet he claims no credit. He loves and sustains all things, yet he claims no lordship; he seems to be small. When all existence returns to him, he still does not claim his lordship. Thus his name is great. From beginning till end, he never claims his greatness. His greatness is thus established. (34:2)

In another chapter, Lao Tzu further describes the power of the great Tao and Tao’s hidden nature, saying:

The highest perfection seems lacking, yet whenever it is applied, it never fails. The greatest fullness seems empty, yet use does not exhaust it. (45:1)

The function of God’s way, however, is even more clearly revealed in the Bible, which also emphasizes the concealment of God: “*Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel*” (Isaiah 45:15). Regarding human nature, the Bible comments: “*Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving*” (Isaiah 6:9).

Lao Tzu reveals tremendous insight into the hidden nature of Tao, fully grasping both Tao’s omnipotent power and effortless appearance, which reveal his transcendent quality and explain why people have a difficult time understanding the true nature of Tao.

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Tao creates, nurtures, gives, and sustains everything. In the same breath, Lao Tzu emphasizes that Tao does not force, does not boast, does not invade, and does not claim credit, all of which reveal Tao's natural attitude and explain Tao's innate will and virtue. Tao's effortless appearance does not negate Tao's existence or Tao's will. On the contrary, Tao's effortless appearance only proves Tao's greatness, virtue, and omnipotence and shows why Tao is worthy of our praise and gratitude.

Lao Tzu's explanation of Tao's hidden nature sheds light on a puzzling, ancient theological mystery: God's sovereignty and human free will, which we will further explore in this next section.

2. Tao (God) Created Free Human Beings

Since antiquity, Christianity has been burdened with these difficult questions: "Why does God allow so much suffering?" and "Why is the world full of evil?" To put it more directly, "Why did God permit Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and will? Why does God tolerate human sins? And since God is presumably an omniscient, omnipotent, loving and kind God, why did God not simply create perfect human beings, perfect just like himself?"

Lao Tzu has provided an answer to these questions: Tao does not deprive anyone or anything of freedom. Tao does not force or boast, does not invade or possess; neither does Tao dominate. In other words, Tao does not take freedom away from anyone or anything. What Tao has created, nurtured, supervised, and sustained is a free and lively universe, not a mechanical, robotic world. Lao Tzu clearly points out that this is exactly why Tao is so magnificent, benevolent, and mighty.

Let me elaborate on this point.

From the viewpoint of ethical theory, there would be no morality without free will. Freedom is the ability to make decisions on whether or not to take certain actions according to one's free will. In

other words, if I want to be quiet, I can be quiet. If I wish to move about, I can move about. Without free will, human actions would possess no moral quality, and thus their actions could not be subjected to moral evaluation.⁹³

Many people object to theism. They might ask: “If an ultimate Being controls the universe and humanity, would not human beings become puppets in his hand?” This question results from an unnecessary anxiety, a naïve hypothesis, and a false claim. If human beings are clear about the relationship between freedom and morality, they already have assumed that the all-knowing God, or Tao, understands reality even more clearly. God did not create robotic humans in the beginning when God created Adam and Eve. Instead, God granted them freedom of choice whether to commit or not to commit sin, that is, to eat or not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁹⁴ To this day, human beings still enjoy this kind of freedom.

Human beings can use their God-given freedom to even deny God’s existence. Exactly because of this freedom, our actions, whether believing in or denying God, obeying or rebelling against God, revering or blaspheming God, have ethical implications. God gives people free will because of His mysterious grace; at the same time, God endows human beings with moral attributes and moral responsibilities.

From an ontological point of view, God’s way itself is absolute freedom. In God, there is nothing that is not free. God will not create a human being with no free will—God created human beings in God’s own image. All human bondage is the result of human choices within the freedom that God grants.

Freedom leads to a serious problem: Many choices that human beings regard as free choices are actually bondages created

⁹³ Frank Thilly, *Xi Fang Zhe Xue Shi (History of Western Philosophy)* (Shang Wu Yin Shu Guan, 1979), 121-122.

⁹⁴ The ironic implication here is that human beings are free to use their own wisdom to rebel against God and rely on their own ability.

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ironically as the result of taking advantage of Tao's gift of freedom. For example, the freedom of immoral pleasure-seeking is, in fact, a loss of freedom because a person is under the manipulation of his lust and desires. Exercising the freedom of rationality that is rebellious to the will of God, or Tao, actually reflects bondage to one's own limited reasoning power. The freedom to declare war and self-defense is a manifestation of the human inability to extricate from hatred. On the other hand, the freedom of market and social competition can be seen as a demonstration of one's inability to detach from personal profit and self-interest.

Kant says: When a person is not manipulated by his desire, interest, or emotions, he possesses true freedom. Human beings can gain true freedom when abiding by the ultimate command of God, which shapes the innermost and outermost true spiritual self. When a person meets his Creator, he achieves freedom. The meaning of freedom is vividly expressed in a dialogue between Jesus and some Jewish leaders (John 8:32-59), which is partially given here:

Jesus: *"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

Jewish leaders: *"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"*

Jesus: *"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."*

Human bondages are not from God; they come from a human being's departure from God, or Tao. When human beings insist on going their own way under the illusion of walking in freedom, they slip into a loss of freedom without even realizing it. Jesus described such a state as when *"a blind man leads a blind man, both fall into a pit"* (Matthew 15:13). Lao Tzu means the same thing when he says: *"If one does not know the eternal Tao and acts arbitrarily, the result will be disastrous"* (16:7).

From the point of view of epistemology, freedom is the recognition of what is inevitable. Paradoxically, inevitability is itself true freedom. God is the inevitability of all existence, which is true freedom. Outside of God, true freedom can never be achieved.

The reason why God created human beings free was so that they would obey Him and enjoy freedom as God experiences it. However, human beings were tempted by lust and desire to take advantage of their God-given freedom to revolt against God and make themselves like God to judge between right and wrong, good and evil (Genesis 3:5-6).

Human beings are inescapably limited because they are created. All human wisdom that attempts to be independent of God (Tao) inevitably falls into relativism, which is in contrast to a kind of absolutism that actually exists in the universe and in the human heart. Thus, when human beings depart from the absolute God (Tao) and rely on themselves, they appear free; however, in essence, they are isolated from the source of freedom (inevitability) and fall into the realm of non-freedom.

Relativism entails conflicts. Conflicts require tolerance. Tolerance implies difference. Difference means “not in harmony,” which, in turn, signifies that something is not in compliance with its fundamental roots, or origin of being. Not grounded in their roots, people experience a sense of loss, absurdity, decadence, dread, perplexity, and anxiety—these are subjects of modern-day philosophy. That is why God (Tao) repeatedly calls humanity to “*return*,” “*return to the roots*,” “*revive life*,” “*repent*,” “*go back*,” “*guard Mother*,” and “*go to Father*.” This call to return is the main theme of the Bible and Jesus’ mission, as well as the wise message that God (Tao) passes to the Chinese people through Lao Tzu.

3. There Is No Freedom Outside of Tao (God)

Since Tao created humans with free will, why are people unable to enjoy freedom unless they are inside Tao? Does this mean that human beings are still not free?

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No. We must accept that, except for Tao, everything on earth and in the heavens exists under certain conditions and must follow certain orders. Lao Tzu states that man models himself after earth, earth after heaven, heaven after Tao; and Tao models after Tao (25:7). Only Tao enjoys infinite freedom; Tao is freedom itself. Birds cannot fly without air; fish cannot swim without water; speeches cannot be made without grammar; work cannot be accomplished without logic. The same thing is true of freedom. Following Tao is the minimum requirement for human beings to gain maximum freedom.

Today, in the name of freedom and profit, people have grown more and more greedy physically and mentally and have trespassed the ancient moral baseline of “revering God.” So, here is what we find: severe loss of morality, rapid increase in crime, prevalence of incurable diseases, destruction of the environment, and shortage of natural resources; and all the while, human greed is still endlessly expanding! In the meantime, intellectuals come up with one theory after another, such as relativism, individualism, humanism, hedonism, and pragmatism, providing a theoretical base for human indulgence and corruption.

While human beings beclouded by sin may cheat themselves, they cannot cheat God (Tao). It is true that God grants human beings free will, but freedom, just like people, is not beyond God. When people try to place themselves outside of God, they appropriate His freedom as their own; but ironically, they end up transforming that freedom into bondage and becoming slaves of sin.

God as God, how remarkable! Let's take a closer look here. Freedom belongs to human beings, but it belongs only to those inside Tao. Whenever people step outside of God (Tao), that same freedom immediately turns into bondage; so, the harder human beings try to gain more freedom, the deeper they sink into sin and punishment. How amazing! This phenomenon can be seen by comparing the way freedom has functioned, for example, in the United States in the past when the general population had faith and at the present time when so many have discarded their faith.

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Is this situation beyond God's ability to amend it? Does God want to take freedom back? No, God is God because He creates everything according to His own laws. A wise ruler does not have to issue commands frequently; he only needs to establish principles. When the law is made clear, the ruler can reign effortlessly. This is what Lao Tzu means when he says: "*Tao normally seems idle, but, in fact, he is in the doing of everything*" (37:1).

So, it is not a matter of God not being able to curb human corruption. God will never withdraw freedom from human beings. By the same token, God has predetermined the destiny of those who believe, revere, and worship Him, just as He has predetermined the destiny of those who deny Him and believe only in themselves. It is up to human beings, who have free will, to make a choice. Ultimately, we have only ourselves to blame for making the wrong one.

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**PART ONE:
THE SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF TAO**

Chapter III. The One Who Transcends

Tao is Ultimate Reality, penetrating and transcending all things. Nothing in the universe matches Tao. No wisdom in life surpasses Tao; no logic in the world circumscribes Tao.

Section A. Tao Transcends All Images

1. Imageless and Ineffable

Both Lao Tzu and the Bible speak about Tao, or God, as incomparable. Lao Tzu writes:

Everyone says that my Tao is too big to be imagined to resemble anything; it is precisely because he is so big that he does not resemble anything. If he resembled something, he would be small. (67:1)

The prophet Isaiah told the Israelites the same thing:

To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? (Isaiah 40:18)

And the great leader Moses told them:

You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke [the Ten Commandments].... Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the water below.

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And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven. (Deuteronomy 4:15-19)

From these references, it is clear that Lao Tzu and the Bible represent the only worldviews that so thoroughly exclude idolatry.

Here are Lao Tzu's reasons for excluding idolatry:

Although Tao is shapeless, it does not mean that he is not existing. Only that he can be seen but cannot be comprehended; can be heard but not understood; can be touched but not grasped. (14:1-3)

He is the form without a form, the image without an image, like a shadow. (14:5)

However, "...In the shadow there appears to be an image; in the shadow there appears to be a real being" (21:2); moreover:

The great voice is too loud to be heard; the great image is too grand to be seen. Tao is hidden and nameless. (41:6)

Obviously, Lao Tzu is not referring to a lack of visual clarity, but to the fact that he is trying to express the inexpressible. The "great image" of Tao is beyond the grasp of ordinary human senses. Human beings must "*block their senses and shut their door to intelligence*" to reach Tao (52:4; 56:2). Until they do these things, no exchange between the human heart and Tao is possible, let alone a fusion of the human heart and Tao.

A subtle and mysterious connection takes place like a shadow quietly coming to the heart, seemingly not there but there: "*deep like an abyss, he appears*" (4:2), and "*the infinity of the One is ineffable, returning to the intangible non-being*" (14:4).

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2. The Imageless Image

Lao Tzu describes Tao as “imageless” and “shapeless” on the one hand:

The great voice is too loud to be heard; the great image is too grand to be seen. Tao is hidden and nameless. (41:6)

Everyone says that my Tao is too big to be imagined to resemble anything; it is precisely because he is so big that he does not resemble anything. If he resembles something, he would be small. (67:1)

Then, on the other hand, he indicates that Tao appears to have an image:

... [I]n the shadow there appears to be an image; in the shadow there appears to be a real being. (21:2)

In a similar way, the Bible depicts God as “invisible” in several places, such as:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (Colossians 1:15)

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (I Timothy 1:17)

...God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. (I Timothy 6:15, 16)

At the same time, the Bible describes the experience of “seeing God” in these ways:

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*As I looked, thrones were set in place,
And the Ancient of Days took his seat.
His clothing was as white as snow;
The hair of his head was white like wool.
His throne was flaming with fire,
And its wheels were all ablaze. (Daniel 7:9)*

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw
the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted,
and the train of his robe filled the temple. (Isaiah 6:1).*

*By faith [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the king's
anger; he persevered because he saw him who
is invisible. (Hebrews 11:27)*

In the presence of such paradox, we need to pause and allow ourselves to explore the unseen spiritual space.

In a sense, the great Tao's existence is shapeless. A shapeless and imageless existence is one kind of existence. To our limited human senses, Tao may seem nonexistent. For us finite human beings, shapelessness creates a feeling of helplessness for two reasons: (1) because we are not able to use our five senses to grasp the great Tao, and (2) because human language cannot conceptualize the full truth about the great Tao.

Some would ask, "On what basis does one conclude that Tao actually exists if Tao cannot be recognized by the five senses?"

Besides having five senses, human beings possess a soul, which can experience what our senses cannot. The difference between our senses and our soul creates a contradiction between shape and shapelessness. When the soul experiences something that the senses cannot, the soul perceives a shape that the senses consider shapeless. Because God (Tao) has the kind of existence that is beyond the five senses, Lao Tzu advises that in order to see the true Tao, we must "*block the senses.*" It is only when the eyes of one's body and intelligence are closed, that the spiritual eyes can be opened.

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Lao Tzu's point is similar to what Jesus also says: "...*those who see will become blind*" (John 9:39).

Tao's transcendent nature is shown in both Tao's image and Tao's imagelessness. Lao Tzu highlights this paradoxical point in three profound ways.

First, he says that having an image and having no image are concepts that human beings use to describe Tao. This either/or objectification has no relevance to the truth of the self-existent nature of Tao.

Secondly, Lao Tzu suggests that the perception that Tao is imageless is relative to our senses and brain. When he says that "*beings are born of the non-being*" (40:2), "the non-being" refers to Tao, who is imageless in the literal visual sense.

Thirdly, Lao Tzu says that the image of Tao is tied to the soul. "*In the shadow, there appears to be an image; in the shadow there appears to be a being*" suggests perceiving a being through the eyes of the soul.

The key, for Lao Tzu, is to open the eyes of the soul so that it can see the seemingly nonexistent Tao. Only when seeing Tao can the soul speak of the imageless image that the five senses simply cannot experience.

It is clear to Lao Tzu that for people who use only their five senses and brain but not their spirit, Tao is completely imageless. These sensory-bound people do not recognize Tao.

3. Spirit and Matter

Lao Tzu does not use the word *spirit* directly to describe Tao. Instead, he uses "*huanghu*" (恍惚, "shadow," for the lack of a better word in English). In the "shadow," image, matter, energy, truth and faithfulness (21:2-4) exist in an invisible spiritual sphere. Lao Tzu is describing no ordinary spirit, but the supreme, true, and faithful

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Spirit, as well as the intense state of spiritual perception he is in when intersecting with the Spirit.

This special state reveals three layers of communication between human beings and the universe: human feeling toward things on a material level; human rationality with logic on an intellectual level; and the human spirit with Tao, the Spirit of God, the self-existent being behind everything in the whole universe, on a spiritual level.

According to the Bible, before earth and heaven were formed, only the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2). The Chinese translation of the “Spirit of God,” which is *Logos* in Greek (meaning “the Word”), is “*Tao*”: “*In the beginning was the Tao, and the Tao was with God, and the Tao was God*” (John 1:1). For Lao Tzu, Tao is the Spirit of God.

In the beginning, God bestowed the Spirit of God to human beings: “*The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being*” (Genesis 2:7). When the Bible says human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), this image refers to God’s Spirit. Here is what the Bible says:

*[A]nd the dust returns to the ground it came from,
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*
(Ecclesiastes 12:7)

*Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to
spirit.* (John 3:6)

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.
(John 6:63)

Relying on the Spirit from God, we human beings are able to communicate and become united with God. However, if we indulge in the sensual dimension, following only human lusts, feelings, and physical existence, we will be far away from God’s Spirit. In the same way, if we human beings become addicted to rationality,

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obeying only the principles of reasoning, calculation, analysis, and experimentation, we will find ourselves isolated from God's Spirit. It is only when we step beyond the entanglement and perplexity of the sensual and rational world that we can experience the irresistible attraction and illumination of God's Spirit.

Jesus once declared:

"...[A] time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4:21, 23)

In our original being, every human person has this Spirit, who is the only path to Tao. Relying on the God-given Spirit, we human beings are able to prevail over countless idols and move beyond magnificent temples. With this Spirit, it is not necessary for us to follow pilgrimage crowds, nor to deprive ourselves in pursuit of religious protocols.

Section B. Tao Transcends Human Wisdom

1. Lao Tzu's Humility

Human beings and Tao communicate in the realm of shadow, or spirit. When speaking about Tao, we have no choice but to employ rational language, including sense-laden descriptions. Using such language to speak about Tao poses a difficulty for Lao Tzu, who alerts his readers:

Tao can be spoken of, but is not the Tao we commonly speak of; a name can be given but not a common name. (1:1)

Lao Tzu's "Tao" is not the usual Tao, however:

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I do not know his name. If I were to label it, I would call it Tao, and if forced to give it a name, I would call it "the Great." (25:4)

Lao Tzu is positively certain of Tao's existence, of Tao's magnificent power in effortlessness, and of Tao's unfathomable grace and righteous judgment, but it is difficult for Lao Tzu to portray Tao with clarity.

Lao Tzu uses the following terms to express his helplessness in describing Tao: "*I do not know*" (4:3; 25:4); "*who would know*" (73:2); "*like*" (4:1, 2); "*as if*" (6:3); "*cannot be perceived*" (14:1); "*were to label it*" (25:4); "*if forced to name it*" (25:4); "*better to be restrained*" (5:3); and so forth.

Also, Lao Tzu uses the following words to express the unfathomable nature of Tao: "*mysterious*" (1:4, 5; 10: 7; 51: 4; 65:24); "*wonderful*" (1:2-5; 27:6); "*yi, xi, wei*" (14:1); "*subtle*" (15:1); and so forth.

Moreover, Lao Tzu uses the following phrases to depict Tao's hidden nature: "*abyss*" and "*deep*" (4:1); "*shadow*" (14:5; 21:2); "*unbroken*" (6:3); "*unsearchable*" and "*invisible*" (14:4, 6); "*in his depth and darkness*" (21:3); "*solitary*" (25:2); "*vast*" (73:4); and so forth.

Although Lao Tzu uses these words to capture a sense of Tao, it is not possible for him to capture Tao from an objective point of view. The words Lao Tzu uses merely give an impression of Tao that conveys his subjective sense of Tao. Tao is seen in a spiritual vision. Once Lao Tzu attempts to rationally communicate this spiritual vision, it instantly becomes blurry, similar to the uncertainty principle proposed by the German physicist Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976). Heisenberg points out that when the position of an atom is measured with a photon, the reflected photon will change the

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momentum of the atom by an uncertain amount inversely proportional to the accuracy of the position measurement.⁹⁵

The same principle applies to our interaction with Tao. When we try to employ a rational tool like language to pinpoint the meaning of an object—in this case, the spiritual vision of Tao, we find that the tool of language is too primitive and inadequate in comparison to the object of our description: Tao. Similarly, we now can understand why Lao Tzu uses so many words, such as those listed above, in his book of only five-thousand Chinese characters.

This limitation of language testifies to the supremacy of Tao on the one hand, but demonstrates, on the other hand, Lao Tzu's humility and sincerity, an attitude with which he approaches and truly recognizes Tao.

Unlike those who become more confident when they gain a certain kind of knowledge or skills, people who know Tao discover the existence of their ignorant, limited, and sinful nature. Lao Tzu says: *"Pursue knowledge, and you will become increasingly conceited; pursue Tao, and you will become increasingly humble"* (48:1). The more he admires the grace of Tao, the more he laments human morality; the more he esteems the mystery of Tao, the more he bemoans human wisdom; the more he appreciates the power of Tao, the more he is astounded by human arrogance; and the more he respects the benevolence of Tao, the more he regrets human disobedience. Therefore, he cannot help but write:

Mystery upon mystery, the gate of all wonders! (1:5)

Who can know the mystery behind it? (58:2)

What profound grace! (10:7; 51:4)

⁹⁵ Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (*She Jian Jian Shi*. Translated by Xu Mingxian and Wu Zhongchao. Yi Wen Yin Shu Guan, 1990), Chinese version. 52, 167.

What great virtues! How mysterious! How profound!
(65:4)⁹⁶

2. From Ordinary Wisdom Arises Falsehood

Since the five senses and the brain cannot touch the Spirit of God, those who rely solely on their five senses and brain cut themselves off from Tao.

Some have criticized Lao Tzu, calling him “anti-wisdom” and “obscurantist.” Things are not that simple! What does Lao Tzu really mean?

First of all, it is not possible to enter the sphere of Tao by relying solely on human knowledge. Lao Tzu is not the only one who holds this opinion. Kant once said that rationality does not lead to the world beyond; only faith does. Francis Bacon’s aphorism is very well-known: “Knowledge is power.” However, people fail to pay attention to an additional Bacon expression that shallow knowledge tends to push people toward atheism, while deeper pursuits will lead people to convert to religion. Even so, human beings cannot rely on pure reason to receive the mystery of Heaven.

Knowledge derived from the sense organs and science is useless in the divine realm. The five senses are like the sun, which blinds us to the stars during the day. Although the senses disclose the appearance of the earth, they shroud the sphere of Heaven. We must obey sacred principles, even if our will secretly complains, and we must follow God’s commandments, even if such obedience offends our rationality.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ The Bible expresses the same sense: “Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great” (I Timothy 3:16); “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.” (Romans 11:33-36).

⁹⁷ Thilly, *Xi Fang Zhe Xue Shi*, v. 2, 24-25.

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Secondly, since it is impossible to rely on knowledge to enter Tao, Lao Tzu believes that indulging in knowledge can prevent people from pursuing Tao. Seeking knowledge alone runs in the opposite direction of Tao, and regarding knowledge as the truth denies the truth of Tao. Thus, he urges the reader: “*Empty yourself to the utmost and simplify yourself in tranquility*” (16:1), and “*Refuse human knowledge and discard human wisdom*” (19:1-2).

Lao Tzu writes:

*My words are easy to understand and easy to live by;
yet no one in the world understands them and lives by
them. (70:1)*

Why is Lao Tzu saying this?

*Because in their own conceit, they thought they
possess knowledge; therefore, they do not understand
me [my words and my undertaking]. (70:2)*

Earlier, Lao Tzu reported that the Holy One leads people to “*seek no knowledge, no desire, and curb their behavior*” (3:5). Of course, in Lao Tzu’s time, it was not possible for people to follow that advice, just as it is in our own time with the knowledge “explosion” and the reliance people place on knowledge. Nevertheless, the principle of Tao has not changed. Even “knowledge” can distract us from the deeper Reality, whom we already know.

In a third point, Lao Tzu suggests how serious the problem is: human wisdom not only prevents people from communicating with Tao and entering Tao, but also blinds people, causing them to slip into sickening sin without realizing it. Lao Tzu says: “*From wisdom arises falsehood*” (18:2), and “*Not knowing that he does not know is a disease*” (71:1).

Mindful of the limits of human wisdom, Lao Tzu emphasizes that such wisdom is not the best means by which to rule a nation:

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Ancient followers of Tao did not make people cleverer; instead, they made them dull. People are difficult to rule because they are too [humanly] wise. Therefore to rule a nation with [human] wisdom will be a detriment to the nation; to rule a nation without [human] wisdom will be a blessing to the nation.

Know that these two are eternal principles; to always remember eternal principles is to have great virtues. What great virtues! How mysterious! How profound! They run contrary to human affairs, yet they lead eventually to a great harmonious flow! (65:1-4)

3. Destroying the Wisdom of the Wise, Frustrating the Intelligence of the Intelligent

What does the Bible say about human wisdom? The words of Jesus: “Those who see [without the eyes of faith] will become blind [in spirit]” (John 9:39) could be considered the leading principle of the transcendent nature of faith.

Lao Tzu expresses the same idea:

Unaware that he sees, he sees clearly. (22:3)

Blind are those who think they can see. (24:4)

During the waning years of the Spring and Autumn period, people turned their backs on Tao, but they were not like people of today who arrogantly deny the existence of Tao through the use of their knowledge and intelligence. The poems of Hong Lou Meng (*Dreams of the Red Mansion*) describe this attitude: “When the false [relative and limited knowledge] becomes the true [the ultimate limitless Tao], the true turns into the false”; “when nothingness [temporary illusionary indulgence] becomes everything, then everything [true eternal life] turns into nothing. The clever is harmed by the cleverness, and what a pity to forfeit a beautiful life for cleverness!” (Bracketed words are the author’s own.)

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In a similar way, the Bible says:

He catches the [worldly] wise in their craftiness.
(Job 5:13)

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate. (I Corinthians 1:19, quoting Isaiah 29:14)⁹⁸

Our contemporary modern age is overflowing with not only a surfeit of human desires, but also an emphasis on human intellect, which many human beings regard as the supreme “wisdom” and the unique yardstick for everything in the universe. In reality, however, the several billion people on earth actually live on a tiny ball of dust.

If we compare the solar system to a room, the sun is like a soybean in the room, while the earth is like a speck of dust. To find the closest star, one must go as far as 100 kilometers (around 65 miles) outside of the room to find it. The Milky Way galaxy alone contains about a thousand-billion stars. In the universe, there are about ten-billion galaxies that are like the Milky Way.⁹⁹ From the perspective of the universe, pride in human intelligence toward the universe is not only morbid and sinful, but also rather absurd.

The Bible points out the limitations of human wisdom:

If any of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a ‘fool’ so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is

⁹⁸ The Apostle Paul describes the transcendence of God’s wisdom very clearly: “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than *man’s strength*” (I Corinthians 12:1-25); [author’s italics].

⁹⁹ John Houghton, *Does God Play Dice* (Yu Zou: Shen Ji Huo Qi Yu?), Chinese version. Translated by Qian (Kun, Mei Guo Fu Yin Zheng Zhu Xie Hui, 1992), 9-14.

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foolishness in God's sight... 'the Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.' (I Corinthians 3:18-20)

Think about it: Who is wiser—someone like Lao Tzu who transcends human wisdom or the one who clings to his own intelligence? Who is more well-connected—the one who reveres the Tao (God) or the one who trusts only in himself? Who shows more understanding—someone who relies on his spiritual sincerity to be united with the self-existent, eternal God or someone who indulges in his own rationality?

For those who understand the limitations of human wisdom, Lao Tzu's words seem easier to accept: *"In exercising discernment, who can transcend understanding and knowledge?"* (10:6).

God is not fathomable. Endless discussion demonstrates the fact that it is hard to clarify the essence of God. Facing the mystery of God, human rationality must be restrained. Refusing to do so is irrational, whereas accepting the truth is rational, as Lao Tzu affirms: *"To know the limit and to end in time is to avert harms"* (32:4), and *"Knowing when to stop and thus avoiding dangers, you will then live long"* (44:3).

Section C. Tao Transcending Dialectics

Some thinkers attempt to use the dialectical method to discuss Lao Tzu's theory. However, dialectics is a shallow method of analysis, because Tao is the absolute One who surpasses all dialectical phenomena. The dialectical sentences that exist in *Lao Tzu* serve only these negative purposes: (1) to criticize the "reality" of the sensory world; or (2) to disclose the limited nature of human beings; or (3) to reflect the difficulty in expressing the transcendent, ontological nature of Tao.

1. Relativity in the Human World

The first chapter in *Lao Tzu* describes the absolute nature of Tao, while the second one deals with the relativity of the human world.

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These two chapters form a comparison, which Lao Tzu describes in this way (2:1-2):

If everyone knows the beautiful as beautiful, there is already ugliness; if everyone knows the kind as kind, there is already evil. Being and non-being beget each other; the difficult and the easy compliment each other. The long and the short contrast each other; the high and the low point to each other. The voice and its echo resound with each other; before and after follow each other.

Lao Tzu seems to talk about “opposite sides relying on each other.” However, looking through the lens of Tao, Lao Tzu is not talking about truth, but merely the absurdity of human logic. When everyone is aware of beauty, it means that ugliness is already in existence; moreover, when everyone is vying for beauty, this is an act of ugliness. When everyone is aware of kindness, there is already evil. When everyone is fighting to be treated with kindness, this is an act of evil. Everything in the world, such as up and down, high and low, have and have not, before and after, is relative, not absolute.

In other words, a human action is not self-existent. What a human being expresses is not a real state of the universe. A helpless fallacy created by the human mind is not an objective truth. Lao Tzu says: “*Therefore, the cause of the Holy One is to rid of all artificial human attempts; the Holy One teaches without speaking*” (2:3). It is obvious that the Holy One transcends a human dialectical view of kindness or evil and beauty or ugliness.

Lao Tzu seems to indicate that “the opposite sides are coming together” (20:1):

*To flatter or to despise—what is the difference?
To praise or to resent—what is the difference?*

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Here he means that everything in the human world is relative, temporary, and changeable, pointing out the phoniness of human contradictions and dialectics. Thus, he says: “*The highest form of morality is to completely obey Tao*” (21:1). Under the ultimate oneness of Tao, these unreliable dialectical phenomena naturally disappear. Lao Tzu also seems to suggest that “the opposite sides are transforming into each other”:

*Blessings follow misfortunes, and misfortunes,
blessing—who can know the mystery behind it? The
sensible becomes absurd; the good becomes evil.
For long, this has been a mystery for man. (58:2-3)*

This interaction of opposites exposes the fluctuating nature of human affairs and the limitation of human wisdom.

Lao Tzu describes Tao:

*Therefore, the Holy One lives uprightly yet judges no
one; he is sharp but does no harm. He is forthright
but not unrestrained; he shines but does not dazzle.
(58:4)*

Here, Lao Tzu embraces the oneness of Tao, who can deal with everything. Since Tao does not change or insist on anything, there is no antithesis or adaptation on Tao’s part.

Earlier on, Lao Tzu seems to point out that “events always move toward the opposite side”:

*Better to stop pouring than to keep on overflowing.
Forge a blade with a thousand blows, its sharpness
will still not last long. Gold and jade may fill your
house, but how long can they be kept? Pride in
wealth and rank will only bring you curses! (9:1-4)*

Herein is the pathetic condition of human beings. The blind person insists that he can see, but walks in darkness. How can he avoid

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bumping into a wall? He realizes his blindness only after he gets bruised. This analogy is perhaps a good description of the human dialectical, analytical method!

2. The Limitation of Human Beings

Relativity and dialectics spring from the limitation of human wisdom, morality, and life. The concept of “up begets down, front begets back” means that human rationality must function in limited space and time to comprehend objects in the world. The idea that “straight becomes slanted” or “the kind becomes the wicked” reflects the fact that human beings make moral judgments based on their own interests.

Lao Tzu is saying that “sharpness cannot be sustained and wealth cannot be guarded,” because all such behavior is meaningful only within the limitations of human life. The limited nature of human wisdom, morality, and life forces human beings into a paradoxical existence. Then, the inevitability of death makes life contradictory; unavoidable self-interest makes morality relative; the inescapability of time and space makes wisdom absurd in its limitation. The culmination of all the limitations causes all existence to be “dialectical.” Some thinking people, experiencing the helplessness of their own limitations for so long, have come to regard contradiction, discord, conflict, absurdity, and paradox as norms to the point of crowning these states with a pretentious name: *dialectics*.

The tragedy is not the limitation of human life, morality, and wisdom, but the fact that human beings often forget their limitations, especially at the moment of discerning kindness from evil and of judging right from wrong. Ironically, when human beings forget their limitations, they try to act as if they were God, judging even God without restraint.

When limited rationality confronts a limitless Being, a false dialectical front will emerge. It is unavoidable for human beings to sink into a dialectical illusion when they use their reasoning capacity to portray Tao. Such a portrayal of Tao is a false illusion, because

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Tao is always unified and never contradictory, absolute and never relative, independent and never dependent, immutable and never changing. Tao transcends all dialectical oppositions.

Let us examine a phrase such as “*Tao normally seems idle, but in fact he is in the doing of everything*” (37:1).¹⁰⁰ Some people argue that idleness is the highest code of conduct that Lao Tzu promotes. This kind of an interpretation simply reveals the interpreter’s ignorance about Tao.

Tao has always been in the doing of everything. Tao seems idle only to human eyes. Tao is like watching the moon at night. It appears as if the moon is moving among the clouds, yet it is the clouds that are moving, not the moon. Sometimes it seems as if the moon is following a child who walks under the moon, because the faster he walks, the faster the moon follows; however, that is not true. If you tell the child that the moon is the unity of walking and non-walking, he would think that is absurd. The fact that the moon seems to walk is only a human perception that has nothing to do with the truth of what the moon is actually doing. This analogy helps to explain why Tao seems idle, when, in fact, he is in the doing of everything. The word *seems* correctly implies an accommodation to the limitation of human senses.

Let us take two other examples: “*The soft and the weak will overcome the hard and the strong*” (36:2), and “*The power of Tao resides in weakness*” (40:1). Such phrases have been taken to exemplify dialectics and even have been turned into a kind of magic involving “the weak overcoming the strong.” As a matter of fact, Tao does not distinguish weakness from strength or softness from firmness.

Human eyes are used to the winner-loser model, but Tao “*wins without contention*” (73:3). For example, a person could look as gentle as water, yet in becoming one with Tao, he transcends

¹⁰⁰ See 34:4; 37:1; 47:4; 48:2; 63:4, et cetera.

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everything. If it were not for Tao in human reality, the weak would remain the weak.

How can the weak defeat the strong? Chicks cannot conquer eagles; lambs cannot overpower wolves. The triumph of the weak over the strong relies solely on divine intervention. Tao humbles and empties a person, making him appear meek and mild to human eyes. However, the one who resides in Tao is like a chick in its master's house, pecking food peacefully, or like a lamb at the feet of its shepherd, nibbling grass in tranquility.

What about Tao as "being" and at the same time "non-being"? Tao is actually "being," not "non-being." When Lao Tzu uses the prefix *non*, he already implies an existing "being." "Non-being" refers to limited human beings perceiving Tao as imageless and shapeless, as if the Ultimate Being is motionless, invisible, and unfathomable. That is why Lao Tzu says: "*Non-being and being are merely two terms for the one source*" (1:4).

Lao Tzu's non-being can be understood as a non (to human rationality and sensibility) being (to Lao Tzu's spiritual realization). It is thus evident that all descriptions about Tao's relativity, contradiction, paradox, and dialectics reflect the fact that human beings cannot help but be relative, contradictory, paradoxical, and dialectical when they try to perceive Tao.

3. Tao's Ontological Transcendence: The Absolute One

Although Lao Tzu demonstrates his own limitations while explaining Tao, he is, first of all, very aware of his own limitations. In various places, he repeatedly says things like: "*I do not know! Inadequate! Tentative! Inexplicable! Mysterious! Better to be restrained! Words fail to express what Tao means!*"

In addition, Lao Tzu is very clear that all relative, temporary, absurd, contradictory, and paradoxical occurrences, the so-called dialectical phenomena, disappear in Tao. Only within Tao do they reach a state of pure unity.

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Lao Tzu calls the realm of this unity “mysterious”:

Those who know Tao do not like to talk about Tao; those who do not know Tao cannot stop talking about Tao. Block passages to the senses, close doors to outside temptations, blunt sharp edges and dim dazzling glare, break away from ever-changing illusions, be united with the light of life, accept your dust nature—this is the profound and mysterious realm. Intimacy and indifference, benefit and harm, nobility and humility arise from a lack of unity with this realm. Therefore, only this realm is truly precious. (56:2-3)

In this other world, in this “mysterious unity,” the differences between intimacy and indifference, benefit and harm, and nobility and humility dissolve; everything becomes one. Consider Lao Tzu’s phrase: “*up begets down, kindness begets evil, beauty begets ugliness.*” Once we are in Tao, all the dialectical phenomena disappear.

Lao Tzu repeatedly emphasizes:

The highest perfection seems lacking; yet whenever applied, it never fails. The greatest fullness seems empty; yet use does not exhaust it. The most upright seems bent; the wisest seems naïve; the most eloquent seems slow. (45:1-2)

Tao is bright but men take it to be dark; to be growing in Tao seems to be retiring; to have peace in Tao seems hard. The highest virtue positions low like a valley; in humiliation lies the greatest honor. The abundance of virtue seems insufficient; the strength of virtue appears weak; the truth of virtue sounds empty. The great room has no corners; the great vessel takes the longest time to form; the

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great voice is too loud to be heard; the great image is too grand to be seen. (41:2-7)

These parallel quotations seem “dialectical.” As a matter of fact, in Tao, all contradictions no longer exist. All contradictions are man-made. For example, why is there no voice in Tao? The voice is too loud to be heard. Why is there no image of Tao? The image is too grand to be seen. Why am I not able to recognize Tao? Tao’s role is too great to be identified. Treating these situations with the dialectical method is meaningless, except to prove one’s own limitation.

Lao Tzu says: “*Knowing the strength of a male, but staying with a female’s loving tenderness, knowing his brightness but staying with obscurity, knowing his glory but staying with disgrace*” (28:1, 3, 5). Those who hold Tao transcend worldly dialectical contradictions. Lao Tzu concludes that great wisdom does not divide. In Tao, there are no divisions or disagreements, only oneness.

This state of oneness is described directly:

What is twisted shall be straightened; the wronged shall be rehabilitated; the dying shall be renewed; the needy shall be given; the plentiful shall be confused... The ancients said: ‘The wronged will conquer.’ That is no empty saying. (22:1-5)

Deeds like these are the work of Tao and remind us of Jesus’ transformative teachings:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

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You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brother, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
(Matthew 5:43-48)

These words are exactly what one expects from Tao. When we live in Tao, inequality disappears. Living in Tao, the low and the high become level. What is lacking is no longer in want, and what is abundant does not have too much.

Lao Tzu says: In the great Tao, there is no death, only life (6:1); no darkness, only light (14:3); no falsehood, only truth (21:3); no evil, only benevolence (81:5); no hatred, only love (34:3).

Jesus speaks with absolute authority:

"He who believes has everlasting life." (John 6:47)

"I am the light of the world." (John 8:12)

"I am the way and the truth and the life." (John 14:6)

"Now remain in my love." (John 15:9)

The Apostle John builds on Jesus' words by pointing out that whoever does not love does not know God, because *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8).

Those who enter Tao experience a pure unity of truth, kindness, and beauty. The true is the kind; the kind is the beautiful; and the

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beautiful is the true. This living faith surprises people and brings them to a sublime state of being. The sense of divine holiness that fills them makes them ashamed of their sin. Uplifted into an irresistible exaltation, they overflow with overwhelming gratitude. Such is the way of Tao; such is the way of God.

PART ONE: THE SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF TAO

Chapter IV. About Life

Under the monopoly—some would say tyranny—of humanism and naturalism, Lao Tzu's Tao has been reduced to nature itself with no relationship to life or human beings. It is as if Tao is a mere puff of cosmic energy, a cloud of primitive fog, or a man-made concept. The wisdom of Tao has been given a rank below human life rather than above it. This distorted view of Tao is not in accordance with the essence of Tao, the door to all mysteries, the root of heaven and earth, the mother of all things. Without a doubt, this modern view is not in harmony with Lao Tzu's 5,000-word description of Tao.

Section A. The Great Tao Has Life

1. The Life Running through Tao

Someone who opens Lao Tzu's book and reads through it nonstop will perceive in one glance what Lao Tzu says about the vitality of life in Tao. Here are some of the basic characteristics of this life:

Mother of all (1, 52): If children have life, how can their mother, who gives them life and nurtures them, not have life?

Door to all mysteries (1): Human beings often regard their own life and their own wisdom as the greatest mystery of the universe and the highest accomplishment of evolution. Even so, are they not still inside the "door to all mysteries"? Is not Tao the One who bestows life and wisdom?

Ancestor of all (4): Even we, the multitudes of the temporary and limited human species, have life and personality. How could it be possible that our Ancestor, the One who gives our life and sustains

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us with his omnipotent power far beyond our comprehension, not have life and personality?

The immortal God (6): How can the One who never dies not have life? Even human beings who disappear in a fleeting moment have life. So, how could it be possible that the immortal God does not have life? Immortality contains and transcends all temporality, does it not?

The root of heaven and earth (6): If there is life on the earth, which is only a dust ball in the vault of heaven, imagine the root of the earth and heavens! If there is life in each cell of the human body, how can it be possible that the Originator of life does not have life?

The Tao of heaven (9): When Tao's work is done and Tao's name is established, Tao recedes into the background. Tao has virtues and wisdom beyond human imagination. How could it be possible that Tao does not possess virtues and wisdom?

Yixiwei (14): Tao can be seen but not perceived and can be heard but not understood. Therefore, how could Tao's wisdom be inferior to human wisdom?

Renew when withering and dying (15): Tao renews those who are withering and dying. How could Tao not be real, energetic and full of vitality?

Return to root and revive life (16): All return to their roots; such a return is called tranquility. Such tranquility is called a return to life; such a return is eternity. How could such a root, or a source, not have life?

Life persists even when the body falls away (16): To return to Tao is to live long. Our bodies will fall away, yet we live on. Tao grants longevity and tranquility. How could Tao not have life?

Tao's name never vanishes (21): From antiquity till now, Tao's name has never vanished. How is it possible that the self-existent

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One (Jehovah, God), who is, in essence, truth, faithfulness, and grace, not possess life and wisdom?

Self-reliant and never changing (25): Tao stands all alone and is never changing. Even humanity, with its relative, dependent, and temporary nature, has life. How could such a self-existent, independent, eternal God, in whose embrace human beings exist, not possess life?

Directs all humanity to Tao (32): Tao guides humanity back to Himself, just as streams and valleys channel water to rivers and oceans. How could it be possible that the One who directs all to himself does not have a fuller life and superior wisdom? How could streams and valleys deny the water in the rivers and seas?

Loves and sustains all (34): The great Tao flows and fills the land—to the left and to the right. Tao upholds all things, yet does not boast. Tao accomplishes great work, yet claims no credit. Tao loves and sustains all things, yet does not lord it over the creation. How is it possible for this great Tao, loving and sustaining the world, humble and unassuming, not to have life?

The language of Tao (35): The name of Tao, when spoken, lacks appeal. Tao does not appeal to the eyes or to the ear; when applied, Tao's benefits are not exhausted. How could Tao, speaking to people and declaring Tao's ways, not possess life and wisdom?

In the doing of everything (37): Tao normally seems idle, but, in fact, is in the doing of everything. Tao accomplishes everything that is accomplished, including the creation of human life and wisdom. How could Tao not have life?

Based on this review through Chapter 37 of *Lao Tzu*, we can agree that Lao Tzu's Tao is real, vibrant, and full of life.

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2. Morality and Personality

Although Lao Tzu does not anthropomorphize Tao as much as the Bible does, Lao Tzu repeatedly describes Tao, using the following words: *Mother* (1, 25, 52, 59), with *faithfulness* (21), having *virtues* (51, 65), *inexhaustible power* (4, 37), *love* (34, 67, 81), *authority* (17), *judgment* (73, 74), *cultivation* (35, 43), *righteousness* (77, 79), *life* (16, 52), *forgiveness* (62), *salvation* (27, 67), and so on. Is Tao precisely God, that omniscient and omnipotent loving Being?

Some speculate that it is merely Lao Tzu's personification of the natural Tao. However, Tao is very multi-faceted, real and true. Who can argue that Tao does not possess a vibrant personality? Of course, to be more specific, Tao does not exactly have a personality in the strictly human sense of the word, but a set of characteristics that is higher than personality. Tao's life, wisdom, virtue, and inspiration are far superior to human life, wisdom, virtue, and inspiration. That is probably why Lao Tzu tries to avoid personifying Tao too much!

In Christian theology, God's personality is termed "person," which suggests that God has human personality characteristics, but God is far beyond human personality.

The characteristics of Tao surpass human personality, because Tao is the self-existent Jehovah. Tao is not only self-existent, omniscient, omnipotent, and loving, but also a life-giver. John 1:4 says: "*In him was life, and that life was the light of men,*" while Lao Tzu says that to return to Tao is to "*return to life*" and "*inherit life*"; that is, to return to real life and inherit eternity (16: 5).

Included in Tao's characteristics is personality, because human personality cannot be outside of God's characteristics. All of his characteristics inevitably contain all of our human personality, such as intelligence, emotions, desire, and so forth.

A scholar by the name of Heinrich Ott once said: "If the limitless being (no matter what name people give to this being) is truly

limitless and if he truly holds the key to the door of all mysteries, [referring to Lao Tzu's phrase] he should symbolically have ears for listening and eyes for observing.”¹⁰¹ Why does Ott say that? If we, limited human beings that we are, can listen and look, surely the Limitless One should be able to do those things and more. Why not?

Tao possesses personality so that people then are able to have a relationship with Tao and communicate with Tao. In such a relationship, Tao is accessible to us and credible. Also, the fact that Tao has personality allows people to use anthropomorphic language to describe Tao truthfully. Lao Tzu uses such words as: *mother*, *grace*, *love*, *forgive*, and so forth; Zhuang Tzu uses the term *Creator/Sustainer*. The Bible uses words, such as *Heavenly Father*, *Lord*, *redeemer*, and so forth.

Of course, Tao exceeds human personality, and that is why people are not able to understand and recognize Tao completely. As a result, human beings may retain a sense of mystery and reverence toward Tao. Simply personifying God has its shortcomings, because personified expressions are insufficient to convey God's greatness, subtlety, and profundity. It is also good to keep in mind that any finite representation that leads to idolatry is not compatible with God's limitless, transcendent, and self-existent nature.

In the historical development of Christianity, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, there sometimes has been a tendency to over-personify or totally personify God, whether in the liturgical or catechetical tradition. The Roman Catholic Church not only uses statues and paintings to represent God the Father and God the Son, but also suggests that the papal hierarchical system represents the Kingdom of God. Here is an example of finite humanity trying to characterize the infinite God. Since the Protestant Reformation, this tendency, beginning in the early 1500s, has lessened; however, the propensity totally to personify God still exists.

¹⁰¹ Au Te, *Shang Di* (God) (Xiang Gang She Hui Zhe Shi Chu Ban She, 1990), 4.

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In religious practices, the “personality” of God tends to conceal the aspects of God that surpass human personality, with the end result that God is over-personified, such as if we refer to God only as “our Friend,” “our Helper,” or “the Man upstairs.” In English, the character of God is called “personality.” Although it is necessary to use this term to distinguish the Gospel from deism, the act of over-personification narrows and distorts the nature of God and seriously confuses faith and superstition.

Of course, it is impossible for human beings to go beyond their own limited capacity to understand and describe the limitless Being. As a matter of fact, when the limitless Being self-reveals to human beings, we try to frame our experience of God in limited ways, such as visualizing, personifying, and secularizing God so that we are able to comprehend and accept him. Limiting God is a totally human reaction. Doctrinal and denominational fights, undoubtedly, have something to do with this human tendency.

There is only one limitless God, but there are many limited denominations. Individual believers have their own personified God. No wonder people say that the image of God is made by human beings. Such misunderstanding is due to the over-personification of God within some denominational traditions. Over-personification limits God and ultimately neutralizes God’s power. The result is as dangerous as deism or even atheism.

When Lao Tzu introduces Tao, he compares Tao with certain human qualities. He does not over-personify Tao. To compare Lao Tzu’s Tao with popular religious practice that tends to over-personify God, Lao Tzu’s Tao seems to lack a common “religious” flavor. Is such criticism fair?

Today’s believers often wish “to see God’s face.” However, Jehovah told Moses: “[Y]ou cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live” (Exodus 33:20). When Jesus was in the world, he called God “Father” and at the same time called God “Spirit.” As an incarnated human being, Jesus transcended his body. He said, “*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing*” (John 6:63).

When Lao Tzu talks about Tao, he often applies anthropomorphic language, while at the same time using numerous phrases, such as “unsearchable,” “mysterious,” “shadowy,” “permeating” and “imageless,” to communicate and convey the spiritual aspect of Tao. Comprehensively grasping the fullness of God’s characteristics, which encompass and surpass human personality, is vitally important. Also important is the understanding that while God can be recognized and spoken of, God cannot be completely known, let alone be thoroughly explained.

3. The Inability to See the Life of Tao

Lao Tzu frequently uses anthropomorphic language to portray Tao as giving and sustaining life, being faithful, and having such qualities as sovereignty, power, virtues, love, authority, judgment, enlightenment, justice, life, forgiveness, salvation, and so forth. However, people would rather believe that Tao is nature itself without personality. Why?

The answer is simple: the life of Tao is so much greater than that of human life that human beings, although residing inside Tao, are not even aware of Tao’s unlimited spiritual existence, let alone noticing the life that Tao represents. Lao Tzu describes this state in the following way:

The great voice is too loud to be heard; the great image is too grand to be seen. Tao is hidden and nameless. (41:6, 7)

Earlier, Lao Tzu compares Tao to a ruler:

With the highest and best ruler, people do not seem to know his presence. Tao moves freely as he wishes; he has no need to give commands. Yet when the great work is completed, people say the occurrence is natural. (17:1, 3)

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Lao Tzu vividly demonstrates how people look but do not see, listen but do not hear, and grab but do not grasp while facing Tao's transcendent existence.

In Christianity, who can trace God's life? Where does God show his personality in the church and in doctrines? Jesus said: "*The time is coming when you will worship the Father* neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (John 4:21), and "*[T]he kingdom of God is within you*" (Luke 17:21). When teaching his disciples, Jesus said: "*But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen*" (Matthew 6:17-18).

Let us imagine viruses in people's intestinal canals. Viruses have life. They are sustained by the "provisions" of the intestinal walls. They adapt to temperature, humidity, and other conditions. They grow and multiply rapidly. In a seeming instant, they can produce generations upon generations. To them, the intestines "seem" to be an eternal existence. The environment supporting them is a natural and material substance. If viruses could think, they might think like this: "*Our life, though short compared to the intestines, is a real life. It has the intelligence to absorb the resources in the intestines. Although the intestines occasionally sound like earthquakes, natural disasters, and meteoric showers, they function according to their regular disciplines. We must rely on our own wisdom to gradually understand, adapt and use these disciplines.*" The viruses are, therefore, very proud of themselves!

This parable may not be perfect. What it attempts to convey is the truth that while viruses have life, how can they rely on their own wisdom to comprehend the life of the human body, which is far more complex than their life? How can they truly understand the essence of their own life? Their life compared to the life and behavior of the human body in which they reside is so very limited!

If we look at human cells in the perspective of their place in the universe, we would be enlightened. Although cells have life, they have no way to understand human life. The value, power, and

destination of human cells rely on their total obedience to the ordering of the human body and on a complete union with the body without ever departing from it. Lao Tzu emphasizes that the strongest power of human beings comes from their gentle obedience to Tao: *“Unite his heart with Tao to achieve a seamless union; overcome his flesh to be meek and gentle as an infant”* (10:1-2).

Zhuang Tzu also repeatedly says that we are fortunate to be created and nurtured as human beings and since we are being enlightened unconsciously, we should be grateful. The fact that our eyes cannot see Tao and our knowledge cannot comprehend Tao does not mean that Tao does not exist or does not have life; in the same way, there is no proof that human beings cannot find Tao.

Relying on faith, we can experience Tao’s faithfulness; relying on piety of the soul, we may enjoy the peace that Tao grants. In complete obedience, we can sense Tao’s guidance; in absolute gentleness, we can receive Tao’s strength. In a total surrender of our intelligence, knowledge, ego, gain, even life, we will obtain and enter into the never dying Tao and the forever living God (6:1).

Section B. The Great Tao Gives Life

1. Giving Birth: Mother’s Grace

Tao not only has life, but Tao is *“the mother of all.”* Lao Tzu comprehensively expresses this concept in Chapter 51:

All things are created by Tao—nursed by its grace, formed into matter, complete in its care. Therefore all things revere Tao and honor his virtues. Tao is worthy of reverence, and his virtues worthy of honor, not because Tao decrees it but because this is naturally so and forever so. Tao gives all things life, nurtures them, rears and develops them, giving them peace, love, and protection. Though he is the lord of all, he doesn’t rule arbitrarily. This is the unfathomable virtue! (51:1-4)

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Tao is the mother of life. Lao Tzu uses the word *mother* seven times, such as in “*mother of heaven and earth*” (25:3), “*mother of all things*” (1:2), “*mother of creation*” (52:1), “*mother of nations*” (59:7), “*receive mother*” (52:5), “*guard mother*” (52:3), “*eat mother*” (20:8). In addition, he uses the word *birth* more than ten times to demonstrate Tao’s authority and status.

Besides being the mother of life, Tao is the mother of nourishment. All things gain life from Tao and are nursed into different shapes and various kinds, to the satisfaction of one and all. Lao Tzu says: “*Only Tao excels in giving and bringing all to completion*” (41:7) and directly uses the word *love* to describe Tao’s sustaining power: “*He loves and sustains all things*” (34:3).

In addition, Tao is the mother of virtues. Tao creates and sustains life, yet “*claims no sovereignty, does not govern capriciously, does not claim lordship*” (2:4; 10:7; 51:4). In other words, Tao does not invade, does not boast, does not possess, and does not claim credits. Tao creates, sustains, and bestows freedom to life. What profound and great virtues Tao exhibits!

Lao Tzu uses the word *virtue* (德) forty four times to express Tao’s goodness. Here is how he describes such virtue: “*mysterious virtue*,” meaning deep and unfathomable virtue (10:7; 51:4; 65:4); “*long-lasting virtue*,” meaning eternal virtue (28:6); “*supreme virtue*,” meaning unsurpassable virtue (38:1); “*great virtue*,” meaning incomparable virtue (21:1); “*broad virtue*,” meaning boundless virtue (41:4); “*strong virtue*,” meaning mighty virtue (41:4), and so on.

Lastly, Tao is the mother of honor. Mother’s authority, love, grace, and virtue earn her the highest honor in heaven and on earth:

All things revere Tao and honor Tao’s virtues. (51:2)

Why was Tao greatly valued in antiquity? Isn’t it because in him seekers find and sinners are forgiven?

Therefore, Tao should be the most honored in the world. (62:4)

2. Feeding on Mother: Gaining Life from Tao

Lao Tzu illustrates that all kinds of life originate from Tao. All things in heaven and on earth, as well as the life of kings and rulers, come from Tao:

What the ancients attained is the One. By attaining the One, sky becomes clear; earth is stable; gods work wonders; rivers flow; all living things grow; lords and princes establish their rule. It thus follows: if not clear, sky might split; if not stable, earth might collapse; if not working wonders, gods might disappear; if not flowing, rivers might dry up; if not growing, all living things might become extinct; if not establishing their rule, lords and princes might fall. (39:1-3)

Lao Tzu could not state it any more clearly that all things, including heaven and earth, gods and rivers, lords and nations, gain their life force from Tao and then die, vanish, and are abandoned when they depart from Tao.

Even the life of ghosts, gods, and saints comes from Tao:

When the state is ruled under Tao, ghosts will trouble no one. Not only do ghosts trouble no one, even gods harm no one. Not only gods harm no one, even saints won't harm anyone. (60: 2-5)

That is to say that Tao controls even the life of those in the invisible spiritual realm.

The fate of nations depends on Tao as well:

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*When Tao prevails in the world, war horses are used
to plough fields; when Tao does not prevail in the
world, even pregnant horses will have to battle.*
(46:1)

*He who follows Tao in exercising his sovereignty
will not rule the world with an army. (30:1)*

Lao Tzu discusses the Great Tao's pervasive power from various angles and demonstrates Tao's vitality and widespread strength in all matters.

Lao Tzu's acknowledges that his own life comes from Tao. After describing how greedy, arrogant, shrewd people are, he says: *"I differ from all people, because I value feeding on Mother."* This phrase *"feeding on Mother"* (食母), literally "eating mother," has caused a great deal of controversy. Some prefer using the terms "nursing mother," "using mother," "milking mother," or "guarding mother," while others even change it to *"virtuous mother"* or *"gaining mother."*¹⁰²

Why is no one willing to use the concept of eating? Eating and drinking mother sounds like dream talk, which has become abnormal and irrational. People are accustomed to interpreting Lao Tzu's Tao as a "typical" Tao, although Lao Tzu emphasizes from the very beginning that his Tao is not the typical Tao.

If we look at a Bible story, we may come to understand the meaning of "eating mother." This account begins with the words of Jesus, who says:

*"I am the living bread that comes down from heaven.
If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This
bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the
world."*

¹⁰² See monographs on Lao Tzu by Chen Guyin, Yang Jialuo, Ren Jiyu, and so on.

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Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me" ...On hearing it, many of his disciples said: "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!... The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." (John 6:51-63)

Eating and drinking Tao, a gift of life from heaven, is like feeding on the milk of *Mother*. Lao Tzu's word "*eat*" vividly points to the fact that Tao is the spring of life, true and real. Given this sense, the word *eat* cannot be replaced by any other word.

3. Bellows: Creation vs. Evolution

When the topic of Tao's life was brought up in the beginning, some people must have thought, "*The thing that creates life does not have to have life! The thing that generates wisdom does not have to have wisdom!*" Although Tao is the mother of all, that merely means that Tao is the origin of life. Tao's life does not have to be patterned after the life and wisdom of human life and wisdom!

The theory of evolution, which has deeply influenced the thinking and behavior of modern people, dares to propose the hypothesis that

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life starts with no life, wisdom originates from no wisdom, and all living beings come from things that die. It is against common sense to follow this train of thought. The French essayist Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533-92) says: "Some say that everything we see in the world is produced by an aimless fate. This is an absurd idea. What could be more absurd than an aimless thing creating existences with wisdom?" According to this absurd way of thinking, he says, "Prior to the existence of wisdom beings, there is a possibility for the existence of non-wisdom beings."¹⁰³ Strictly speaking, that a power exists which can turn such a possibility into a reality is not only possible, but also inevitable. Otherwise, it would be simply impossible for wise beings to appear, regardless of how much time it might take.

What are the characteristics of such a power? Why would such a power work to turn this possibility into a reality? The theory of evolution totally sidesteps questions like these and uses "chance" to avoid such questions. A serious scientist should not accept that the universe is dominated and controlled by accidents. If that is true, no disciplines or laws would be reliable. What then could be the foundation of science? That is why Albert Einstein said, "God does not play dice," strongly suggesting that it is impossible for those who probe into the mysteries of the cosmos and see the harmony of the universe not to think of God and how chance cannot be ultimate.

Zhuang Tzu compares human beings to metal and heaven and earth to a furnace, whereas Lao Tzu calls heaven and earth "*a bellows*." The Bible uses the metaphor of a potter for God and human beings his clay; thus, heaven and earth are a kiln. When metal or clay becomes a utensil, if it has "wisdom" and traces its origin, it will discover it comes from the earth and is only dust. During a lengthy, time-consuming process, the metal or clay "accidentally" enters into a condition where it is dissolved and mixed under a certain temperature, humidity, and pressure; then it is shaken, soaked, softened, made into a lump and turned into a rough shape; finally, it is smoothed, sprayed on, given a label, decorated, and so on. Step

¹⁰³ *Lun Fa De Jin Shen (On Spirit of Law)* (Shang Wu Yin Shu Guan, 1982), v. 1, 1-2.

by step, the metal or clay has “evolved” into the “advanced” vessel it has become today.

The vessel might have some understanding of the creative process, the condition, material, and procedures, but how can it “prove” the wisdom of the “creator” who controls everything? Just like a computer or a car. In the production line, the process, from the starting point to the finish line, is the “evolution” process. However, the truth is that computers and cars are produced by human beings. Also, computers and cars cannot “prove” this fact, because their creator’s life and wisdom are far beyond their own life and wisdom. The created being can never comprehend the wisdom of the creator, and the most advanced product is still a product, not a producer. In fact, the more advanced the product, the more evident is the wisdom of the producer.

The same point can be made about things on the earth: water, dust, air, sunshine, vegetation, and animals, and so forth. An “evolution” in time and space produced human beings with wisdom. The earth is like a factory that has the condition, facility, and ability to create such products. “If there is a creator...he may have created humankind using a method that is beyond scientific understanding. The method may be understood a little by science. The important thing is that there is a design and a purpose in the productive process.” (This is never knowable to humans.)¹⁰⁴

I would say that the most important thing is the fact that there is a Creator, a point that already has been proven. Suppose some aspects of the theory of evolution are reasonable, such as the design of necessary conditions, precise control of the process, the turning of a possibility into a reality, the complete harmony of the environment for human existence and so on. Certainly, all of these aspects illustrate the existence of a higher existence having superior wisdom. The prophets of Israel and Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu of China

¹⁰⁴ Zhan Feili, *Shen Pan Da Er Wen (Judging Darwin)* (Zhong Xin Chu Ban She, 1994), 137.

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compared earth and heaven to a furnace, a bellows, and a kiln. These are visions from God revealing his role, are they not?

The last line of defense for evolution and all atheistic theories is rationalism, which arrogantly asserts: "Reason cannot prove God or his design ability."¹⁰⁵ In their publication *Declaration of Humanism*, a group of atheist scholars say: "There is no sufficient evidence to persuade us about the existence of supernatural power."¹⁰⁶ Now, consider these questions: "Can the pottery examine the potter?"; "Can Ford vehicles discover how Mr. Ford invented Ford vehicles?"; and "Can computers inspect their designers?" If God does not reveal himself to human beings, how can human beings relying on their own reasoning ability to recognize God? Unless rationalism can prove that human rationality is omnipotent and surpasses all wisdom, it has no right to judge the most mysterious things in the universe, including the development of human beings and their destination.

Without relying on rationality, how can human beings think and communicate? With rationality, how can human beings discuss subjects beyond rationality? Human beings have spirituality. We depend on honesty and sincerity to perceive the existence of God and receive God's revelations. Rationality is, by no means, the only human ability, nor the highest.

Mere rationality, as Lao Tzu says, prevents human beings from connecting with God's Tao. For this reason, prophets repeatedly have emphasized humility, while urging people to transcend worldly intelligence and connect with Tao with their heart and soul. When human spirituality revives, rationality returns to its rightful place, does not trespass, and judges things beyond its realm. No longer does true rationality serve the instincts of the human senses or indulge in its limited self, but instead submits to the spiritual light that is linked to eternity.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 137.

¹⁰⁶ James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Intervarsity Press, IL, 1988), 64.

Now, although it still cannot “prove” the existence of God, rationality can communicate Tao’s blessed grace, discuss the experiences of the heart and the soul, convey the revelations of God, and uphold the sacredness of faith. The effectiveness of rational expressions about spirituality depends on the awakening of the soul; as an ancient proverb says: “When spirit dawns, hearts touch.”

Section C. Return to the Life of Tao

1. Human Life Residing in Tao

Let us return to Lao Tzu’s words:

*Man models himself after earth, earth after heaven,
heaven after Tao; and Tao models after himself. (25:7)*

This sentence is crucial to the understanding of Lao Tzu’s Tao, for it conveys the concept that the ecology, life, and value of human beings belong to an existential system. Human beings do not live independently, but rely on the system in which they exist. Moreover, they do not create their own laws, and have the least right to establish their laws for themselves. The truth of this concept has been well established in the science of ecology. Geocentric theory was discarded long ago. However, this concept as of yet has not been received into the field of life science. Human life is still considered the product of an accident. In this value system, the concept of a moral standard above human invention meets the strongest resistance. Here, human interests are regarded as the only unique standard in the universe; human wisdom is considered as the only unique rational ability; and human efforts are treated as the only unique salvation.

According to Lao Tzu, human ecology, human life and value are not the only things that are part of Tao. If isolated from Tao, human life and value will separate from reality and sink into illusion; thus departing from laws that human beings depend on constantly, they will end up in disastrous situations. Apart from Tao, human beings disconnect from their root, become transient and die.

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To borrow from scientific terminology in the ecological sphere, the life and value of an individual exist in the overall system. An element separated from the system and a cell separated from an organism are like the straw dog not being served on an altar and a drop of water apart from the ocean. What kind of life and value do they have? Human beings cannot live without the earth; the earth cannot exist without the heavens; the heavens cannot be sustained without Tao. It appears that human beings are separated from Tao by the earth and the heavens, yet human beings are endowed with the Spirit, possessing the life force granted by the Creator. Because of this act of creation, human beings are able to reach toward and connect with God directly and ultimately receive eternal life.

Jesus vividly makes the comparison between himself as the true vine and human beings as the branches on the vine, saying:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” (John 15:5-6)

The life and value of the branches belong to the vine; they are inseparable. If branches rebel against the vine and try to be independent, they end up dying.

Similarly, Lao Tzu writes that branches and leaves are soft and gentle, but they are alive; once they make themselves hard and strong, they die:

Therefore, the hard and strong belong to death; the soft and the weak belong to life. (76:2-3)

Jesus repeatedly says: “[W]hoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it” (Matthew 16:25; see also John 12:25). While this seeming contradiction sounds harsh, it carries deep meaning.

2. The Loss of True Life

Deluded by their own desires, wisdom, and morality, people depart from Tao and end up losing real life and living in death. Lao Tzu describes this situation in the following way:

At the moment of birth, men begin to die. Men live with their four limbs and nine apertures; men die with their four limbs and nine apertures. Men send themselves to the graves with their four limbs and nine apertures. (50:1)

Why does Lao Tzu say this? He offers three reasons:

The first reason is that human greed and the tendency to live a profane life lead to the death of real life.

Much greed will lead to great disasters; storing much will lead to great losses. (44:2)

Men send themselves to the graves...Why is so? It is because they are too indulged in worldly pleasures. (50:2)

Note that the Bible says: “*Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death*” (James 1:15).

The second reason is that human reliance on one’s own ability also leads to the death of real life. Lao Tzu repeats this point three times: “*Death looms near when it does not come from Tao,*” which also could be translated as: “Departure from Tao leads to an inevitable eternal death.”

What does “departure from Tao” mean? Here is Lao Tzu’s answer: “*Rule the world with army, seeking no benevolent results, relying on force*” (30:1, 3, 5); “*rely on their own strength, stick on their own path*” (42:5); and “*those controlled by their flesh and are contrary*

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to the way of eternity are doomed to die” (55:5). The Bible concurs: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

The third reason Lao Tzu gives is that human pride in one’s own wisdom is another avenue that leads to the death of real life:

*Unlock your passage to senses, use your cleverness
and ability, and throughout your life, you will not
reach salvation. (52:4)*

In Lao Tzu’s opinion, those who follow their flesh and desire, indulge in worldly pleasure, and rely on their own wisdom, will, and vigor deviate from Tao; they are doomed to die because of their departure from Tao.

O, people who are away from Tao, what is the meaning of your life since death is looming in front of you? No wonder people sink in the shadow of death, all the while struggling with absurdity, pain, and emptiness.

3. Return to Life

Three chapters in *Lao Tzu*: 16, 52, and 55 deal with the topic of “returning to life.”

Chapter 16 provides a thorough examination of what it means to “return to life”:

*Flourishing things of a million kinds, all return
to their roots.
Such a return is called tranquility;
Such tranquility is called return to life;
Such a return is eternity.
To know eternity is enlightenment;
Not to know eternity is waywardness,
Resulting in calamity.
To know eternity is to embrace whatever comes;*

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*To be just is to be complete;
To be complete is to be like heaven;
To be like heaven is to return to Tao;
To return to Tao is to live long.
Your body falls away; yet you live on. (16:2-10)*

How well said! Deep down, human roots reside in tranquility. In tranquility, human beings enjoy real life, which belongs to eternity. In eternity, the light illuminates.

Lao Tzu's contemporary, the great prophet Isaiah, expresses a similar view:

*In repentance and rest is your salvation.
(Isaiah 30:15)*

Jesus, the incarnate Tao, says directly:

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)*

Lao Tzu also points out:

*The Holy One is good at saving people, and no one is
abandoned. He is good at saving all things, and
nothing is abandoned. This is called following the
light. (27:3-4)*

The Holy One follows the light because Tao is the light of life; the world does not recognize the light (John 1:4, 10); not knowing the light, people do what they want and thus experience calamities. Only those who return to "the root, tranquility, life, eternity, and light" can be forgiving, righteous, open, complete, connected with heaven, entering Tao, enjoying longevity and peace; and although their body may fall away, they live on. Lao Tzu puts it simply: *"He who dies without perishing has longevity" (33:6).*

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In Chapter 52, Lao Tzu uses the parable of “returning to Mother,” sincerely urging people to return to the Tao of life:

*The world has a beginning;
The beginning is the mother of the world.
Knowing the mother, we know that we are sons.
Knowing we are sons, we must return
to wait on mother;
We can thus be safe and sound
even when our bodies disappear.*

*Block your passage to sense,
Shut your door to intelligence,
Your whole life will then be trouble free.
Unblock your passage to senses,
Use your cleverness and ability,
And throughout your life, you will not reach salvation.*

*To see the small is to be bright;
To remain soft is to be strong.
Follow the light,
Return to its brightness,
You will then keep yourself from calamities.
This is to inherit eternity. (52:1-6)*

Chapter 55 uses the “infant” parable to describe those who return to the Tao of life.

*One who has abundant virtues is like
a newborn infant.
Poisonous insects don't sting him;
Ferocious animals don't attack him;
Birds of prey don't harm him.
His bones and muscles are weak
but his grasp is strong;
He doesn't know the union of man and woman,
Yet his organ stands erect.
This is because his sexual vitality is pure and full.*

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*He cries all day without becoming hoarse,
This is because he is in perfect harmony.
To know harmony is to know eternity;
To know eternity is to see the light. (55:1-3)*

Some crucial concepts are brought up in these three chapters: (1) knowing harmony is called eternity; (2) to know eternity is to inherit the light; (3) to rely on the light, to return to the light, to return to the root, to return and wait on Mother, and to return to life are all called “knowing eternity”; (4) to inherit eternity; one follows the light; (5) Tao is longevity; bodies fall away but life goes on; and finally, (6) one can die without knowing Tao if he acts without Tao and experiences calamities.

These concepts can be sorted into the following categories:

First, *nouns*, which declare what truly exists:

- 1) *Light*: To know eternity is to inherit the light, to rely on the light, to return to the light. Light is Tao itself. “*Above the one there is no light, beneath the one there is no darkness*” (14:3). The Holy One is the light of the world.¹⁰⁷
- 2) *Root, mother, life*: Tao is people’s root, mother, and real life.
- 3) *Eternity*: Ever existing. Knowing that there is an eternal One (知常). To inherit the life of the eternal One (袭常) is to gain eternal life. (曰常). To know eternity brings longevity.

Second, *verbs*, which describe the actions that people could and should take:

- 4) *Know*: To know the union of heaven and mankind (知和) and to recognize the eternal One (知常).

¹⁰⁷ John 1: 4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35, 46, and so on.

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- 5) *Return, guard, revive*: Lao Tzu is urging the world to return to Tao because people have already departed from Tao and are lost and thus need to return to Tao.
- 6) *Inherit*: To inherit eternity is to inherit light. Human beings have neither light nor eternity in themselves. People can inherit light and eternity only in Tao.

Third, *adjectives*, which describe various characteristics, or qualities:

- 7) *Auspicious, lasting*: Something that benefits life is auspicious, for example, bodies fall away but life goes on. Tao lives forever. Those inside Tao experience peace and happiness, both physically and spiritually. Until they die, they are still in peace even in the midst of calamities.
- 8) *Disastrous, dead*: Without knowing eternity; people do what they want; such behavior leads to a disastrous end with no salvation. Death means not knowing Tao. Lao Tzu points out that those who deviate from Tao and rely on their own strength experience disastrous consequences. They are never saved and already have begun sinking into death.

At the end of this chapter, we now are more equipped to understand how Tao is life itself. This knowledge leads us to the next chapter about the “Revealer” and what Lao Tzu has to say about his name, actions, and characteristics.

PART ONE: THE SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF TAO

Chapter V. About the Revealer

Section A. Lao Tzu's Revelations

1. What Is Revelation?

The word *reveal* comes from Latin and literally means to “uncover the veil on the face.” In the Hebrew Scriptures, the concept of revelation refers to God disclosing himself to people, while according to a Chinese dictionary, “*reveal*” simply means “to enlighten, or inspire.”

The path to knowledge and the path to revelation are completely opposite. Knowledge is gained by an ignorant person learning from a knowledgeable person. However, revelation is given by a knowledgeable person revealing his knowledge to an ignorant person who receives knowledge passively. Suffice it to say that everyone can obtain knowledge, although not everyone can grasp revelation.

Those who are adept at gaining knowledge rely on their diligence, while those who are adept at gaining enlightenment embrace humility. Broad knowledge makes one's tongue the pen of a ready writer; however, deep revelation renders people speechless. It is also true that possessing great knowledge usually makes a person stand out, whereas receiving miraculous revelation often causes a person to withdraw from public acclaim. As Lao Tzu says:

*Pursue knowledge,
and you will become increasingly conceited;
Pursue Tao,
and you will become increasingly humble.
Keep humbling yourself,*

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and you will reach the state of being effort free.
(48:1)

One cannot attain Lao Tzu's Tao by human knowledge or wisdom. Thus, it is not only possible but also necessary that Tao is the One who self-reveals to human beings.

2. Lao Tzu: A Work of Sacred Revelation

How is it possible that *Lao Tzu* is not merely the expression of human knowledge but the revelation of Tao?

Let us first take a look at Lao Tzu's principles. It is well known that Lao Tzu urges his readers: "*humble yourself to the utmost and simplify yourself in tranquility*"; "*refuse intelligence and discard knowledge*"; and "*block your passage to senses, shut your door to intelligence*" (16:1; 19:1-2; 52:4). We might call this condition a *state of void*, which consists of three aspects: humility, emptiness, and tranquility.

When we are humble, we are better able to be emptied of self; when we are emptied of self, we are better able to find tranquility, which comes from a listening heart. Tao dawns only in such a state. Conversely, worldly people are often in a state of "behaving, or acting," doing something for the sake of self, for the advancement of knowledge, or for the acquisition of virtuous qualities; they are so preoccupied with their own actions that they have no room to receive Tao's revelation.

From this perspective, human intelligence cannot attain Lao Tzu's Tao. To attain Tao, one must remove human wisdom from the equation. Such is the revelation of Tao.

Secondly, let us consider Lao Tzu's descriptions of Tao. Tao's form, substance, and name are beyond the grasp of human rationality and scientific methodology. For example, Lao Tzu states that Tao is void and shapeless, with inexhaustible power, reaching far and deep; Tao, the ancestor of all things, is prior to all visible gods (4:1-3).

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How can mere human knowledge produce such an impressive and daring declaration? Lao Tzu obviously has seen a vision from the Holy Spirit. Lao Tzu says:

*What can be seen but not perceived
is called "Yi";
What can be heard but not understood
is called "Xi";
What can be touched but not grasped
Is called "Wei."
These three are beyond comprehension—
Together they become one. (14:1-2)*

Since Tao is invisible, how is it that Lao Tzu sees, hears, and understands Tao? It is abundantly apparent that Tao's revelation has enlightened Lao Tzu. For example, whenever Lao Tzu talks about Tao and the Holy One—regardless of Tao's bearings, actions, essence, abilities, or language—his comments about Tao are very mysterious yet so real, and his tone is humble yet so sure. One cannot help but be amazed by the fact that Lao Tzu must have seen the truth which is hidden behind the veil—beyond the sight of ordinary people.

The third point to consider is Lao Tzu's own comment that what he has seen and heard is from the Great Tao. In Chapter 21, after discussing Tao's highest morality characterized by truth and trust, he declares:

*From antiquity till now, his name has never vanished
so that people may see the father of all. How do I
know the father of all? By him.*

Undoubtedly, verses 4 and 5 of Chapter 21 provide the most precise evidence regarding the origin of Lao Tzu's thoughts.

Later, at the end of Chapter 52 and the beginning of Chapter 53 (these originally were linked chapters; chapter divisions were

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created by later generations), Lao Tzu once again declares with absolute assurance:

Follow the light [of] Tao; you then will keep yourself from calamities. This is to inherit eternity. This is why I am certain [of Tao] and walk in his path—the only thing I fear is to go astray. (52:6; 53:1)

It is obvious that bathing in Tao's light, Lao Tzu firmly believes in Tao; after having tasted eternity, he delineates Tao's eternity.

In Chapter 54, Lao Tzu continues:

*What the perfect builder [Tao] builds cannot be destroyed.
What the perfect preserver preserves cannot be lost.
Your descendants ought to offer sacrifices [to the perfect One] without ceasing.
So cultivated, the world will have virtues that prevail.
Applying that to itself, the world comes to know itself.
“How do I get to know what the world is like? By such application.” (54:4)*

From this passage, it is obvious that Lao Tzu observes the world through Tao. In fact, everything in the world depends on the relationship between the self and the perfect One. We know that Lao Tzu occasionally talks about worldly affairs. He always holds the opposite view from what people typically think and feel, yet speaks with such certainty, power and grandeur that whoever wishes to oppose Lao Tzu is disheartened by his own superficiality. Lao Tzu has the heavenly Tao as his foundation and sacred revelations as his support; his root goes deep and his energy reaches high.

In Chapter 67, Lao Tzu says “*my Tao*,” whereas in Chapter 70, he uses phrases such as “*my words*,” “*my understanding*,” and “*my undertaking*.” He also declares that his words have a root and his undertaking has a master. Since people do not recognize the source and the master, they can neither understand nor practice Tao. Thus,

Tao is “*a true treasure*,” which as Lao Tzu hints, “*is what the Holy One, who wears coarse attire, brings to the world*” (70:1-4).

In a book merely five-thousand words long, Lao Tzu repeatedly asks, “*How do I know?*” and then straightforwardly points out his “*root and master*.” This kind of response is quite unusual. When we consider that Lao Tzu constantly admits that he “does not know,” as evidenced by his use of such words and phrases as “*who knows*,” “*cannot be named*,” “*if forced to give it a name*,” “*uncertain*,” and “*mysterious*,” then the truth becomes obvious: Lao Tzu’s Tao comes from sacred revelation beyond knowledge, proof, and rationality. Tao speaks for Tao.

Section B. Tao is the Tao of Revelation

1. The Revelation of Tao in Words

Tao can come in words of revelation. In the Chinese language, the word *Tao* also conveys the meaning of “word”; for example, in Lao Tzu’s opening sentence “*The Tao that can be spoken is not the Tao itself*,” Tao can literally be *Taoed* (spoken). This use of the word *Tao* means “to put into words.” God’s Tao is God’s Word; God’s Word is God’s Tao. This is the mystery and wonder of the word *Tao*. Lao Tzu is talking about words of Tao that affect people:

*Tao, when spoken, lacks flavor.
He does not appeal to the eye or to the ear;
When applied, his benefits are not exhausted. (35:3)*

This sentence implies three layers of meanings: (a) Tao can be words revealed to people; (b) these words sound simple, clumsy, unpleasant, and unappealing; and (c) they, nevertheless, have the power of absolute truth and will never fade away. Lao Tzu also describes people’s reactions to Tao:

*When the best man hears Tao,
He practices it diligently;
When the average man hears Tao,*

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*He only seems to understand—attaining some and
losing some;
When the worst man hears Tao,
He bursts out laughing.
If not laughed at, can Tao still be Tao?*

Therefore, Jian Yan has it:

*Tao is bright but men take it to be dark;
To be growing in Tao seems to be retiring;
To have peace in Tao appears hard. (41:1-2)*

Three layers of meaning are found here: (a) The revelation of Tao can be heard and accepted; (b) only few would understand and practice Tao, while most people turn a deaf ear to Tao, looking without seeing, listening without hearing, and touching without grasping, and what is even worse, some sneer at and mock Tao; and (c) Tao definitely contains light, peace, and progress that those who turn their back on Tao cannot see.

In Isaiah, God says, “*I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I’*” (Isaiah 65:1). Jesus spoke a parable that describes people’s reactions to heavenly revelations:

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.”

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The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them... This is why I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

*'You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
You will be ever seeing but never perceiving.
For this people's heart has become calloused;
They hardly hear with their ears,
And they have closed their eyes,
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
Hear with their ears,
Understand with their hearts
And turn, and I would heal them.'*

"But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. What was sown on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. What was sown among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the

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*deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.
But what was sown on good soil is the man who hears
the word and understands it. He produces a crop,
yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was
sown.” (Matthew 13:3-23)*

No further explanation is necessary. Jesus’ parable and Lao Tzu’s depiction of various ways in which people react to revelation match so perfectly that they seem to have come as if from the same mouth.

2. The Great Tao’s Speechless Revelation

Through miraculous wonders, the Great Tao gives human beings revelations without words; to quote Lao Tzu, the Great Tao gives “*teaching without words*”:

*The Holy One acts without effort and teaches
without speaking. (2:3)*

*From antiquity till now, his name has never vanished
so that people may see the father of all. (21:4)*

*The softest in the world will rule and reign
the hardest;
That which has no substance penetrates into that
which has no cracks.
Thus I come to know the benefits of making no efforts.
Teaching without words and the benefits of making
no efforts—
Few people come to know these. (43:1-3)*

*The Tao of Heaven...
Responds eloquently without words,
Shows up without being summoned. (73:3)*

This kind of revelation is called “general revelation,” also known as “natural revelation” in theological terminology. Note that Psalm 19:1-4 concurs:

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*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech,
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.*

Such voice beyond language is what Lao Tzu means by “teaching without words.”

The great Protestant Reformation theologian John Calvin (1509-1564) says in his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book 1, Chapter 5, Section 1):

*God manifests his perfections in the whole structure of the universe, and daily places himself in our view, that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him. His essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraved in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse.*¹⁰⁸

God’s speechless revelation is, perhaps, even more difficult for contemporary human beings to appreciate compared to his revelation with words. It is possible that Calvin may have been thinking of Romans 1:20: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men [people] are without excuse.”

¹⁰⁸ Jia Erwen, *Ji Du Jiao Yao Yi* (*Institute of Christian Religion*) (Ji Du Jiao Wen Yi Chu Ban She, 1991), v.1, 16.

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3. Revelation to Receivers of Tao

Tao, whether with words or without words, can be understood only by those inside Tao. Jesus once said to his disciples when he was still in this world:

“...The Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.... But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.” (John 14:17; 16:13)

Lao Tzu says that those inside Tao know the ancient and the contemporary and understand the beginning and the end:

Hold fast to the Tao of antiquity, then you will command all realities of the present and know their coming and going; that is the essence of Tao's teaching. (14:7)

When inside the kingdom of truth, Lao Tzu says:

No need to go out to know the whole world; no need to look out of the window to see the Tao of heaven; therefore, the Holy One knows without having to experience, sees without looking, and accomplishes without effort. (47:1)

He who knows has no broad learning; he who has broad learning does not know. (81:3)

Once inside Tao and back to the root of life, a person transcends all worldly learning. How true this is! Those who are directly in touch with the Creator/Sustainer of the universe, with Tao, understand far more than those who are acquainted with the phenomena of the universe and human events. Surely, someone who grasps the essence of heaven and earth is more knowledgeable than someone who merely collects external representations of heaven and earth.

That is why the Bible in Proverbs 9:10 says: *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”*

4. Reviewing the Enlightening Tao from Proverbs in *Lao Tzu*

Lao Tzu’s 5,000 words have proven to be a gold mine of proverbs, which have become recipes for worldly behavior and personal growth for both young and old. However, can those who are not inside Tao understand Lao Tzu’s meaning? Let us examine a few of these proverbs.

“The soft and the weak will overcome the hard and the strong” (36:2). This sentence has almost become a slogan for power tactics often employed as a methodology in which the “gentle” get to “conquer the strong.” Actually, without the intervention of Tao, the weak remain the weak in this world. How can the weak overcome the strong? Without the great power of Tao, for what reason would the weak try to defeat the strong?

The great mystery is that humble and gentle people are able to receive Tao. Once inside Tao, they are connected with the power and blessings of heaven and as a result, have *“risen above the realm of death”* (50:4). However, by relying on one’s own strength, one may not enter Tao: *“those not inside Tao are doomed to die”* (30:5). Apart from Tao, it is meaningless to apply Lao Tzu’s sentence as a kind of tactical maneuver. It is similar to what Lao Tzu says—that everyone knows the idea of the soft and weak overcoming the hard and strong, but no one can implement it.

“By being effort free, you then can do all things” (48:2). Some will recognize this very common expression. People often regard it as promoting an attitude of passivism in dealing with worldly affairs. The expression even becomes a comfortable excuse for helplessness. Lao Tzu’s meaning, however, is that by being so humble, one can reach a state of self-emptiness to the point that one may be totally immersed in Tao and become one with Tao. In this effortless state,

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one can do all things. Lao Tzu echoes Jesus' words: "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*" (Matthew 19:26).

"He who knows [Tao] does not speak; he who speaks does not know [Tao]" (56:1). This expression conveys the idea that it is not about techniques of pursuing knowledge or cultivating spirituality, but about the reality of how people react when they are inside Tao—they find themselves speechless when they realize they are in Tao's presence. When Job heard the Lord's word, he replied: "*I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth*" (Job 40:4). When Moses heard God's voice, he hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3:6).

When Lao Tzu envisions the Great Tao, he repeatedly says things like: "*I do not know! Barely able! Who knows? Uncertain! Better be constrained! Indescribable!*" Because Lao Tzu does not dare to say too much once he recognizes Tao, he concludes that those who wag their tongue too freely and boast of their learning too frequently have yet to know Tao.

"Ruling a state is like cooking a small fish" (60:1). This sentence is often cited by government officials as a motto for managing the affairs of state, with the assumption that Lao Tzu is cautioning against recklessness; however, that is far from his meaning! Lao Tzu says: "*When Tao prevails in the world, war horses are used to plough fields; when Tao does not prevail in the world, even pregnant horses will have to go to battle*" (46:1); and "*when Tao rules the state, ghosts will trouble no one. Even gods will harm no one. Not only do gods harm no one—even saints won't harm anyone*" (60:2). Basically, he is underscoring the idea of effortless rule in Tao. Imagine that Tao is lost to human beings on earth. How could a ruler ever bring peace to his state by effortless rule?

"Not striving to compete enables one to become a mentor" (67:2). This sentence is interpreted as a strategy and is on the same level as other ancient Chinese sayings, such as "*birds sticking their heads out are easily shot*" and "*advance by retreating*." Lao Tzu is saying that people should not compete in this world because then Tao can

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be lost (53:3). Everyone is selfish and conceited, and haggles over every ounce (20:2, 4, 5). *“Some lead and some follow; some blow warm air and some cold; some strengthen and some weaken; some inherit and some overturn”* (29:3). Only Lao Tzu chooses to be different from others. He values *“feeding on Mother”* more than anything (20:7). The same idea is expressed in Romans: *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world”* (12:2).

“Of two armies of nearly equal strength, the grief-stricken side will win” (69:3). This expression was shortened into *“Grief-stricken armies must win,”* romanticizing the atmosphere of grief as a pre-war motivation strategy. Prior to this sentence, Lao Tzu says:

I dare not take the initiative in attack but would rather rise to defend; I dare not advance an inch but would rather retreat a foot. Thus there will be no need to line up, roll up sleeves, or pick up weapons, for there will be no enemies. (69:1-2)

We can see two things: (1) that the truly grief-stricken ones are defenders who are attacked, and (2) that they are not proud or conceited. Such people will receive divine assistance because God *“mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble”* (Proverbs 3:34). Jesus says: *“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh”* (Luke 6:21). This is exactly how God reveals his righteousness; otherwise, the world would turn into a complete hell where the strong trample on the weak.

“The Net of heaven is vast; its meshes may not be fine yet nothing slips through” (73:4). Although it has become an idiom, few believe in this saying. Lao Tzu believes in it because he witnesses the Great Tao’s omnipotent, loving power and Tao’s rewards and punishments that transcend the legal systems of this world. Obviously, this concept is trustworthy only by faith.

Lao Tzu says: *“Throughout eternity there has always been an executor”* (73:4). Somewhere in the universe, there is a master who controls life and death, who gives and takes. Just as the Bible says,

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the heavenly Father sees what is done in secret: *“Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you”* (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18). This is the true meaning of *“The Net of heaven is vast; its meshes may not be fine yet nothing slips through.”*

Lao Tzu is full of proverbs like these, which cannot be taken as common principles, general reasons, or typical knowledge. Buried in these proverbs are profoundly deep roots. They are revelations of Tao that can be understood only if one is in Tao. Separated from Tao and taken as worldly maxims, they seem shallow and twisted, even absurd, especially if one were to try to put them into practice.

Section C. The Revealer as Trinity

1. The Origin of the Trinity

The concept of the Trinity is important, even indispensable, in Christian theology. However, even to theologians, the Trinity remains a three-sided paradox.

The word *Trinity* as such cannot be found in the Bible. However, the relationship of Father (*Elohim*), Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit as a union permeates the Bible. Since Jesus' ascension to the Father and since the 2nd century after all the Apostles had died, discussion about the Trinity has never stopped. The Western and the Eastern churches established the orthodox view of the Trinity at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. and the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. Even today, disputes about the Trinity have not been laid to rest, but more people have become accepting of its mystery and prefer not to argue about it.

The dispute centers on the nature and status of Jesus. When living in this world, the incarnate Jesus claimed that he was the Son of God (*Elohim*) at the same time he said that he was the Son of Man. He was with the Father eternally and he was born by the Father; everything that belonged to the Father belonged to him. Jesus also claimed something that only the Father knew. After uttering, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father*

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except through me” (John 14:6), he said that he and the Father shared the same visible presence: *“If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him”* (John 14:7). To those stunning words, the Apostle Philip replied: *“Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us”* (John 14:8).

Here is how Jesus then answered Philip:

“Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.” (John 14:9-11)

Later, on the cross, however, in contrast to his revealed oneness with the Father, Jesus cried out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* as an expression of utter anguish of soul (Matthew 27:46). Contrasting claims that Jesus made like these have triggered various opinions and schools of thought.

The traditional Christian teaching is that *Elohim*, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all self existent and self sufficient. They are three persons in one God—Jehovah. Opinions differ about the function, the communication, and the division of each “person of the Trinity” and how they also are One.

It is not my intention to join the debate or to explain the fine details of each school of thought. However, I would like to present an idea from Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu. It is up to the reader to draw his own conclusions.

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2. “Name, Substance and Form” United as One

In Chapter 2 of this book, I briefly mentioned Lao Tzu’s statement “*Tao begat one; one begat two; two begat three; three begat all things*” (42:1). This sentence is a riddle, which also has spawned numerous speculations.

Zhuang Tzu comments on Lao Tzu’s “one, two, three” concept:

*Since there is one, what else can be said? Once we gave it a name, haven’t we uttered the one? The original one and what we say about one become two. These two plus the original one is three. From nothing to something, it stops at three.*¹⁰⁹

He then attempts to explain the three “one” like this: the first “one” is the formal presentation of the substance, from which we know it is “one.” The second “one” is the verbal expression of the formal presentation, which is a conceptualization of the “one.” The third “one” is a substance that exists, even if it does not reveal itself to us or is spoken by us.

First of all, what does Zhuang Tzu mean by “*from nothing to something, it stops at three*”? Going from one to three is actually a process of revelation. To human beings, it is a process of being revealed to. For example, take a person (or any living being with a personality) who wishes to reveal himself to those do not know him. Prior to the revelation, he is already a true existence (substance). He presents himself to strangers by saying, “My name is Hua Lee” (name). The strangers thus notice him and recognize his face and body (form).

Tao existed before creating all things and revealing himself to humanity. In the beginning there was Tao, Mother of all, like the Spirit moving around in Genesis 1:2. We did not know Tao then. There was no concept of God. After God created all things and

¹⁰⁹ *Qi Wu Lun.*

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humanity, human beings called him “*God*.” Adam and Eve knew the face of the Spirit (“*the imageless image*”). When they rebelled against God, they were expelled from the Garden of Eden and were deprived of the opportunity to see God. Human beings, however, still know God’s name. In every ethnic group and in every period of history, human beings have called for God.

Secondly, human beings cannot truly know God’s name or substance without a form. Without seeing Hua Lee, for instance, people do not really know him. People knowing his name but not his form may mistake him for another person. When religion goes astray, it is because of the same reason. Jesus came to the world to show us his spiritual form in human flesh. The Bible repeatedly says, for example:

No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.
(John 1:18)

...Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

He is the image of the invisible God. (Colossians 1:15)

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (Hebrews 1:3)

When it comes to revelation, none of the three aspects—name, substance, and form—can be omitted. Once substance is there and name has been heard as when Job encounters God: “*My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you*” (Job 42:5), formal presentation becomes crucial. That is why when Jesus was still in this world, he said without equivocation: “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6).

Thirdly, the concept of the Trinity (to borrow this theological term for a moment) is a revelatory truth, not a cognitive truth. With

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cognitive truth, people look for a focus of cognition. A sense of blindness comes with the process. For example, a stranger who has never met Hua Lee looks for him. He knows his name and even may know a little about his conduct, but has never seen him (image). The stranger does not recognize Hua Lee as of yet, but has to begin inquiring and questioning; these acts involve hearsay, guesses, and inferences, conclusions and so forth. What results is not sufficient to prove who Hua Lee is.

It is only when Hua Lee himself stands in front and says, *"I am truly Hua Lee,"* that the process of revelation finally can be completed. At that moment, this person's name, substance, and form are united as one. The process of recognition must transcend pure recognition; the last step must be "revelation": Hua Lee proves to those who wish to recognize him personally that he is Hua Lee. That is the reason why there is no absolute truth when there is no revelation. Pure recognition can produce only relative truth, which is the status of worldly knowledge at present. To sum it up, absolute truth must be a "trinitarian" truth, and this "trinitarian" reality must be completed by revelation.

Lastly, Tao is a complete *"One"*—*"one being one image."* Just as Hua Lee is a completely revealed person in name, substance and form, so too is Tao like one complete Hua Lee. Tao's name, substance, and form are three aspects of Tao in Tao's revelation to people. If not revealed in this way, Tao is not recognizable to people.

The incarnate Jesus is exactly such a form that demonstrates Tao's name and substance. That was why when his divine demonstration fulfilled the reason for his incarnation—his dying on the cross as the atonement for human sin—Tao's name and substance for an instant left his incarnated form, leaving Jesus as the Son of Man: a real man crucified on a real cross soaked in real blood for real human sin. That was why Jesus cried out: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* (Mark 15:34).

If the eternal God did not leave Jesus, how could Jesus have died? If God had faked a death for people to see, why would people be moved? Jesus is both the only begotten Son of God and the Son of Man. The Son of Man truly died and was brought back to life by the Spirit. The Son of God still prints his real image in the hearts of people, even today's 6.7-billion people, through his words, miracles, and resurrection. That is why the last words of Jesus on the cross are: "*It is finished*" (John 19:30). His saving ministry was complete.

3. Lao Tzu's Discussion about "Name, Substance and Form"

Inspired by Zhuang Tzu, I have made an attempt to translate Lao Tzu's "*Tao begat one; one begat two; two begat three; three begat all things*":

Tao exists alone before everything, which is the substance of Tao, as one. Tao is called Tao, which is Tao's name, as two. The manifested form of the substance of Tao named as such makes three. Tao, three in one, gives birth to everything and sustains everything.

Many words in the entire text of *Lao Tzu* support such a translation.

About the name. From the very beginning, Lao Tzu points out that Tao is not the typical Tao: "*Tao can be spoken of but is not the Tao we commonly speak of; a name can be given but not a common name*" (1:1). Later on, Lao Tzu says: "*I do not know his name; I would name him 'the Great'*" (25:4). Tao's name lasts forever so that the world would recognize him: "*From antiquity till now, his name has never vanished so that people may see the father of all*" (21:4). Nevertheless, Tao's name is not being heard or seen by people; it seems hidden: "*To retire after winning success and establishing a reputation is the way of heaven*" (9:5); "*Tao normally does not reveal his name*" (32:1); "*Tao is hidden and nameless*" (41:7); and so forth.

About the substance. "*An integrated being existed before the birth of heaven and earth*" (25:1). The Bible opens with this sentence:

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“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2). Is the “integrated being” by Lao Tzu the same as the Spirit of God in the Bible? According to Lao Tzu’s description, Tao as an existence is a shadow, an image in the shadow, a substance in a shadow. In the depth and darkness, there exists a spirit: *“The spirit is authentic and full of faithfulness”* (21:2-3).

Is not Tao a spiritual experience? Lao Tzu says: *“The power of the invisible Tao is inexhaustible; deep like an abyss, he appears as the progenitor of all things. The being then may be dimly visible in the distance”* (4:1-3). Note the following:

*The unfathomable God is immortal.
This gave birth to all mysteries.
From the gate of this motherly being come heaven
and earth.
Everlasting and dwelling in mystery,
She is what she seems not.
She gives and is not exhausted.* (6:1-3)

This kind of description obviously refers to an intangible non-temporal being, “an imageless image”—the Spirit.

About the form. Lao Tzu calls Tao “the form without a form” (14:5), but “there appears to be an image” (21:2) and “the great image is too grand to be seen” (41:6).

Lao Tzu also describes the radiance and impact of Tao’s image:

*Above the one there is no light; beneath the one there
is no darkness; the infinity of the one is ineffable,
returning to the intangible non-being.
This is called the form without a form, the image
without an image, like a shadow. Approaching from
the front you cannot see the face; approaching from
behind you cannot see the back.* (14:3-6)

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*If one holds on to the image of the great [Tao],
the whole world will come to him. Coming to him,
people will not harm each other; instead they will
have rest, inner and outer peace. (35:1)*

Jesus, the image of Tao, came to this world attracting all people to himself and blessing those drawn to him. From antiquity till now, in China and outside, has ever such a thing happened before?

Here is what the prophet Isaiah prophesied about Jesus around 600 years before his birth:

*Surely you will summon nations you know not, and
nations that do not know you will hasten to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of
Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor. (Isaiah
55:5)*

Twenty-nine times in 26 chapters, Lao Tzu portrays the Holy One who manifests Tao in this world, while Isaiah spends a third of his book prophesying about the “*Holy One of Israel*.” Isaiah also said: “*Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit*” (Isaiah 27:6). Jesus is the best fruit of Israel for the feeding of the world.

About the relationship of name, substance and form. Chapter 21 touches upon the relationship of name, substance, and form. Lao Tzu sees a shadowy “*image*” in deep darkness and at a far distance, and it has a “*substance*” spiritual, authentic, and full of faithfulness; and his name is everlasting. Chapter 25 talks about the “*integrated being*” (substance): “*How still! How void!*” (form); and “*Mother, Tao, Great*” (name). Although Lao Tzu humbly states that the substance of Tao is not very clear (“*shadowy*”), the name of Tao is not very precise, and the form of Tao is vague (“*the Holy One*” and “*the One manifesting the great form*”), Lao Tzu has truly received the revelation of the union of name, substance, and form.

Interestingly, once the topic has been raised in Chapter 42, the successive 39 chapters never mention the relationship of name,

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substance, and form again. In fact, even the words *image*, *name* and *matter* (used to describe substance) no longer appear, as if to indicate that “*one begat two; two begat three; and three begat all*” provides the final conclusion on how Tao self-reveals to human beings. After that culminating statement, what else could possibly be added?

PART ONE: THE SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF TAO

Chapter VI. About the Righteous One

The words of Lao Tzu demonstrate that the living Tao not only self-reveals, but also possesses character and virtues. Among the great Tao's attributes are holiness, love, and righteousness.

Section A. Tao Is Completely Holy

1. Direct Descriptions of Self-centeredness and Selflessness

The concept of full holiness implies total unselfishness because all sin originates from selfish desires, as the Apostle James says in the Bible:

...[E]ach one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:14-15)

Self-centeredness, a manifestation of human limitation, is expressed in different ways. For example, human beings are self centered in relation to their life, because death is inevitable and life is short. Also, human beings are self centered about wealth, because poverty is part of their true nature: they come to the world empty handed and leave the world the same way. Human beings are self centered about personal emotions, because their often lonely, empty hearts crave fulfillment. Why do we human beings have self-centered desires? It is because too often we are weak and vulnerable, and basically cannot help but to focus on ourselves.

Lao Tzu believes that human limitation causes self-centeredness, and thus human beings are lost in their own state of self-centeredness. On the other hand, the great Tao is limitless and, therefore, selfless. Tao's selflessness fosters Tao's fulfillment.

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*Heaven and earth endure.
They endure because they are not selfish
or self-preserving;
Therefore, they live long.
Likewise, the Holy One thinks of himself last
and comes first;
He disregards himself and finds himself enduring.
Is not all this because he is fulfilled in his selflessness?
(7:1-3)*

*The Holy One does not accumulate.
He lives for others; so, he possesses more;
He gives all to the world; so, he becomes richer.
The Tao of heaven is benevolent, causing no harm.
The way of the Holy One is to act on behalf
of the people;
He does not contend with them. (81:4-5)*

The great Tao, or Tao's incarnate "Holy One," is selfless, innocent, and completely holy, yet Tao does not force people to follow Tao's own standards. Tao is loving, forgiving and patient.

*Therefore, the Holy One lives uprightly yet
judges no one;
He is wise but does not harm.
He is forthright but not unrestrained;
He shines but does not dazzle. (58:4)*

*Therefore, the Holy One holds the loan but does not
ask for payment;
A creditor of virtue knows the debts but seeks
no payment;
A creditor of no virtue demands payment
by every means. (79:2)*

Tao also expresses selflessness in humility and self-concealment — never boasting and never being conceited—and possesses "mysterious virtues":

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To retire after winning success and establishing reputation is the way of heaven. (9:5)

The creator/sustainer of the world does not impose his ownership. He works in all things without claiming his power. The ruler of all does not govern capriciously. What profound grace and virtue! (10:7)

Another aspect of the great Tao's selflessness and holiness is the willingness to maintain a lowly position and endure humiliation:

*The highest virtue positions low like a valley;
In humiliation lies the greatest honor.
The abundance of virtue seems insufficient;
The strength of virtue appears weak;
The truth of virtue sounds empty. (41:3-4)*

*He who is humiliated is the lord of the society;
He who is sacrificed is the king of the world. (78:3)*

Lao Tzu compares this virtue with water: *"The highest good is like water, nourishing all things and not contending with them; dwelling in loathsome places and thus coming close to Tao" (8:1-2).*

2. The Parable of Light

Brightness is the manifestation of holiness. Lao Tzu says that Tao is full of illumination: *"Above the one there is no light; beneath the one there is no darkness" (14:3).*

However, the world does not recognize the light of the great Tao: *"Tao is bright but men take it to be dark; to be growing in Tao seems to be retiring; to have peace in Tao appears hard" (41:2).*

Those who recognize the eternal Tao are enlightened: *"To know eternity is enlightenment; not to know eternity is waywardness, resulting in calamity" (16:6-7); and "to know harmony is [to know] eternity; to know eternity is [to see] the light" (55:3).*

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The Holy One inherits light and illuminates the world: “*The Holy One is good at saving people, and no one is abandoned; he is good at saving all things, and nothing is abandoned. This is called following the light*” (27:3-4).

Following the light of the Holy One, people may enter the kingdom of light: “*Follow the light [of Tao], return to its brightness; you will then keep yourself from calamities. This is to inherit eternity*” (52:6).

3. Comparison to the World

People usually praise beauty and virtue and condemn ugliness and evil, thus demonstrating their own noble character and sterling integrity. Lao Tzu, nevertheless, points out that there is no true beauty and virtue in this world: “*The sensible becomes absurd; the good becomes evil. For long, this has been a mystery for man*” (58:3). Earlier, Lao Tzu asks:

*To flatter or to despise—what is the difference?
To praise or to resent—what is the difference? (20:1)*

In this world, since no true beauty and virtue exist, even the pursuit of beauty and virtue turns ugly and evil: “*If everyone knows the beautiful as beautiful, there is already ugliness; if everyone knows the kind as kind, there is already evil*” (2:1). This statement seems accurate, since if everyone schemes and competes to obtain the beautiful and indulge in it, is it not true that the pursuit of beauty becomes itself a vice?

The reason why Lao Tzu thoroughly negates beauty and worldly virtue is because he envisions an absolute state of beauty and virtue in Tao. By comparison, the relative, temporary, limited nature of every thing and every occurrence in this world is quite blatantly obvious to any honest observer. Compared to Tao’s eternal kindness and beauty, worldly beauty is ugly, and worldly kindness and virtue are evil. In Lao Tzu’s opinion, from the perspective of Tao, the things that people are proud of are like leftover food and repetitious

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work to be despised by those inside Tao (24:4). Lao Tzu thus dismisses the validity of all virtues outside of Tao. He insists:

*The highest form of morality is to completely obey
Tao. (21:1)*

*A man of high morality needs no moral commands,
because he has them within; a man of low morality
needs moral commands, because he does not have
them within.... Therefore, morality is required when
Tao is lost. (38:1, 5)*

Lao Tzu's insistence on obeying the absolute virtue of Tao and discarding worldly righteousness may seem totally at odds with all human moral teachings and religious faith. However, Lao Tzu's position is, in fact, Biblical.

The Psalmist writes: "*The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men... there is no one who does good, not even one*" (Psalm 14:2-3). Here is what the prophet Isaiah says: "*All our righteous acts are like filthy rags*" (Isaiah 64:6), and the Apostle Paul declares: "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23).

The Bible further affirms that salvation does not rely on people's good deeds but on belief in God that results in a restored relationship; in a similar way, Lao Tzu advocates following Tao rather than depending on human effort.

Both the Bible and Lao Tzu share the same view, which is to relinquish the legalism of the Pharisees of Israel and discard the morality of the Confucius of China, admitting that human beings in their failure cannot save themselves and that only the Tao of the Holy God can provide salvation. In Hebrew, this is called "*separating from the world and turning to the Holy One,*" and in Chinese, "*detaching and becoming sacred.*"

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Section B. Tao Is Incomparable Love

1. Universal Love

Along with holiness, the attribute of love characterizes the great Tao. Lao Tzu fills his entire text with expressions of gratitude toward Tao's omnipresent love; for example:

Tao gives all things life, nurture them, rears and develops them, giving them peace, love, and protection...This is unfathomable grace! (51:4)

He upholds all things...he accomplishes great work...he loves and sustains all things.... (34:2-3)

Descriptions that bring to mind a typical loving mother can be found throughout *Lao Tzu*. A mother gives birth, nurses, loves, teaches, and grooms her children. Her love, complete and attentive, comes totally from her natural motherhood, without a shred of domination, force, self-interest, and selfishness. If her child says, "Thank you," she might feel surprised, uneasy, and perhaps even offended. In a similar way: "*Tao is worthy of reference and his virtues worthy of honor—not because Tao decrees it, but because this is naturally so and forever so*" (51:3).

A benevolent mother's love reveals no favoritism, as the common expression says: "*All ten fingers are connected with the heart.*" The great Tao's love for humanity is the same:

Heaven and earth would be in harmony and sweet dew would fall; it would fall on everyone naturally and equally without being decreed. (32:3)

Tao is the Lord of all things, the treasure of the good man and mediator for sinners. (62:1)

I (the Holy One) am good to those who are good, and I am also good to those who are not good. There is

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thus goodness. I trust in those who are trustworthy, and I also trust in those who are not trustworthy. There is thus trust. (49:2-3)

Jesus describes this love:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:43-45)

Lao Tzu says that there is no one in the world who is not loved and saved by God: *“The Holy One is good at saving people, and no one is abandoned”* (27:3-4). Similarly, the Bible speaks of the magnificent light of universal love: *“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world”* (John 1:9). Salvation is offered to all.

2. The Love of Heart and Soul

Lao Tzu disregards fame and profit, money and wealth, as well as intelligence and morality. He even discounts human wisdom and rationality. What is left for him to endorse? Very simply, what Lao Tzu values is a humble heart:

Humble yourself to the utmost and simplify yourself in tranquility. I can see the coming and going of all that grows. Flourishing things of a million kinds, all return to their roots. Such a return is called tranquility; such tranquility is called return to life; such a return is eternity. (16:2-5)

Lao Tzu values peace, harmony (42:2), tranquility (16:3), rest, and inner and outer peace (35:1) because fame and profit, intelligence and morality, and everything else people chase after are not sources

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of real life. People search after such worldly things as if they are real, but they are mere illusions. Relying on these illusions, people become unsettled in bitterness and pleasure, uneasy in gain and loss, restless in life and death, and anxious in contentment and discontent.

Lao Tzu declares:

Many colors blind the eyes; many tones deafen the ears; delicacies spoil the taste; riding and hunting make the heart go wild; hard-to-find treasures corrupt life. In governing the people, the Holy One provides inner fulfillment, not pleasures of the eyes.
(12:1-2)

The Holy One governs human hearts and souls by loving, not harming. Moreover, the Holy One knows more about human beings than they know about themselves, just as parents know more about what is beneficial for their children than their children know. Here is how Lao Tzu describes what the Holy One knows:

*Do not honor the virtuous, lest people contend.
Do not value hard-to-find treasures, lest people want to steal.
Do not evoke evil desires, lest people become restless.
Therefore, the Holy One rules by humbling people's hearts,
Filling their stomachs,
Subduing their will,
And strengthening their bones.
He makes them seek no knowledge and have no desire;
Then even the wise must curb their behavior.* (3:1-5)

Human beings who indulge their lusts, desires, intelligence, morality, power and wealth may not be able to accept such great love and instead may mistake it for foolishness. For a long time, the world, especially in our current time, has turned its back on Tao. Peace, however, is still attainable by those who wish to enjoy it. Lao Tzu

assures: “*Tao accepts those who identify with him*” (23:4). When they are suffering or experiencing despair or disappointment, and even when confronting death, people would do well to pause, relax, and taste of Tao’s beauty and kindness.

3. The Most Precious Treasure

Lao Tzu claims:

*I have three treasures to keep and cherish:
The first is love,
The second is frugality,
The third is not striving to lead.
Love enables one to be brave,
Frugality enables one to save,
Not striving to lead enables one to be a mentor.
Nowadays, people have lost love but try to be brave,
They have lost frugality but try to save,
They have lost humility but try to lead.
They are not far from death!
With love, you triumph in attack and stand strong
in defense.
Those heaven wants to save, it protects with love.
(67:2-5)*

Among the three treasures, love is the leader. True bravery is based on love, like a mother protecting her infant in her embrace, like a hen shielding her little chicks under her wings. Bravery that does not originate from love is competition; such ambition causes one to seek superiority over one’s fellow human beings. Such behavior is the direct opposite of Tao and is not far from death. However, to fight with love, one wins; to guard with love, one expands.

When people asked Jesus to summarize God’s laws, Jesus’ response was that people should love God and love people (Matthew 22:34-40). Love ranks first in the Bible just as it does among Lao Tzu’s three treasures: “*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love*” (I Corinthians 13:13).

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Section C. Tao Is Absolutely Righteous

It is inevitable that Tao's holiness and love manifest themselves in the two virtues of faithfulness and righteousness.

1. The Highest Ruler, Lawmaker, and Executor

Tao is the highest ruler. In fact, Tao is so high that people hardly notice:

With the highest and best ruler, people do not seem to know his presence. Next comes the ruler who is loved and praised; next comes the ruler who is feared; next comes the ruler who is despised. Trust is due to lack of faith. Tao moves freely as he wishes; he has no need to give commands. Yet when the great work is completed, people say the occurrence is natural.
(17:1-3)

People are often not aware of Tao's actions and regard them as "natural occurrences." Lao Tzu points out that just because Tao is not noticed does not mean that Tao does not exist. Just the opposite, it means that Tao is the highest and absolute ruler. He is different from the second-rate ruler, who is like the heavens in being noticed and respected and like the earth in directly controlling people and being feared. Undoubtedly, Tao does not resemble the lowest rulers—people who are prone to making demands and who frequently exploit others.

Tao is the highest lawmaker. As a matter of fact, Tao is the highest law: "*Man models himself after earth, earth after heaven, heaven after Tao; and Tao models after himself*" (25:7). The earth and the heavens make laws for human beings, as does Tao. Since Tao is the highest law at the top, with heaven and earth in between, human beings often do not see Tao, but instead mistake Tao for "nature."

Tao is the highest executor, the one who executes decrees and makes ultimate decisions:

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If people do not fear death, what is the point of using death to scare them?

If people are made to fear death and violators are executed, who then would dare to be a violator?

Throughout eternity there has always been an executor. If one tries to take his place and executes, it would be like chopping wood in place of the master carpenter. In chopping wood in place of the master carpenter, few do not hurt their hands. (74:1-5)

This executor who controls life and death is obviously Tao. In the previous chapter, Lao Tzu already pointed out that “*the net of heaven is vast; its meshes may not be fine yet nothing slips through*” (73:4). Using human laws to replace Tao’s righteousness, undoubtedly, would be harmful for human beings. The point of making “*people fear*” is so that they will revere Tao, who rules and executes justly.

2. Trust, Justice, and Peace

Although Tao occupies the highest place with the utmost power, Tao does not execute arbitrarily. That is because Tao’s nature is holy and loving; as a result, Tao’s actions are absolutely righteous. Lao Tzu concludes his text with these deeply meaningful words:

*The Tao of heaven is benevolent, causing no harm.
The way of the Holy One is to act on behalf of the people; he does not contend with them. (81:5)*

Regarding faithfulness, Lao Tzu says: “*In its depth and darkness is a spirit; the spirit is authentic, full of faithfulness. From antiquity till now, his name never vanished so that people may see the father of all*” (21:3-4).

Lao Tzu uses the behavior of water as a physical parable to portray the great Tao’s faithfulness: “*Dwelling among the lowly; great-hearted; loving in relations; sincere in speech; establishing order in government; demonstrating ability in undertaking; timing acts*

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perfectly” (8:3). Lao Tzu further describes Tao’s incarnation, the Holy One: “*I trust in those who are trustworthy, and I also trust in those who are not trustworthy*” (49:3).

The entire text of *Lao Tzu* talks about Tao’s faithfulness, for example:

Standing all by himself and never changing. (25:2)

To retire after winning success and establishing reputation. (9:5)

His name has never vanished. (21:4)

He who gives up his life for the world is trusted by the world. (13:4)

No one is abandoned; nothing is abandoned. (27:3)

Tao excels in giving and bringing all to completion. (41:7)

If the state has the mother, it can then last long. (62:1)

[The Lord] is the treasure of good men and mediator for sinners. (62:1)

He is always with good men. (79:3)

The Tao of heaven is benevolent, causing no harm. (81:5)

In discussing justice, Lao Tzu says:

*The way of heaven is like the flexing of a bow.
It presses the high and raises the low;
It slackens the string when over-stretched;
It stretches the string when over-slackened.*

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*The way of heaven takes from those in excess to help
those in want.
Not so the way of man.
It takes from those in want to profit those in excess.
Who has excess and gives it to the world?
Only those who have Tao. (77:1-3)*

In portraying Tao's justice, Lao Tzu says:

*What is twisted shall be straightened;
The wronged shall be rehabilitated;
Low lands shall be filled;
The dying shall be renewed;
The needy shall be given;
The plentiful shall be confused.
The ancients said: "The wronged will conquer."
That is no empty saying. (22:1; 5)*

The great Tao's justice is irresistible. Lao Tzu warns:

*Better to stop pouring
Than to keep on overflowing.
Forge a blade with a thousand blows,
Its sharpness still will not last long.
Gold and jade may fill your house,
But how long can they be kept?
Pride in wealth and rank will only bring you curses.
(9:1-4)*

He clarifies the nature of peace in the midst of discussing war. He believes that when Tao yields benevolent fruits, there is no need for people to use force:

*He who follows Tao in exercising his sovereignty will
not rule the world with an army; his undertaking will
have a good conclusion. Thorns and brambles spring
up where the army has encamped; tragic years follow*

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*great wars. Goodness will produce good results
—no need to obtain them by force. (30:1-3)*

Lao Tzu says that when forced to use weapons, people should know that the use of weapons is not in accordance with the ways of Tao:

Arms are instruments of ill omen; a gentleman does not use them. He uses them only when he has no alternative, and even then he uses them in a serene manner and with restraint. He does not see victory as something good. To see victory as something good is to take pleasure in killing people. He who takes pleasure in killing people will not succeed as a ruler. As for arms, they are instruments of ill omen; all things hate them; he who has Tao does not use them. A gentleman prioritizes the left in times of peace and the right in times of war, because the left symbolizes good omens and the right bad omens. The lieutenant stands on the left and the general on the right. The way they stand means to treat a war like a funeral. After killing many, one should weep in mourning; after winning a war, one should observe the rites of mourning. (31:1-2)

Moreover, those who are truly with Tao do not have enemies, according to Lao Tzu:

Military strategists have this saying: “I dare not take the initiative in attack but would rather rise to defend; I dare not advance an inch but would rather retreat a foot.” Thus, there will be no need to line up, roll up sleeves, or pick up weapons, for there will be no enemies. (69:1)

In Tao, the world is “in peace”: “When Tao prevails in the world, war horses are used to plough fields; when Tao does not prevail in the world, even pregnant horses will have to go to battle” (46:1).

3. Justice and Judgment

Obviously, the topic of the great Tao's justice raises some questions.

First of all, if God's Tao is absolutely kind and loving, why does Lao Tzu say: "*Heaven and earth have no regard for benevolence; they view all creatures as straw dogs*" (5:1)? Straw dogs are used for sacrificial rites. When they are placed on the altar, they are valued and even sacred; when they are not connected to God, they are worth nothing. Are not people the same? A human life comes in a flash. No one knows why someone is born or when that person will die. Life is like the morning dew; fate is like part of a moving cloud. Sartre's existentialism moans, "Human beings come from emptiness and head toward emptiness." Job observed: "*Man born of woman is a few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away*" (Job 14:1, 2).

What is the meaning of life? For some people, it is nothing more than a time that makes them violently ill from their excesses. As Lao Tzu observes:

At the moment of birth, men begin to die. Men live with their four limbs and nine apertures; men die with their four limbs and nine apertures. Men send themselves to the graves with their four limbs and nine apertures. (50:1)

Without a doubt, life often seems as temporary as grass, yet once human beings are connected with Tao in the light of eternity, their life has a proper context and such a definite value that even death is not able to deprive them of peace. Lao Tzu comments about an individual who is good at holding onto true life:

*He will not meet with tigers in his journey;
He will not get wounded in battle.
Standing before him,
Rhinos don't know how to pitch their horns;
Tigers don't know how to stretch out their claws;*

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*Enemies don't know how to wield their knives.
Why is this so?
Because he has risen above the realm of death.
(50:3-4)*

If God's Tao is omniscient and absolutely righteous, why is there so much injustice in the world? Why do evil people often triumph and good people suffer?

Let us compare the Biblical Psalm 73 with Chapter 73 in *Lao Tzu*. The Psalmist says:

*For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity
of the wicked... They are free from the burdens
common to man; they are not plagued by human
ills... They say, "How can God know? Does the
Most High have knowledge?" This is what the
wicked are like—always carefree, they increase
in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart
pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.
All day long I have been plagued.*

Like the Psalmist, who openly reveals uncertainty about the injustice in the world, Lao Tzu expresses similar bewilderment: "*Of what heaven hates, who can know the reason?*"

However, both the Psalmist and Lao Tzu never doubt the absolute justice of God's Tao. Lao Tzu says:

*The Tao of heaven wins without contention, responds
eloquently without words, shows up without being
summoned, and fulfills his plan without being noted.
The net of heaven is vast; its meshes may not be fine
yet nothing slips through. (73:3)*

He firmly believes that the great Tao does not ignore evil people or try to wrong good people: "*The Tao of heaven shows no favoritism; he is always with good men*" (79:3). However, Tao's timing for

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giving reward and punishment is Tao's own. Tao may even come and go without a trace. Also, Lao Tzu expresses doubts about human criteria for good and evil: *"The sensible becomes absurd; good becomes evil. For long, this has been a mystery for man"* (58:3).

The Psalmist also affirms God's ultimate justice:

[T]ill I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies... I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. (Psalm 73:17-23)

Lao Tzu and the Psalmist transcend human illusions, relativity, and temporality, which are like fantasies in a dream. Now that they see the absolute righteousness of God's Tao, the shadow of evil ones can never disturb their heart.

Another question that is often raised is "If God is totally kind and omnipotent, why does He allow evil in the world?" In fact, why did God not create a perfect world?

In previous chapters, I discussed the idea of God creating humanity free. Lao Tzu says that in dealing with heaven and earth and everything in the world, the great Tao *"does not force, does not invade, does not arbitrarily demand, does not control, does not possess"*; in other words, the world is a free and lively place, not a robotic, cultic existence. The fact that human beings are free reveals Tao's greatness, power and grace beyond measure.

Is Tao helpless regarding human beings who choose to be rebellious, act recklessly, and do evil? No. In fact, Lao Tzu believes that those who turn their back on Tao are doomed to die (30:5; 55:5). Whether

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to obey or to rebel against the great Tao has been predetermined. Within the realm of predetermination, human will is free to act.

From antiquity till now, God's Tao repeatedly has self-revealed through many prophets and in various ways from one generation to another, calling human beings to "*return*," "*revive*," "*re-root*," and "*repel*." Today, in an age overflowing with lusts and desires and burdened with the weight of arrogant human intelligence, God, with great patience and love, yet calls, warns, and saves humanity. God still yearns for us human beings to renounce our illusions, relinquish the temptations of temporality and sin, and enter at last into Tao—the real, eternal, and holy Tao.

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Chapter VII. About the Savior

The primary purpose of Lao Tzu's discussion on Tao is to declare Tao's salvation. Tao's eternal self-existence, creative and sustaining grace, revelation about life, holiness and righteousness consistently affirm one point: Tao is the key to human salvation.

If Tao cannot save people, then all we have is simply empty talk without any benefit to human beings; it is only when Tao saves people that such talk becomes relevant. That is why this topic is worthy of our examination.

In *Lao Tzu*, Tao's salvation covers the following aspects:

- (1) Human beings fall into sin and death.
- (2) Relying on their own wisdom and morality, human beings are not able to save themselves.
- (3) The meaning of salvation lies in "*returning to the root*" and "*reviving life*" and in "*perceiving and living in eternity.*"
- (4) The savior is the great Tao, the incarnate Holy One.

Section A. Human Downfall: Sin and Death

Talking about salvation is to recognize that human beings fall into sin and death and thus need salvation. The seriousness of the problem is magnified because human beings do not realize their need for salvation and continue to indulge in the pleasures of sin, which leads to the numbness of spiritual death.

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1. Sin on Display

Living during an age of rebellion, Lao Tzu preached about Tao in a social milieu characterized by sin.

Lao Tzu considered the following as sins that are not only common but also natural from a humanistic viewpoint. He indicates that the primary temptation is the pursuit of pleasure: five colors—colors in profusion; five tunes—fluctuating sounds; five flavors—relishing delicacies, caviars, and rare goods, and so on. Human beings see these material pleasures as normal and even regard them as marks of social progress. Nonetheless, Lao Tzu deems them a cause of human blindness, deafness, loss of taste, dissipation of will, and undisciplined behavior (12:1-2): *“Travelers in a hurry would stay for music and delicacies”* (35:2); *“People lightly take their death because they seek this world too much”* (75:3).

Fighting, robbery, and adultery: *“the less people contend...the less people want to steal...the less people become restless”* (3:1-3); *“The great Tao is of great peace, but men prefer bypaths”* (53:2); *“The less stable the country becomes...the more bizarre things appear...the more criminals there are”* (57:2); *“Nowadays, people have lost love but try to be brave; they have lost frugality but try to save; they have lost humility but try to lead. They are not far from death”* (67:4).

The rulers of the state are leaders of bandits: *“The court is corrupt indeed. The fields are full of weeds; the granaries are all empty. Are they not robbers indeed—those wearing fine robes, those bearing sharp swords, those indulging in delicacies, those storing too much wealth. This is rebellion against Tao!”* (53:3).

People’s hearts are cunning, and the strong trample over the weak: *“When wisdom comes, there arises great falsity”* (18:2); *“This is what the human world is like: Some lead and some follow; some blow warm air and some cold; some strengthen and some weaken; some inherit and some overturn”* (29:3); and *“The way of the world takes from those in excess to help those in want”* (77:2).

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There is no beauty and kindness in the world: *“If everyone knows the beautiful as beautiful, there is already ugliness; if everyone knows the kind as kind, there is already evil”* (2:1); *“To flatter or to despise—what is the difference?”* (20:1); *“The sensible becomes absurd; good becomes evil”* (58:3). Lao Tzu emphasizes that human beings do not even have absolute criteria for judging the beautiful and the kind.

Lao Tzu paints a subtle picture of a worldly life, which perfectly matches today’s secular world. His ironic, self-mocking tone makes his depiction even more vivid:

*Crowds of people bustle and hustle—
As if enjoying a feast or being on the stage;
I alone do not share the feeling, as if uncivilized,
uncultivated,
like a newborn infant not knowing how to smile.
Exhausted and sad, I do not know where to return.
All people have more than enough;
I alone seem to have lost something.
Worldly people see clearly;
I alone see dimly.
Worldly people bargain;
I alone can’t see the difference.
The water is vast like an ocean; the wind blows
without a trace.
All people have their own trades;
I alone am useless and stubborn.
I differ from all people because I value
feeding on Mother.
The highest form of morality is to completely obey
Tao. (20:2-8; 21:1)*

2. The Origin of Sin

Lao Tzu defines *sin* concisely as “greed”: *“There is no greater misfortune than discontent; there is no greater sin than greed”* (46:2). A similar expression goes like this:

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*Fame or life, which is dearer to you?
Life or wealth, which is more valuable to you?
Gaining the world or losing your life, which is the
greater suffering?
Much greed will lead to great disasters;
Storing much will lead to great losses. (44:1-2)*

The Bible also reviews human sins. There are many sins, but “the original sin” centers on Adam and Eve, who ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—what we will call the secular “wisdom tree.” Here is the Biblical record:

*And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die”...
“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves...they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.
(Genesis 2:16-17; 3:4-8)*

A careful examination of the moral of this story leads to the conclusion that the reason why our human ancestors ate the fruit from the wisdom tree was because of greed. What kinds of greed are there?

First, there is the greed for authority, or wisdom, apart from God. The serpent lured Eve by saying, “When you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Being

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“*like God*”—what an arrogant idea! Certainly, human beings have an irresistible urge to trespass, do they not? They use human wisdom by which to comprehend everything, evaluate everything, and even judge God! That is why when Eve saw the fruit of the tree desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

Secondly, there is the greed for material things: “*The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food.*” Human beings cannot help but to search for more and fresher delicacies and rare treasures.

Lastly, there is the greed for emotional pleasure: “*pleasing to the eyes.*” Human beings cannot resist being tempted by beauty nor flirting with it. They take action and commit sins before they even realize it. The spiritual fall of human beings is precisely due to their failure to resist the temptation of these three types of greed.

Jesus experienced similar tests while he was in this world:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me,

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Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” (Matthew 4:1-10)

The temptations Jesus encountered are similar to those that lured Adam and Eve: creating food while in hunger—material temptation; jumping from a high pinnacle to test God—authority temptation; receiving the splendor of the world—emotional temptation. The difference is that Jesus met the tests with a flat refusal and remained the sinless, holy Son of man, who upheld God’s will and saved humanity from the harm of the fall.

Both Adam and Eve’s tasting of the fruit of the wisdom tree and Jesus’ experiencing the series of temptations are events that carry profound symbolic meanings. I believe that eating the fruit of the wisdom tree refers not only to our human ancestors’ initial step into sin by rebelling against God’s will, but also to ongoing occurrences in human history and in the ongoing life of individuals every moment of every day. Lao Tzu says, “*When wisdom comes, there arises great falsity*” (18:2). Over thousands of years, human beings have been swallowing the secular wisdom fruit on a consistent basis, and have become accustomed to craftiness and hypocrisy. As a result, human beings have made painstaking efforts to create skepticism, relativism, pragmatism, humanism, materialism, and all kinds of theories as excuses for their high-sounding self-centeredness and greed, gusty indulgence in pleasure, and shrewd shortsightedness.

The temptation in the Garden of Eden—obtaining what is good for food, what is pleasing to the eye, and what is desirable for gaining wisdom—is the cause of cunning hearts and misconduct characteristic of the “five colors, five tunes, five flavors” of Lao Tzu’s era. Today, such temptation has advanced into an overt trend as evidenced by displays of human pride through sexual liberalism, homosexuality, world wars, and so on. O people! You are “*being corrupted by its [the old self’s] deceitful desires*” (Ephesians 4:22), and “*Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin’?*” (Proverbs 20:9).

3. The Payment of Sin

"The wages of sin is death," according to Romans 6:23. In the very beginning, Jehovah warned Adam: *"[W]hen you eat of it you will surely die"* (Genesis 2:17). Jesus also said: *"You will die in your sins,"* and *"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins,"* and *"..."* (John 8:21; 24). The Bible clearly explains the sequence of sin: *"[A]fter desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death"* (James 1:15).

Lao Tzu also repeatedly declares that the result of sin is death.

First of all, Lao Tzu claims that this life, in fact, is a process of death; indulging in this life brings death: *"At the moment of birth, men begin to die. Men live with their four limbs and nine apertures; men die with their four limbs and nine apertures. Men send themselves to the graves with their four limbs and nine apertures"* (50:1-2).

Secondly, Lao Tzu frequently uses words, such as "staunch," "firm," and "strong beam," to describe those who are rebellious toward Tao, relying on their own strength and following their own path. Lao Tzu claims that such people will die: *"Anything that flaunts its superiority and shows its strength must grow old and phase out. It is not in accordance with Tao. Those not inside Tao are doomed to die"* (30:5); *"The hard and strong belong to death"* (76:3); and *"those relying on their own strength will not die peacefully"* (42:5),

Thirdly, Lao Tzu points out that reliance on one's senses and intelligence also causes death: *"Unblock your passage to sense, use your cleverness and ability, and throughout your life, you will not reach salvation"* (52:4).

Lastly, Lao Tzu says that people who are unloving, unkind, morally unclean, wasteful, and who care only about competing, are not far from death: *"Nowadays, people have lost love but try to be brave, they have lost frugality but try to save, they have lost humility but try to lead. They are not far from death!"* (67:4).

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Both the Bible and Lao Tzu elicit the concept of death from sin. Obviously, everyone must die. What is the meaning of *death*?

Prior to discussing the concept of death, we need to clarify the meaning of *living*. Consider the following: “*The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being*” (Genesis 2:7). A living being has spirit, and is not merely a body made of dust. Jesus makes it very clear what to live means: “*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing,*” as the Gospel of John says (6:63).

To die means to experience spiritual death—the total death of a person, because what makes a person alive is his spirit. Without his spirit, even though physically alive, a person lives in death; with an eternal spirit, even though physically dead, a person lives on. This is what Lao Tzu means by: “*He who dies without perishing has longevity*” (33:6), and “*He [Tao] is rooted deep and firm, eternal, long awaited*” (59:8).

When the self-existing Jehovah told Adam that he must die if he ate the fruit from the wisdom tree, God was telling the truth. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, the spirit in them truly died: “*for dust you are and to dust you will return*” (Genesis 3:19). When the spirit that makes a human being alive departs, dust is all that remains of the body. That is why Lao Tzu says, “*At the moment of birth, men begin to die.*” A man’s “*four limbs and nine apertures*” belong to dust; they do not have real life. Only the spirit that is breathed into the human body by God holds real life. When real life is lost, living is being extinguished and life becomes death.

Obviously, the spirit of life granted by the Tao of God is intended to surpass life’s temporality and illusion and to last forever. The spirit is the essence of life. Human beings who lose the spirit of life and indulge in the temptations of this world are only half made and remain only dust; they are merely four limbs and nine apertures. Sinful people live under the control of sin; staying in the process of dying is a living death.

Section B. The Hopelessness of Self-Salvation: Wisdom and Morality

1. The Geocentric Theory of Human Values

Since antiquity, human beings concerned about morality and conscience have expressed an urge to save themselves. For example, Confucius and his followers developed a value system based on “investigating things, obtaining knowledge, upholding sincerity, amending the heart, cultivating the body, keeping families in order, managing affairs of state, and maintaining peace.” They believed that human beings are born with a good conscience and that it could be developed to a great extent through etiquette and edification. The cornerstone of this belief is that human beings can reach an understanding of everything, especially an understanding of themselves, by investigation.

In the time of Confucius, such a theory was not so systematized. His attempted remedy was to apply “morality,” return to “propriety,” and advocate “benevolence” in his pursuit of the great Tao. Because the great Tao was concealed, Confucius chose to rely on human morality and wisdom to save humanity. However, in his old age, he had no choice but to admit: “*Tao has been lost for a long time. My dream of pursuing Tao is broken.*”¹¹⁰ His followers also sighed: “*For a long time, it has been evident that what we proposed has not been working!*”¹¹¹

Since Buddhism migrated to China, many metaphysical Buddhist concepts have compensated for the inadequacy of Confucius’ humanism. Buddhism promulgates “enlightenment and cultivation,” which is a path of self-salvation. However, that should be no surprise since Buddhism originated from the “enlightenment” of Sakyamuni, who sat under the *bodhi* tree and pronounced Buddhism as a religion of wisdom.

¹¹⁰ Sima Qian 司马迁, *Shi Ji/Kong Zi Shi Jia* 《史记/孔子世家》.

¹¹¹ Lun Yu/Wei Zi 《论语/微子》.

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Lao Tzu underscores the fact that since nothing can replace Tao, it is impossible for human beings to save themselves. All human morality and intelligence are limited and sinful. The only way to salvation is through abandoning the self, remaining in tranquility, and making no human effort except to follow Tao.

Lao Tzu's foundation is built on the concept that human life, value, wisdom, and morality can be compared to a cell in an organism in the sense that these factors are inside, not outside, the great universal Tao. It is impossible for the wisdom of the cell to grasp the whole system or organism. If the cell insists on controlling the entire system, it fails to see its own place in the system clearly and must fall into difficulties. Similarly, human value belongs to an organism and a system. Human beings cannot find absolute values within human beings; if they insist on relying on their own strength and departing from the great Tao, they are without value, like the straw dog without an altar.

To use an analogy, Confucianism strives to solve human problems within human perimeters, such as the ancient "earth theory" in which it was assumed that the universe consisted of a flat substratum of earth on which problems and solutions for the good and the bad, the kind and the evil rest. Buddhism is "geocentric" in that it realizes that the earth is neither a flat layer nor the sole entity, but rather a dot in the universe, close to non-existing. Human self-reliance is the basis of Buddhism: the dot tries to transcend itself, attempts to disappear and ignore everything else, striving to reach a state of nothingness. Lao Tzu breaks out of "geocentricism" and reveals a "cosmogony"—human life, value, wisdom, and morality exist within the true great Tao, just like the earth, which revolves around the sun, which, in turn, has its own orbit inside the Milky Way: "*Man models after the earth, the earth after the heaven, the heaven after Tao*" (25:7). Human beings can see the light of truth only by following Tao.

Similar to the rejection of Copernicus' heliocentricism by people of his own time, Lao Tzu's Taoism is also misunderstood by the Chinese people. It is easier to discard the theory of "geocentricism"

in astronomy than the values of “geocentricism,” even though history proves again and again that human beings cannot save themselves in their spiritual fall, and the evidences for that are even stronger than what can be detected in astronomy. The resistance comes from human beings' self-interests, pleasures, and contentions.

A Russian proverb says: *“Even an axiom of geometry would be declared null and void if it offends human interests.”*

Another crucial point is that the detection of truth requires vision of the soul, not the apprehension of evidence by the senses. An astronomical telescope may compensate for the physical limitation and short-sightedness of human eyes. However, what else but a

spiritual awakening and revival could make up for the limitation and short-sightedness of human wisdom?

Intelligence neglects the heart and soul; morality adheres to interests. Wisdom and morality, two human attributes laden with human limitations and pretensions, cause blindness in the face of real life, truth, and value. They have been circling around and around, for generations upon generations, in human relativity, limitation, and temporality.

2. Cunning Wisdom

Some critics think that Lao Tzu is against wisdom. After all, he emphasizes that human knowledge and wisdom not only cannot help human beings but also can prevent them from gaining real life and real value: *“When wisdom comes, there arises great falsity”* (18:2). This statement is similar to the Bible’s attribution of sin to the act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Human instinct hides behind wisdom. Beneath objective logical inference and rational analysis lurk self-centered desires. That is why Lao Tzu says: *“Ancient followers of Tao did not make people clever; instead, they made them dull”* (65:1) and also claims:

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People are difficult to rule because they are too [humanly] wise. Therefore to rule a nation with [human] wisdom will be a detriment to the nation; to rule a nation without [human] wisdom will be a blessing to the nation.” (65:2)

Lao Tzu urges: “Discard accomplishment and wisdom, and people will benefit a hundredfold...Discard [human] learning. Be free of cares” (19:1-3). He clearly perceives that human wisdom often hinders people from getting to know God and gaining authentic life: “My words are easy to understand and easy to live by, yet no one in the world understands them or lives by them.” Why is this so? “You thought that you had knowledge; therefore, you do not understand me [Tao]” (70:1-2). Before the eternal Creator/Sustainer, human cleverness and knowledge are nothing when wisdom brings disasters; when wisdom becomes falseness, foolishness, and self-delusion, it leads the self and others astray. Lao Tzu asks: “Who can transcend understanding and knowledge?” (10:6).

In a sense, human wisdom is morbid. Is it normal for people to treat what is nothing as wisdom while true wisdom is being neglected? Yes. That is why Lao Tzu says:

*Good for men to know they are ignorant;
Sad for the ignorant to presume they know.
To avoid sickness, one needs to treat sickness as it is.
(71:1-2)*

The Bible speaks to this same point:

Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a “fool” so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness.” (1 Corinthians 3:18-19)

3. Powerless Morality

In Chapter 38, the very beginning of the so-called *De Jing* (Moral Scripture) points out the hypocrisy and powerlessness of human morality, benevolence, justice, and law:

*A man of high morality needs no moral commands,
Because he has them within;
A man of low morality needs moral commands,
Because he does not have them within...
Therefore, morality is required when Tao is lost;
Benevolence is emphasized when morality is lost;
Justice is sought after when benevolence is lost;
Propriety is obligatory when justice is lost.
The so-called propriety is needed
When there is little loyalty and faithfulness left.
This is a sign of disorder.
The so-called foreknowledge is merely a tiny shred
of Tao's glory;
It is the beginning of folly.
Therefore, the great man dwells in the abundance
of Tao,
And not in the poverty of propriety;
He dwells in the substance of Tao,
And not in his outer glory.
Thus one is chosen and the other discarded.
(38:1, 5-6)*

As a matter of fact, the entire book of *Lao Tzu* conveys his position against shallow and popular moral teachings:

*Do not honor the virtuous (3:1); Heaven and earth
have no regard for benevolence (5:1); When the great
Tao is rejected, there arise humanity and justice
(19:1); Discard humanity and justice, and people
will return to filial piety and compassion (19:2);
The highest virtue positions low like a valley (41:3);
Beautiful words can win honor; good deeds can win*

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*respect. But how can a man purge his sin? (62:2);
To dissolve great hatred through mediation will not
remove all of it. How can this be regarded as good?
(79:1)*

Lao Tzu does not believe that propriety will turn the human heart to benevolence and bring peace to the world:

*A man of great propriety seeks propriety, but he rolls
up his sleeves to use force when no one responds.
(38:4)*

*The more prohibitions there are, the poorer the
people become; the more sharp knives people have,
the less stable the country becomes; the more tactics
people learn, the more bizarre things appear; the
clearer the legal codes become, the more criminals
there are. (57:2)*

Distinct from all other religions, Christianity thoroughly repudiates the possibility of human reliance on virtue, good deeds, learning, and propriety as the means of becoming righteous and gaining salvation. The Jews in the Old Testament era pursued salvation by following the Ten Commandments. Even though they are revelations from God and glorify God, the Ten Commandments in practical and operational terms are not too different from human laws. That is why God foretells, through the prophets, the coming of the Holy One Jesus into the world, who would engrave God's law in people's hearts and renew people's hearts and souls in a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:33).

Jesus affirms that all laws are fulfilled in him. What does this mean? Although the moral laws, including the Ten Commandments, from antiquity to now have been good, people are not able to practice them. The Apostle Paul vividly discloses the secret of people's inability to follow laws—it is because of their sinful nature: “*For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out*” (Romans 7:18).

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Lao Tzu says, “*No one in the world understands them [Lao Tzu’s words] or lives them*” (70:1); “*This principle is known to all people under heaven, yet no one puts it into practice*” (78:2). The Apostle Paul also says that the law of God is originally the law of the Spirit. People are powerless to follow the law because their sinful nature has weakened them.

Jesus brought the Spirit of life to people. Whoever believes in him has the Spirit dwelling in his heart “*in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit*” (Romans 8:4). Through the Spirit, people are able to transcend all morality and laws naturally; thus, all laws are fully and fundamentally fulfilled. Lao Tzu describes such a state this way: “*A man of high morality needs no moral commands*” (38:1).

Section C. The Meaning of Salvation: Return and Eternity

Lao Tzu conveys the meaning of salvation by using several common concepts: “*pause,*” “*reverse,*” “*return,*” “*revive,*” “*tranquil,*” “*lasting,*” and so forth. Let us consider each of these terms.

Explanation 1: *Pause* (止)

Lao Tzu says that knowing when to stop, one lives long: “*Fame or life, which is dearer to you? Life or wealth, which is more valuable to you? Gaining the world or losing your life, which is the greater suffering? Much greed will lead to great disasters; storing much will lead to great losses. Therefore, be content and thus spare yourself troubles. Know when to stop and thus avoid dangers. Then you will live long*” (44:1-3).

Fame and wealth, even gaining the whole world, are naturally less important than life: “*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*” (Matthew 16:26). Lao Tzu expresses a similar view: “*Better to stop pouring than to keep on overflowing. Forge a blade with a thousand blows, its sharpness will still not last*”

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long. Gold and jade may fill your house, but how long can they be kept? Pride in wealth and rank will only bring you curses” (9:1-4).

Lao Tzu goes even further in exposing the meaning of *pause* by saying that human beings must not trespass God: *“The moment the universe started, hierarchy was already there; with hierarchy being there, man ought to know his own limit and not trespass. To know the limit and to end in time are to avert harms” (32:4).*

Explanation 2: Reverse (反)

The real path to salvation is the complete opposite of self-help. Salvation does not come by making advances in virtue or wisdom, but by refusing to trust intelligence and learning and by being tranquil and effort free. This is the meaning of *to reverse*.

The true way of living is totally contrary to the regular approach of life. Real living does not come by pursuing pleasure, strength, and fame, but by being content with simplicity, gentleness, and humility. This is also the meaning of *“to reverse,”* as Lao Tzu expresses it: *“To reverse is how Tao works” (40:1), and “How mysterious! How profound! They run contrary to human affairs; they lead to the great harmony” (65:4).*

Lao Tzu uses the behavior of water as a parable: *“Dwelling in loathsome places and so coming close to Tao” (8:2).* When he praises the Holy One by saying, *“He who is humiliated is the lord of the society; he who is sacrificed is the king of the world,”* Lao Tzu underscores the point: *“Paradoxical are the words of truth” (78:3-4).*

Explanation 3: Revive and Return (复, 归)

Lao Tzu is telling us to stop chasing the typical worldly things and reverse the direction of our worldly path. Where then does one go? “Return,” says Lao Tzu, “to the root of life.”

All return to their roots....such a return is eternity.
(16:2, 5)

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Return to being infants...return to the infinite...return to their original state of being. (28:2, 4, 6)

Return to wait on mother...return to its brightness. (52:3, 6)
Virtues meet to return to Tao. (60:5)

He leads men back from their transgressions. (64:5)

Let people return to using knotted ropes for writing. (80:2)

The last sentence seems to talk about returning to a point in time, yet it actually refers to a return to one's soul. Up until now, humanity has been enjoying the fruits of "civilization," as well as swallowing its bitter pills: gunpowder (killing), printing (lies), compass (navigation, invasion), chemistry (weapons); physics (atomic bomb), high nutrition (disease), high consumption (competition), high competition (unemployment), high unemployment (street crimes), high efficiency (suicide), high development (ecological crisis), high pleasure (AIDS), high civilization (divorce); high freedom (homosexuality), air conditioning (destruction of the ozone sphere), electronics (war), television (pollution), and so on. Do you think about the loss of 220,000 lives in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, when you are admiring the accomplishments of great scientists like Einstein and feel very proud of human wisdom?

Today, the development of nuclear energy and nuclear weapons has consumed tremendous manpower and financial resources and polluted the environment. O people, while you are enjoying the fruits of civilization, please remember: the cost of your enjoyment is the harm, suffering, and death of your fellow human beings and the effect of this on the life and best interests of your descendants. Imagine: as human consumption and the pursuit of pleasure increase, as incurable diseases increase and the ecological crisis deepens, as morality deteriorates and criminal behavior spreads, as weaponry becomes more sophisticated and resources become depleted, the human appetite also continues to increase.

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In other words, when the end of the world (How reluctant I am to use this phrase!) draws closer, no matter how many isms and theories have been invented by the intelligent and the wise to defend a rationale for human actions, no matter how many Humes, Sartres, Russells, and Deweys emerge, no matter how many volumes of complete collections of Shakespeare and the *Encyclopedia Britannica* appear, of what use will these things be? At that time, should one re-read Lao Tzu: “*A small country has a small population... Let people return to using knotted ropes for writing,*” one might think differently. So, return and revive, but what if we wait until it is too late?

Explanation 4: *Tranquil* (静)

Lao Tzu encourages people to pause and reverse, reverse to return, and return to tranquility. In tranquility lies real life.

Such a return is called tranquility; such tranquility is called return to life. (16:3-4)

Simplicity and tranquility is the true way for the world. (45:3)

The female often overcomes the male with her stillness and humility. (61:2)

When we “*pause,*” “*reverse,*” and “*return,*” we come to tranquility and thus revive our life—that is the key to entering Tao.

Explanation 5: *Lasting* (久)

Lasting means “enduring forever, eternal.”

Lao Tzu talks about entering Tao and living forever in contrast to departing from Tao and living in death:

(1) Human beings are born to die, yet the saved have “*risen above the realm of death*” (50:4).

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- (2) Human beings are finished when they depart from Tao, yet *“he who dies without perishing has longevity”* (33:6).
- (3) Human beings do not know eternity and act recklessly; such behavior results in calamity. However, the one inside Tao knows eternity and thus embraces whatever comes—in other words, is just, complete and like heaven. Returning to Tao, he lives long; though his body falls away, he lives on (16:5-10).
- (4) Human beings store much, leading to great losses. However, someone in Tao knows when to stop and thus avoids dangers and then lives long (44:3).
- (5) Human beings collect gold and jade, but are not able to guard them, while *“he who upholds his true self has endurance”* (33:5).
- (6) Human beings unblock their senses, use their cleverness and ability; throughout their life, they will not reach salvation. However, someone in Tao returns to *“wait on mother,”* and is safe and sound even when his body disappears (53:3).
- (7) Human beings cannot see light, yet someone in Tao follows the light of Tao, returns to brightness, keeps from calamities, and thus inherits eternity (52:6).
- (8) Finally, human beings greedily indulge in this life, yet a person in Tao endures because he is not self centered or tries to preserve himself. Thus, he lives long (7:2) and so on.

Section D. The Great Tao of Salvation: Treasure and Mediator

1. Tao’s Salvation: Treasure and Mediator

Chapter 62 of *Lao Tzu* clearly declares the great Tao’s salvation:

*Tao, the lord of all things,
Is the treasure of the good man and mediator*

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*for sinners.
Beautiful words can win honor;
Good deeds can win respect.
But how can a man purge his sin?
Therefore, it is far better to dwell in Tao
Than to be crowned as emperor
or appointed as ministers with glory
and wealth!
Why was Tao greatly valued in antiquity?
Is it not because in him seekers find and sinners
are forgiven?
Therefore, Tao should be the most honored
in the world.*

First, “*Tao, the lord of all things.*” The word *lord* (奧) is interpreted as “*preserver*” (藏) by the ancient scholar He Shanggong, and as “*shield*” (庇蔭) by the Lao Tzu scholar Wang Bii. The excavated Han silk manuscripts A and B in Mawangdui both footnote this word as “*lord*.” The word *lord* implies the meaning of preserving and shielding.

“*The good man*” is the one who is penitent and treats disease as disease. Such a man views the great Tao as the ultimate treasure. The sinner is someone who lives in sin and is sick without realizing he is sick. Although such a person does not know Tao, Tao still saves him and mediates for him. The Bible frequently refers to Jesus as the mediator for sinners, for example: “*But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One*” (1 John 2:1).

Secondly, beautiful words, such as expressed in literature and philosophy, can win honor. Beautiful deeds, such as expressed by benevolence, virtue, and humaneness, can win respect. Nevertheless, Lao Tzu is fully aware that beautiful words and deeds cannot overcome the sinful nature of human beings. As we have explained before, human wisdom, morality, and law cannot save people. Here, Lao Tzu exposes the mystery of the great Tao’s salvation and the deficiency of various moral and religious teachings.

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Thirdly, the position of even a prince or a state leader possessing tremendous wealth and utmost honor does not equate to dwelling in Tao. What great faith! Jesus once said:

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.” (Matthew 13:44-46)

Lao Tzu must have perceived this precious pearl. Even today, whoever truly discovers it will regard power, fame, and wealth as dung. Conversely, those tempted by worldly splendor and unable to extricate themselves from it definitely have not seen this pearl, no matter what religion they claim to hold.

Fourthly, Lao Tzu affirms that our ancient ancestors treated the great Tao as their treasure, a point already discussed in the introduction of this book: *The Majesty of Ancient Tao*.

Finally, why did the ancients cherish the great Tao? Because in Tao, *“seekers find and sinners are forgiven.”* Let us look at *“seekers find.”* Is this not a wonder of the world, even if the concept is hard to grasp? Please pay attention to what Jesus says:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:7-11)

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Note this again: *“Sinners are forgiven.”* This truth is even harder for people to understand. Why is human sin forgiven? The Bible explains: *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:8-9); and *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned...”* (John 3:18). Why such an absolute truth? Although in various forms, sin originates from human rebellion against God and is expressed in not revering God’s power, not submitting to his will, and not uniting with his holiness. However, when a person comes to know the Tao of God, he is in remorse and comes to revere and follow the holy Tao; thus, his sins are naturally forgiven.

2. Tao’s Incarnation: Teacher and Resource

Lao Tzu’s discussion about the great Tao’s salvation centers mostly on Tao’s incarnation, *“the Holy One.”* Although the next chapter is devoted to *“the Holy One,”* we must mention this term when we touch upon salvation in this chapter.

a. Powerful Salvation: Good at Saving People and Transmitting Light

Lao Tzu says the following:

*A good traveler leaves no track;
A good speaker speaks without blemish;
A good beckoner needs no device.
Those good at shutting doors do so without bolts,
and doors cannot be opened;
Those good at tying knots do so without ropes,
and the knots cannot be untied.
Likewise, the Holy One is good at saving people,
and no one is abandoned.
He is good at saving all things, and nothing is
abandoned.
This is called following the light.*

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*Hence, the good man is the teacher of the wicked;
The wicked is the resource of the good man.
One is hopelessly lost, however wise he is,
If he does not respect the teacher or love his treasure.
This is an important mystery! (27:1-6)*

First of all, the Holy One not only saves people, but also is good at saving people and has the miraculous skill of “untying the knot with no rope.”

Secondly, no one is abandoned. Sinners are exactly the ones to be saved. They are resources for the Holy One:

*I am good to those who are good, and I am also good
to those who are not good. There is thus goodness.
I trust in those who are trustworthy, and I also trust
in those who are not trustworthy. There is thus trust.
(49:2-3)*

People were puzzled by Jesus, who dined with sinners and got close to them. Jesus said: “*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*” (Luke 5:31-32). What Lao Tzu means is made very clear in Jesus’ explanation.

Thirdly, the great Tao dwells in the world as the incarnated Holy One to transmit light because: “*In him was life, and that life was the light of men*” (John 1:4; see also 9).

Fourthly, if a sinner does not respect the teacher, the Holy One, and does not love his resources, no matter how wise that person is, he is lost. In Chapter 54, Lao Tzu mentions the Perfect One: “*What the perfect builder builds cannot be destroyed; what the perfect preserver preserves cannot be lost. Your descendants ought to offer sacrifices [to the perfect one] without ceasing*” (52:1-2). To offer sacrifices is to revere, to worship, and to cherish the teacher. In Lao Tzu’s view:

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*Applying that to oneself, one comes to know his true grace;
Applying that to itself, a family comes to know his abundant grace;
Applying that to itself, a village comes to know his lasting grace;
Applying that to itself, a nation comes to know his prosperous grace;
Applying that to itself, the world comes to know his prevailing grace. (54:3)*

b. Universal Salvation: The World Comes to the Great Image in Peace

Lao Tzu's Chapter 35 discusses the point that the One, who manifests in a great image, is the universal Savior:

The one who holds on to the image of the great Tao is the one that the whole world will come to. Coming to him, people will not harm each other; instead, they will have rest, inner and outer peace. (35:1)

The Bible frequently points out that Jesus is the true image of God:

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (Hebrews 1:3)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (Colossians 1:15)

Jesus gives human beings heavenly peace, joy, comfort, and a merciful spirit. The prophet Isaiah gives these prophecies: "See,

they will come from afar—some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Sinim [Aswan]. Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones” (Isaiah 49:12-13); and *“Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you”* (Isaiah 55:5).

c. Loving Salvation: The Creditor of Virtue Knows the Debt but Seeks No Payment

In Chapter 79, Lao Tzu says: *“To dissolve great hatred through mediation will not remove all of it. How can this be regarded as good? Therefore, the Holy One holds the loan but does not ask for payment; a creditor of virtue knows the debt but seeks no payment; a creditor of no virtue demands payment by every means”* (79:1-2).

Sin is debt. Jesus taught us to pray: *“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”* (Matthew 6:12). The Holy One knows more clearly about the sin of sinners than they themselves know or understand; however, the Holy One does not seek payment but grants forgiveness. The Bible says: *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (John 3:17); this verse expresses the boundless love of the Tao of God.

Lao Tzu writes: *“Those heaven wants to save, it protects with love”* (67:5). In God’s great love, all debts, including those among human beings, are forgiven. Those who are forgiven by God are willing to forgive the debts of others; heavenly love flows into their hearts like living water from rivers and oceans gushing out in a natural way. They cannot help loving other sinners like themselves.

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3. To Be Saved in Tao: Infant and Mother

Lao Tzu emphasizes the elimination of self-centered desires and the transcendence of the self:

They endure because they are not selfish or self-preserving. Therefore, they live long. (7:2)

If I discard my life, what troubles do I have to worry about? (13:3)

The self can then become smaller and smaller; desires can then become fewer and fewer. (19:2)

Hence, more virtuous are those who are unattached to this life than those who value this life too much. (75:4)

It is not true that Lao Tzu dwells on nihilism, as some scholars suggest. From the beginning to the end, Lao Tzu stresses the great Tao as the true root. He urges people to give up relying on themselves, to be without desire, without action, and without effort in following the great Tao, which means to “*completely obey Tao*” (21:1) and “*unite with Tao*” (22:2).

Lao Tzu describes such salvation in terms of a relationship between an infant and a mother. It is well known that Lao Tzu directly calls the great Tao “Mother.” There are three layers of meaning:

- (a) Have a Mother: “*The world has a beginning; the beginning is the mother of the world*” (52:1);
- (b) Return to Mother: “*We must return to wait on mother; we can thus be safe and sound even when our bodies disappear*” (52:3);
- (c) Eat Mother: “*I differ from all people because I value feeding on the Mother*” (20:7).

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“To have a mother” requires people to “recognize” mother, Tao. To recognize is to have faith. In other words, we put ourselves under her name and admit that we are her children, thus entering into an eternal relationship: *“If the state has the mother, it can then last long”* (59:7).

“To return to the Mother” is to go back to the root of life, to return to the embrace of Mother, who gave us life, and to enjoy her great power and love. As a result, we gain peace and safety for as long as we live.

“To eat mother” is to drink the milk of life and feed on the food of the soul in her bosom. Lao Tzu knows too well that all worldly pursuits are but shadows of temporary illusions that end in sin and death. The real life of human beings lies in Mother’s embrace. That is why Lao Tzu values only “eating Mother.”

Since the great Tao is Mother, we are naturally children in relation to Tao. What kind of children are we? Before the omniscient, omnipotent, absolutely kind, eternal, and self-sufficient Tao, we are so ignorant, without power and virtue, temporary, and transient—in essence, we are truly like infants. As infants, we receive everything from Mother not by our own ability, but by selfless sincerity, gentle reliance, effort-free receptiveness, and tranquil obedience.

*I alone do not share the feeling—as if uncivilized,
uncultivated, like a new-born infant not knowing
how to smile. (20:3)*

*Knowing his strength of a male but keeping to a
female’s loving tenderness, he thus becomes the
stream for the world. As the stream for the world,
he has the eternal virtue with him, enabling people
to return to being infants. (28:1-2)*

*In this world, with his breath the Holy One makes
people’s hearts simple. People fix their eyes and ears
on him, and he treats them like children. (49:4)*

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One who has abundant virtues is like a newborn infant. (55:1)

Jesus reveals the special significance of infants and children in spiritual terms:

“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.” (Matthew 11:25-26)

“... I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3)

People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” (Luke 18:15-17)

How miraculous! Lao Tzu seems to have recognized the Tao of Jesus almost 700 years before he the Christ came to this world. The incarnate Son of God has repeatedly fulfilled the diverse prophecies of many prophets from antiquity and the various hopes of many ancient sages.

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**PART TWO: THE INCARNATION OF
TAO—ABOUT THE HOLY ONE (聖人)**

Chapter I. The Holy Name

It is worth noting that Lao Tzu describes the Holy One 29 times in 26 of the 81 chapters in his book. In fact, the phrase *the Holy One* appears in more chapters than the word *virtue* (德), which is found in 17 chapters. Thus, a perhaps more accurate title for Lao Tzu's book would have been *On Holiness* (道聖經), rather than *On Virtues* (道德經).

Obviously, Lao Tzu attributes various characteristics to the Holy One. When these characteristics are synthesized into a cohesive whole, the image of Tao emerges as a vivid personality. Then, why for over 2,600 years has the Holy One under Lao Tzu's pen been merely a shadow of a cloud, a dream within a dream, and an illusion in a void?

It is because no scholars truly have devoted their efforts to examining the origin and essence of this Holy One. In fact, all of the books about Lao Tzu that I have been reading pay no special attention to the Holy One. That is not so surprising when we carefully think about it.

First of all, no one in the history of China has been comparable to the Holy One. Secondly, Lao Tzu's Tao is already too mysterious for worldly-minded people. Thus, it would have seemed even more impossible to imagine Tao incarnating and becoming a person.

Had I myself not entered into Tao—and had the incarnate Jesus not deeply moved and reclaimed my heart and taken up lively residence in my mind—the Holy One in *Lao Tzu* would not have attracted my attention either. I would have passed Him by in the same way I did when studying philosophy a number of years ago.

Today, when I reread *Lao Tzu*, the image of the Holy One is very familiar and intimate. The more I muse about Him, the more amazed I am: Is He not Jesus? How similar they are. Such a similarity could not have been a coincidence!

Lin Yutang once said: “Lao Tzu and Jesus are spiritual brothers.”¹¹² If we see the Holy One through the lens of Lao Tzu, it is not difficult to see the truth of Lin’s insight. It is not Lao Tzu himself, but the Holy One under Lao Tzu’s pen that seems identical.

Let me explain.

Section A. The Holy One is not just a Name, but True Substance

In the traditional view, the Holy One in *Lao Tzu* is an idealized person portrayed according to the perception of Tao, an archetype, but not a true existence. It is impossible for this “person” to exist. However, a careful examination of Lao Tzu’s 29 depictions of the Holy One makes it obvious that His substance is definite and vibrant.

The Holy One accomplishes everything, yet claims no credit; thinks of himself last and comes first; sustains all things, yet claims no lordship (2, 7, 22, 34, 66, 72).

He is the One who holds on to the image of the great Tao. The world comes to him, receiving rest, as well as inner and outer peace (35).

He inherits the great Tao’s light and eternity and saves people (27, 28, 58, 79).

He knows his glory but allows himself to be disgraced; he knows his brightness but maintains obscurity; he is the vehicle to heaven for all people (22, 28).

¹¹² Lin Yutang 林語堂, *Xin Yang Zhi Lu (From Pagan to Christianity)*, 243.

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He leads men back from their transgressions (64).

He clothes himself in coarse garments, hiding a treasure within (70).

He endures humiliation, sacrifice, and suffering, yet he is the lord, king, and the most powerful (63, 77, 78), and so forth.

I agree that it is hard to imagine the existence of such a person who possesses all the qualities described above. It is, however, undeniable that these are the qualities of a “person” and of one who is a truly unique “person.” We cannot prove that such a person does not exist, although it is unimaginable that he actually exists in this world. Instead, we should turn our eyes to the divine realm because Lao Tzu already clearly said that this person is “the Holy One”!

Actually, whoever knows Jesus recognizes Him at first glance. He is exactly the One prophesied in the Old Testament, demonstrated in the four Gospels of the New Testament, and testified by the letters his disciples wrote. The remarkable match between Lao Tzu’s Holy One and Jesus is stunning. To those who do not know Him, He is merely a name; to those who know Him, He is so true! The following sections compare Jesus and the Holy One.

Section B. The Holy One Is Not Commonly Referred to as Saint, but as the Incarnate Tao

The common word *saint* (聖人) refers to a person of the highest caliber, such as Confucius. Nevertheless, Confucius said: “Saint—I have never seen one. I would be satisfied if I see a noble man” (*Lun Yu Shu Er*). In other words, Confucius does not consider himself a saint; he thinks that it would be impossible to see one.

The original meaning of the word *holy* (聖) is “connected” (通): “*holy, connected*” (*Shuo Wen*). Connected with what? Naturally, the greatest connection above is with God, while the greatest connection below is with human beings. Here is what Mengtzu says: “Largeness transcending everything becomes holy; holiness becoming unknowable is God” (*Jin Xin Zhang Ju Xia*). Among the

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qualities of “benevolence, faith, beauty, largeness, holiness, and God,” holiness and God are linked.

Zhao Qi, a Mengtzu scholar, interprets: “Largeness transcending everything” means that “Tao is so greatly practiced that it [Tao] transforms the world.” That is holiness. “Holiness becoming unknowable” means that “holiness enlightens too miraculously for its way to be explained,” or in other words, “Tao is too wonderful for words.” That is God. The Holy One enables the unknowable Tao to prevail in the human world, connecting with heaven above and reaching down to the earth below. That is what is implied in the sentence *“The Holy One is connected.”*

The Holy One under Lao Tzu’s pen is not a common saint—a person with wisdom, virtue, and great humanity. He encourages the reader to “*discard wisdom, discard humanity, and discard cleverness*” (19:1-2), which means that the Holy One he powerfully advocates is not a common saint. A quick reading of Lao Tzu’s Holy One makes the reader realize that the “He” Lao Tzu is referring to is the incarnate Tao, the One who transcends everything and transforms the world. This Holy One possesses every aspect of Tao’s essence. All of the Holy One’s accomplishments are not his efforts but the undertakings of Tao:

The Holy One acts without effort and teaches without speaking. (2:3)

The Holy One unites with Tao to be the vehicle to heaven for all people. (22:2; 28:3)

The excavated manuscript of Mawangdui says: “*The Holy One upholds the Great Tao. He is the shepherd of humankind.*” This description perfectly matches the concept of “holiness.”

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Section C. The Holy One Is Not a Receiver but a Revealer of Tao

The following are examples of names for receivers of Tao that Lao Tzu uses:

He who has Tao (24, 31, 77).
Those who follow Tao (15, 65).
Those who identify with Tao (23).
Those who are engaged in Tao (23).
He who follows Tao in exercising his sovereignty (30).
A gentleman (26, 30).
A good man (27, 49, 62, 79, 81).
The best man (41).
The great man (38), and so forth.

Obviously, to Lao Tzu, these kinds of people cannot be compared to the Holy One. Phrases like these are scattered throughout his 5,000 words, yet the phrase “*the Holy One*” appears on a large scale, and is heavily emphasized in a third of Lao Tzu’s chapters. Compared to these admirers, receivers, and practitioners of Tao, the Holy One is a direct incarnation of Tao, meaning that he represents Tao. Lao Tzu often describes the essence of Tao and then follows with a description of the Holy One, implying that the Holy One has the same substance, the same characteristics, and the same actions as Tao. In Chapter 2, Lao Tzu portrays the Holy One like this:

All things arise from him yet he claims no sovereignty;
He multiplies all yet claims no possession;
He benefits all yet expects no return;
He accomplishes all yet claims no credit;
He claims no credit yet he endures forever. (2:4-5)

It is uncommon that the same language used for describing Tao would be used for describing the Holy One. Consequently, some scholars, such as Chen Zhu, regard this paragraph as a mistake. According to common sense, how can the language describing the Creator and Sustainer of the universe be used to depict a person? Nevertheless, anyone who recognizes the incarnate Jesus, the one

united with Tao—and anyone who is familiar with how the Bible describes Jesus—would understand Lao Tzu’s words, without attaching the label of “mistake” to this description of the Holy One in order to sidestep a rational dilemma.

Section D. The Holy One Is Not an Oracle of Antiquity and Is Not Limited by Time or Space

One of the unique and mysterious features of *Lao Tzu* is that the book never mentions any human figures, events, dynasties, or even geographic locations. It seems to have come from nowhere, unlimited by time or space.

Some people speculate that the image of the Holy One could be modeled after a person of antiquity, such as Emperor Huang, Emperor Niao, Emperor Shun, or Zhou Gong, and so on. However, there is no evidence for this speculation. Lao Tzu admires and repeatedly praises ancient followers of Tao (15:1, 16:1), asking the question “Why was Tao greatly valued in antiquity?” He is fully aware that the ancient Chinese ancestors lived in Tao. However, when Lao Tzu talks about the Holy One, he uses a totally different tone. It is as if the Holy One is Tao and as if the Holy One had exited from the human world. Nevertheless, everything is the Holy One’s doing yet in an effortless way.

The Holy One is beyond time and space. Despite the fact that there had been no such Holy One from antiquity till now in China, Lao Tzu gives no room for questioning. He does not say that “there may appear such a Holy One.” Neither does he say, “If there is such a Holy One” or “Should there be a Holy One.” He does not even claim that “there must be a Holy One.” Lao Tzu says, “Therefore, the Holy One...,” as if the Holy One is right at his side. The phrase *beyond time and space* is a synonym for *omnipresence*. Lao Tzu does not seem to care about how the Holy One shows himself to human beings, only that He does.

I would like to mention two references from Zhuang Tzu and Meng Tzu about the Holy One. Zhuang Tzu says:

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Don't I know how foolish those who pursue this life are! Don't I know those who are afraid of death are just like those who left home at a young age and do not want to return home! Only when one awakens does he realize that he just had a big dream. Fools, however, always think that they are awake, assuming that they know everything...this kind of talk may be considered strange. When we meet the great Holy One ten thousand years later, we may finally understand; sooner or later, we will meet Him!
(*Qi Wu Lun*)

I know that Jesus clearly explained what Zhuang Tzu said, but I will set that point aside for now. Zhuang Tzu mentions "ten thousand years later" and also says "sooner or later." He does not know exactly when the Holy One will show up.

In *Jing Xin Zhang Ju Xia*, Meng Tzu claims that a saint must show up every 500 years. From the emperors Yao, Shun, Tang, and Zhou Gong to Confucius, we have individuals who imparted the great Tao practiced by the ancients. What about after Confucius? Meng Tzu concludes his book with a question that sounds like his life's final calling: "How is it possible that no one would continue the work after Confucius?"

In 1996, Brother Tang Liming sent a Hong Kong church a letter that his 95-year-old father-in-law, Mr. Xu Songshi, had written. This letter points out that it was exactly 500 years after the death of Confucius when Jesus started his ministry and directly revealed the great Tao to humankind.¹¹³

¹¹³ Xu Songshi 徐松石 wrote *Ji Du Jiao He Zhong Guo Wen Hua (Christianity and Chinese Culture)*. In a letter, Xu thus wrote: "*Shi Ji* documents the life of Confucius. It stops at his disciples weeping at his tomb in 474 B.C. Initially, historians misrecorded the birth date of Jesus Christ by four years. Jesus actually started his ministry in 26 A.D, not 30 A.D. If you add 26 years to 474, that comes to exactly 500 years between the end of Confucius' life of teaching and the beginning of Jesus' teaching and ministry."

The Holy One that Lao Tzu described has no time and space limitation. Zhuang Tzu and Meng Tzu touch upon the question of the time and space related to the Holy One's appearance. Jesus as the incarnation of the great Tao is a unification of the eternal God and earthly human personality. This is a mystery of the spiritual realm. Human beings may be enlightened; however, the mystery never can be understood thoroughly.

Section E. Logical Argumentation Does Not Produce the Holy One; the Great Tao Reveals Him

Questions worth pondering are: "Why does Lao Tzu bring up the Holy One when he talks about Tao?" and "Why does Lao Tzu devote a large portion of his book to a figure that scholars consider an 'imaginary figure'?"

According to traditional explanations, this Holy One is merely a personified figure of Lao Tzu's idea of Tao. Why must there be such a figure, and why does Lao Tzu, whose every word is worth its weight in gold, spend a third of his chapters on a figure that is only imaginary?

If there has to be such an imaginary figure, could there be something that we do not know? *"You do not know [the source or my master]; therefore, you do not understand me [my words and my undertaking]"* (70:2).

If there must be such an imaginary figure, who could logically deduce such a figure from the nature of Tao?

As a matter of fact, we can declare that the Holy One is neither a superfluous figure nor a logical necessity of Tao. We must admit that neither the Holy One nor the great Tao is a product of human rationality. Just the opposite: Tao self-reveals when a human being discards human wisdom and knowledge, rejects human effort and pursuit, blocks passages to senses, empties himself, and stays tranquil. A person sees Tao as a result of following Tao in humility,

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not as an outcome of chasing knowledge for self-contentment or personal gain.

We should not logically analyze Lao Tzu's Holy One. Instead, we should consider: Since Tao is a revelation to Lao Tzu, not the result of pursuing knowledge, it would be a mistake to examine by reasoning alone how the Holy One is working in Lao Tzu's heart and soul.

Actually, the Holy One, just like the great Tao, is completely removed from rational pursuit and logical deduction: "*Tao works in reverse*" (40:1); "*How mysterious! How profound! They run contrary to human affairs*" (65:4). Let us take a closer look.

Tao possesses utmost glory and power. He enters the world in incarnation, yet he appears in humbleness and bears humiliation. Tao reigns over everything and everybody, yet he comes to this world to love and save people; the Holy One loves and saves human beings, yet human beings reject him; he is sinless yet he suffers; he mediates for sinners and connects human beings with God, or Tao; he turns all human beings into infants; he wants nothing that human beings want, learns nothing that human beings learn, and leads human beings out of sin; he suffers humiliation and sacrifices, yet he is the lord and king; and while he does not claim to be the great one, he is forever the greatest....

The truth about the Holy One seems incomprehensible, yet Lao Tzu utters it.

Even more miraculously, Jesus acted it out.

Confronting these two facts—Lao Tzu's expressions and Jesus' actions—what more can our rationality, logic, knowledge, and learning have to say?

Since the great Tao is omnipotent, one should be able to imagine that Tao can naturally and unsurprisingly self-reveal to human beings. Since Lao Tzu receives Tao by spirituality not by reasoning,

the vision of the Holy One's incarnation and his practice of Tao in the human world are naturally a part of revelation. Since God enlightens Lao Tzu and Lao Tzu sees the Holy One, it is understandable that he would portray the Holy One directly and confidently without doubts or argumentation.

To think more broadly, since the universal, almighty Tao plans to incarnate, Tao must provide various layers of revelation, including different formats from all angles, just like the prophecies in the book of Isaiah and in many cultures. Meanwhile, the events prophesied by the great Tao would have to be fulfilled at certain times and places. Consequently, the prophecies were, indeed, fulfilled in ancient Israel: "*Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit*" (Isaiah 27:6).

Section F. The Holy One Prophesied by Isaiah: Jesus Christ

Lao Tzu's contemporary Isaiah, the great prophet of Israel, received special revelation from God and gave the most definite and abundant prophecy about the coming of Jesus. In the book of Isaiah, which has 66 chapters, about a third of the chapters mention "the Holy One of Israel," referring to Jesus Christ. God's voice through Isaiah thus conveys this profound message:

*Give ear and come to me;
Hear me, that your soul may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
My unfailing kindnesses promised to David.
See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander of the peoples.
Surely you will summon nations you know not,
and nations that do not know you will hasten to you,
because of the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel,
for he has endowed you with splendor.
Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call on him while he is near. (Isaiah 55:3-6)*

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Isaiah emphasizes that the time of the Holy One's arrival is when Jehovah is near and searchable. Obviously, the Holy One is the self-existing Jehovah, who generally cannot be seen by human beings. Isaiah accurately foretells many details of the Holy One's birth and suffering; for example: "*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel*" (Isaiah 7:14), and He was afflicted, stricken, and assigned a grave with the wicked (Isaiah 53). These details cannot be found in *Lao Tzu*. The Holy One was born to the nation of Israel, while Lao Tzu was a "Gentile." Therefore, although Lao Tzu mentions the Holy One in a third of his chapters, his description of the Holy One naturally does not carry such vivid details.

Nevertheless, Lao Tzu and Isaiah simultaneously point out the Holy One who would practice the heavenly Tao on earth. To save human beings, the Holy One humbled himself and was humiliated; he suffered and sacrificed, yet he is the LORD [traditional Biblical spelling for *Jehovah*] and king; he is the light, but does not dazzle; he looks like a regular man, yet holds the utmost treasure; the incarnate Tao is rejected by people, yet is rich and unlimited.

Lao Tzu says: "*He who holds on to the image of the great Tao, the whole world comes to him... people will have rest and inner and outer peace*" (35:1). At the same time, Isaiah portrays the Holy One even more clearly: "*I, the LORD,...will make you to be covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles...*" (Isaiah 42:6); "*The nations will rally to him... He will raise a banner for the nations*" (Isaiah 11:10-12); "*The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth*" (Isaiah 54:5); and "*In that day men will look to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel*" (Isaiah 17:7).

God's revelation transcends human wisdom and logic. Therefore, when Lao Tzu and Isaiah talk about the Holy One, they have no proof. All they simply do is to declare—and that is enough.

God's revelation also transcends nations and cultures. Therefore, Isaiah repeatedly stresses that the Holy One does not belong only

to Israel, even though He comes from Israel. Unlike Confucius and Meng Tzu, Lao Tzu never mentions any Chinese sage, and there is no reference to a specific nation. Lao Tzu is interested only in announcing the universal Tao. The legend of Lao Tzu in his old age wandering out of the Hangu Mountain Pass on the back of an ox is in keeping with what he enunciates. Today, the fact that there are more than 100 English translations of *Lao Tzu*, far more than *Lun Yu* and *Zhou Yi*, is itself a statement to the universality of *Lao Tzu*.

Section G. The Holiness of Jesus: “I Do Not Belong to This World”

A few hundred years later, the prophecies of Isaiah and Lao Tzu came true in Jesus, the Holy One. Through Jesus, there appeared a light in darkness, a road that runs from heaven to earth. Through Jesus, there appears a path for human beings to follow and a way for them to become sanctified, in other words, to become holy.

Jesus is the Holy One, because he is the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit forms and conceives Jesus (Matthew 1:20). When Jesus started his ministry at age thirty, the Spirit came down from heaven like a dove and remained on him. God gave Jesus the Spirit without limit. Jesus had to leave this world in order for the Spirit to be passed on to others, starting with his disciples (John 1:32; 3:34; 16:7).

Jesus is the Holy One, because he is the One who connects with heaven above and human beings down on earth: “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven which a man may eat and not die*”; “*I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father*”; and “*I am the way and the truth and the life...If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well*” (John 6:50; 16:28; 14:6, 7).

Jesus is the Holy One, because he sows the heavenly Tao in the world and transforms humanity: “*The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world*”; “*The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us*”; and “*is full of grace and truth*”

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(John 1:9, 14). After his ascension into heaven, he sends the promised Holy Spirit: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...”* (Acts 1:8). He earlier had told them, *“When he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth”* (John 16:12).

Jesus is the Holy One, because he always separated himself from this world, and all who follow him walk a holy way. Before going to the Cross, Jesus prayed to the Father for his disciples: *“They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth... For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified”* (John 17:16-19).

Jesus lived up to and fulfilled his divine name. According to the Bible, he is truly the incarnate Holy One—the One that Lao Tzu also clearly announced.

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Chapter II. Duties

During his earthly life, the duties of Jesus could be categorized in three ways: (a) *Prophet*, speaking on behalf of God; (b) *Priest*, mediating between God and human beings; and (c) *King*, glorifying God in the human heart and soul.

It is remarkable that when describing the Holy One, Lao Tzu clearly points out these same three categories of duties.

Section A. Prophet

1. The Holy One Has Special Knowledge

*The Holy One knows without having to experience,
sees without looking. (47:2)*

Is Lao Tzu's assertion an exaggeration? Is this knowledge real? To the human mind, such a person is unimaginable. However, anyone who is familiar with Jesus will not be surprised. Jesus knows the life story of Nathaniel and of the Samaritan woman at one glance (John 1:47-51; 4:17-19); Jesus calls the name of Zacchaeus without being told (Luke 19:5); Jesus predicts his own death and resurrection (Luke 18:31-34); and Jesus foretells the end of the world (Matthew 24).

In a way similar to what Lao Tzu says about the Holy One, Isaiah prophesies about Jesus:

*The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit
of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel
and of power, the Spirit of knowledge, and of the fear
of the LORD... He will not judge by what he sees*

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with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears.” (Isaiah 11:2, 3)

When Jesus taught people, the Jewish leaders were amazed and asked: “How did this man get such learning without having studied?” Jesus answered: “*My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me*” (John 7:15-16); “*The Son can do nothing by himself*” (John 5:19); and “*I do nothing on my own*” (John 8:28). These words help to explain the inexplicable.

The Holy One knows without having to experience, sees without looking, and accomplishes without effort because He is divine. Prophets of the world from ancient times had received only partial revelation from God. However, Jesus Himself is God’s revelation—completely and totally.

2. Inheriting Light and Eternity, the Holy One Is the Teacher of the Unkind

Inheriting light means “following and transmitting light.” Lao Tzu says: “*The Holy One is good at saving people. And no one is abandoned. He is good at saving all things, and nothing is abandoned. This is called following the light*” (27:3-4). Light comes from Tao. For this reason, the Holy One, who “inherits light,” spreads the light among all people.

Lao Tzu continues: “*The Kind One is the teacher of the unkind; the unkind is the resource of the Kind One*”; and “*One is hopelessly lost however wise he is, if he does not respect the teacher or love his resource. This is an important mystery!*” (27:5-6).

Being kind to everyone also matters to Jesus: “[L]ove your enemies, do good to them...then...you will be sons [children] of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked” (Luke 6:35).

Sometime after Jesus started his ministry at age thirty, he was called “Teacher,” or “*Rabbi*,” a word that is translated in Chinese as “pedant.” When a Pharisee named Nicodemus addressed Jesus as

“Teacher” directly, Jesus told him a mystery: *“I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3). Obviously, Jesus understood that he was not an ordinary teacher. He was at that time, and still is, the light carrier who brings the new birth of eternal life—“a lesson” that goes way beyond any classroom. Lao Tzu says: *“Follow the light of Tao, return to its brightness, you will then keep yourself away from calamities. This is to inherit eternity”* (52:6).

Placed side by side, the terms *inherit light* and *inherit eternity* carry deep meaning. The Holy One inherits light and becomes the teacher of sinners; when sinners follow the light, they return to brightness and thus inherit eternity. This is an apparent affirmation of the relationship between the revealer and those receiving revelation, the Savior and those being saved—the ultimate “lessons” of life that go far beyond discursive teaching.

3. The Holy One Teaches without Speaking

The Holy One who connects Heaven above with human beings on earth is responsible for both teaching and transforming people. This unique prophet does not teach only by applying knowledge, reasoning, or language, but by using Spirit, love, and life to revive people and give them a new life. Jesus says: *“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life”* (John 6:63). However, words in the Bible are dead when people do not read them with a revitalized heart and soul. The true Teacher not only transmits knowledge, but also transforms people. Lao Tzu says that *“the Holy One teaches without speaking”* (2:3) and that his teaching surpasses all relative knowledge and wisdom (3; 12; 19; 58, and so on). About the Holy One’s unique teaching style and ability, Lao Tzu says:

*The Holy One rules by humbling people’s hearts,
Filling their stomachs,
Subduing their will,
And strengthening their bones. (3:4)*

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In governing people, the Holy One provides inner fulfillment instead of pleasures for the eye. Thus, one thing is chosen, and the other discarded. (12:2)

Furthermore, the Holy One says:

*I make no effort—and people's hearts are transformed by themselves;
I live in tranquility—and people's hearts are set right by themselves;
I disengage myself—and people grow prosperous by themselves;
I have no desires—and people become pure by themselves. (57:3)*

*In this world, with his breath the Holy One makes people's hearts simple.
People fix their eyes and ears on him, and he treats them like children. (49:4)*

*The Holy One appreciates what men abandon;
He learns what men do not want to learn;
He leads men back from their transgressions.
This is in accordance with the nature of all things;
It is not [human] effort. (64:5)*

To lead people from their transgressions is to help people repent. In order to live a new life, human beings must enter into the great Tao, but this does not happen when they rely on the knowledge, discipline, and austerity taught by traditional moralistic religion. Instead, new life comes from reliance on faith in God and on the Spirit of God. Such is the mystery of Tao's incarnation and His transformative power.

Section B. Priest

Priestly duties include managing spiritual events and matters, such as sacrificial rites, intercessions, and benedictions. The Israelites

established the priesthood during the Old Testament era; Aaron, the elder brother of Moses, and his descendants served as priests, as well as the tribe of Levi (Exodus 28:1-3, Numbers 3:1-9). In the New Testament, Jesus as the ultimate priest sacrificed his body once and for all, paying the penalty for sin for those who have faith in him, and then he also overcame death itself.

Just as in Israel, sacrificial rites prevailed in the life of the ancient Chinese, along with sacrificial language, music, etiquette, and of course, priests. However, unlike ancient Israel, no designated clan served as priests in ancient China. It was the emperors themselves who performed the sacrificial rites. In effect, the emperors were the priests.

Lao Tzu does not call the Holy One “priest,” yet the imperial duties of priesthood clearly were assigned to the Holy One.

1. Instrument: The Great Priest—the Instrument to Heaven for All People

Lao Tzu says: “*The Holy One unites with Tao to be the instrument to Heaven for all people*” (22:2).

Several chapters later, Lao Tzu reiterates: “*Knowing his brightness but keeping to obscurity, he thus becomes the instrument for the world to know Heaven. As the instrument for the world to know Heaven, he has the eternal virtue with him, enabling people to return to the infinite*” (28:3-4).

The word translated “*instrument*” is “*shi*” in Chinese 式; in this passage, it is mistaken by many to mean “principle.” However, in *Selections of History and Philosophy* (Pre-Qing), published by Taiwan Muduo Publishers, “*shi*” is defined as “a tool used by ancient imperial astronomers to study astronomy.” The Chief Librarian of Beijing Library and professor of philosophy in Beijing University, Mr. Ren Jiyu states in *Lao Tzu Quan Yi*: “*Shi* is a tool used by the ancients to ascertain divine information. Up to the Han dynasty, fortunetellers were still using this tool to predict good or

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bad omens according to the results of its spinning” (*Shi Ji: Ri Zhe Lie Zhuan*).

The meaning of “*shi*” is clear and definite. However, ordinary modern reasoning has a difficult time fitting that word into Lao Tzu’s chapters. Even though translators of *Lao Tzu* understood “*shi*” as an astronomic tool, they still translated it as “principle” as in “*The Holy One uses Tao as a principle for the world.*”

According to the sentence “*The Holy One unites with Tao to be the instrument to Heaven for all people,*” the Holy One makes Himself the instrument for people to understand Heaven. This interpretation supports the meaning of “*The Holy One is connected*”—the instrument connecting people and Heaven, time and eternity. Here, “*shi*” can apply only to the dual nature of Jesus, who alone possesses both divine and human characteristics. Only in Jesus can human beings see the ultimate reality of life, death, and resurrection. Jesus serves as the “*shi*,” or the instrument, for people to see Heaven; he says: “*If you really knew me, you would know my father as well*” (John 14:7), and “*No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man*” (John 3:13).

For people who do not recognize Jesus, this twice-occurring concept of “*the Holy One as the instrument to Heaven*” is difficult to grasp; however, when one recognizes Jesus’ cosmic role, this idea is easy for one to understand and interpret. The word *mediator* in *Lao Tzu* contains the same concept of priesthood, as we now will explore.

2. “Mediator”: The One Who Mediates for Sinners

Lao Tzu describes Tao “*the lord of all things, the treasure of the good man and mediator for sinners*” (62:1). Here, the word *mediator* (保) is also a source of headaches for many scholars. The translation of Ren Jiyu and Chen Guyin concurs with that of He Shangong: “*Tao is also for sinners to keep every step of the way.*” This interpretation is obviously problematic, since sinners cannot hold on to Tao. Lao Tzu clearly states this point (chapters 18, 19, 53, and so on). Wang Bi translated *mediator* as “*to prevent from*

damage”; Feng Dapu concurs with Wang Bi: “*The unkind relies on Tao for protection,*” which implies that sinners can hold onto Tao for protection although they do not know Tao. This interpretation is off the mark.

The two related concepts “*the treasure of the good man*” and “*the mediator for sinners*” work together. Sinners are passively mediated by Tao, whereas the good man actively applies Tao as the utmost treasure to save people. Putting the two concepts together, one can perceive the clear meaning: Tao is the treasure that the good man uses to mediate for sinners. This point relates to what Lao Tzu says previously: “*The Holy One is good at saving people and no one is abandoned; the good man is the teacher of the wicked; the wicked is the resource of the good man*” (27:3-6). To mediate for sinners means to lead them into Tao so that they may discard their wicked ways and have their sins forgiven. This point also is emphasized in Chapter 62 of *Tao Te Ching*.

The Bible states: “*But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One*” (1 John 2:1), and “*...Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance*” (Hebrews 9:15). Chinese people now may not be accustomed to these words. Nevertheless, what Lao Tzu expressed is quite satisfactorily explained in the light of the Bible.

Every Christian who knows Jesus Christ can testify that he is the mediator for sinners. Once someone accepts Jesus as his Savior and Lord, regardless of how seriously he sins, he can repent, change his ways, be released from the bondage of sin and become a person with a new life. Those who previously regarded themselves as already righteous and thought they were sufficiently kind, once they affirm Jesus, come to recognize their internal wickedness. They also will repent and be reborn spiritually.

To believe in the incarnate Jesus is to enter into Tao. In Tao, “*seekers find and sinners are forgiven*” (62:4), and human beings realize that “*it is far better to dwell in Tao than to be crowned as*

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emperor or appointed as ministers with glory and wealth” (62:3). Being in Tao, one knows that even good deeds and beautiful words cannot purge sins. Moreover, in Tao, one naturally realizes that the Holy One’s Tao is the mediator for sinners like each of us.

3. Priestly “Body”: Sacrificed for Human Sins, Living beyond Itself, Bearing the World on Itself

According to Hebrew tradition, the high priest had to offer a perfect lamb as a sin offering to God every year. Jesus Christ, as the High Priest, offered his own sinless body as a sacrifice to atone for sin, once and for all time, on behalf of all who repent.

John, the prophet, upon seeing Jesus come toward him, uttered: *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29). The Bible records: When Jesus came into the world, he said: *“Sacrifice and offerings you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me... He sets aside the first to establish the second”* (Hebrews 10:5, 9).

Lao Tzu dramatically claims centuries earlier: *“The Holy One thinks of himself last and comes first; he disregards himself and finds himself enduring” (7:2); “He who gives up his life for the world is trusted by the world; he who gives up his life for loving the world is relied on by the world” (13:4); and “He who is humiliated is the lord of the society; he who is sacrificed is the king of the world” (78:3).*

In a similar vein, Isaiah also vividly prophesies of Jesus: *“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed... The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth”* (Isaiah 53:5; 54:5).

Section C. King

When we say that Jesus is the King, we are not referring to an ordinary earthly king; instead, we are pointing to the King of hearts

and souls, the King of the universe—the ultimate in guidance and leadership.

When Pilate asks Jesus, “*Are you the king of the Jews?*” Jesus replies, “*My kingdom is not of this world*” (John 18:33, 36). Another time, Jesus tells the Pharisees: “*The kingdom of God does not come visibly [with your careful observation], nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17:20-21).

The King of the universe is also the King of time and space; He is the embodiment of Tao, who created and sustains life. Lao Tzu says that all things arise from Him, the Holy One (2:4-5).

All earthly kingdoms will disappear; however, in the kingdom of the Holy One, hearts are sanctified (made holy), and thus this kingdom is eternal. Kingdoms not sincerely based in the heart will never last, yet the kingdom of the Holy One is based in hearts that are purified; it is therefore a kingdom that lasts forever. Let us examine how Lao Tzu describes the King of such a kingdom.

1. The King and the Lord Who Suffered and Is Disgraced

Nothing in the world is as soft and weak as water, yet for attaching the hard and strong, nothing works as well. This is because water is too soft and weak to be altered... Thus the Holy One says: He who is humiliated is the lord of the society; he who is sacrificed is the king of the world. Paradoxical are the words of truth. (78:1-4)

In Lao Tzu’s original text, the word *humiliated* means “having borne disgrace for the world,” and the word *disgrace* is a synonym for “filth.” Worldly filth, that is, human unkindness and impurity, represents sin. The original meaning of *sacrificed* is “having suffered for the world’s evil,” that is, fierceness 兇. It is hard to imagine that a person as soft and weak as water can bear the sin and evil of the world alone. He also must be the king and the lord of

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the world. Only the incarnate Jesus fulfills this paradoxical role of exemplary humility and cosmic authority: “[N]ot only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one” (John 11:52).

How can a soft, gentle person who suffers and sacrifices for the world be the lord and the king? Lao Tzu explains very clearly: “*The Holy One does not rely on his own ability*” (77:4). This sentence is the key to the mystery of Tao. The incarnate Tao engages Tao’s ability to accomplish his undertakings. Lao Tzu also says: “*The Holy One acts without effort*” (2:3). What an accurate prediction of the “Jesus phenomenon”—the One who exercised simple authority over wine, sicknesses, storms, demons, bread and fish.

2. The Ruler Who Knows His Glory but Bears Disgrace

Knowing his glory but bearing disgrace, he thus becomes the valley for the world. As the valley for the world, he is abundant in eternal grace, [enabling people to] return to their original state of being. Once applied, this state of being becomes an instrument. The Holy One uses it to become the ruler. (28:5-7)

For Lao Tzu, simplicity 朴 is the original state of being, e.g., the spirit, which is the original, pure essence of life. Once restored and filled (cleansed) by the Holy Spirit, a person becomes the instrument of Jesus. The concept of *instrument* here is very familiar to every Christian, because the Bible refers to Godly people as His instruments, or vessels.

To Christians, Jesus is also the ruler, because Jesus descended to earth, bringing Heaven’s life and values. Jesus is like a valley, a spiritual home to which people can return in the face of a dangerous world that is constantly changing and challenging.

3. The Master Who Hides Treasure

My words are easy to understand and easy to live by, yet no one in the world understands them or lives by them. My words have a source, and [my] undertaking is for my master. You do not know [the source or my master]; therefore, you do not understand me [my words and my undertaking]. The fewer the people who understand me, the more precious is what I have. Therefore, the Holy One clothes himself in coarse garments hiding a treasure within. (70:1-4)

In these verses, Lao Tzu highlights the concept of “Creator,” or “Master.” Words must have a source; any undertaking must have a master. Lao Tzu declares that the *Word*, which is translated into Chinese as *Tao*, and the act of declaring Tao have a Creator, or a Master—Tao himself, incarnated as the Holy One. Lao Tzu says that the Holy One clothes himself in coarse garments, and that is why the wise and the learned do not recognize him. However, the Holy One possesses true treasure. Many human beings are not aware of the Holy One and, therefore, do not understand Tao and cannot follow Tao. Conversely, if people recognize this Creator and Master, what Lao Tzu teaches is easy to comprehend and not difficult to carry out.

When he ministers, the Holy One is constantly rejected and defied, because he appears insignificant and humble like a person wearing the coarse garments of a poor person. Jesus says: “*Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say....Yet because I tell you the truth, you do not believe in me... I am the way and the truth and the life... If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well*”; “*My yoke is easy and my burden is light*” (John 8:43, 45; 14:6; Matthew 11:30).

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4. The Lord of All Kings Who Treats Human Beings as Children and Straw Dogs

*Heaven and earth have no regard for benevolence;
they view all creatures as straw dogs offered to God.
Nor does the Holy One have regard for benevolence;
he likewise views common people as straw dogs. (5:1)*

I already have discussed the meaning of these sentences (see Part One, Chapter 2 of this book). When straw dogs are placed on the altar, they are sacred, precious and even holy; however, once separated from God, they are like a pile of dry grass. This description captures the true state of human life apart from God. In this view, the Holy One is the foundation for redeemed human life. Lao Tzu also says that the Holy One treats human beings as children:

The heart of the Holy One is not concerned about himself. His heart is concerned about the concerns of the people. He is good to those who are good, and he is also good to those who are not good. There is thus goodness. He trusts in those who are trustworthy, and he also trusts in those who are not trustworthy. There is thus trust. In this world, with his breath the Holy One makes people's hearts simple. People fix their eyes and ears on him, and he treats them like children. (49:1-4)

This paragraph reveals that the Holy One is the King of hearts and souls. The sentence “*he treats them [human beings] like children*” should not be interpreted negatively. For Lao Tzu, the state of being a child is how human beings enter and stay in Tao. (The return to childhood helps to restore the pristine goodness that existed before sin.) “*Who can overcome his flesh to be meek and gentle as an infant?*” (10:2). Embraced by the Holy One, human beings behave like children—trusting, dependent, even helpless. This point is identical to what Jesus says: “*I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it*”

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(Luke 18:17), and “[Y]ou have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” (Matthew 11:25). What makes the Holy One the Lord of all lords is evidently neither force nor knowledge, but the power of the Spirit. This power originates from God, because only God bestows human beings with His Spirit.

To summarize, Lao Tzu’s description of the Holy One’s duties are the same as those of Jesus, as the Hebrew prophets foretold and the Bible testifies:

1. The Holy One knows without having to experience, sees without looking, teaches without speaking, and leads people out of sin. He is the great “Prophet.”
2. The Holy One serves as the instrument between Heaven and earth and acts as the mediator for sinners. He suffers and sacrifices for the benefit of all people—the good and the bad. He is the great “Priest.”
3. The Holy One is the king and the lord who treats human beings like children and straw dogs. He governs the heart and soul and bestows value to life. He is the great “King.”

That all three duties would be embodied in one person—the Holy One—is miraculous in its own right. How could Lao Tzu’s description of the Holy One so perfectly match the prophecies of Isaiah and dovetail so powerfully the exemplary life and duties of Jesus Christ? Centuries after Lao Tzu and Isaiah, Jesus fulfilled the deepest vision and yearnings of not only the Chinese and the Hebrews, but also of all other people, for a perfect prophet, priest and king. Such a fulfillment could only have been crafted in Heaven itself.

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PART TWO: THE INCARNATION OF TAO—ABOUT THE HOLY ONE (聖人)

Chapter III. The Original Concept

Readers of fiction commonly ask, “What was the writer’s original concept of the character?” Similarly, some people may try to apply this question to the concept of “the Holy One.” However, that question does not quite fit, since we cannot treat *Tao Te Ching* as a merely literary work. In fact, the value of Lao Tzu’s five-thousand words would have been totally different had they been originally categorized only as literature. In a similar way, we should not treat the Holy One as a fictional character, because that is not Lao Tzu’s original intention or how his *Tao Te Ching* has been treated for 2,600 years. To Lao Tzu and his readers, the Holy One is as real as Tao.

Nevertheless, the question persists: “After what or whom is the Holy One modeled?” since the reality of the Holy One remains a mystery in some academic circles.

The Holy One is modeled after the original concept of Tao. In fact, the Holy One is the incarnate Tao, the true image of Tao. This point is self-evident in *Lao Tzu*. However, when people examine the Holy One in the light of ordinary people, ordinary reasoning, and ordinary principles, they cannot help but consider the Holy One as imaginary, unrealistic, and untrue, since he has not been found in human time and space.

Lao Tzu would disagree with this “ordinary” view. Since he firmly believes in the existence of the shadowy and mysterious Tao, he, doubtlessly, would trust in the actual, historic Holy One. Lao Tzu would not have known that the Holy One whom he described was Jesus, who appeared in Israel six hundred years later, or that his earlier contemporary, the Hebrew prophet Isaiah, had prophesied about the Holy One in great detail. Nevertheless, Lao Tzu seems to

have seen the Holy One. This Holy One is Tao, and Tao is the One who came to the world of human beings to demonstrate the divine love, righteousness, and salvation of Tao.

Section A. Direct Revelation: The One Who Manifests

On the one hand, Tao, in Lao Tzu's view, is shapeless, formless, shadowy, and mysterious: "*the form without a form, the image without an image* (14:5), and "*the great image is too grand to be seen*" (41:6). On the other hand, Lao Tzu says: "*In the shadow there appears to be a real being*" (21:2). In addition to these descriptions, Lao Tzu uses many phrases, such as "*shadowy, mysterious, unsearchable, deep, unknowable, unspeakable,*" and so on, to describe Tao. Clearly, Tao is not an object that can be simply seen or portrayed. Similarly, the Bible states: "*No one has ever seen God...*" (John 1:18).

In Chapter 35, when Lao Tzu discusses the appearance of the image of Tao in the world, his tone changes sharply as he declares with certainty and clarity:

He who holds on to the image of the great Tao will have the whole world come to him. Coming to him, people will not harm each other; instead they will have rest and inner and outer peace. Travelers in a hurry would linger for music and delicacies; Tao, when spoken, lacks flavor. He does not appeal to the eye or to the ear; when applied, his benefits are not exhausted.

Lao Tzu proclaims that the image of Tao transforms the world. If we relate this view to Lao Tzu's more than two dozen prophecies about the Holy One, here is what we discover:

First, the mysterious Tao self-manifests clearly to the world through the incarnated form, the Holy One. The image bearer is Tao's revealer, the Holy One, who transforms the world. He is the One who connects Heaven with earth and links God with human beings.

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While Lao Tzu says, *“He who holds on to the image of the great Tao, the whole world comes to him,”* the great prophet Isaiah in Israel has foretold at a slightly earlier time: *“Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor”* (Isaiah 55:5).

The Bible reiterates that Jesus is *“the exact representation of his being”* (Hebrews 1:3) and *“... the image of God”* (2 Corinthians 4:4); He (the Son) is *“the image of the invisible God”* (Colossians 1:15); and *“No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known”* (John 1:18).

Secondly, Lao Tzu points out that the great Tao brings rest and peace to the world through the Holy One: *“Coming to him, people will not harm each other; instead they will have rest and inner and outer peace”* (35:1).

Isaiah prophesies: *“In that day the Root of Jesse [Jesus] will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious...”* (Isaiah 11:10).

Jesus announces: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Matthew 11:28-29).

Before his death, Jesus told his disciples: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives...”* (John 14:27).

Thirdly, worldly pleasures attract people, whereas the Holy One’s true Tao seems tasteless, and is neglected: *“Travelers in a hurry would linger for music and delicacies; Tao, when spoken, lacks flavor. He does not appeal to the eye or to the ear; when applied, his benefits are not exhausted”* (35:2-3).

Jesus' words always seem clear and easy to understand. Repeatedly, he says that those who have ears should listen! I often think that when the omniscient, omnipotent God talks to human beings, he chooses to use simple language that is easy to understand so that there is no need for scholars and the learned to explain his words. Otherwise, his words would be monopolized and distorted by the so called "experts."

People prefer to indulge in "*music and delicacies*," Lao Tzu observes. Jesus agrees: "*The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe*"; "*Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me*"; and "*I tell you the truth, if a man [anyone] keeps my word, he will never see death*" (John 6:63; 8:45, 51). Lao Tzu also expresses the eternal perspective: "*When applied, his benefits are not exhausted, because the Holy One hides a treasure within*" (70:4).

Section B. Indirect Revelation: *Therefore* and Other Aspects

1. *Therefore*

Lao Tzu talks about the Holy One 29 times and uses the word *therefore* 22 times to introduce the Holy One. *Therefore* means "*as a result*" or "*for that reason*." After discussing the essence, image, characteristics, and principle of Tao, Lao Tzu uses *therefore* to draw out the Holy One's deeds. This use of *therefore* confirms Lao Tzu's belief not only in the existence of the Holy One, but also in the inevitability and pre-existence of the Holy One. It is not only a logical induction, but also a description of reality. Therefore, Lao Tzu's position is beyond dispute:

Quick promises are not reliable; the seemingly easy will turn out to be difficult. Therefore, despite difficulties, the Holy One eventually will overcome.
(63:4-5)

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[Human] efforts will fail; for men to lay hold of it is to lose it. Therefore, the Holy One will not fail, because he makes no [human] effort. (64:3)
To dissolve great hatred through mediation will not remove all of it. How can this be regarded as good? Therefore, the Holy One holds the loan, but does not ask for payment. (79:1-2)

The Holy One is equal to Tao, and is united with Tao. He is the image, the messenger, and the representation of Tao.

2. Other Aspects

First of all, Lao Tzu directly uses the descriptions of Tao to portray the Holy One:

Therefore, the Holy One acts without effort and teaches without speaking. All things rise from him, yet he claims no sovereignty; he multiplies all, yet claims no possession; he benefits all, yet expects no return; he accomplishes all, yet claims no credit; he claims no credit, yet endures forever. (2:4)

Not able to explain the Holy One's behavior logically, some people treat this verse as a mistake. The Bible, however, expresses a view similar to that of Lao Tzu:

In the beginning was the Word... the Word was God... Through him all things were made... He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him... The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us... full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-14)

Through the lens of the Bible, it is no surprise that the Holy One creates and sustains the world, but claims no credit.

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Secondly, the Holy One functions in a unique category as the mediator between God and humanity:

*When the state is ruled under Tao,
ghosts will trouble no one.
Not only do ghosts trouble no one—
even gods harm no one.
Not only do gods harm no one—
even saints will not harm anyone.
Thus, the two do no harm to each other,
And virtues meet to return to Tao. (60:2-5)*

When Tao is in charge, “*gods harm no one*” and “*even saints will not harm anyone.*” The mystery of these statements is that the Holy One belongs to the realm of spirit; he is a “man” of God, heaven, Tao, Spirit, not an ordinary human. These statements are definitely thought provoking.

Thirdly, the Holy One lives among human beings, just as Tao exists in the universe:

*Heaven and earth have no regard for benevolence;
They view all creatures as straw dogs offered to gods.
Nor does the Holy One have regard for benevolence;
He likewise views common people as straw dogs.*

“*Heaven and earth*” obviously refers to the transformative energy of the universe and the deeds of Tao. All things have value and meaning in Tao, who loves and sustains everything (34:3). However, departing from Tao, everything is mere straw and dust (see also Genesis 3:19, which concurs). By saying “*Heaven and earth have no regard for benevolence,*” Lao Tzu is pointing out that in the eye of Tao, even human morals and righteousness are irrelevant and useless, if human beings have not committed themselves as God’s instruments, or vessels. This understanding is similar to the Biblical point that even good behavior and sacrifice, laws and liturgy, are worthless for salvation. What really matters is a vibrant relationship with the Creator.

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The marvelous thing is that the Holy One plays the same role in the human world that Tao plays in the universe. To human beings, the Holy One is the way Tao is to everything in the universe. Human values can be found in Tao; outside of Tao, human beings by themselves are mere “straw and dust.”

Section C. Self-revelation: Accomplishment without Effort

When he is in the process of describing the Holy One, Lao Tzu devotes a substantial amount of ink on the Holy One’s mysterious power of “*accomplishing without effort*”:

The Holy One acts without effort and teaches without speaking. All things rise from him yet he claims no sovereignty; he multiplies all yet claims no possession; he benefits all yet expects no return; he accomplishes all yet claims no credit; he claims no credit yet endures forever. (2:3-5)

The Holy One unites with Tao as the vehicle to Heaven for all people. Unaware that he sees, he sees clearly. Not holding himself to be right, he proves to be right. Not seeking his own glory, he accomplishes great missions. Not regarding himself as great, he becomes the king of all. Precisely because he does not contend, no one can contend with him. The ancients said: “The wronged will conquer.” That is no empty saying. Truly, the world will return to the conqueror. (22:2-5)

The Holy One knows without having to experience, sees without looking, and accomplishes without effort. (47:2)

The Holy One will not fail because he makes no [human] effort; what is not for men to lay hold of will not be lost...the Holy One appreciates what men abandon; he depreciates what men value.

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*He learns what men do not want to learn;
he leads men back from their aggressions. This
is in accordance with the nature of all things;
it is not [human] effort. (64:3; 5)*

*The Holy One knows himself but does not display
himself; he loves himself but does not exalt himself.
(72:3)*

*The Holy One does not rely on his own ability;
at completion, he claims no credit and makes
no display of his virtues. (77:4)*

*The Holy One does not accumulate. He lives for
others and thus possesses more; he gives all to the
world and thus becomes richer. The Tao of heaven
is benevolent, causing no harm. The way of the Holy
One is to act on behalf of the people; he does not
contend with them. (81:4-5)*

These passages paint a clear picture of the Holy One, whom Lao Tzu characterizes in terms of a series of apparent negatives: the Holy One is not possessing, not contending, not exalting himself, not holding himself right, not displaying himself, not glorifying himself, not accumulating, not acting, not relying on his own ability, and not regarding himself as great.

What are the apparently positive results? The Holy One radiates light, sees clearly, endures, knows himself, loves himself, does not fail, does not lose, benefits, and completes. Why are these effects characteristic of the Holy One? The answer is simply because the humility that the Holy One possesses is not ordinary humility. From antiquity till now, numerous scholars have treated Lao Tzu as a passive escapist. Even his many admirers can appreciate only his effort-free tranquility at most. Few have perceived Lao Tzu's deeper truth, which is "The Holy One accomplishes all, endures, and becomes the king of all."

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In Jesus, this difficult paradox can easily be resolved! His words and actions accurately affirm Lao Tzu's description of the Holy One's mysterious power of accomplishing without effort. That fact is undeniable. Now, let us consider:

The words of Jesus:

But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world... I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.
(John 8:26, 28)

For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. (John 12:49)

The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.
(John 14:10)

The deeds of Jesus:

I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing... By myself I can do nothing. (John 5:19, 30)

For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. (John 5:36)

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me... no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him. (John 6:38, 65)

I am not here on my own. (John 8:28)

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The prayers of Jesus:

*...I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.
(John 5:30)*

He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth. (John 7:18)

If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. (John 8:54)

Father, ... not my will, but yours be done. (Luke 22:42)

By His words, deeds and prayers, Jesus reveals that He is Tao's incarnation. His words and deeds do not originate from himself, but serve to demonstrate the great Tao!

This Carpenter of Galilee who never went to school and died at age thirty-three gave the world the path leading to Heaven. Such self-giving, divine love, with the power to forgive sins and restore broken fellowship with God, calls for utmost devotion and gratitude. No wonder that for over 2,000 years, His love has won the heart of humankind and that today, over 2.3-billion people call him "Savior." How could such a humble young man have produced such a remarkable feat? Because He was not merely human!

Mr. Lin Yutang speaks pointedly: "His whole life is itself a 'revelation,' that is, the spirit of God made visible and concrete for us to see... Only Jesus, and no one else, could bring us to that direct knowledge of God."¹¹⁴

Obviously, the Holy One's accomplishments are not generated from human wisdom, human authority, human virtue, or earthly

¹¹⁴ Lin Yutang, *From Pagan to Christian* (Cleveland, New York: The world Publishing Company, 1959), 239.

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knowledge. Jesus achieves without effort. It is the great Tao who gave birth to him, impelled him, guided his words, and bestowed on him divine abilities. It is also the great Tao who sent Jesus to the Cross to endure suffering, humiliation, and death — then breathed life back into him — and who makes him King and Lord now and forever!

PART TWO: THE INCARNATION OF TAO—ABOUT THE HOLY ONE (聖人)

Chapter IV. The Mission of the Holy One

Section A. Omnipotent, Universal Salvation

What is the mission of the Holy One? Both Lao Tzu and I could not state it in any more clear or simple terms than these—the mission of the Holy One is to save human beings. Lao Tzu “announces” this mission in Chapter 27:

*A good traveler leaves no track; a good speaker
speaks without blemish; a good reckoner needs
no device. Those good at shutting doors
do so without bolts, and the door cannot be opened;
those good at tying knots do so without ropes, and the
knots cannot be untied. Likewise, the Holy One
is good at saving people, and no one is abandoned.
He is good at saving all things, and nothing
is abandoned. This is called following the light.*

The main point of Chapter 27—that the Holy One’s mission is salvation—is the foundation upon which these other points rest:

1. The mission is extraordinary and brings enlightenment from above to people, who thus inherit light.
2. The mission is universal; no one is abandoned and nothing is forsaken; and
3. The mission is omnipotent.

The Holy One is good at doing, speaking, planning, shutting, untying. In other words, He is “*good at saving people.*”

Lao Tzu further expresses the Holy One’s omnipotent power of salvation in Chapter 54:

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*What the perfect builder builds cannot be destroyed;
What the perfect preserver preserves cannot be lost.
Your descendants ought to offer sacrifices
without ceasing.
So cultivated, a person will have genuine virtues;
So cultivated, a family will have more than
sufficient virtues;
So cultivated, a village will have virtues that endure;
So cultivated, a nation will have virtues in abundance;
So cultivated, the world will have virtues that prevail.
Therefore, applying that to oneself, one comes to
know one's self;
Applying that to itself, a family comes to know itself;
Applying that to itself, a village comes to know itself;
Applying that to itself, a nation comes to know itself;
Applying that to itself, the world comes to know itself.
How do I get to know what the world is like?
By such application.*

Viewing chapters 52 through 55 as a cohesive whole can help us better to understand Chapter 54. In chapters 52 and 53, Lao Tzu claims that Tao is the only salvation: *"Follow the light of [Tao], return to its brightness, you will then keep yourself from calamities. This is to inherit eternity"*; and *"This is why I am certain of [Tao] and walk in his path. The only thing I fear is to go astray"* (52:6; 53:1).

Lao Tzu characterizes some sins of his era: *"The great Tao is of great peace, but men prefer bypaths. The court is corrupt indeed; the fields are full of weeds; the granaries are all empty. Are they not indeed robbers—those wearing fine robes, those bearing sharp swords, those indulging in delicacies, those storing too much wealth? This is rebellion against Tao!"* (53:2-3).

In Chapter 54, Lao Tzu confidently affirms the great Tao's salvation and sustaining power: *"What the perfect builder builds cannot be destroyed; what the perfect preserver preserves cannot be lost."* Despite the corruption in this world, what the "perfect builder

builds” is not subject to destruction, just as what the “*perfect preserver preserves*” is not capable of getting lost. In other words, the Savior has the great ability to save the world. Thereafter, Lao Tzu brings up the issue of sacrificial rites: “*Your descendants ought to offer sacrifices [to the Perfect One] without ceasing.*” In modern parlance, Lao Tzu goes a step beyond a theological question by putting theory and practice together. (In other words, devotion must be expressed in behavior, not merely belief.)

The true origin of the so called “*virtues*” (德) for a family, a nation, or the world is from the great Tao’s salvation and the practice of Tao. “*So cultivated, the world will have virtues that prevail.*” Guan Tzu said: “The home of virtues is Tao.” The word *virtue* literally means “gain” (得), as in “gaining from Tao.” Lao Tzu thus declares: All principles, large or small, are related to Tao. “*How do I get to know what the world is like? By such application.*” *Virtues* (道德) and *principles* (道理) are two words commonly found in Chinese lexicons. For Lao Tzu, both of these words are empowered in Tao’s salvation: Without Tao, there will be no virtues. Indeed, without Tao, there will be no principles. In Tao’s salvation, virtues are abundant, and principles lead to understanding and accomplishments.

Lao Tzu observes that individuals who dwell in Tao’s salvation are guarded by Tao, whose virtues are so abundant that whoever is guarded in Tao has the simplicity and purity of an infant: *One who has abundant virtues is like a newborn infant. Poisonous insects do not sting him; ferocious animals do not attack him; birds of prey do not harm him...*” (55:1). Lao Tzu’s observation brings to mind Jesus’ words about God’s revelation, which is given only to those who are like little children: “*Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it*” (Matthew 11:25; Luke 18:17).

Lao Tzu’s discussion of the great Tao’s salvation through the Holy One will be fully explored in the following sections. Let us now briefly examine how Jesus fulfills Lao Tzu’s prophecy of salvation.

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The name *Jesus* is also *Joshua* in the Hebrew language, meaning “the Lord saves.” When appearing to Joseph, the husband of Mary, in a dream, an angel of the Lord said: “*Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:20-21). The heart of Christianity—that Jesus Christ is the means to salvation—is perhaps well understood; thus, there is no need to dwell further on this point. However, the meaning of this salvation should be clarified.

The salvation that Jesus brings, as Lao Tzu foretells, is about humbly receiving (“*inheriting*”) the light from Heaven: “*In him was life, and that life was the light of men*”; and “*Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light*” (John 1:4; 12:36).

The salvation of Jesus has several characteristics:

1. It is universal. His believers are all over the world. Throughout time, “*no one is abandoned*” by the Holy One, who is especially close to those who suffer for him and his work.
2. It is miraculous and mighty. This humble carpenter never attended school, but he knew the Scriptures thoroughly inside and out and ministered to thousands of people for three years, healing and restoring them, and then died and rose again at age 33. Ever since, he has conquered the hearts of billions and changed the course of human history. He has built and preserves an everlasting kingdom of faith. Lao Tzu declares exactly the same thing when he says: “*What the perfect builder builds cannot be destroyed; what the perfect preserver preserves cannot be lost. Your descendants ought to offer sacrifices without ceasing.*”
3. It is the spring of love and virtue that nurtures the heart and strengthens one’s entire being—“*strengthens the bones*” (3:4). Every Christian believer can testify to this truth: “*So cultivated, a person will have genuine virtues; so cultivated, a family will have*

virtues more than sufficient; so cultivated, a village will have virtues that endure; so cultivated, a nation will have virtues in abundance; so cultivated, the world will have virtues that prevail."

Section B. The Intention of Salvation: Bringing Human Beings back from Their Transgressions

To "*bring humans back from their transgressions*"—to restore them—points out the purpose of salvation: to remove sins, repent, and return to the great Tao. True faith relies on this fact: in the eyes of God, human beings are enslaved by sin, corruption, and death. Therefore, God's revelation and salvation is the eternal motif of faith, leading to full, personal restoration.

When Jesus began to minister, his first sentence was a call to repentance. To repent is to turn back from sins. Repeatedly, Jesus declares: "*I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*" (Luke 5:32). According to the Bible, anyone who does not know and revere God but indulges in his selfish desires and the things of this world is not righteous. It is Jesus' first command that is especially easily broken by our failure to love God with our whole selves. Without this love, we are not spiritually healthy. That is why Jesus says: "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick*" (Matthew 9:12).

When Lao Tzu prophesies about the Holy One, he says something very similar to Jesus' words: "*To avoid sickness, one needs to treat sickness as it is. The Holy One never gets sick because he treats sickness as it is—therefore, he never gets sick*" (71:2-3).

Lao Tzu says that the Holy One, just like Jesus who saves people from their sins, leads human beings from their transgressions:

The Holy One appreciates what men abandon; he depreciates what men value. He learns what men do not want to learn; he leads men back from their transgressions. This is in accordance with the nature of all things; it is not based on human effort. (64:5)

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The Holy One acts in ways that are opposite to human behavior, because he knows that human knowledge and values are sick. What human beings regard as foolish is actually healthful. For this reason, Lao Tzu says: “*The reverse is how Tao works*” (40:1), and the Holy One’s Tao is contrary to human affairs (65:4). Also, the Holy One leads people from the spiritual sickness manifested in the pursuit of knowledge and the lust of greed: “*Pursue knowledge, and you will become increasingly conceited; pursue Tao, and you will become increasingly humble*” (48:1); and “*There is no greater misfortune than discontent*” (46:2). Moreover, the Holy One makes us discontent not out of vanity, but in accordance with the true essence of things in order to revive our basic hunger for Tao. He thus leads people back to their own natural, complete selves.

What transgressions do human beings commit? How can the Holy One lead us back from such transgressions? Lao Tzu points out some ironies of morality-based religion:

Honoring the virtuous, people contend; evoking desires, people become restless. The Holy One rules by humbling people’s hearts, filling their stomachs, subduing their will, and strengthening their bones. Then the wise must curb their behavior.
(3:1-5)

Later, in Chapter 57, Lao Tzu says:

The more prohibitions there are, the poorer the people become; the more sharp knives people have, the less stable the country becomes; the more tactics people learn, the more bizarre things appear; the clearer the legal codes become, the more criminals there are. Thus says the Holy One: I make no [human] effort, and people’s hearts are transformed by themselves; I live in tranquility, and people’s hearts are set right by themselves; I disengage myself, and people grow prosperous

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by themselves; I have no desires, and people become pure by themselves. (57:2-3)

Lao Tzu comments in Chapter 58 that worldly happiness and calamities, righteousness and wickedness, and good and evil are not defined topics to be taught directly. Only the Holy One surpasses all. He lives uprightly yet judges no one; he is wise but does no harm; he is forthright but not unrestrained; he shines but does not dazzle.

A similar view that appears in Chapter 2 is that all human behavior and language are relative. Ugliness and evil are contained in beauty and kindness, and the positive encompasses the negative; the Holy One acts without effort and teaches without speaking (2:3).

We can see that the Holy One's salvation makes people realize their sinful and limited nature and helps them to open their blind eyes and to rise above their self-centered condition so that they will return to the true Tao. From an epistemological point of view, although human beings are limited and sinful, they often judge everything as if they are limitless and righteous. Human beings do not realize that they live in sin and are spiritually sick, and thus Lao Tzu says: "*Sad for the ignorant to presume they know*" (71:1). When people ignorantly presume they are knowledgeable without Tao, they are actually spiritually sick (sinful), whether they know it or not.

Section C. The Method of Salvation: United with Tao as the Instrument to Heaven

"United with Tao to be the instrument to Heaven for all" (28:3, 4) points out that the method of salvation is being "*united with Tao*" as an "*instrument*."

In the previous chapter, we discussed the similarity between the duties of Jesus as a prophet, priest, and king and the main duties of Lao Tzu's Holy One. The focal point of these three duties is the Holy One's mission of salvation. The prophet as a revealer, the priest as a consecrator, and the king as a shepherd are all established for the purpose of saving people who live in sin.

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Lao Tzu says: *“The Holy One unites with Tao to be the instrument to Heaven for all people”* (22:2), or according to the excavated version found in the Mawangdui tomb: *“The Holy One upholds Tao to be the shepherd of all.”* As discussed in Chapter 2 (Part Two), the word “*shi*” in Chinese (式) is an astronomical tool. This word is borrowed to describe the Holy One’s function as a medium for human beings to recognize Heaven. When talking about Jesus, the Bible repeatedly emphasizes: *“No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known”* (John 1:18).

In Chapter 28, Lao Tzu uses the same word to describe the Holy One: *“Knowing his brightness but keeping to obscurity, he thus becomes the instrument for the world [to know Heaven]. As the vehicle for the world to know Heaven, he has the eternal virtue with him, [enabling people] to return to the infinite”* (28:3-4).

Also, in the Mawangdui Han version, the Holy One upholds the true Tao and becomes the shepherd of all; the meaning is of the Holy One as the lord and the king. Jesus uses the metaphor of “shepherd” to describe Himself. All lambs from the world will come to this same shepherd (John 10:1-16). In the Bible, the Book of Psalms has a beautiful song that also describes God as a shepherd:

*The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,
He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness
for his name’s sake.* (Psalm 23:1-3)

The Holy One is the shepherd God sent to the world; to know the Holy One personally is to be saved. To receive His transforming revelation is to accept His salvation. The point is that the personal revelation of God and His salvation are intertwined. Believing Him is the basis for the right relationship with the Eternal, as Abraham also discovered (Genesis 15:6). Lao Tzu says: *“My words are easy*

to understand and easy to follow, yet the world cannot understand and cannot carry out my words. That is because people do not know the source of my words and the master of my undertakings... The source and the master is the Holy One...." Lao Tzu is pointing out that the meaning of this transforming revelation remains elusive for those who have no personal knowledge of the source.

Section D. The Focus of Salvation: People's Hearts

"His heart is concerned about the hearts of the people" (49:1) points out the focus of the Holy One's salvation is the human soul.

When Jesus came to the world, he transcended all previous and external laws. The Book of Matthew (chapters 5 to 7) records that when Jesus began to minister, he addressed people's hearts: It was no longer *"do not murder,"* but now anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. No longer was it *"do not commit adultery,"* but now anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. No longer was it *"do not break your oath,"* but now do not swear at all—and anything beyond that comes from the evil one. Jesus further declared that when giving to the needy, one should not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing; when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen; do not worry about what to eat or drink or wear; do not judge others, and so on. Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the Hebrew Scriptures—the Law and the Prophets—but to fulfill them by planting the Law into people's hearts and internalizing it, just as the prophet Isaiah had foretold:

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."
(Jeremiah 31:33; quoted also in Hebrews 8:10-12 and 10:16-17)

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This verse conveys the idea of the “*new covenant*” (what the words *New Testament* mean), which became part of the Bible. Jesus consummated this new covenant, or testament, with His final Passover supper on earth, which has become known as “the Lord’s Supper”: “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you*” (Luke 22:20).

People once asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, and Jesus replied: “*The kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17:20-21). What does this verse mean? The kingdom of God is not in the Holy Land, churches, or religious organizations, but in the hearts of believers—here is where God rules primarily, in addition to His authority over the entire cosmos.

When talking about worship, Jesus said that true worshipers will worship neither on the mountain nor in Jerusalem, but will worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:23). What does Jesus mean by this? He is saying that what is of true and lasting value is not religious rituals or beautiful words of prayer, but a sincere heart.

Jesus gives peace to his believers: “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives*” (John 14:27); and “*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*” (Matthew 11:29).

The Holy One under Lao Tzu’s pen is also the Savior of human hearts and souls:

*The Holy One rules by humbling people’s hearts,
filling their stomachs, subduing their will. (3:4)*

*The Holy One provides inner fulfillment, not
pleasures of the eye. (12:2)*

*The heart of the Holy One is not concerned about
himself; his heart is concerned about the concerns
of the people. (49:2)*

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In this world, with his breath, the Holy One makes people's hearts simple. People fix their eyes and ears on him, and he treats them like children. (49:4)

The Holy One is concerned about people's hearts, because he treasures their hearts more than anything else. He uses the Holy Spirit (Tao) to make a person's heart as innocent as an infant. Only this kind of person can disentangle from worldly greed, craftiness, and pride, and receive salvation. The pinnacle of the Holy One's salvation is eternal life. Lao Tzu says that the Holy One inherits the light of the great heavenly Tao and passes the light of life to people (27:3-4).

Whoever follows the light of Tao and returns to its brightness will be kept from calamities. Thus is to "*inherit eternity*" (52:6).

Similarly, Jesus says: "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" (John 8:12). The extraordinary bright light of the God of Israel and his eternal son Jesus, the Holy One, clearly penetrated into the ancient writings of Lao Tzu. How remarkable that the reflected light from this greatest Chinese sage now enlightens 21st-century people in their search for the Eternal.

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Chapter V. Humility

It may seem surprising, even unimaginable, that the glorious, Almighty God accomplishes His unique revelation and salvation in the most humble and humiliated human form. However, this is a truth about which Lao Tzu wrote, the Bible records, and history has demonstrated.

Section A. Lao Tzu's Description: The Holy One—Knowing His Glory, Bearing Disgrace, and Dwelling in Loathsome Places

When Lao Tzu depicts the Holy One, his brush highlights how the Holy One descends to earth and humbles himself. This behavior goes far beyond ordinary human modesty. The Holy One, glorious, omnipotent, and sovereign, chooses to humble himself and thereby manifests unsurpassed status and grace. His humility is revealed in three dimensions: *perception*, *behavior*, and *character*.

First of all, in terms of perception, Lao Tzu's Holy One is aware of his masculine strength, yet maintains feminine gentleness. The Holy One is aware of his glory but bears disgrace; he carries out his mission of salvation and lordship in loathsome places. The Bible testifies that Jesus did the same kind of thing: "*He made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*" (Philippians 2:6-8).

Second, in terms of behavior, the Holy One totally follows and obeys Tao. He accomplishes his mission by relying on Tao's guidance and ability, rather than on human effort. Jesus was the same way; he repeatedly emphasizes: "*The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because*

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whatever the Father does the Son also does...” (John 5:19-30; 6:38; 7:15-18; 8:28, 50; 12:44-50; 14:10).

Third, in terms of character, the Holy One is tender and meek, clothed in coarse garments, simple, unpretentious, hard-working, non-contending, and generous like a valley (29:4; 58:4; 63:6; 70:4). Similarly, Jesus says of himself: *“I am gentle and humble...”* (Matthew 11:29-30). Even on the cross, Jesus intercedes for his murderers when he prays: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34).

We can uncover this mystery more closely by looking at the direct and indirect descriptions of the Holy One’s humility, which Lao Tzu unfolds 16 times. These three dimensions of the Holy One—perception, behavior and character—are referenced in the following chart based on chapters in *Lao Tzu*:

Key Phrases about the “Holy One”	References within <i>Tao Te Ching</i>	Perception: glory and gentleness	Behavior: total reliance on Tao	Character: tenderness and meekness
<i>He benefits all, yet expects no return; He accomplishes all, but accepts no credit.</i>	2:3-5	*		*
<i>...nourishing and not contending... dwelling in loathsome places, and so coming close to Tao.</i>	8:1-2	*	*	*
<i>...not holding himself to be right, he proves to be right ...not regarding himself as great, he becomes king.</i>	22:2-5	*	*	*
<i>Knowing his strength of a male but keeping to a female’s loving tenderness, he thus becomes the stream for the world.... Knowing his glory but bears disgrace, he thus</i>	28:1-6	*		*

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Key Phrases about the “Holy One”	References within <i>Tao Te Ching</i>	Perception: glory and gentleness	Behavior: total reliance on Tao	Character: tenderness and meekness
<i>That which is forcefully sought after, extravagant, and prideful, the Holy One abandons.</i>	29:4			*
<i>Tao is bright but men take it to be dark... The highest virtue positions low like a valley; in humiliation lies the greatest honor....</i>	41:2-4	*	*	*
<i>The Holy One lives uprightly yet judges no one; he is wise but does no harm. He is forthright but not unrestrained; he shines but does not dazzle.</i>	41:2-4	*	*	*
<i>The Holy One, not aiming to be great, accomplishes great things.</i>	63:4			*
<i>Despite difficulties, the Holy One eventually will overcome.</i>	63:6	*		
<i>The Holy One will not fail because he makes no [human] effort; what is not for men to lay hold of will not be lost.</i>	64:3	*		*
<i>The Holy One appreciates what men abandon... He learns what men do not want to learn; he leads men back from their transgressions....</i>	64:5	*	*	*
<i>The sea gathers a hundred rivers because it lies low... He who</i>	66:1-4	*		*

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Key Phrases about the “Holy One”	References within <i>Tao Te Ching</i>	Perception: glory and gentleness	Behavior: total reliance on Tao	Character: tenderness and meekness
<i>The Holy One clothes himself in coarse garments, hiding a treasure within.</i>	70:4	*		*
<i>The Holy One knows himself but does not display himself; he loves himself but does not exalt himself.</i>	72:3	*		*
<i>The Holy One does not rely on his own ability; at completion he claims no credit and makes no display of his virtues.</i>	77:4		*	*
<i>The Holy One says: ‘He who is humiliated is the lord of the society; he who is sacrificed is the king of the world.’</i>	78:4	*		*

Section B. Isaiah’s Prophecy: Despised, Oppressed, Enduring Sorrow and Suffering

The prophet Isaiah, who lived a little earlier than Lao Tzu, prophesied about Jesus so clearly that it is sufficient for the reader to read the verses in the Bible about “the suffering and glory of the Servant.” Further explanation is not needed:

See, my servant will act wisely, he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told they will

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see, and what they have not heard, they will understand. (Isaiah 52:13-15)

He grew up before him [Jehovah] like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. (53:2-10)

Section C. Jesus: Poor, Uneducated, the Son of a Carpenter

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the world gave him no sign of welcome, except from a few wise men from the East and some shepherds in the field. His neighbors treated him as an illegitimate child. Wild rumor painted him as a child born by a soldier named Terre Pam.¹¹⁵ His earthly stepfather was Joseph the carpenter. His brothers and sisters, born by Joseph and Mary, did not believe that he was the Son of God. People mocked him with such comments as: *“Isn’t he the son of Joseph the carpenter?”*; *“This man has never attended school. How come he knows so much?”*; and *“He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”* (Matthew 9:34; John 7:20; 8:48; 10:20; also Matthew 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15). Many times, people pushed him, wanted to stone him (John 10:32; 11:8), and even forced him toward a cliff to try to push him off, *“...but he walked right through the crowd and went on his way”* (Luke 4:28-30).

Jesus not only was poor with a low status, but also lived a short life. He started his ministry at the age of 30, lived in poverty and humiliation, and was killed three years later. He said of himself: *“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head”* (Luke 9:58).

Jesus came to the world to save human beings from sin, yet ironically, was killed because of the sin of human beings. He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, one of his own disciples. Roman guards humiliated him, whipped him, spat on his face, teased him, blindfolded him, and demanded: *“Prophecy! Who hit you?”* The soldiers dressed him in a purple robe, set a crown of thorns upon his head, and called out, *“Hail, King of the Jews!”* in a mocking way. They divided up his clothes by casting lots (Luke 23:34), and when they nailed him to the cross, they put a written notice above him: *“THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS”* (Matthew 27:37). The Jewish religious leaders sneered: *“He saved others; let him save*

¹¹⁵ Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972) [Tie Zheng Dai Pan (Geng Xing Chuan Dao Hui, 1990), 159.]

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himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One” (Luke 23:35). When Jesus was thirsty, the soldiers offered him wine vinegar. Throughout the entire ordeal, Jesus was “*soft as water*” and obedient as a lamb, humble and loving. He said: “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34). The last words he uttered on the cross were: “*It is finished*” (John 19:30).

From a human perspective, Jesus’ humility, humiliation, poverty, and gentleness could be considered extreme. Then, when we read *Lao Tzu*, we see that the incarnate Tao, the Holy One, is as gentle as water, benefiting all but staying in a loathsome place, recognizing his male nature yet keeping to his female tenderness, knowing his glory yet bearing disgrace, clothed in coarse garments yet hiding treasure, accomplishing everything yet effort free, refusing to contend with anyone, conquering the strongest with utmost tenderness, being the king and the lord of the world while suffering and sacrificing.

We have a difficult time imagining, let alone comprehending, how the incarnate Tao, the Holy One, could experience and bear the burden of evil, weakness, darkness, and humiliation. It is beyond understanding how anyone who is effort free, non-aggressive, extremely gentle, and afflicted could have become the king of all valleys, the lord of the whole world, and accomplished everything, without anyone contending with him. Incomprehensible though these characteristics might be, they, indeed, are manifested in Jesus so thoroughly and vividly that he shocked the whole world and still surprises the entire human race.

Truly, Jesus could not have been poorer and more humble, more moderate and more humiliated than he was. Though his life was short, he accomplished all, effort free. Indeed, history is marked by his birth. Christmas, Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday, the holidays in memory of Jesus, have become more and more universal.

Jesus’ recorded words themselves are only a few hundred in length. However, his Word has been translated into nearly two thousand

languages, spreading among all cultures. The most popular books in the world cannot be compared with its wide distribution.

For over two thousand years, more and more people have become his believers. Over the years, some have been illiterate, but others have been literary giants, such as Tolstoy, Hugo, and Lin Yutang. There have been beggars and presidents; farmer's wives and scientists of the likes of Newton, Copernicus, and Edison—all have knelt at the feet of this humble, gentle son of a carpenter and called him Savior and Lord. Even the proud Napoleon commented: "Alexander the Great, Caesar, and I are the three greatest rulers in human history, yet compared to Jesus of Nazareth, we are but fleeting clouds."

The arrival of Jesus spurred the growth of Christian civilization throughout the world. From this civil tradition grew European and North American modernity and democracy, after which many countries with various religious backgrounds are modeled.

Kenneth Scott Latourette, an American historian, wrote in *American Historical Review*: "Generations after generations, from the historical sources that we have gathered, we can see the influence of Jesus to human history. He is, indeed, the most prominent person who ever lived on this earth. His impact is increasing daily."²

Another scholar Philip Schaff further comments:

With neither financial resource nor military force, Jesus of Nazareth has conquered more people than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon. He is not trained in science neither in scholarship, yet he has exerted infinite influence upon secular and religious knowledge, far more profoundly than any philosopher or scholar. He has received no elaborate education, yet his words are more precious than gold, far more powerful than any orator or poet. He never wrote one sentence, yet he has inspired many people to produce countless lectures, testimonies, poems,

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paintings, and books. His influence is larger than the total of all great people from antiquity till now.¹¹⁶

More importantly, Jesus enters into the hearts of millions upon millions of people, saving countless people from their spiritual fall. He spreads love among people and becomes the light for the world, food for life, and living water for the soul. Anyone who believes in him receives the peace, sincerity, and strength bestowed by Heaven. Today, billions of believers are spread throughout the world in every country and race. The kingdom of Jesus lasts forever.

Could all of this be the accomplishment of a poor, short-lived, uneducated son of a carpenter who walked from street to street for three years? It is he; it is not he. Pay attention to what he said:

“I do nothing on my own.” (John 8:28)

“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself...By myself I can do nothing...It is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.” (John 5:19, 30; 14:10)

“No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.” (John 6:65)

“For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.” (John 5:36)

Section D. “Tao Works in Reverse” and “What Is Highly Valued among Men Is Detestable in God’s Sight”

Here is a brief review of the words of Lao Tzu and Isaiah regarding the Holy One:

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 183.

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(1) Lao Tzu points out the characteristics of the Holy One: He guards his feminine tenderness with his masculine strength, enters the darkness from the light, and suffers humiliation with glory; his coarse, humble appearance veils a gentle and generous heart; he does not do things by himself, nor does he see things by himself; he does not rely on himself; he has no conceit, but achieves great things; and his accomplishments last forever.

(2) Isaiah says: *“He was oppressed and afflicted... he was led like a lamb to the slaughter... The LORD Almighty is the Holy One of Israel”* (Isaiah 53:7; 54:5).

Why does God reveal his salvation through someone of low social status and in the most humiliating way? It is neither illogical nor unreasonable to pose such a question. Even an atheist would raise the question “In what form might Almighty God incarnate himself if He planned to bring salvation to the world?”

God would not enter the world as a nobleman, lest people would say: “This is the fruit of nobility.”

He would not become a man of learning, lest people would mistake his accomplishment as the result of human knowledge.

He would not live a long time, lest people would attribute his miracles to long-term effort and say, “Look, he has worked a whole life for them.”

He would not turn into a man of strength, lest people would confuse his might with human will and ability.

Almighty God revealed his glory and sovereignty through a man deprived of all that human beings value. Why? In order to demonstrate to people that He is God!

Think of this another way: when God plans to disclose the truth about God himself and human beings, what kind of language should he employ?

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God would not use deep philosophical language, lest his words would become twisted and monopolized by a few and sold to the common people as so much second-hand jargon.

He would not apply words of logic, lest human beings would say, "Look, human logic and thinking enable us to see God's true self."

He would not employ scientific formulas to speak to people, because he understands human hearts thoroughly. Of course, He knows that one day the human race would use scientific formulas to create destructive weaponry in an attempt to destroy Him, although that is not possible! Almighty God has expressed himself definitively in the most simple and clear language, so that anyone who has an ear can hear his words directly.

Jesus repeatedly says: "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says...*" (seven times in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3). Lao Tzu also understood that human beings easily ignore what matters most: "*Tao, when spoken lacks flavor. He does not appeal to the eye or the ear; when applied, his benefits are not exhausted*" (35:3).

Lao Tzu summarizes the reverse modus operandi of the Great Tao by saying: "*Tao works in reverse; the power of Tao resides in weakness*" (40:1); and "*What great virtues! How mysterious! How profound! They run contrary to human affairs; and they lead to great harmony*" (65:4). Similarly, Jesus taught: "*What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight*" (Luke 16:15). Is this not the ultimate summation of Lao Tzu's view about Tao's reverse movement?

Human beings value wealth, but Jesus is penniless. He says: "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...*" (Matthew 6:19-20).

In a similar way, Lao Tzu states: "*It is far better to dwell in Tao than to be crowned as emperor or appointed as ministers with glory and wealth!*" (62:3).

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Human beings esteem learning, but Jesus never attended school. He reminds us that God hides wisdom “*from the wise and learned,*” but ironically reveals it “*to little children*” (Matthew 11:25).

In a similar way, Lao Tzu advises: Discard wisdom and cleverness, and return to being infants. “*Who overcomes his flesh to be meek and gentle as an infant?*” (19:1-2; 10:2, 6; 20:2-7; 49:4).

Human beings have a drive to be first and climb high, but Jesus humbles himself and bears disgrace. He says: “*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*” (Luke 14:11). In a similar way, Lao Tzu observes: “*The Holy One thinks of himself last and comes first... What is twisted shall be straightened; the wronged shall be rehabilitated*” (7:2; 22:1).

Human beings admire power and strength, but Jesus is gentle and effort free and meek as a lamb. Similarly, Lao Tzu describes the Holy One: “*By being effort free, you then can do all things... He does not contend; therefore, no one in the world contends with him*” (48:2; 66:4).

Human beings hold on to their lives, but Jesus sacrifices his life. He says: “*...Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it*” (Matthew 16:25). Lao Tzu expresses the same kind of thing: “*He disregards himself and finds himself enduring*”; “*The greatest curse is to overvalue physical life*”; and “*He who dies without perishing has longevity*” (7:2; 13:1; 33:6).

Human beings pursue pleasure, but Jesus comes to serve people (Mark 10:45) and washes his disciples’ feet (John 13). Lin Yutang muses that Lao Tzu could imagine the act of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Lin Yutang, *From Pagan to Christian* (Cleveland; New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959), 226.

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The omnipotent Tao manifests his sovereignty and glory through the Holy One in ways completely contrary to the ways of this world. The ways of the Holy One tell people that transformation and glory are not the product of human accomplishment, but the work of Tao, who works in reverse: the power of Tao resides in weakness. Such is the footprint of God!

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Chapter VI. Sacrifice

In this chapter, we will be looking at the sacrifice of the Holy One and Jesus with special emphasis on the concepts of the Cross and Resurrection, the World and true Kingship. Note that to the original meaning of *sacrifice* as “ritual offering,” modern Chinese adds an additional connotation that includes active, personal participation.

Section A. Sacrifice and Resurrection

Regarding the Holy One of Israel, Isaiah says:

*He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted...
He will see his offspring and prolong his days.
(Isaiah 52:13; 53:10)*

Lao Tzu's most similar description of the Holy One is found in Chapter 7:

*...The Holy One thinks of himself last and comes first;
he disregards himself and finds himself enduring.*

Prophecies are usually elusive expressions of principles. However, Jesus' revelations are concrete. Realizing that the time has come for him to give up his life on the cross, Jesus falls with his face to the ground and prays: “*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will*” (Matthew 26:39). He would repeat this prayer a short time later (Matthew 26:42).

After Jesus is arrested, his disciples scatter. Even his disciple Peter denies knowing him three times, and is ready to return to fishing. Only when Jesus resurrects from the dead and repeatedly reveals himself to his disciples, do their discouraged hearts revive. More

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than likely, they recall his words: *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”* (John 11:25). Then, after gathering together as one group with other believers and praying, they receive the Holy Spirit from Jesus that he promised. Daring to travel all over the world, the disciples spread the Gospel until they are martyred one after another. Only the Apostle John lives out his days, albeit in exile on the island of Patmos.

Even though Jesus’ body no longer exists on earth, he lives more eternally than heaven and earth. That Jesus is alive is a fact which is not only real to believers, but also is evidenced to the entire world.

Section B. Sacrifice and the World

In Chapter 13, Lao Tzu talks about the Holy One and points out that the greatest problem people have is overvaluing the physical aspects of life. If they were to follow the Holy One, give up their lives for the world and love the world, not only would they avoid calamities, but also the world would trust them and rely on them. Lao Tzu says:

*Therefore, he who gives up his life for the world
is trusted by the world; he who gives up his life for
loving the world is relied on by the world. (13:4)*

Jesus’ death and resurrection earn him the trust and dependence of the world and earn for human beings who trust in him, peace and consolation. More and more people have come to accept this truth. Throughout history, Jesus is the only one who gives life by giving up his own life, grants people peace by his suffering for them, and bestows eternity with his short life. He dies because of human hatred that inhibits human beings from living in love.

Ironically, the cross, symbolizing cruelty and death, radiates life, love, and peace, all because of the Holy One, who died on that instrument of unspeakable torture. The light of His Cross has been

shining for over two thousand years. It reaches farther and farther and becomes brighter and brighter....

Section C. Sacrifice and Becoming the King

The latter chapters of *Lao Tzu* focus intensively on the Holy One. Twenty-four chapters, from Chapter 57 to Chapter 81, touch upon the Holy One. Lao Tzu refers to the Holy One five times in the last five chapters as he most significantly discusses the Holy One's accomplishments; becoming the King; eternal love; and the fact that the more he gives, the more he has.

Let us examine Chapter 78 on the Holy One's sacrifice and kingship:

*The weak will overcome the strong;
The soft will overcome the hard.
This principle is known to all people under heaven,
Yet no one puts it into practice.
Thus, the Holy One says:
"He who is humiliated is the lord of the society;
He who is sacrificed is the king of the world."
Paradoxical are words of truth.*

The Chinese people of Lao Tzu's time had heard about the principle of "*the weak overcoming the strong*," but no one ever could make it a reality. In the world, the strong trample over the weak and the large squash the small. Even so, the Holy One declares: He who bears disgrace and suffering and chooses weakness so that humiliation, murder, and wickedness are all put on his body is the king of the world. From antiquity till now, who could be like this? Only Jesus!

No one is weaker than Jesus. Just as Isaiah prophesied: He is led like a lamb to the slaughter. He carries the sin and disgrace of the whole world: "*Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgressions... he poured out his life unto death*" (Isaiah 53:4-7, 12). Thus, he becomes the king: "*The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of*

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all the earth” (Isaiah 54:5). When the Jewish leaders plot about how to deal with Jesus, the Bible thus records:

Then one of them named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man dies for the people than that the whole nation perish.” He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. (John 11:49-52)

Observe that Jesus dies not only for the nation of Israel, carrying the nation’s sins, but also gathers the scattered children of God from all nations and becomes their king. When the Roman governor Pilate asks Jesus: “*Are you the king of the Jews?*” Jesus replies: “*Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?*”

“Do you think I am a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

Jesus said: “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into this world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:33-37)

Jesus sternly and clearly testifies: he is weak to the utmost, bearing humiliation and suffering, yet he is the king and the lord; although

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oppressed because of the nations' infirmities, he becomes the king of human hearts, the king of all kings.

Mr. Lin Yutang once cited the French scholar Renan: "A thousand times more living, a thousand times more loved since thy death than during the days of thy pilgrimage here below, thou wilt become to such a degree the cornerstone of humanity, that to tear thy name from this world would be to shake it to its foundations."¹¹⁸

No more fitting words could conclude this chapter.

¹¹⁸ Lin Yutang, *From Pagan to Christian* (Cleveland; New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959), 230.

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Chapter VII. The Accomplishments of the Holy One

In the preceding chapters, we have uncovered various characteristics of the Holy One, who works without effort in such a way that his effortlessness reaches a state of weakness. Then, in that state of weakness, he is disgraced and ultimately gives up his life.

Nonetheless, the Holy One succeeds in mastering all and lives eternally. Moreover, his accomplishments last forever; he is the king of society and the lord of the world; he saves people's hearts and treats human beings like infants.

The Holy One is extraordinary, and His doings are miraculous!

It is incredible that Lao Tzu captured these truths in words and Jesus lived them out in reality. The testimony of the Gospels is available to all, and we get to witness the historical testimony!

Now let us examine Chapter 81, which is the last chapter in *Lao Tzu* and the conclusive passage for “this man”—the Holy One.

**Section A. The Holy Word: Neither Beautiful, Nor
Argumentative, Nor Extensive**

The first three sentences in Chapter 81, which is Lao Tzu's concluding chapter, are:

*Words of truth are not pleasing to the ears;
What is pleasing to the ears are not words of truth.
Good men are not good at arguing;
Those good at arguing are not good.
He who knows has no broad learning,
He who has broad learning does not know.*

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These sentences encapsulate the characteristics of the Holy One's language—the Word and Tao: words that are faithful, kind, and true.

From antiquity to today, whether inside or outside of China, whose words match these descriptions? There is no need for them to be charming, for the words are trustworthy; there is no need for them to be eloquent, for the words are kind; there is no need for them to be extensive, for the words are true.

Jesus left the world only a few hundred words by way of his followers who recorded a fraction of his words throughout the four Gospels of the New Testament. His words are by no means pleasing to the ear. Most of them are metaphors, repetitive and unadorned, typical of expressions understood by peasants, shepherds, and fishermen, sometimes so frank and rough that they are offensive (John 6:61). Nevertheless, his words reveal great truth. Jesus declares: *"The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life"* (John 6:63). In order to spread these life-giving words, his disciples gave up their lives. For over two thousand years, more than ten-billion people have believed in his words and as a result have become blessed in body, heart, and soul. These words are indeed faithful, even though they are not charming.

The words of Jesus also are not argumentative. Each statement is a direct declaration like radiance from heaven, casting directly into people's hearts, refusing to argue with the human mind. One either sees the light or does not see it. There is no room for debate. Jesus often says: *"I tell you the truth..."* and *"He who has ears, let him hear..."* He declares: *"Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life"* (John 4:14). Later, He proclaims: *"I am the bread of life... I am the light of the world... I am the way and the truth and the life"* (John 6:35, 48; 8:12, 9:5; and 14:6).

These are truly words beyond argument. In them resides the greatest kindness, within which God's love flows forever. These are words of salvation and revelation, like the sound of parents calling for their

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children to return home! Anyone who believes in these words can enter into God's kindness and bring heavenly love into the experience of human love. To repeat, these words truly express God's kindness and cannot be argued against.

Jesus' words are also not extensive. It is not necessary for him to use references and evidences the way scholars, men of learning, and the Pharisees do. Jesus speaks straight into people's souls. He knows things in heaven and on earth, and he knows the beginning and the end. Thus he says to his disciples: "*I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear*" (John 16:12). Then, to a learned scholar, he says: "*I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?*" (John 3:12). Although Jesus' words are not extensive, they are words of truth. He says: "*If you hold to my teaching... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:31-32). He said this, because Tao frees people from the bondage of sin; Jesus is the one who knows everything, but extensive human knowledge is not required of us.

Lin Yutang once commented on Jesus' words:

Theology, of whatever kind, always detracts from the power and simplicity of Jesus' teachings. Surely, the Apostles' Creed requires many questions and answers. There is nothing to catechize in Jesus' own words, nothing which the average man cannot understand for himself. There are in Jesus' words no mysterious definitions, no dangerous deductions, no self-deluding dialectics...

Jesus never expounded His faith, never reasoned it out. At most He said, "How is it that ye do not understand?" He taught without hypothesis and without argument. With the utmost naturalness and gentility, He said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." With perfect simplicity, He said, "These things I command you, that ye love one another." That is altogether a new voice in history, a voice never heard before.... There is a note of authentic nobility about it, as in

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” That is the gentle voice of Jesus, and at the same time the compelling voice, a commanding voice that has haunted the understanding of men for the last two thousand years.¹¹⁹

Section B. The Holy Undertaking: Abundant without Accumulating, Plentiful While Giving

In his final chapter, here is the way that Lao Tzu describes the Holy One: “*The Holy One does not accumulate. He lives for others—so, he possesses more*” (81). The Holy One does not hoard anything for himself. In fact, since everything he does is for human beings and everything he owns has been given to human beings, he has abundant possessions. That is how the Holy One operates.

Other chapters in *Tao Te Ching* include many descriptions about the Holy One’s way of operating, such as:

He claims no credit yet endures forever. (2:5)

Is not all of this because he is fulfilled in his selflessness? (7:3)

...The Holy One, not aiming to be great, accomplishes great things. (63:4)

...The Holy One will not fail because he makes no [human] effort. (64:3)

Similar descriptions also apply to Tao, for example:

The great Tao flows and fills the land—to the left and to the right...

¹¹⁹ Lin Yutang, *From Pagan to Christian* (Cleveland; New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959), 230, 224.

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From beginning to end, he never claims his greatness.
(34:1, 4)

From such passages, we can see that Tao and the Holy One are in one accord, sharing the same nature. That is the reason why the Holy One accomplishes without effort; He does not rely on his own aptitude, but on Tao's will and ability. Ultimately, the Holy One's effortlessness testifies to Tao's accomplishments, and the Holy One's lack of accumulation reflects Tao's abundance.

The Holy One's work has three layers of meaning:

First, the Holy One does not store up things for himself; everything he does is for human beings and everything he owns has been given to human beings. The word "*since*" in "*Since he lives for others...since he gives all to the world...*" (81:4) implies that the Holy One's living for others and giving all to the world are already accomplished, just as a previous chapter of *Tao Te Ching* says that the Holy One already has been "*humiliated*" and already has "*sacrificed*" his life (78:3).

Secondly, the more the Holy One gives, the more he owns. His abundance is obviously the result of his giving, just as Lao Tzu explained earlier: the Holy One is the lord of society, the king of the world. He is the ultimate One.

Thirdly, of ultimate significance is the extraordinary relationship between points one and two above. The Holy One does not rely on himself, because he evidently has someone else upon whom to rely—Tao. Similarly, the Holy One does not see through his own lens, because he sees through someone else's lens—Tao's. Also, the Holy One does not claim to be great, because he regards someone else greater than himself—Tao. As a matter of fact, to someone who begins to read *Lao Tzu*, the unity of the Holy One and Tao is self explanatory. The Holy One gives up himself, just because he is the incarnation of Tao.

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Let us examine how Jesus gives a concrete expression of Tao in person—in the flesh.

First, Jesus possesses no wealth, no degree, and no longevity. He suffers humiliation and disgrace. He sacrifices all, including his life, for the world. How thoroughly Jesus' action matches Lao Tzu's description of the Holy One: *"With no accumulation, yet he gives all to people and does everything for people."*

Secondly, the more Jesus gives, the more he has. This has already become a historical fact. The expansion from twelve disciples to 2.5-billion believers on the entire globe; countless books, never-ending poetry and music, the magnificent Christian civilization.... The son of a carpenter, insignificant and weak in human eyes, living a short life, turns out to be the most vital person in human history: *"The stone the builder rejected has become the capstone. The LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"* (Psalm 118:22-23). Jesus reminds the Jews: *"Have you never read in the Scriptures...?"* and then recites this verse from the Psalms (Matthew 21:42).

Thirdly, how does point one relate to point two? Why does the Holy One know his glory but keep to the path of disgrace; why does he bear disgrace yet gain glory? Why does he not accumulate, yet ends up owning more? Why is his work effortless, yet he is able to accomplish all? Jesus clearly explains the reason: *"I do nothing on my own"* (John 8:28); *"I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge"* (John 8:50); and *"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves"* (John 14:10-11).

The incarnate Tao came to the world to reveal Tao, to practice Tao, to transform the world with Tao, to teach and save people. He is not only a living "person" but also the living Tao. This is precisely the

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answer to the puzzle about Jesus in history—He is the Holy One that Isaiah prophesied and Lao Tzu portrayed.

Section C. The Holy Love: Benefits without Harming, Accomplishes without Contending

The last sentence of the last chapter in *Lao Tzu* says:

*The Tao of heaven is benevolent, causing no harm.
The way of the Holy One is to act on behalf of the
people; He does not contend with them. (81)*

These words express the ultimate truth about the great Tao and the Holy One: Tao is love, and love is the Holy One.

Lao Tzu clearly describes the love of the great Tao:

*The highest good is like water, nourishing all things
and not contending with them. (8:1)*

He loves and sustains all things.... (34:3)

*Tao gives all things life, nurses and develops them,
providing them peace, love, and protection. (51:4)*

*Tao is the lord of all things, the treasure of the good
man and mediator for sinners... Why was Tao greatly
valued in antiquity? Is it not because in him seekers
find and sinners are forgiven? Therefore, Tao should
be the most honored in the world. (62:1, 4)*

In Chapter 66, Lao Tzu portrays the Holy One in the following way:

*The sea gathers a hundred rivers because it lies low;
because of its low position it is the king over the
hundred rivers.
He who desires to rise above the people must first
humble himself;*

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*He who desires to go before the people must first follow from behind.
Thus when the Holy One rules above, people feel no burden;
When he leads, people are not harmed.
Therefore, the whole world gladly supports him and never tires of him.
He does not contend.
Therefore, no one in the world contends with him.*

Considering the fact that millions upon millions of Christian believers enthusiastically and tirelessly spread the Gospel and follow Jesus in loving service, no undertaking in this world can be compared to their sincerity, sacrifice, holy love, and undying will. Jesus' humility and low status form a great ocean toward which endlessly flow billions upon billions of souls. Tao guides the whole world to himself, as streams and valleys guide water to rivers and the sea. Lao Tzu expressed it so well! People love Tao because Tao loves people.

He thinks of himself last and comes first. (7:2)

...The Holy One is good at saving people, and no one is abandoned. (27:3)

*Knowing his brightness but keeping to obscurity...
knowing his glory but bearing disgrace. (28:3; 5)*

His heart is concerned about the concerns of the people. (49:1)

He is sharp but does not harm. He is forthright but not unrestrained.... (58:4)

He leads men back from their transgressions. (64:5)

He who is humiliated is the lord of society; he who is sacrificed is the king of the world. (78:4)

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Chapter 79 vividly describes the Holy One's love:

Therefore, the Holy One holds the loan but does not ask for payment; a creditor of virtue knows the debt but seeks no payment; a creditor of no virtue demands payment by every means. (79:2)

Without the great Tao, it is unimaginable to think of the Holy One's love as Lao Tzu describes it. Jesus teaches people how to pray: "*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*" (Matthew 6:12). What are our debts? They are internal and external human sins, debts to God, debts to Tao. God is fully aware of human debts, yet does not chase after our debts or convict debtors. Instead, God sent the Holy One Jesus to teach people to repent and receive Tao so that in Tao, "*seekers find and sinners are forgiven*" (62:4).

Listen to what Jesus says: "*...God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him*" (John 3:17).

As Lao Tzu concludes, as if for the last time, he sincerely and earnestly urges people to follow Tao: "*The Tao of heaven is benevolent, causing no harm. The way of the Holy One is to act on behalf of the people; he does not contend with them*" (81:4).

Indeed, following Jesus and entering into Tao, one does not lose anything but instead gains the light of life. Jesus says: "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*" (John 10:10). Jesus does not come to possess land, status, people, or culture—quite the opposite. He gives people from different lands, status, nations, cultures, and learning one common blessing: the living water of love, rest for the soul, peace and sincerity in life, and the state of eternity.

The characteristics of the Holy One under Lao Tzu's pen, which Jesus brought into realization, are summarized below:

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(1) Universality. The Holy One is not restricted to China. He has no spatial boundary. He came in true fullness in Israel, and his significance applies to the whole world.

(2) Eternality. The Holy One's appearance has no date and no time boundary. He was born in the year of grace and continues throughout history—and beyond history.

(3) Authenticity. The existence of the Holy One does not need any presupposition or precondition. His arrival proves that the revelation about the Holy One came from the self-existent One.

The Holy One demonstrates four levels of Oneness:

(1) The oneness of the person and Tao. The Holy One is a person both manifesting the substance and characteristics of Tao and revealing the work of Tao. He is the incarnate Tao.

(2) The oneness of glory and humility. The Holy One is full of glory, strength, and brightness, yet keeps to the path of disgrace, weakness, and darkness. He is the link between God and human beings.

(3) The oneness of benevolence and righteousness. The Holy One creates and sustains everything. His heart is concerned about the heart of the people, and he is good at saving people. He knows people's sins and forgives debtors. He treats people as straw dogs. He is the mediator between human beings and God.

(4) The oneness of sacrifice and sovereignty. The Holy One gives up his life for people and suffers humiliation for them. The more he gives, the more he has. His accomplishments last forever. He is the King of the universe.

Given the Holy One's incomparable characteristics, how can people not be drawn to seek Him, whom to know is "life eternal"?

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PART THREE: THE WAYS OF TAO— SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION

Introduction

For over 2,600 years, Lao Tzu's mysterious, inexplicable Tao has been the focus of endless speculation coupled with a gradual indifference toward Tao. Sadly, in spite of Lao Tzu's in-depth attention, people have ignored the Holy One, because of their limited comprehension of him. Generations of serious scholarship have led to only incoherent interpretations of Lao Tzu and various misunderstandings of Tao that have spawned mysticism, cloistered lifestyles, utilitarianism, and so forth.

Tao, the Creator and Sustainer of all, too often has failed to inspire love. With the original intention of entering the world to save people, Tao has become a door to escapism. Tao, a bright and broad path, has turned into a dark and narrow alley of exploitation. Unselfish, simple, and sacrificing, Tao has been twisted to excuse indulgence in fleshly pleasures. When Tao is obscured, people are lost in their search for Tao and lack the ability to benefit from following Tao.

In the Old Testament era, Tao was also obscured to the Jewish people, whose ways were often off the mark. Only when Jesus manifested Tao's original, loving nature in person could Tao effectively spread peace and sow the seeds of saving grace. Tao thus became searchable, relevant and accessible to humble people. In the Holy One Jesus, Tao finally revealed himself within history, proving to be the true Tao of salvation that brought this world and the eternal world together. Indeed, the Holy One Jesus brought Lao Tzu's five-thousand words about Tao and the Holy One to life: Tao is illuminated and embracing, and the Holy One is made vivid and vital. Only because of the Holy One Jesus could the essence of Lao Tzu's great Tao possibly be interpreted and bring heavenly blessings to readers who are able to understand, follow, and benefit from them.

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Because the incarnate Jesus entered the world, Lao Tzu's Tao and the Holy One now have been fully and concretely demonstrated. They are no longer merely abstract principles, but are part of the flow of living history as seekers of Tao actively follow the precepts of Tao and the Holy One.

Today, God's light is finally bringing genuine illumination akin to solving an ancient riddle or the fulfillment of a puzzling prophecy. Seekers of Tao need only come to Jesus. Lao Tzu's Tao was God's preparation for Jesus in first leading the Chinese people to search for Tao. The time now has arrived for all people to trust in the living Jesus, submit their lives to Him, and fulfill the ancient search.

Without Jesus, Lao Tzu's Tao is obscured. Following Tao seems impossible; not following Tao seems injudicious. However, with Jesus, all is clear—Lao Tzu's Tao points to Jesus and is truly fulfilled in Jesus.

In short, the heart of Tao is the incarnate Jesus. The so-called injunction "*Follow Tao*" should really be "*Follow Jesus*." Through Jesus, the eternal Tao can penetrate widely and deeply into the ancient land of China. Today, because of Jesus, everyone in the world can encounter the eternal Tao.

Previously in the dark for 2,600 years, Tao has been brought into the daylight. Who would send Tao back into obscurity? Today, the mysterious Holy One is no longer mysterious. Who would force him back into mystery? The path of Tao used to be hidden and of no benefit to most of the Chinese people. Today, because of Jesus, seeking and following Tao are fulfilling, popular, and accessible. Who would return to the old, obscure path where Tao could not be followed openly and devotedly, bringing blessings to people? The great Tao—"root of Heaven, Mother of all, sustaining everything, good at saving people"—is no different from the Tao of the beginning, the Word, Jesus.

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The Holy One Jesus is the necessary bridge and destination for all seekers of Tao. All ways of approaching Tao that Lao Tzu laid out are connected with Jesus. In Jesus, Lao Tzu can finally rest in peace.

Dear Reader: If your heart yearns for Tao, now is the time to put aside all of your preconceived notions about human knowledge. Please realize that we are not engaged in a merely scholarly debate. Instead, we are talking about a personal experience and a spiritual journey. May you find fulfillment as you embark on your journey.

PART THREE: THE WAYS OF TAO— SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION

Chapter I. The Principles of Following Tao

This chapter will deal with the main principles of following the great Tao as revealed in *Lao Tzu*: (1) Work in reverse—return to the root; (2) Follow Tao in humility; and (3) Dwell in the Eternal Tao.

However, before we examine these general principles, it would be helpful to review some basic concepts.

A. Background Concepts

1. We Have a Root and a Mother

Lao Tzu says: “[Be] *humble to the utmost and remain tranquil*” (16:1) so that the inner eyes may see the bigger picture. In other words, return to the root, the Mother who created the world; return to Tao, who is deeply hidden and who preserves and protects everything. Such recognition of the root, the Mother, and the Creator is doubtlessly the first step in following Tao.

2. Return to the Root, Guard the Mother and Enjoy Peace and Rest

As soon as we realize that we have a root and a Mother, our heart yearns for her. Once our heart and soul leave behind the shallow surface of the world and touch upon the deeper root and the Mother, we experience great peace and rest! This experience is expressed in the Bible: “...*I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me*” (Psalm 131:2).

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3. In Peace and Rest Lies the Root of Life

Lao Tzu says: “*Such tranquility is called return to life*” (16:4). “*Return to life*” indicates that life comes from a source, a root. When the soul returns to its root, it finds peace and rest. The Bible also states: “*In him [the Word, God, and Tao of the beginning] was life*” (John 1:4).

4. To Return to the Origin of Life Is to Enter Eternity

“*Such a return is eternity*” (16:5). In the eternal Tao, life lasts forever. Even though “*your body falls away; you will keep yourself from calamities*” (16:10; 52:6), and “*It is far better to dwell in Tao than to be crowned as emperor or appointed as ministers with glory and wealth!*” (62:3). These references bring to mind what the Apostle Peter once said to Jesus: “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*” (John 6:68). Lao Tzu’s words about the Holy One are not empty.

5. To Enter the Eternal Tao Relies on the Light of the Eternal Tao

Lao Tzu clearly says: “*Follow the light of Tao, return to its brightness; you will then keep yourself from calamities. This is to inherit eternity*” (52:6). Evidently, the light of the great Tao illuminates the whole world for everyone. The Holy One, described in a third of Lao Tzu’s chapters, is the light of Tao, who entered into the world and transformed human beings.

The Bible also says that Tao of the beginning later entered the world. Tao is light for human beings, yet human beings often do not accept spiritual light. Jesus says repeatedly: “*I am the light of the world*” (John 8:12; 12:35, 46) and also declares: “*I am the way and the truth and the life*” (John 14:6). Lao Tzu’s words “*follow the light of Tao*” correspond to “*the way*,” while his words “*return to its brightness*” corresponds to “*the truth*”; and “*you will then keep yourself from calamities*” corresponds to “*the life*.” Notice the wonderful correspondence here!

6. The Great Miraculous Tao Forgives Human Sins and Bestows Blessings

Lao Tzu is fully aware that although beautiful words can win honor and good deeds can win respect, they cannot purge sins. Only the light of the infinite Tao can help people transcend their dark nature and their limitations. That is why Lao Tzu says: “*Why was Tao greatly valued in antiquity? Is it not because in him seekers find and sinners are forgiven? Therefore, Tao should be the most honored in the world*” (60:4).

B. Overarching Principles for Following Tao

Keeping the preceding concepts in mind, let us examine the main principles for following Tao. First, take a look at the chapters that contain these principles.

In Chapter 16, Lao Tzu reveals the first principle of following Tao: Work in reverse—return to the root:

*Humble to the utmost and remain tranquil,
I can see the coming and going of all that grows.
Flourishing things of a million kinds,
All return to their roots.
Such a return is called tranquility;
Such tranquility is called return to life;
Such a return is eternity.
To know eternity is enlightenment;
Not to know eternity is waywardness, resulting
in calamity.
To know eternity is to embrace whatever comes;
To embrace whatever comes is to be just;
To be just is to be complete;
To be complete is to be like heaven;
To be like heaven is to return to Tao;
To return to Tao is to live long.
Your body falls away; yet you live on.*

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Later on in Chapter 52, Lao Tzu writes about the second principle:
Follow Tao in humility:

*The world has a beginning;
The beginning is the mother of the world.
Knowing the mother, we know we are sons.
Knowing we are sons, we must return to wait
on mother;
We can thus be safe and sound even when our
bodies disappear.*

*Block your passage to senses,
Shut your door to intelligence,
Your whole life will then be trouble free.
Unblock your passage to senses,
Use your cleverness and ability,
And throughout your life, you will not reach salvation.
To see the small is to be bright;
To remain soft is to be strong.
Follow the light [of Tao],
Return to its brightness,
One will stay away from calamities.
Thus is to inherit eternity.*

Finally, in Chapter 62, we find the third principle for following Tao:
Dwell in the Eternal Tao:

*Tao is the lord of all things,
The treasure of the good man and mediator
for sinners.
Beautiful words can win honor;
Good deeds can win respect.
But how can a man purge his sin?
Therefore, it is far better to dwell in Tao than
to be crowned as emperor or appointed as ministers
with glory and wealth!
Why was Tao greatly valued in antiquity?
Is it not because in him seekers find and sinners*

*are forgiven?
Therefore, Tao should be the most honored
in the world.*

1. Principle One: Working in Reverse 反—Return to the Root

Note that the concept of “reverse” has two layers of meaning: the first is “being opposite to the world,” while the second is “returning to Tao.” These two meanings are interrelated.

a. Tao Works in Reverse

Lao Tzu describes the virtues of the great Tao: “*What great virtues! How profound! They run contrary to human affairs; and they lead to great harmony*” (65:4). He also illustrates his point by such examples as: “*Do not honor the virtuous; do not value hard-to-find treasures*” (3:1-2); “*...Dwelling in loathsome places*” (8:2); “*In exercising discernment, transcend understanding and knowledge*” (10:6); “*Discard accomplishment and wisdom, discard humanity and justice, discard cleverness and gains, discard learning. Be carefree*” (19:1-3); “*Do non-doing. Engage in disengagement. Savor the flavorless*”; and “*Ancient followers of Tao did not make people clever; instead, they made them dull*” (65:1).

Lao Tzu also makes a significant point in terms of the great Tao’s actions: “*Tao works in reverse*” (40:1). The incarnate Jesus and the Holy One under Lao Tzu’s pen both work against worldly ways in every respect: “*...thinks of himself last and comes first; disregards himself and finds himself enduring*” (7); “*Knowing his glory but bearing disgrace; knowing his brightness but keeping to obscurity*” (28); “*depreciates what men value, learns what men do not want to learn*” (64); “*clothes himself in coarse garment hiding a treasure within*” (70); and “*humiliated...sacrificed...*” (78:3).

The world values education, yet Jesus never went to school (John 7:15); the world honors nobility, yet Jesus was born in a humble setting (Mark 6:3); the world chases after wealth, yet he had no

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place to lay his head (Matthew 8:20); the world admires beauty, yet he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him (Isaiah 53:2); the world cherishes dignity, yet he suffered extreme humiliation (Matthew 26:67; 27:27-31); the world desires power, yet he was as meek as a lamb (John 1:29; Isaiah 53:7); the world values longevity, yet he lived for only 33 years.... Clearly, Tao worked in the life of Jesus in so many reverse ways!

b. Do Not Follow the Ways of This World

Tao works in the reverse of what we human beings expect. No wonder the Bible says: *“What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight”* (Luke 16:15); hence, *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world”* (Romans 12:2). Jesus said that his disciples are not of the world any more than he is of the world and declared: *“Take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 17:14, 16; 16:33). His disciple Paul realized he should boast only *“in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”* (Galatians 6:14).

This principle of being opposite to the ways of the world is a true point of departure for those following Tao; those who are absorbed in the things of this world have no way of exercising Tao.

Why be opposite to the world? The answer is because *“the whole world is under the control of the evil one”* (1 John 5:19). Greed and selfish desires drive this world; force and trickery are the wheels; profit and pleasure are the never-ending goals; arrogance and ignorance are the eyes of godlessness. With such factors at work, is it any wonder that this world is full of pain, wickedness, jealousy, slander, hatred, killing, and death? Soul and conscience are like drowning swimmers in the ocean of sins, earnestly desiring beauty and kindness and silently waiting for salvation.

Is there another reason why Tao works in the opposite way of the world? Yes, it is because, as Lao Tzu says: *“To return to Tao is to live long. Your body falls away; yet you live on”* (16:10), and *“Those who are not inside of Tao are doomed to die”* (30:5; 55:5).

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The Bible says the same thing: *“this world in its present form is passing away”*; *“The world and its desires pass away”* (1 Corinthians 7:31); and *“But the man who does the will of God lives forever”* (1 John 2:17).

c. Return to Rest

The Bible says: *“In repentance and rest is your salvation; in quietness and trust is your strength”* (Isaiah 30:15). Lao Tzu’s concept of *“return”* also can be interpreted as *“repentance.”* Now is the time to return; now is the time to repent. Why would anyone who recognizes the sin, emptiness, illusions and fragility of this world not respond to the call of the soul and conscience and *“return to the root”* and *“guard the Mother”*? Indeed, why would anyone not follow the light and return to brightness, especially since anyone who follows the light will be protected and inherit eternity!

Anyone who has the will to be contrary to the world is on the opposite side of sin, and to be on the opposite side of sin is to return to beauty and kindness.

Anyone who has the will to be contrary to the world is on the opposite side of illusions; to be against illusions is to return to truth and reality.

Anyone who has the will to be contrary to the world is on the opposite side of decay; to be against decay is to return to the eternal Tao.

2. Principle Two: Following Tao in Humility 損

a. Pursuing Learning Brings Conceit; Following Tao Leads to Humility

Seekers of Tao must know the difference between the pursuit of learning and the pursuit of Tao. The acquisition of knowledge comes through exercising one’s mental faculties. However, those who seek after Tao must employ the deeper resources of a sincere

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heart. At best, learning yields limited knowledge and at worst gives people an inflated sense of mental superiority. Not so with those who pursue Tao—the closer one gets to the infinite Tao, the more humble he becomes.

Another point about learning is that there is never an end point in knowledge because of the limitations of human wisdom, moral character and life itself. The accumulation of finite human values and qualities, no matter how excellent, can never result in infinite, eternal values. Wise men have underscored some of the futilities of finite learning. For example, “Desires and hypocrisy increase with learning,” warned He Shanggong. So many people pursue knowledge until their hair turns gray and their body fades away, yet they never find the path that leads to the root of life! Pursuing illusions and temporal things is a waste, like chasing after the wind. Those who pursue learning for its own sake participate in futile effort, too.

b. Humble to the Utmost and Effort Free, Yet Accomplishing Everything

Following Tao is to return to the truth of life from the ever changing phenomena of the world. It is to return to the inside from the outside, from the many to the One, from knowledge to life (Tao). That is why the seeker of Tao becomes more and more humble—desires decrease, hypocrisy lessens, pride diminishes, profit devalues, lust vanishes; humility grows, quietness appears, humbleness emerges, gentleness surfaces, hearts cleansed, and spirituality revives. Then the light of Tao enters into the heart, the Holy Spirit flows inside, and God reveals himself to the seeker’s spiritual eyes.

Once enlightened and in union with Tao and following Tao, one does not need to work hard, because all is accomplished effortlessly—as if one is riding on a cloud or sailing with a fair wind. This effortlessness is because “*with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*” (Matthew 19:26).

The Holy One Jesus accomplished miraculous things in human history and human hearts and continues to do so. Why? *“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself”* and *“I do nothing on my own”* (John 5:19; 8:28). Poverty-stricken, humiliated, without any formal education and a short life, Jesus was truly humble and effort free, yet he accomplished his entire purpose.

c. Live the Paradox: To Lose Only To Gain and To Gain Only To Lose

What seekers of Tao lose are illusions, the fragility of life, relativism, and changing objects. Losing these things enables a person to return to truth, eternity, and the changeless Tao of life. Seeking Tao is beneficial, is it not?

Conversely, while chasing after the transient and tangible things, one is easily tempted and entangled and can lose the Tao of life without even realizing it. What a great loss! This is what Lao Tzu means when he says that one *“loses only to gain and gains only to lose”* (42:4).

Seekers of Tao do not pursue non-spiritual benefits and thus receive sacred blessings; they would rather suffer humiliation and hence see the light of Tao (28:5). Such seekers endure grievances and yet have their desires fulfilled (22:1); they are not worried with thoughts about self-preservation, but they last long (7:1). These seekers of Tao are unaware that they see; they, however, see clearly (22:3). As Lao Tzu says:

The highest perfection seems lacking; yet whenever applied, it never fails. The greatest fullness seems empty; yet use does not exhaust it. The most upright seems bent; the wisest seems naïve; the most eloquent seems slow in speech. (45:1-2)

Herein is a fantastic truth: one gains by losing.

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3. Principle Three: Residing in Tranquility 靜

For Lao Tzu, achieving the state of tranquility contains three steps:

- (1) the precondition: quiet down;
- (2) the method: remain quiet; and
- (3) the result: enter into tranquility.

a. Quieting Down

Tao cannot be followed if one cannot quiet down. Given this ever changing world with its countless temptations, human beings often experience frenzy, worry and restlessness combined with a sense of being lost and unfulfilled. To break the bondage of this world—to “revive” the original vigor of life and return to the eternal Tao, it is crucial to quiet down. *“Stillness is the master of restlessness”* (26:1). Only in stillness, when the throbbing, restless heart settles down, can one come close to Tao and understand Tao. *“Simplicity and tranquility is the true way for the world”* (45:3).

Not only can Tao not be followed if one cannot quiet oneself down, but also Tao cannot even be heard. We human beings cannot approach God with worldly interests and motives; if we do, we will discover that our hearts really have no space for God’s Tao. As the Bible reminds us: *“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace”* (I Corinthians 14:33). The Apostle Peter advises women concerning true beauty: *“It should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight”* (I Peter 3:4).

b. Remaining Quiet

The concept of “quietness” is closely related to Lao Tzu’s principles of “reverse” and “humility.” When one’s heart is free from worldly distractions and bondages and returns to purity, simplicity, and tranquility, it reaches the most pure, basic, and peaceful state

possible to human beings in this world (16:1), one in which the true essence of everything, including human beings, gradually will be revealed. Lao Tzu says: *"Who can purify his heart to be clear like a mirror?"* (10:3). After all of the inner desires have been cleansed by following Tao, the heart becomes as clear and bright as a mirror (without stain); then, a person is prepared to receive Tao more fully. To be still in God's presence includes discarding the distractions of worldly knowledge and learning. Lao Tzu says: *"You do not know [the source or my master]; therefore, you do not understand me [my words and my undertaking]"* (70:2). Similarly, the Bible says: *"You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children"* (Matthew 11:25). This is why Lao Tzu puts such an emphasis on people *"discarding knowledge"* and trying to *"be care free."*

c. Entering into Tranquility

To rest in Tao is to be in perfect tranquility and have abundant blessings. *"Such a return is called tranquility; such tranquility is called return to life"* (16:3-4). Such tranquility is no longer the same as "quiet down" and "remain quiet." One is now in a place of peace and rest where the root of life resides, in the bosom of Mother, in the true home of our hearts and spirits. Such tranquility is the realm of Tao.

The seeker of Tao goes through the three stages of quieting down, remaining quiet, and entering tranquility. Going through these steps involves a process of breaking away from the decaying and illusive world and entering into Tao in honesty and sincerity. The divine Tao is the source of life. In the great Tao, life enjoys peace and rest in its spontaneous way. This kind of peace moves from the temporal realm to eternity.

To ordinary people, the idea of enjoying peace and rest in Tao seems like a fairy tale. However, since the incarnate Holy One Jesus entered the world, residing in Tao for human beings becomes an easy thing to do, as these words from the Bible suggest: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"*

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(Matthew 11:28); and *“In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious”* (Isaiah 11:10). Lao Tzu also says: *“He who holds on to the image of the great Tao, the whole world will come to him. Coming to him, people will not harm each other; instead they will have rest, inner and outer peace”* (35:1).

How amazing that Isaiah, Lao Tzu, and Jesus uttered the same call: Believe in God, and enter into the eternal Tao in order to enjoy peace and rest. *“To whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?”* (Hebrews 3:16; 4:1).

The great Tao transforms the world through the Holy One by using the easiest method: simple belief—a door to Tao in whom peace and rest reside.

4. Principle Four: Dwell in the Eternal Tao 襲

a. Receiving Eternal Inheritance

For Lao Tzu, the word *“inherit”* is heavily loaded with meaning. Even though he uses it only two times, it bears close attention. Here is the first instance of *“inherit the light”*: *“The Holy One is good at saving people and no one is abandoned. He is good at saving all things and nothing is abandoned. This is called to inherit light”* (27:3-4). The second instance of *“inherit eternity”* is in Chapter 52, verse 6: *“Follow the light, return to its brightness, you will then keep yourself from calamities. This is to inherit eternity.”*

The Holy One inherits light. He enters into the world to save people and inherits and transmits the light of Tao. People who inherit eternity follow the inherited light of the Holy One, return to the brightness of Tao, and gain eternity.

It is thus clear that one must follow the Holy One in order to inherit the eternal Tao. Lao Tzu says: The bright Tao looks dark. Most of the people who hear what Lao Tzu says only seem to understand; some even burst out laughing (41:1-2). Only the Holy One knows

his brightness but remains in obscurity; he thus becomes the vehicle for the world to know heaven (28:3-4).

The Bible also says that Tao from the beginning is the light of life. Jesus enters the world and is the light of the world: "*The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it*" (John 1:5). Jesus says that he came into the world as the Light of the world so that no one who believes in him should stay in darkness and those who believe in him should have eternal life (John 12:36, 46).

b. Going beyond Humanism to the Essence of God

In *Lao Tzu*, the word for "*to inherit*" means "*to receive*." The act of receiving is passive, implying that people are given something without any effort. The word "*inherit*" also implies that the estate is already there; it is not at all created by the inheritor. Receiving the estate does not depend on the inheritor's will, but on the grace of whoever dispenses the estate.

No religion, morality, and learning based on humanistic learning underscores the idea of "inheritance"; instead, each emphasizes the idea of "making it happen"—an active action of one's will that brings out some inner potential, relies on personal capacity, and aims at personal accomplishment. The idea of "inheritance" is just the opposite—it does not come from oneself but from someone greater than and prior to oneself. The giver who created and sustained embraces the receiver, whereas the receiver, who has limited wisdom, morality, and life, does not already possess the inheritance.

Furthermore, the word "*inherit*" explains the principle of relying on Tao as a foundation. All is from Tao, including heaven, earth, human beings, morality, values, truth, and life. Since everything comes from Tao, human beings should receive everything from Tao with utmost humility.

The word "*inherit*" also signifies that the more wisdom we human beings have and the more accomplishments we achieve, the more gratitude and reverence we should feel in our heart. Fundamentally,

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even all human “inventions,” in a sense, are the result of hybrid reactions and interactions between the God-given wisdom endowed in human minds and hearts and the God-created materials that human beings also inherit. All come from God.

Humanity comes from the breath of both heaven and earth. The breath of heaven is the Spirit. The breath of earth is material. Heaven and earth are within Tao, who alone is self-existent. Lao Tzu beautifully expresses this point: Human beings model after the earth; the earth models after heaven; heaven models after Tao; and Tao models after “*what is as is*” (25:7).

c. Receiving Grace

During the time of the ancient Chinese, the concept of “inherit and receive” was deeply embedded in every aspect of life. Up to the end of the Spring and Autumn period, it was still possible to hear Confucius’ admiration and lament about the lost Tao.¹²⁰ During the past two-thousand years since the passing of Confucius, human wisdom and desires have been exalted above everything; sadness over the lost Tao and struggles in searching for Tao have never stopped, even in spite of general indifference.¹²¹ Once reliance on human wisdom, scientism and self-indulgence became the modern *modus operandi*, the concept of “inherit and receive” lost its spiritual influence on the Chinese nation. Sadly, as a result of this popular “loss of faith,” the living Tao of Lao Tzu turned into a dinosaur fossil, generally incomprehensible and inaccessible.

Amazingly, remnants of the Jewish people continued to affirm the sacred orthodoxy that had been embraced over several millennia. Even today, many Jewish people continue to believe that they are the recipients of the sacred Tao, “God’s elected people.” What is it that these people received in the light of God? Grace (unmerited favor),

¹²⁰ See Introduction I, II.

¹²¹ From Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 to the influential rationalistic Neo Confucian thought, the Principle of Li 理学 in the Song and Ming dynasties, the lament and the struggle had no power; instead, it often has been taken advantage of by human wisdom, desire, and control.

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which is already fulfilled in the Holy One Jesus, and promises yet to be fulfilled. The Bible tells us about this historic understanding: *"May he give you and your descendants the blessing of [given to] Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham"* (Genesis 28:4); *"I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever"* (Exodus 32:13); and *"You must go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their forefathers to give them"* (Deuteronomy 31:7). From these verses, we perceive that the relationship between what God has bestowed and what the Jewish people inherited is crystal clear.

If possession of land is a gift from God, surely the Tao of eternity is even more of an inheritance of God's abiding love.

Those who seek after Tao must have a humble heart in order to "inherit" Tao. Inheriting Tao is not a matter of personal will or effort, but rather of receiving Tao with a tranquil heart. It means learning to wait for Tao in a spirit of reverence and calm patience, without regarding this "inheritance" as something one deserves.

Lao Tzu's basic principles—work in reverse, practice humility, reside in tranquility, and inherit the eternal—can draw us closer to God. With these basic principles in mind, let us read on to find more ways of following the great Tao.

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PART THREE: THE WAYS OF TAO— SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION

Chapter II. Choosing between Two Worlds

Those who seek Tao need to follow three basic guidelines:

- 1) Affirm the self-existent nature of the eternal Tao, the root of life, the Mother of all;
- 2) See through the illusive and temporary nature of this world with its greed and empty sumptuousness; and
- 3) Give attention not to this illusive, temporary world, but to what matters in the genuine and eternal world.

How tragic that many people living in the deceptive, temporary world consider this real and eternal world to be a hollow religious hope, even a superstitious fabrication, when, in fact, very human being must come to terms with this reality. Various religions believe in the world beyond this one, as do many first-rate philosophers and scientists. Moreover, the most advanced scientific findings demonstrate that what matters most is invisible and elusive to human possession or control.

Now, let us explore some philosophical and scientific ideas about the eternal world, before coming to terms with Jesus, the incarnate Holy One.

Section A. Philosophical Views

As an expression of genuine human wisdom and rational human endeavor, philosophy long ago conjectured the existence of a world beyond this one. What follows are examples of some of the most famous ones:

(a) In ancient Greece, Plato presents an allegory depicting human ignorance: Human beings seem to be facing a wall in a cave and are unable to turn around. The light outside the cave casts the shadows of moving images on the cave wall. Inside the cave, the human beings mistake these flat, lifeless, illusive images for the real world. If someone is led out of the cave of ignorance, the bright light could blind him and prevent him from seeing anything. In this allegory, Plato recognizes the other world—the world outside the cave, which is the real world beyond this temporary, sensory world.

(b) German philosopher Hegel believes in an eternal self-existent absolute “idea,” which is similar to the “*Logos*” in Greek philosophy.¹²² This temporary world is a phase of the eternal “idea.” As this phase passes, the world will return to the original absolute “idea.” In a vast and elaborate philosophical system, Hegel attempts to idealize and somehow intuitively grasps a sense of the incomprehensible relationship between this world and the world beyond.

(c) Kant, another German philosopher, poses an idea of this world and the one beyond that is familiar to many people: rationality is suitable only for this temporary world, and approaching the world beyond relies on faith and a deeper awareness. Kant’s strict and forceful demarcation between reason and faith has greatly influenced generations of philosophical thought and scientific development.

(d) In the 20th century, the analytic school of modern philosophy focuses exclusively on this temporary world. All topics related to the world beyond, such as eternity, infinity, and absoluteness, are excluded from so-called rational thinking and scientific research. However, the researchers are intrinsically human whose own humanity, nevertheless, reaches beyond temporal rationality and science. As a result, Russell, according to his research principles, should have avoided topics of a metaphysical nature, but ironically,

¹²² “*Logos*” as used in the Bible represents “God” and is translated as “*Tao*” in the Chinese language and in English as “*The Word*.”

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he even wrote a book about God,¹²³ because the eternal questions always matter.

(e) The humanistic school of modern philosophy struggles constantly between the two worlds. Out of this school of thought appear a cast of characters: Nietzsche, who experienced a nervous breakdown while hurling curses at God; Sartre, who realized the illusive and temporary nature of this world yet failed to find the solid ground of the genuine eternal world beyond, and was tortured by the seeming absurdity of temporal life itself; Bergson, who plunged into a life philosophy in the attempt to transcend rationality, went beyond Kant's this-worldliness and relied on intuition for experiencing a certain reality of life; Heidegger and Kierkegaard, who could be more appropriately called "theologians," rather than philosophers, because their philosophies eventually became stepping stones for renewed faith in God.

Section B. Scientific Understandings

Everyone has heard of the two scientists—Newton and Einstein, names representing science from two distinct eras. As far as modern science goes, I would like to point out that the findings of these great scientists and the theory of the Big Bang support our investigations beyond the temporary world.

Newton, who lived in the 16th century, was a devout Christian. His faith and science are in such harmony that like Aristotle, Newton attributes the ultimate force beyond science's reach—"the First Mover"—to God. His notes about the Bible later on in his life are extensive and profound. In his book *Basic Principles (Ji Ben Yuan Li)*, Newton concluded that miracles evident to astronomy prove that there must be an omnipotent God who is in ultimate control.

Einstein says: "In the face of miraculous, cosmic harmony and beauty, I believe that any scientist who is immersed in the wonders of the universe would have no choice but to think of God." In his

¹²³ *Wo Wei She Me Bu Shi Yi Ge Ji Du Tu (Why I Am Not a Christian)*.

old age, he concluded: "I spent my whole life engaging in scientific studies. My biggest finding is that before God, science is merely a child's game." Einstein also said: "God does not play dice." This famous expression appropriately depicts the subtle relationship between science, which explores the internal principles of the physical universe, and God, who created the principled universe.

Evidence is mounting about the theory of the Big Bang. The physical universe is no longer considered self-existent and forever existing. It has a beginning and an end. More miraculously, the magnificent and exquisitely tuned universe started with an explosion from "the point of singularity," an elemental particle smaller than dust. This theory immediately makes people recognize the dependence of the physical universe on the self-existent and eternally existing God, who is above the universe. When people ask authoritative scientists the question "Where does the 'point of singularity' come from?" The answer is: "Only God knows."

For hundreds of years, many people have treated science and rationality with an innocent pride, trusting that with scientific advancement, human rationality eventually would solve all the mysteries of the universe and life. Some people firmly believed that there is no world beyond human rationality. Today, however, fewer and fewer people still hold on to "the fairy tale of complete human rationality." As we previously discussed, those deeply immersed in rational thinking and scientific research, such as Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Kant, Heidegger, Newton, Einstein, and so forth, pointed out the existence of an essential world that transcends the physical phenomena that human eyes behold. This other world totally differs from the physical world, and is unattainable by human rationality and science.

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Section C. The Universal Meaning of *Logos*

The ancient Greeks regarded “*Logos*” as the ultimate master of the universe. The word “*Logos*” is translated into Chinese as “*Tao*.”¹²⁴

Heraclitus (ca. 500 B. C.) said: *Logos* exists for ever and ever. However, although everyone shares in *Logos*, most people live so full of themselves that they are not even aware of how ignorant they are of *Logos*. Even though they hear about *Logos*, the word and its meaning are sadly incomprehensible to them. As the saying goes: they are there but they are not there—a perfect reflection of people’s state of mind. People feel at odds with *Logos*, which never departs from them and controls everything. *Logos* is an intrinsic part of the soul and grows. How can a person get away from such an immortal entity? All clawing things on earth are driven by God’s whip to the pasture.¹²⁵

The concept of *Logos* spread to the ancient Hebrew people, who used it in the Bible for the living God as he reveals himself—the Word, which was translated into Chinese as “*Tao*”: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it*” (John 1:1-4).

The identical meaning of these three words—*Logos*, *Tao*, and *God* (*Jehovah*) unites the origin of three ancient civilizations (Greece, China, and Israel) on the metaphysical level. This unity is, of course, by no means an accident. It is the same light coming from the world beyond, reflecting on different nations and cultures in this world. These three words have the same meaning even though they are expressed in different languages. Whatever communication existed among these three cultures was minimal and sporadic at best, with

¹²⁴ Beijing University, Department of Philosophy, *Xi Fang Zhe Xue Yuan Zhu Xuan Du* (*Selected Readings of Western Original Texts of Philosophy*) (Shang Wu Yin Shu Guan, 1981), v. 1, 22.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

occasional isolated travelers. If this common inspiration did not come from “the Only One,” where did it come from? Likewise, in religion, philosophy, and science—the three spiritual spheres covering the human heart, mind and wisdom expansively and distinctively—we see a clear demarcation of “the two worlds” and the affirmation and the human search for the world beyond. Regardless of language or modes of expression, we sense a tremendous centripetal force from all directions. In this world’s passing of generations, the yearning for a self-existent, eternal world has never ceased.

Section D. Focusing Our Eyes on Jesus

When we seek to follow Tao, it is essential that our internal eyes no longer focus on this temporary, illusive, and noisy world but on the eternal, real, and tranquil world. As we do so, we begin to move from the distractions of the merely temporal world to Ultimate Reality, to what endures.

He who reveals to the human race can save the human race;
He who has revealed himself to human beings since antiquity
is able to help human beings understand his revelation;
He who lets human beings enter this world can also lead
them to the world beyond;
He who allows human beings to enter this world can enter
this world himself.

Thank God that now the eternal longings of millions and millions of human beings can be turned into vital reality. The evasive world of science, philosophy, and religion cannot be a foothold to this reality. Tao, Logos, God—the master who controls everything—graces the world with his presence and meets human needs.

Tao, as Lao Tzu penned him, was illusory until the incarnate Holy One, through his unique words and action, revealed the great Tao to the world. The great prophet Isaiah even more accurately prophesied “the Holy One of Israel” whose characteristics are so similar to Lao Tzu’s description of the Holy One. Jesus came

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to the world a few centuries later and vividly lived out the Holy One's personalities that both Lao Tzu and Isaiah depicted. Lao Tzu, Isaiah, and Jesus authenticated each other. Indeed, nothing remains to be said for those whom the Holy One enlightens. *"The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us... full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

Tao, Logos and God have often been pursued like a dream, but now these three ancient vanguards of civilization have become fully realized and united in the person of Jesus. Jesus once told his disciples: *"Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it"* (Matthew 13:16-17).

It is true that among established major religions, only Jesus affirmed himself as the God of Heaven, not merely a messenger of God (such as Mohammed) or a wise man who tries to understand God (like Sakyamuni). Jesus evidently knows who he is and must tell the truth; otherwise, he would be a liar (John 8:55). He verified the highest visions of all three cultures—Chinese, Greek and Hebrew.

Nevertheless, Jesus comes contrary to all worldly extravagant hopes: he is humble, poor, weak, short-lived, without formal education, without the usual trappings of success, without status, without heroic exploits. He remains in a state of disgrace, weakness and obscurity "dwelling in a loathsome place." Doing things in reverse of what the world expects is Tao's way. How contrary to human affairs! What great virtues! How mysterious and profound! (65:4). Jesus met this world's disdain, rejection, hatred, and cruelty, bringing something longed for by generations upon generations: universal love, the root of life, the Mother of soul.

O Inheritor of light, you came from the eternal world. Against dark resistance and renouncement, you uttered a painful and shrilling call on the cross, like lightning piercing through the night sky! Anyone with a soul trembles because of you, Jesus!

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Jesus left this world, murdered by those he loved, yet he resurrected and ascended. His tomb is empty, but he gave the world the Holy Spirit, the source of human life, the everlasting Tao, undying love and now his indwelling presence. When people of later generations shut their eyes and see that young body of Jesus covered with bruises, how could their broken hearts not repent? How could they hold back remorseful tears?

Jesus ascended, having fulfilled Hebrew, Chinese, Greek and other prophecies. Because of his suffering, humiliation, and sacrifice, he became the king of hearts and the lord of all lords. He became the savior of human souls and the hope of eternal life.

“It is finished” (John 19:30) were his last words on the cross, but they reveal God’s merciful smile like a lily blooming in the yearning hearts of human beings. The incarnate Holy One sent the world peace in suffering, gave the world life in death, bestowed eternity with his short-lived life, and fulfilled Heaven’s most perfect plan in a humility rarely seen in this world!

Lao Tzu says:

The twisted shall be straightened; the wronged shall be rehabilitated... therefore, the Holy One unites with Tao, to be the vehicle to heaven for all people... Not holding himself to be right, he proves to be right. Not seeking his own glory, he accomplishes great missions. Not regarding himself as great, he becomes the king of all. Precisely because he does not contend, no one can contend with him. The ancients said: “The wronged will conquer.” That is not empty saying. Truly, to the conqueror will the world return. (22:1-5)

My friends, since the incarnate Tao has already revealed himself through Jesus to human beings, would it not be futile to bypass Jesus in the process of looking for Tao? Is it not foolish to avoid looking at Tao’s incarnation—Jesus—and dwell on abstractly musing about

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Tao? Since Tao became a person and the Holy One clearly demonstrated Tao, if people pursue Tao aside from Jesus, they forgo the reachable to look for the unreachable and lose the chance of finding Tao.

The transcendent Tao is originally beyond human understanding. Therefore, the omniscient Tao inevitably comes in the flesh. Only the omnipotent Tao is able to become flesh, and only the benevolent Tao is willing to become flesh.

Since Tao has become the incarnate Jesus, human beings can understand Tao through Him. Since Tao has become the incarnate Jesus, the ancient, illusive techniques of following Tao may now be discontinued, since knowing Jesus is the only straight path to Tao.

PART THREE: THE WAYS OF TAO— SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION

Chapter III. Lesson One: Discarding

Section A. The Meaning of Discarding

As we have discussed earlier, Tao's way of operating is through reversing and returning. Seekers of Tao allow their thoughts to be in harmony with Tao, whom they follow with single-minded devotion. What do they need to learn first? The lesson of discarding.

Exactly what should seekers of Tao discard? Lao Tzu speaks of discarding cleverness and intelligence, and the usual accoutrements of prideful intelligence, humanity and morality, which includes craftiness, material gain and selfishness; he encourages reducing desires and learning and being free of cares (19). He also warns against honoring the virtuous, valuing hard-to-find treasures, evoking evil desires, seeking knowledge, having desires (3). Colors, tones, delicacies, and riding and hunting do not benefit the heart (12). Even pride in physical life should be rejected (7, 13).

Knowledge and learning, craftiness and profits, morality and righteousness, pleasures and physical life are all valued by the world. However, "*what is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight*" (Luke 16:15). In light of the real and eternal Tao, all of these values that human beings esteem are temporary, illusive, and not worthy of one's life. In its essence, the human spirit belongs to the eternal Tao. Sadly, however, separated from the noble, tranquil realm of the eternal, the human spirit is lost in trivial, fleeting, and shallow physical exertion, which causes it to sink in the mud of sin and death. Through prophets from various corners of the world, God repeatedly speaks the message: "Return, for in peace and rest is your salvation; and in returning to the root, you will find peace and rest and the true life that lies in divine tranquility...."

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What a challenge for us humans to learn how to discard! Our pleasure-seeking flesh, the temptations of this world, the necessity to survive, and the power of prevailing customs are difficult to ignore. On one hand, we know that the flesh will stiffen, decay, and disappear, while on the other hand, the desire of the flesh is palpable and irresistible and faintly senses that the soul is longing for its eternal home.

Eternity seems to remain an illusion, but that is not true! The temporary looks real but is illusive; the eternal looks illusive, yet it is real. A person cannot step into the same river twice, as the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus observed, because this world is forever changing. What is changing is illusive; what is illusive is changing. Our flesh, temporal wisdom, worldly fame and knowledge are changing; they are the illusive. All the while, our soul yearns for eternity from which comes the call of God, who never changes—who uniquely fills the God-shaped vacuum within each of us; this is real.

Section B. The Holy One Jesus—Rejected

The Holy One Jesus came from the eternal Tao. Jesus knows his glory but remains in obscurity, knows the truth but enters into the world of temporal distractions. Before he started his ministry, he finished his work of “rejection” during forty days in the wilderness. Those forty days are rich in meaning for seekers of Tao, who also must experience the potent temporal temptations that the incarnate Jesus experienced and rejected. There is no shortcut on the path to Heaven.

1. Rejection of selfish desire. When Jesus was hungry, Satan told him: “*If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread,*” and Jesus replied: “*It is written ‘Man does not live on bread alone’*” (Luke 4:3-4). The pursuit of Tao is not a means of preserving one’s physical life; faith is not a vehicle for temporal pleasures. When various desires surge inside you, you should not follow a voice deep in your heart that says: “Pray to your God. He will give you all the blessings, blessings more than others so that He will be glorified.”

No! You must reject this temporal trick and turn your thoughts to the Tao of God and never be swayed: live *“on every word that comes from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4) and value *“eating Mother”* more than anything else in the world. Thus, *“five colors, five tones, five delicacies”* lose their wicked power; the twisted and selfish desires will no longer have a place; and even your physical life must be beyond your concern. Then, you will have won the first test.

2. *Rejection of worldly temptations.* During Jesus' wilderness trial, Satan the deceiver led him up to a high place and showed him all the kingdoms of the world; he then told Jesus: *“I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.”* Jesus answered: *“For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’”* (Luke 4:5-8). Jesus did not value worldly splendor and pleasures, since they are illusive and temporary temptations that often drive people away from the true eternal Tao. All seekers of Tao must recognize how empty these things are. *“Tao is hidden and nameless.”* The Holy One does not see by himself, does not regard himself, does not fight for himself, and does not boast, but tightly holds on to the true Tao tightly in order *“to be the vehicle for all people”* (22).

As a seeker of Tao, you do not need to care about worldly fame, status, profits, and accomplishments. Fix your eyes on the Tao of God. Do not pursue transitory things in the name of God. Do not mistake authority, splendor, fame, and prosperity as rewards from God. Seekers of Tao should *“dwell in loathsome places,”* and those who do will pass the second test.

3. *Rejection of rational overstepping.* After Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness, the devil *“took Jesus to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God’ he said, ‘throw yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”* Jesus answered, *‘It says: “Do not put the*

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Lord your God to the test.”’ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time” (Luke 4:9-13). Notice that Jesus used Scripture in his previous two tests to defeat the devil. This time, the devil used Scripture to test Jesus. Jesus’ answer demonstrated a supreme principle: God can test people, but no one can test God: “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

In the Chinese language, the word *God* means “sacred and incomprehensible” (Meng Tzu). Whatever God reveals to us is what we know; beyond this, we know nothing. Anyone who wants to pursue God with mere rationality can only fall. Anyone who tries to test God in the pursuit of God is doomed to fall! Satan designed this trap to lead people away from God, and it is his last and most deadly one! However, when he was up against Jesus, he was up against God himself. Wanting to test God shows a desire to control, judge, and surpass God. Wishing to know good and evil like God (Genesis 3:5) is the poisonous effect of “the fruit of wisdom.”

Lao Tzu advises people to “discard wisdom, learning, and knowledge” and go beyond their human limitations. He knows that the infinite Tao cannot be reached by relying on limited human wisdom, learning, and knowledge. According to human wisdom, *“Tao is bright but men take it to be dark; to be growing in Tao seems to be retiring; to have peace in Tao appears difficult”* (41:2). Tao cannot be approached through ordinary human wisdom; attempting to do so goes against Tao. Using human wisdom to prove that Tao exists can lead us to lose Tao completely. How very difficult it is for modern seekers of Tao during today’s knowledge explosion to discard human wisdom and follow Tao!

Transgressions of rationality, such as the Tower of Babel, can be found even in seminaries and churches. Compared to Lao Tzu’s and Isaiah’s era, contemporary rationality has invented countless “truths” and knowledge that have led people to go around in mazes. Limited human wisdom has filled people with pride. The truth of

Tao has been buried in the cloud of human wisdom. Only as we discard the fake authority of human wisdom and spit out the fruit of wisdom, can we achieve that humility and purity that will enable us to discover the authority of God's Tao, which guides human rationality. A person who truly reaches this state can accomplish anything effortlessly.

Section C. The Fall of Our Human Ancestors

Unlike Jesus, Adam and Eve, our human ancestors, could not resist Satan; as a result, they cut themselves off from God, leading the human race to today's sinful state. Satan's demonic power continues to express itself in three main ways: selfish desire, worldly temptations, and transgressions of the mind. The Bible describes it like this: *"The serpent told the woman: 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it"* (Genesis 3: 5-6). Let us focus on key aspects of these verses.

"The fruit of the tree was good for food." Notice that Jesus' first temptation was also related to food when he was hungry. To relieve hunger, maintain life and growth, and improve and enjoy life, human beings desire "jade and gold"—luxury and pleasure as they progress from life to death. However, for Lao Tzu, *"the greatest curse is to overvalue physical life"* (9, 14, 50). Here is how the Bible puts it: *"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matthew 16:26). Since sin and death entered our world as a result of pursuing pleasures (the forbidden fruit), the human inclination has been to give up life in exchange for worldly pursuits. Clearly, Jesus' incarnation and deeds show that he is the salvation of the human race. Only when human beings follow Jesus and reject the selfish self will they be able to revive, with the living Tao's help, the living Tao residing within them.

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“Pleasing to the eye.” While authority, splendor, fame, and prosperity did not exist in the Garden of Eden, the phrase *“pleasing to the eye”* says it all. Anyone who is tangled up in worldly interests, profits, reputation, position, wealth, desires, and so forth is far away from Tao. Lao Tzu says: *“Travelers in a hurry would stay for music and delicacies”* (35:2). How perfectly expressed! Human beings are but travelers in the world. They are only guests, but are tempted by illusive and temporary pleasures and delicacies and thus are unable to detach and forget to return home. The call of the real and eternal Tao sounds tasteless, faint, and laughable (35, 41)! People become so obstinate that they plunge to their spiritual death and lose eternal life. Jesus resisted worldly temptations and focused only on God. Becoming the vehicle for human beings to know Heaven, he left us the Tao of repentance and eternity.

“Desirable for gaining wisdom,” “eyes will be opened,” and “like God, knowing good and evil.” Human rationality oversteps its bounds when it tries to be as wise as God. Unfortunately, this is precisely the attitude of human being—even today. What has happened to the human heart’s reverence toward Tao? Human beings occupy such a tiny spot in the universe. Human wisdom is so minuscule. How ironic that human morality is so limited and human life is so vulnerable and yet human beings wish to be like God! We have the illusion that human rationality is able to penetrate everything in the universe, even to the point of judging the existence of God and systematizing God’s character and deeds!

O, foolish builders of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), God will confuse your wisdom. Today, people speak without understanding one another; numerous schools of philosophy confound each other; thousands of thoughts contradict each other; millions of churches act like strangers; the East and the West do not get along; the South and the North act like total aliens. *“Who can transcend understanding and knowledge?”* (10:6); *“When wisdom comes, there arises great falsity”* (18:2). The only way out, as Lao Tzu says, is to *“discard human learning. Be carefree”* (19:3).

Section D. Pursuit of Tao and the World

O, seekers of Tao, let us go a step further and listen to the teaching of the incarnate Tao: *“No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and Money”* (Matthew 6:24).

When Jesus said, *“Come, follow me,”* Peter and Andrew left their nets right away, as did John and James (Matthew 4:19-22); Matthew, also called Levi, answered the call of Jesus (Luke 5:28).

Jesus told his followers: *“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”* To someone he called who had not yet buried his father, he said: *“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”* When someone wanted to say goodbye to his family before following him, Jesus said: *“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God”* (Luke 9:58-62).

Jesus said: *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”* (Luke 9:23-25). Similarly, Lao Tzu says: *“Fame or life, which is dearer to you? Life or wealth, which is more valuable to you? Gaining the world or losing your life, which is the greater suffering?”* (44:1).

Jesus said: *“...The worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful”* (Mark 4:19). Why? *“...They are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. Sanctify them by the truth”* (John 17:14-17).

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Section E. The Pursuit of Tao and Virtues

Morality and laws cannot make people enter Tao and gain life. Conversely, *“When the great Tao is rejected, there arise humanity and justice”* (18:1); *“Morality is required when Tao is lost”* (38:5); and *“A man of low morality needs not moral commands because he does not have them within”* (38:1).

Jesus came to the world and broke many traditional Jewish laws. For example, he cured people on the Sabbath and dined with known sinners. His disciples picked ears of corn on the Sabbath, did not fast, and did not wash their hands before eating. When the Pharisees (the learned men who interpreted the Bible at that time) condemned Jesus, he said to them: *“You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight”* (Luke 16:15); and *“You hypocrites! They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men”* (Matthew 15:7, 9).

Jesus came to the world, entered into people’s hearts and fulfilled the entire Law (Matthew 5:17). He is the Light coming into the world, exposing the darkness of people’s hearts (John 3:19). Jesus fulfilled the prophecy God gave Jeremiah: *“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people”* (Jeremiah 31:33). The inheritor of light (27:4) brought the great Tao that cannot be perceived, understood, and grasped (*YiXiWei* 14:1) to people in darkness. Indeed, *“He knows his glory but keeps to obscurity and becomes the vehicle to heaven for the world”* (28:3). He led those who believe in him to follow the light of Tao, return to its brightness, and keep away from calamities and inherit eternity (52:6). The Tao of God is not only the root of all virtues and morality, but also the creator and sustainer of the world, giving life to people, cleansing people’s unkindness, saving souls, and returning to eternity. How can Tao, valued by heaven and earth, be compared to mere benevolence, beautiful words, and fine deeds!

Section F. The Pursuit of Tao and Wisdom

Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." (I Corinthians 3:8)

When the previously hidden Tao is revealed through Jesus, who upholds the image of Tao, those relying on human wisdom must fall. Lao Tzu explains it thus: *"When wisdom comes, there arises great falsity" (18:2); "You do not know my source or my master; therefore, you do not understand me" (70:2); "Blind are those who think they can see; foolish are those who think they are wise" (24:2); and "Unaware that he sees, he sees clearly. Not holding himself to be right, he proves to be right" (22:3). Jesus says: "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind" (John 9:39).*

One must discard human wisdom in pursuit of Tao, because Tao is far higher than human wisdom, just as the heavens are higher than the earth. No one on earth is foolish enough to try to reach the sun, the moon, and the stars using his arms. Anyone who attempts to use rational thinking to pursue Tao is as foolish as someone who is trying to reach the sky.

Andrew Murray provided some excellent thinking about two ways of understanding. One way is to rely on the perceptive and contemplative faculties to investigate and analyze; the other way is to depend on spiritual aspiration to sense and realize. A blind person can gain knowledge about light by hearing; a child understands light much better than the blind person even though the child has never heard about the definition of light. Murray also said that Jehovah revealed this truth when he set up a tree of wisdom and a tree of life in the Garden of Eden. If Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit from the tree of life, they would have received abundant life

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from the spiritual power God provided. However, Eve was driven by greed and ate the fruit from the tree of wisdom, and Adam followed her example. As a result, human beings have gained the knowledge of kindness but not kindness itself.¹²⁶

Basically, believing in God and entering into Tao have two aspects: the first is to admit the ignorance of human beings; the second is to look forward to eternity.

Section G. The Pursuit of Tao and Livelihood

How can one ignore the self, abandon the world, and discard wisdom? To truly live in the world, we must use wisdom. So, how could we discard those things by which we make a living for ourselves? Perhaps only hermits can pursue Tao!

The art of discarding does not require one to live outside of the world; instead, it means that one is free to cultivate the inner spirit. Many people regard Lao Tzu as a complete hermit. His position as an archivist in the Zhou court aside, is it not obvious that Lao Tzu wrote *Tao Te Ching* with the point of spreading Tao and saving people's hearts? His words prove that he had an in-depth experience and understanding of the world. An accurate assessment of Lao Tzu should lead one to see that his heart is linked with Tao (God's Word), but his eyes are gazing at the human world. In other words, Lao Tzu lived in an illusive, transitory, greedy, and extravagant world, yet his heart dwelled in the real, eternal, holy, and humble Tao of God. That is a realistic state for seekers of Tao. Lao Tzu lived that way.

The Holy One who knows his brightness but keeps to his obscurity, who serves as the vehicle to heaven for the world, who knows his glory but bears disgrace, and who is the valley of the whole world also possesses the heavenly characteristics of Tao, along with an earthly personality. He is the light in the darkness and the divine among the secular, the love in hatred, the life in death, the salvation in infirmity, and the hope for the repentant.

¹²⁶ Andrew Murray, *Nei Zai Sheng Huo (The Master's Indwelling)*. Ji Du Jiao Xi An Tang, 1990, Chapters 12-14.

Spiritually, Jesus does not belong to this world. He came into this world for the sake of love. Similarly, those whose hearts yearn for Jesus initially belong to this world, yet they surpass this world because they have followed Jesus in order to return to the root, to guard the Mother, and to inherit the light.

So, the art of discarding is a path to Tao, not a means of livelihood. If people equate faith in God and the pursuit of Tao with making a living, they are wrong; likewise, if people employ methods of survival and livelihood to follow Tao, they are also totally wrong. Seekers of Tao have no choice but to make a living as well; those who make a living also can seek Tao. First, one has to differentiate between this life and eternal life; then, one has to treat one's livelihood calmly, and to set his heart on the pursuit of Tao. Finally, once a person devotes his heart to seeking Tao, he must disentangle his heart from the self, the world, and human wisdom.

Section H. The State of Transcendence

According to Lao Tzu, to discard is to transcend. Those who overvalue this life cannot possibly focus on Tao and are merely "born to die." Lao Tzu teaches seekers of Tao to attend to this life lightly, value the life beyond, conceal one's fame, discard intelligence, and abandon selfish desires. At that point, they will have transcended the worldly things that have weighed down their heart and soul. Once the heart and soul reach a state of purity and holiness, one's livelihood depends on accepting the gift of Tao, whether or not one follows the literal example of Jesus' disciples, who left everything behind Tao to seek and preach Tao.

Section I. The Mode of Praying

Discarding the self, the world, and intelligence in order to reach a state beyond learning, desire and effort requires both an act of the will and a spiritual quest. This authentic state of being can be entered only in prayer.

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Prayer involves talking to God and being in communion with Him. While praying, a person no longer faces the toil and pain of worldly living, but the loving mother who creates and sustains the heavens and the earth. The one who prays is no longer defined by the trivial affairs of the world, but by Tao, whose life creates a vibrant spiritual environment. In prayer, one does not depend on his own will, rational thinking, or desires; he throws his entire body and soul into the embrace of almighty God.

In that moment of prayer, one lives in the Tao of God, as truly as he breathes air, and is attracted to God, as truly as he lives under the force of earth's gravitational pull. His heart is pure and tranquil, like that of "*a weaned child with its mother*" (Psalm 131:2). The torment of selfish desires, the disruptive noise of the world, and thoughts that wrack the mind do not exist in true prayer. Instead, one enters eternal life, and the spirit of life is united with the infinite truth of existence. The one who prays transcends life and death, bypasses yesterday and today, and rises above kindness and evil—at that moment, he has mastered the art of discarding.

Praying and being with God, walking in step with God, and breathing with a consciousness of His Presence could take place in the morning, at night, or anytime during the day. Even though the prayer time may be limited, the deepening sense of linking and connecting with God will gradually spread and permeate one's daily life, until prayer—sincere, pure, transcendent, effort-free—becomes a way of life.

When Jesus entered the world and ministered, he often left the crowds and went to be alone on a mountain or in the wilderness to converse with his heavenly Father. It was sometimes in the dawn, at night, or for an entire night. He taught his disciples: When you pray, call on God's name, God's kingdom, and God's righteousness; as for yourself, just ask God to forgive your sin, to provide today's bread, and to keep away from temptations and the evil One.

Section J. Home for the Soul

Let us return to Lao Tzu. Immediately after pointing out three rules about discarding and abandoning, Lao Tzu says: *"It is not enough to have these three rules. People's hearts must return to where they belong"* (19:2). The reason is obvious: life must have a foundation. To give up something, one must have something else upon which to rely; to refuse illusions and temporality, one must return to authenticity and eternity. What attracts and welcomes us must be greater, better, and more powerful. Lao Tzu continues to advise people to *"know and embrace the source of life"* (见素抱朴). The source of life is the original existence of things, as things were made at the beginning. They are connected with "the source," the Maker, the Spirit of life.

In Chapter 28, Lao Tzu also uses the word "*Pu*" (朴), referring to the Holy One who knows his glory but keeps to his obscurity, who leads people to return to the original state of life. This life dwells in different individuals. The Holy One develops individuality in people and becomes their ruler, while maintaining the undivided original unity and wisdom of the great Tao.

The realm of returning to the source of life is higher than the state of returning *"to the infant"* (obedience) and *"to infinity"* (limitlessness) (28: 2, 4, 6). This condition is similar to the Christian model of "living in the Holy Spirit." The sentence *"Once applied, this state of being becomes tools of all kinds for various people"* (28:7) implies that "*Pu*" is a living source that is full of life and interconnects individuals.

Tao normally does not reveal his name. The being behind existence does not take space, yet there is no higher authority above him. Heaven and earth would be in harmony, if rulers attended to this source (32:2). This creating and harmonizing evidently refers to the work of the Holy Spirit. Lao Tzu further explains: *"Tao normally seems idle, but in fact he is in the doing of everything. Were lords and princes able to respect this, all things would transform accordingly. When desires rise in the transformation, let them be*

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conquered by the nameless being. Desire will die in the being that cannot be named. When desires are dead, human hearts are calm; then the world will naturally be at peace” (37:1-3).

Lao Tzu’s words remind us of the effect of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says: *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law”* (Galatians 5:22-23). Many of these virtues are mentioned along with “*Pu*.” Since this is the original state of life, it must be the original life force, *“the breath of life”* (Genesis 2:7). It is unreasonable to expect Lao Tzu to use Christian terminology. Nevertheless, is it not amazing that the intrinsic meanings of “*Tao*” and “*Pu*” and “*the Holy Spirit*” are so utterly close?

Let us review Lao Tzu’s descriptions of Tao: mysterious, formless, deep, unsearchable, invisible, inaudible, ungraspable, shadowy, formless form, imageless image, with no beginning and no end, existing in non-being, with spirit, faith, truth, grand, flowing, gentlest, strongest, penetrating (1, 4, 6, 14, 21, 34, 43). Without argument, it is obvious that the original state of Tao is that of spirit.

Therefore, to pursue Tao is the same as Christian spiritual cultivation: living in the Holy Spirit is obeying and following Tao. Here is where the soul belongs.

Section K. The Value of Eating Mother

After Lao Tzu expresses his view about the art of discarding and the source of life, he comments on his own approach: *“I differ from all people because I value feeding on the Mother (the great Tao). The highest form of morality is to completely obey Tao”* (20:7; 21:1). This expression further explains where the human heart belongs: with Tao as the foundation of life.

The concept of “*Eating Mother*” is a marvelous one for seekers of Tao, although it has puzzled scholars for two-thousand years. “*Eating Mother*” is the same as “*feeding on Tao*.” The Bible

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explains: *“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight”* (Jeremiah 15:16), while the incarnate Tao Jesus says: *“My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him”* (John 6:53-58).

Entering into Tao and cultivating the spiritual life is to eat and drink eternal life. Whoever tastes this sweet and heavenly grace must detach, transcend, and discard the things belonging to the self and this world.

In order to “reverse” in relation to the world, to return to the root, to guard the Mother and to inherit eternity, one first must discard the self, abandon the world, and give up prideful intelligence. Our human ancestors, driven by greed, ate the wisdom fruit and thus sank into the struggle of sin and death. As an incarnate human, Jesus completed the art of rejection during his meaningful forty-day test. He commands all seekers of Tao to sanctify themselves by discarding cleverness, desires, and the excesses of physical life.

The art of rejection is a path to Tao, not a means of livelihood. To reach this transcendent state of heart, one must pray. Prayer integrates our heart and soul with Tao and other human beings through conversation, connection, and communion. The experience, atmosphere, and the effect of praying gradually can spread throughout the body, heart, soul, and the entire process of living. Thus is to live in the Holy Spirit, connect with the source of life, uphold Tao, and value feeding on Mother.

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PART THREE: THE WAYS OF TAO— SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION

Chapter IV. Lesson Two: Tranquility

After “absorbing” the lesson on discarding from the previous chapter, we have another lesson of vital importance in the pursuit of Tao: learning how to be tranquil. Both Lao Tzu and the Bible have much to say about tranquility.

Section A. A Panoramic View of Tranquility

Tao must be sought in tranquility. Otherwise, Tao cannot be approached, heard, or followed. Lao Tzu says: “*Stillness is the master of restlessness... To be agitated is to lose control*” (26:1, 4). Human beings are easily irritated, agitated, worried, and restless. In this cauldron of emotions, the whole body seems to lose control. What masters a person is a tranquil heart. If we reflect on our own personal behavior, any number of us has spent a good deal of our lives in a state of “restlessness without control.” If we could somehow find a way to guard a “tranquil” heart, our lives would be much more serene and peaceful.

The question is “How does our heart become tranquil?” Lao Tzu underscores at least two ways:

First, stay low. Women are often more serene than their male counterparts because traditionally, women have quietly submitted to lower positions. When water is boiling, it rises up and evaporates; when water is quiet, it settles and holds together. *Qi*, or energy, is the same. The ancients wisely observed: A person lives when energy gathers; a person dies when energy disperses. Therefore, those who stir up and evaporate their energy are the ones who lose; those who quiet themselves down and retain their energy stand to gain. A humble person who remains calm has control of his life, whereas a person in constant struggle to prevail is restless and tends

to lose control of his life. For such a person, death is near—whether spiritually or physically or both.

Secondly, “*block your passage to senses, shut your door to intelligence*” (52:4), and “*purify one’s heart to be like a mirror*” (10:3). The heart is unsettled, because people are entangled with craftiness, temptations, and various desires, which are naturally related to the senses. The pull of the senses is so strong that it obscures the soul’s existence. Our senses are powerful because of the brevity of their life span. Like fleeting clouds and blooming crocuses, their transient life passes quickly. By comparison, the spirit, because of its eternal nature, is generous, calm, quiet, and unrushed. Once a person is able to eliminate the disturbance of the senses, the eternal spirit can surface naturally and master one’s life, as it was divinely endowed to do.

Why does one need to be tranquil? According to Lao Tzu, “*Humble to the utmost and remaining tranquil, I can see the coming and going of all that grows. In flourishing things of a million kinds, one can see their roots. To return to the root is called tranquility. To go back to tranquility is to return to real life. Such a return is eternity. To know eternity is to be enlightened. A person hence becomes forgiving and generous and lives long in Tao. Even though the physical body falls away, he lives on*” (16:1-6, 10).

With a restless heart, one tends to notice only the surface of things, rather than the mother of all things. With a restless heart, one sees only the world rather than the Tao of God (Word of God) and feels only the urge of the flesh and fails to heed the voice of the spirit. In such a state, one struggles in the illusive, transient world rather than dwelling in the tranquility of a true eternity.

The art of tranquility helps one to see the eternal Tao and to return to the root of life, but not for the purpose of turning seekers of Tao into hermits. “*Such tranquility is called return to life; such a return is eternity. To know eternity is enlightenment*” (16:3-6). As soon as a person recognizes the incarnate Tao, the Holy One, he follows the light of Tao, returns to its brightness, and is able to keep himself

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from calamities. He then will inherit eternity (52:6). To be tranquil is the first step in breaking away from temporality and knowing eternity, which leads to inheriting eternity.

Section B. From Restlessness to Tranquility

The nature of livelihood is restlessness—the result of an exchange of the self with the world: selfish desires spring at the world and the world lures the self; the self attempts to earn more fame and pleasures from the world, which, in turn, demands from the self more mind and energy. Both sides are wrestling and becoming entangled. How can human beings not be restless? Human wisdom and life—what individuals can summon as payment for the world—are so limited and never enough for the world. Fame and riches—what the world presents to individuals—are transient and never satisfy human beings. No wonder people are never at peace.

Living in the world is very much like the description of the dead that G. G. Ritchie gave about his nine-minute death experience: The alcoholics repeatedly try to grab the glistening glasses, yet their hands bypass the hard bottom of the glass and pass over the heavy wooden bar and fail to grasp the glass; the “lover” rushes to his sweetheart again and again, yet he always goes through her body and is never able to be truly united with her... To live like this for ever and ever—such an idea makes one shudder; the more one craves, the stronger the fire of desires burns, and one cannot do anything about it. Is not the meaning of hell like this: living on the earth, yet never being able to truly connect with the earth? ¹²⁷

You are living in the universe. Do you have a real relationship with the root of the universe? You are going through life. Do you have a real connection with your spiritual essence? You have wracked your brain, and for your entire life have made painstaking efforts time and time again, chasing after fame, profits, wealth, beauty, status, knowledge and other worldly things. Is it not true that all of these things loosen from the fingers of your life and are washed away?

¹²⁷ G. G. Ritchie, *Si Wang Jiu Fen Zhong (Return from Tomorrow)*, trans. by Chen Jianming,, (Shanghai: Bai Jia Chu Ban She, 2005), 76.

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You eat and then are hungry again, drink and then become thirsty again; you laugh and then cry; you are lifted up and then put down. You have spent your entire life calculating and have never had a moment of peace. What have you gained?

O, people, fortunately, in the twinkling of an eye, a few decades will have passed and you will pass as well. That will be the only hope for you to end an empty life of labor. Unfortunately, your soul, which is burdened with greed, will enter into an eternal torment of grasping emptiness in the burning fire of desires with no hope of relief. Although you have escaped from a worldly hell, you, nevertheless, have fallen into a real hell....

Things would be so much simpler if people could see through worldly, transient restlessness and understand what it means to avoid suffering tormenting hell, but once one sees through this restlessness, what can be done? Here are some suggestions:

1. Let your heart return from meaningless entanglement of the self and the world;
2. Let go of illusive, worldly temptations;
3. Put out the fire of selfish desires;
4. Drive away all useless worries and anxiety; and
5. Submerge your heart in tranquility.

Think of a bucket of cool spiritual water pouring down upon you from head to toe, slowly soaking into your skin and going into your inner heart. All is quiet. The world no longer disturbs you; in fact, it is as if it does not exist. You breathe more and more slowly. Your breath becomes deep and heavy and permeates your bone. You are breathing the Holy Spirit. You feel your head, face, and neck loosening and your shoulders, arms, legs, and feet relaxing. Your body seems to disappear. You are at rest and peace.

You can hear the tranquility. It is a voice filling the universe and your heart. You are resting in the true peace and quietness of the Holy Spirit. Even though your heart and soul are alive, you do not want to bother them. Even though you can sense your self, you do

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not wish to sense it. You know you are melting into the Tao of God (God's Word).

Section C. Purify the Heart to Be as Clear as a Mirror

Once one's heart is directly linked with the Tao of God, what is the value of scientific axioms, philosophic theories, and religious dogma? Once our lives are blended into the Tao of God, what would be the use of clever craftiness, logical induction, and rational analysis?

Lao Tzu is not an "anti-intellectual." Things are not that simple. Lao Tzu realizes that human wisdom is pathetically limited before God, yet human beings proudly rely on their own wisdom and intelligence, depriving themselves of the opportunity to recognize Tao from the outset. Human beings have a penchant for regarding their own rational brain as the ultimate criterion and thus suffocate the hope of transcending limited human wisdom to link with the God. That is why Lao Tzu observes: "*Unaware that he sees, he sees clearly*" (22:3); "*Blind are those who think they can see*" (24:2); and "*You do not know the source, therefore, you do not understand*" (70:2). Hence, he advises people: "*block your passage to senses, shut your door to intelligence*" (52:4; 56:2); "*discard wisdom and cleverness*" (19:1-2); and so forth.

Listen to these words: "*Pay attention to my words: shut the door to the senses so that you may hear what your master, God, says in your heart.*" This passage is from *The Imitation of Christ*,¹²⁸ an invaluable book from the West written during the Middle Ages and belonging to the same spiritual family as *Tao Te Ching*, written by Lao Tzu from the East.

Now listen to the words of the Christian mystic Madame Guyon: "*Close your physical eyes and open your spiritual eyes, focusing on being together with God.*" In other words, we should enclose our hearts in prayer. "*Stop wandering away,*" she says. "*Stay away from external disturbance. Then you will be able to get close to God.*"

¹²⁸ See *Zhong Shi Ji Lin Xiu Wen Xue Xuan Ji (Selections of Medieval Spiritual Literature)*. Ji Du Jiao Wen Yi Chu Ban She, 1991.

For God can only be found in the deepest inner heart.” Madame Guyon gave the Christian world a most valuable example of spiritual cultivation—and an excellent interpretation of Lao Tzu’s passages!

Section D. To Transcend Knowledge

The art of tranquility is not for the purpose of gaining the world, but for seeing and entering Tao. In this realm of tranquility, worldly knowledge is of no benefit and can actually do harm. True faith is not established on human knowledge, but on a spiritual realm that surpasses all human knowledge. Madame Guyon points out that extensive reading is for the learned, not for gaining the true Tao. Therefore, she suggests we refrain from using our rational minds and just quietly stop thinking. In front of God, she says, one shall stop thinking.

If one remains in a busy noisy place, it is hard to be quiet; if one does not give up sins of the mind and the pride of learning, one has no chance of gaining quietness of heart. It is usually one’s brain that stops him from going toward God. The logical waves, the intellectual splashes, and the swirling currents of wisdom are but hollow, transient things. Only when waves, splashes, and currents disappear does water return to its calmness. In the same way, upon leaving those transient things behind, one’s heart is able to return to its true state and life then can enter eternal tranquility.

When people encounter verbal expressions of Tao, “the utterances of Tao” (53:3), rational thinking and knowledge tend to block the Tao of God—the Word—in the mind. Just as doors and window shades block sunshine, rational thinking and knowledge can barricade the finite from the infinite and keep darkness as the destined condition.

Richard J. Foster says: “True faith does not research and analyze but accepts God’s word in your humble heart.”¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Shu Lin Cao Lian Li Zan (Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth)* (Xue Shen Fu Yin Tuan Qi Chu Ban She, 1993), Chinese Translation, 37.

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Section E. To Empty the Self

Being “*humble to the utmost and remaining tranquil*” means emptying the self until one reaches a state of no knowledge, no desire, no effort, no action, and no temporal self. Christian mystic Andrew Murray says: “Abandon and empty what we are; the power of God will then flow in continuously.”¹³⁰

Everyone knows that a bottle full of sand cannot contain water; the amount of sand one pours out is the amount of room left for water that can flow in. Spiritually speaking, if one completely empties oneself, God will fill him up completely. Jesus uses water as the metaphor for God’s spirit. Lao Tzu also says, “*The highest good is like water*” (8:1). The characteristic of water is its downward flow, which pours into an empty place. Therefore, the more humble one becomes, the easier it is for the Holy Spirit to flood one’s heart. When a person is humble to the utmost, he can be infiltrated by the Tao of God (God’s Word) and become a living temple for Tao.

Section F. The State of Death

I cannot imagine what would be more difficult than “crucifying the self,” yet I dare say that nothing in this life is more comforting than “the self crucified.” “Emptying the self completely,” or “the state of no awareness, no desire, no effort, no action, and no temporal self” is a state of death—precisely what Jesus means by the words “*carry your cross and follow me.*” In this state, a person is dead to the world but alive in God.

One time I prayed according to the teaching of the Bible and asked for three things: first, for the death of my body and my lust (Galatians 5:24); second, for the death of my temporal mind, knowledge, learning, and wisdom (I Corinthians 3:19-20); and third, for the death of all worldly worries and thoughts (I Corinthians 7:29-32). Each time I prayed, God answered that each part of my self was

¹³⁰ Andrew Murray, *Zhu Zai Ji Du Li (Abide In Christ)* (Xiao Yuan Shu Fang, 1992), 101.

dead; at that point, I no longer felt my self, only the sense of my spirit melting in the indescribable, boundless, and infinite Tao.

In this incomparably sweet tranquility and rest, one does not want to think and worry about anything, because he is caressed by the Holy Spirit, immersed in the loving Tao of God. At this moment, the self is indeed dead. One does not even look at the self and the world, but tries to discard the illusions of the world, because the world, one's intelligence, the temporal self, and all the illusions are no longer palpable and have been set aside. In this state, only Tao, the root of all, the essence of existence, is there. Once a person touches the eternal and the absolute, all transitory and relative concerns simply disappear without a trace.

Section G. To Live in Tao

To be humble, to stay low, to reverse, then to detach, to empty, to lack, until the temporal self reaches a state of death—this path to Tao is full of profound wonders.

What is the biggest enemy of life? Is it not death? Once a person enters into the realm of death, he has experienced the taste of “forever living.” Even his death has died. In this world, however, the purpose is not to stay in death, but to prepare for the arrival of real life. “Emptying the self” and “selflessness” are not truth itself, but offer a way to obtain truth—a means but not the goal or the purpose. Therefore, this method of “detaching, emptying, and lacking” is hugely different from the “ontological emptiness” and “nothingness” of traditional Buddhist teaching.

Existence has a true essence—the Tao of God, who is the “*formless form*” and “*imageless image*”—the Spirit (John 4:24). As the root of life and mother of all things, the will of Tao is much superior, and Tao's path is far higher than the human path. To calm down and empty the self is to hear Tao's gentle voice; to put the self to death is to welcome the real life of Tao in which our spirits can flow.

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If one wishes to listen, he must stop talking; if one wishes to hear the voice of Tao, he must be quiet. A painter cannot paint if his palette is moving; if the old self (lust, craftiness, and worldly worries) occupies one's heart, there is no room for God's Tao—the Word of God—to speak. Remember, it is not that He is not with you or does not care about you. It is that you have refused to quiet down and wait for Him wholeheartedly, and you have blocked Him and cast Him outside of your heart.

O, the superb, incomparable blessings! “Heed nothing, just stay with God silently. What a joy! Breathe His name silently. No blessings on earth are more magnificent.”¹³¹

¹³¹ Richard, Foster, *Shu Lin Cao Lian Li Zan (Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth)* (Xue Sheng Tuan Qi Chu Ban She, 1993), Chinese Translation, 42.

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Chapter V. Lesson Three: Gentle Humility

If the art of tranquility is an internal spiritual effort to discard the self and the world, the art of gentle humility is a way of external behavioral abandonment. *“Tao works in reverse; the power of Tao resides in weakness”* (40:1). Being opposite to the self and the world and appearing weak and humble are the exact behavioral model that Lao Tzu advocates.

Gentleness and humility characterize the nature of Tao. That is one reason why Lao Tzu emphasizes that *“the highest form of morality is to completely obey Tao”* (21:1). We human beings should be humble and *“walk in His path”* for fear of going astray (53:1). The heart of Lao Tzu’s five-thousand magnificent words is this: not only can we recognize Tao, but also it is possible for us to emulate and enter into Tao. Seekers of Tao echo that conviction.

Section A. How Humility Expresses Itself

1. In Weakness

Lao Tzu says:

*A man’s body is soft and weak when alive, but hard and stiff when dead.
Grass and trees are supple and pliant when alive, but dried up when dead. Therefore, the hard and strong belong to death; the soft and weak belong to life. An army will vanish when it becomes strong; a tree will fall when it grows strong. The strong occupies the inferior position; the weak occupies the superior position. (76:1-5)*

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Lao Tzu later says:

Nothing in the world is as soft and weak as water. Yet for attacking the hard and strong, nothing works as well. This is because water is too soft and weak to be altered. The weak will overcome the strong; the soft will overcome the hard. This principle is known to all people under heaven, yet no one puts it into practice. (78:1-2)

Following these two passages, Lao Tzu describes the Holy One this way:

Thus, the Holy One says: He who is humiliated is the lord of the society; he who is sacrificed is the king of the world. (78:3).

It is difficult to understand why Lao Tzu uses these words. Moreover, we cannot figure out exactly why the Holy One appears in this context and what Lao Tzu means. However, we know that the Holy One Jesus lived out this principle: “*The weak will overcome the strong; the soft will overcome the hard*” (43:1), and “*He grew up before him like a tender shoot...he was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is silent... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities...*” (Isaiah 53). Who is softer and weaker than Jesus? His last words on the cross are filled with forgiveness and love. The incarnate Jesus’ life solved Lao Tzu’s 2,600-year-old riddle: “Who is the Holy One?”

Lin Yutang writes about the meaning of Jesus’ life:

In him was condensed all that is good and elevated in our nature... Whatever may be the unexpected phenomenon of the future, Jesus will not be surpassed. His worship will constantly renew its youth, the tale of his life will cause ceaseless tears, his sufferings will soften the best hearts;

*all the ages will proclaim that, among the sons of men,
there is none born who is greater than Jesus.*¹³²

O, seekers of Tao, meditate on Jesus! Read his words! Call on his name! In him, this weak, humble, unschooled, short-lived son of a carpenter hides the mystery of eternity. In his superb treatise *The Imitation of Christ*, the Christian mystic Thomas a Kempis advises: "If you want to see clearly and avoid blindness of heart, it is His virtues you must imitate. Make it your aim to meditate on the life of Jesus Christ."¹³³ Anyone who lives with the Holy Spirit definitely will find the hidden manna (Exodus 16, Revelation 2:17).

2. In Meekness

Water is both soft and humble. Consider the words of Lao Tzu:

*Dwelling in loathsome places and so coming close to
Tao. (8:2)*

*The sea gathers a hundred rivers because it lies low;
Because of its low position it is the king over the
hundred rivers.
He who desires to rise above the people must first
humble himself;
He who desires to go before the people must first
follow from behind.
Thus when the Holy One rules above, people feel
no burden;
When he leads, people are not harmed.
Therefore, the whole world gladly supports him and
never tires of him.
He does not contend;
Therefore, no one in the world contends with him.
(66:1-4)*

¹³² Lin Yutang, *From Pagan to Christian* (Cleveland; New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959) 229-230.

¹³³ Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1977), 15.

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Jesus told his disciples:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:26-28).

When his disciples argue about who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus calls a little child and has him stand among them. Then He warns: *“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 18:2-5). At yet another time Jesus says: *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Luke 14:11), and from His Sermon on the Mount: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted; blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”* (Matthew 5:3-5).

Lao Tzu says: *“What’s twisted shall be straightened; the wronged shall be rehabilitated”* (22:1), and *“Blind are those who think they can see; foolish are those who think they are wise. Those who boast have not achieved; those who brag cannot be leaders. Tao views these as leftover food and burdens—detestable. Those of Tao will not do such things”* (24:2-4).

The following passage from *The Imitation of Christ* speaks to the distinction between humility and spiritual pride:

An unlearned peasant, whose contentment is the service of God, is far better than the learned and the clever, whose pride in his knowledge leads him to neglect his soul while fixing his attention on the stars. True self-knowledge makes you aware of your own worthlessness and you will take no pleasure in the praises of men. If your knowledge encompasses the universe and the love of God is not in you,

what good will it do you in God's sight? He will judge you according to your actions.¹³⁴

I highly recommend this book to seekers of Tao, since it embeds the mystery of Jesus and the essence of Lao Tzu—a rare treasure in Western literature. The book has enjoyed a wide distribution among Christians, and its popularity has been second only to the Bible.

Section B. Examples

The concept of humility permeates the entire book of *Lao Tzu*. In addition to what we have covered in principles, the book contains three examples of humility.

1. The Holy One: keeps to the gentler side, obscurity, humiliation, and suffering (28, 78)

He lives uprightly yet judges no one; he is sharp but does no harm. He is forthright but not unrestrained; he shines but does not dazzle. (58:4)

He knows himself but does not display himself; he loves himself but does not exalt himself. (72:3)

He thinks of himself last and comes first; he disregards himself and finds himself enduring. (7:2)

That which is forcefully sought after, extravagant, and prideful, the Holy One abandons. (29:4)

He clothes himself in coarse garments hiding a treasure within. (70:4)

¹³⁴ Ibid, 17.

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In his undertakings the Holy One does not rely on his own ability; at completion he claims no credit and makes no display of his virtues. (77:4)

*From beginning till end, he never claims his greatness—His greatness is thus established...
Not aiming to be great, he accomplishes great things.
(34:4; 63:4)*

2. The ancient followers of Tao:

*So subtle, discerning and profound
Are the ancient followers of Tao
That words only poorly describe them as:
 Watchful as if crossing a winter river,
 Cautious as if in fear of neighbors,
 Polite and respectful like guests,
 Natural and genuine like melting ice,
 Simple like uncarved wood,
 All embracing like a valley,
 Earthy like muddy water.
Who can settle the mud to make water clear?
Who can revive a stiff corpse?
Those who follow this Tao will not be conceited.
Only if not conceited can you be renewed when worn
out and dying. (15:1-4)*

3. Lao Tzu himself:

I have three treasures to keep and cherish: The first is love, the second is frugality, and the third is not striving to lead. (67:3)

*What a vast and deserted land!
Crowds of people bustle and hustle—
As if enjoying a feast or being on the stage.
I alone do not share the feeling—
As if uncivilized, uncultivated,*

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*Like a newborn infant not knowing how to smile.
Exhausted and sad,
I do not know where to return.
All people have more than enough;
I alone seem to have lost something.
I have the heart of a fool!
Worldly people see clearly;
I alone see dimly.
Worldly people bargain;
I alone can't see the difference.
The water is vast like an ocean;
The wind blows without a trace.
All people have their own trades;
I alone am useless and stubborn.
I differ from all people
Because I value feeding on the Mother. (20:2-7)*

Section C. Following Tao

When one has humility before Tao, one cannot help but express that attitude in certain qualities, such as gentleness, tolerance, tranquility, generosity, and so on. However, another set of qualities might not be accepted so easily by the world, such as the “four S’s”: *solitude, simplicity, silence, and suffering.*

1. Solitude: *“I differ from all people...”* (20:1). In Tao, one does not value what the world values, does not speak what the world speaks, and does not think what the world thinks. Instead, *“he depreciates what men value; he learns what men do not want to learn”* (64:5); he connects directly with Tao. Therefore, solitude is a must.

Worldly people have a fear of loneliness that pushes them into crowds. Such fear is a result of internal poverty and spiritual shallowness. In contrast, solitude holds a richness that is revealed through quietness, for in quietness one may hear and listen to the murmuring of the spirit, the breathing in of Tao. No matter who he is, a seeker of Tao must spend time in the wilderness. A spiritual

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state of being in the wilderness must not be disrupted. The Bible passage “*Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted*” (Psalm 25:16) underscores the idea of being in a spiritual wilderness and the openness to God that one may experience in this state.

2. Simplicity: “*Return to using knotted ropes for writing...*” (80:2). The physical and spiritual life of human beings has become more and more complicated. What a normal American family must deal with—including all kinds of insurance, bills, credits, tax, educational requirements, car maintenance, job opportunities, marriage variables, children’s rebellion, entertainment distractions, media pollution, electronic temptations, and so forth—is far more complicated than what a traditional family had to deal with only a hundred years ago. I dare say that a simple peasant unburdened with so many worries is much happier than a modern man.

The story goes that someone who lived in the North Pole for a few months exclaimed: “I gradually realized that one can live a rich and meaningful life without a lot of things.”¹³⁵ Jesus’ message has always been: Unload what you have in this world and give to those in need; then you will have countless riches in heaven (Mark 10:17-23).

Every seeker of Tao must remember this beautiful, natural, profound, and eternal teaching:

*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life,
what you will eat or drink; or about your body,
what you will wear. Is not life more important than
food, and the body more important than clothes?
Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap
or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father
feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than
they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour
to his life? And why do you worry about clothes?*

¹³⁵ Richard J. Foster, Shu Lin Cao Lian Li Zan (*Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*), 100.

See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."
(Matthew 6:25-33)

3. Silence: *"He who knows [Tao] does not speak" (56:1), and "Many words lead to failing..." (5:3). The Bible says: "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God; God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). Being quick with words is a common human problem. A thoughtful person usually utters few words. Those who are inside Tao are naturally silent: "I put my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:4).*

4. Suffering: *"Dwelling in loathsome places..." (8:2). People want to avoid suffering, yet seekers of Tao are able to take suffering calmly. They even face it gladly, for suffering is an unavoidable path for those who wish to be near God: "and so coming close to Tao" (8:2). Christian mystic Madame Guyon lost her husband and children. Her mother-in-law turned against her. People rejected her, and even Christians thought that God was punishing her. Nevertheless, she was able to say: "Put your self to death. This is a humble path. I only treat Jesus as my utmost treasure. Once a queen passed before me, I did not even raise my head to look at her. Grave suffering comes from the grace of God. O God, when I am deprived of everything, I am in you and with you. O, I am in such joy."*¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Madame Guyon, *Xun Xiang De Mo Yao (The Fragrant Myrrh)* (Yi Lin Chu Ban She, 1993), Chapter 15.

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From antiquity till now, there has been no lack of teaching about the singular treasure we can have in God—what empowers us to endure any temporal suffering. Madame Guyon affirmed:

God is the fountain and principle of all virtue, we possess all in the possession of Himself... All virtue is but a mask, an outside appearance changeable as our garments, if it doth not spring up, and issue from within... These souls, above all others, practice virtue in the most eminent degree, though they advert not to virtue in particular; God, to whom they are united, carries them to the most extensive practice of it.¹³⁷

This passage is probably what Lao Tzu means by “*a man of high morality needs no moral commands because he has them within; a man of low morality needs moral commands, because he does not have them within*” (38:1).

5. The Cross

The zenith of humility is the cross upon which Jesus was nailed innocent like a lamb, all because of his love for human beings. Jesus, the salvation of humankind, is the model for his followers. His disciples took up the cross and followed him. To suffer humiliation and sacrifice because of love becomes the common characteristic of millions of Tao’s followers. The cross becomes a symbol of glory because of Jesus’ sacrifice. The weak overcome the strong; the humble will be raised high.

Madame Guyon further encourages us with these words:

Beloved souls, ye will not find consolation in aught but in the love of the Cross, and in total abandonment.
It is impossible to love God without living the Cross;
and a heart that favors the Cross finds the bitterest things to be sweet. God giveth the Cross, and the Cross giveth

¹³⁷ Madame Guyon, *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2007), 9-10.

us God.... Jesus Christ Himself was willing to suffer its utmost rigors. We often bear the Cross in weakness, at other times in strength; all should be the same to us in the will of God.¹³⁸

Naturally, seekers of Tao sometimes will encounter failure, yet “the truly humble soul is not surprised at defects or failings; and the more miserable and wretched it beholds itself; the more doth it abandon itself unto God, and press for a nearer and more intimate alliance with Him,”¹³⁹ as Madame Guyon reminds us.

Jesus has many followers who love his kingdom of heaven, yet few carry his cross. Many seek comfort, yet few seek suffering. Many dine with him, yet few fast with him. Everyone wishes to share his joy, but few are willing to suffer for him. Many praise his wonders, but few are willing to bear the humiliation of the Cross.

Indeed, as Thomas a Kempis wrote:

To carry the cross, to love the cross, to chastise the body and bring it to subjection, to flee honors, to endure contempt gladly, to despise self and wish to be despised, to suffer any adversity and loss, to desire no prosperous days on earth—this is not man’s way. If you rely upon yourself, you can do none of these things, but if you trust in the Lord, strength will be given you from heaven, and the world and the flesh will be made subject to your word. You will not even fear your enemy, the devil, if you are armed with faith and signed with the cross of Christ. Set yourself, then, like a good and faithful servant of Christ, to bear bravely the cross of your Lord, Who out of love was crucified for you. Be ready to suffer many adversities and many kinds of trouble in this miserable life, for troublesome and miserable life will

¹³⁸ Ibid, 49-50.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 103-104.

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always be, no matter where you are; and so you will find it wherever you may hide. Thus it must be; and there is no way to evade the trials and sorrows of life but to bear them....

If, indeed, there were anything better or more useful for man's salvation than suffering, Christ would have shown it by word and example. But He clearly exhorts the disciples who follow Him and all who wish to follow Him to carry the cross, saying: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."¹⁴⁰ (Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23)

So, in conclusion, the question to be raised among today's Christians is "Who would model after Jesus willingly and be weak and humble and suffer death of the self, let alone of the body?" The answer has profound significance for individual followers of Tao and for the entire world.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas a Kempis, *Zun Zhu Sheng Fan (The Imitation of Christ)* (Ji Du Jiao Wen Yi Chu Ban She, 1991), 206, 210, 212.

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Chapter VI: Lesson Four: Effortlessness (无为)

Section A. The Great Puzzle

Expressions such as “*tranquil and effort free*” or “*govern effortlessly*” are often used to encapsulate Lao Tzu. It is true that Lao Tzu mentions “*effort free*” (*Wuwei*) thirteen times, explaining that the great Tao is free of effort, the Holy One is free of effort, and the followers of Tao should be free of effort. In addition, people will transform themselves when rulers are free of effort.

In reality, human beings hardly understand what “*effort free*” means. Does it mean doing nothing? Or treating others courteously with no contention? Or dealing with worldly affairs passively with reservation? Or governing the state with an open and simple style? Does it mean *laissez faire* or decadence, liberalism or conservatism? To ordinary people, being “*effort free*” seems a synonym for “submission to one’s fate.”

The riddle of “effortlessness” can be solved through Tao. A brief survey of Lao Tzu’s words will shed light on this puzzling concept:

First, the premise of being “*effort free*” is built on human inability and Tao’s omnipotence: “*Tao normally seems idle. But in fact he is in the doing of everything*” (37:1). “*Tao normally seems idle,*” because people do not see or hear Tao; the great Tao is unsearchable, formless, and nameless. Still, Tao is in the doing of everything with limitless resources and inexhaustible power; Tao loves, sustains, and accomplishes everything.

Secondly, the inner meaning of “*effort free*” is based on human beings modeling after Tao and obeying only Tao. If people merely emulate Tao’s effortless way of operating, that is meaningless effort.

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True effortlessness means that human beings abandon their own efforts and submit themselves totally to Tao. To use Lao Tzu's words, "*Pursue Tao, and you will become increasingly humble. Keep humbling yourself, and you will reach the stage of being effort free*" (48:1).

Thirdly, human effortlessness affirms that "*Tao is in the doing of everything.*" It is only when human beings fully humble themselves and totally discard the temporal self that they then can enter into the omnipotent doing of Tao. Human beings gain God's power in self-abandonment. The words of Jesus provide a key to understanding how it is possible to gain by losing: "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*" (Matthew 19:26; see also Mark 10:27 and Luke 18:27). The Bible further explains this concept in another verse: "*Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain*" (Psalm 127:1).

Due to a lack of clarity and confusion, people have not been able to grasp the true meaning of Lao Tzu's Tao or the essence of the Holy One. They have missed the premise of "gaining Tao"; as a result, they unavoidably have failed to see the true meaning of "*effort free*," which is to discard the self and to obey Tao. With the passing of time, people have stopped paying attention to this abnormal and surprising concept of "accomplishing everything effort free." No one even talks about it anymore. People seem to understand but seem not to understand, and it seems there but it seems not there.¹⁴¹ Sadly, being "*effort free*" has become nothing more than a cliché.

Since the Spring and Autumn period and the concealment of Tao, Lao Tzu's effort-free theory has continued to circulate, even thriving a few times; however, it has always been "effort free without Tao," rather than "effort free with Tao." Over time, Lao Tzu's effort-free concept has evolved into something like a slogan: "Effortlessness

¹⁴¹ "When the best man hears Tao, he practices it diligently; when the average man hears Tao, he only seems to understand—attaining some and losing some; when the worst man hears Tao, he bursts out laughing" (41:1).

is Tao.” Scholars and Taoists pay more attention to the exterior appearance than to the internal essence of “effortlessness.”

Internal effortlessness means letting go of selfish desires, greedy craftiness, and worldly interests and returning completely to the true Tao. With internal effortlessness and in union with Tao, a person’s effortlessness naturally becomes part of the doing of Tao, who accomplishes everything. On the other hand, what motivates external effortlessness—an imitation of Lao Tzu’s effortless way of operating—is selfish desires, greedy craftiness, and worldly interests. External effortlessness may work superficially at times, yet it is separated from the true power of Tao.

Take, for example, Emperor Hui, Emperors Wen and Jin of the Han dynasties (the so-called Rule of Wen Jin), and Emperor Tang Tai Zhong of the Tang dynasty (the Rule of Zhen Guan), who followed the effort-free principle of Emperor Huang and Lao Tzu (57:3). Their dynasties are considered golden periods in Chinese history. We can see that even just imitating Emperor Huang and Lao Tzu externally would have been much better than being rebellious toward Tao. However, because the moral character of the people and their social atmosphere were not rooted in the internal effortlessness of Tao, they were not able to obey Tao solely and thus failed to “offer sacrifices [to the Perfect One] without ceasing.”¹⁴² Without the internal support from Tao, people were not able to prevent sin from corrupting their hearts and land. It was impossible even to talk about accomplishing everything effortlessly.

¹⁴² “What the perfect builder builds cannot be destroyed; what the perfect preserver preserves cannot be lost. Your descendants ought to offer sacrifices [to the perfect one] without ceasing. So cultivated, a person will have genuine virtues; so cultivated, a family will have virtues more than sufficient; so cultivated, a village will have virtues that endure; so cultivated, a nation will have virtues in abundance; so cultivated, the world will have virtues that prevail. Therefore, applying that to oneself, one comes to know his self; applying that to itself, a family comes to know its self; applying that to itself, a village comes to know its self; applying that to itself, a nation comes to know its self; applying that to itself, the world comes to know its self. How do I get to know what the world is like? By such application” (54).

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Of course, the ancients and the moderns face their own destiny. Discussion about destiny is possible, although we are in no position to judge; only God is.

Section B. Effortlessly Seeking Tao

Worldly people admire achievements, whereas only seekers of Tao value effortlessness. The world depends on “effort” to accomplish things, while seekers of Tao make no “effort.” The world goes after benefits; however, only seekers of Tao regard humility as a virtue (48:1-2).

Why must one seek Tao in effortlessness?

First, Tao is unreachable by limited human morality and wisdom, and Tao is the infinite, self-existent Jehovah. How can a limited being reach the infinite being? No matter how many finite numbers are added together, the total is finite. Human beings cannot bridge the gap between themselves and God, just as the created cannot overcome the difference between themselves and their creator.

Andrew Murray noted that human beings could not reach the eternal God on their own and that the harder human beings try to, the more helpless they feel. From antiquity till now, no effort of religion, philosophy, and science has ever been able to link and unite human thinking with the “One.”

Secondly, even though Tao self-reveals to human beings, human beings cannot totally understand Tao. It is possible that the infinite One enlightens limited human beings from time to time (actually, it has happened and is happening now); however, all too often limited human beings accept this enlightenment incompletely. Jesus’ death on the cross proves this. The world’s refusal to accept the impact of the incarnate Tao in human history and its continued denial of this fact in its thinking prove the point as well.

“Yet, the eternal God works on us with methods beyond human comprehension using our limited brain. All we need is simple

reliance like infants.”¹⁴³ The work and word of Tao do not impact the human mind so that people may understand the theory and wonder of Tao. No, the omnipotent Tao must be experienced with sincerity and understood by the heart. The law of Tao is: “*You may not understand what I do today, but you will later.*”¹⁴⁴

Thirdly, what comes from human beings is tainted with selfishness, restlessness, sin, and death, all of which are absolutely incompatible with the holy, tranquil, and eternal Tao. The Bible says: “*No one may see me and live*” (Exodus 33:20). That is why human beings must humble themselves, put themselves to spiritual death, and reach the state of effortlessness so that the Tao of God may touch their spirit. The human spirit within which lies the true life of tranquility and eternity comes from God. However, greed, restlessness of the flesh and arrogant rationality block this true life and prevent the spirit from returning to the root, guarding the mother, and being revived in tranquility.

The art of discarding, tranquility, and humility come together in effortlessness. To be free of effort means: (1) to thoroughly discard selfish desires, human wisdom, and the world; and (2) to be humble to the utmost; and (3) to remain tranquil. When in a state of effortlessness, the self becomes absolutely weak, humble, and dead. Only the spirit is alive. Completely free from any control and entanglement, the spirit turns toward its eternal native home, which has been waiting, expecting, calling all along. In that native home, the spirit calms down, rests, and comes back to true life. And where is that eternal home? In the eternal Tao, the illuminating Tao: “*To return to Tao is to live long. Your body falls away; yet you live on*” (16:10).

Andrew Murray clarifies this concept: “The relationship between God and human beings is unique, that is: human beings surrender and submit themselves to God. When humans stop, God works.

¹⁴³ Andrew Murray, *Jue Dui Fu Cong (Absolute Surrender)* (Zhong Guo Zhu Ri Xue Xie Hui Chu Ban), 11.

¹⁴⁴ Andrew Murray, *Zhu Zai Ji Du Li (Abiding in Christ)* (Xiao Yuan Shu Fang Chu Ban Chu, 1992), 108.

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All human doings are sinful. Only when human beings put themselves into God's hands and passively become a vessel, can God then use the vessel freely and actively with great power. In short, only when our mind stops working completely, can God then perform his work completely."¹⁴⁵

Madame Guyon expresses the same view: "We must pay close attention to this: stop all our own movement and power and allow God alone to work."¹⁴⁶ She uses a perfect metaphor to explain her point. When a person opens his hand, the stone in his hand will naturally drop. Likewise, when people let go of their own ideas, desires, and will that they hold on to so stubbornly and dearly, their internal spirit will turn naturally toward God, who is the only fitting center of attraction for everything that exists.

Everything relies on God and eventually returns to Him ("*Flourishing things of a million kinds, all return to their roots*" 16:2). That is why letting go of everything and focusing on God enables human beings to connect with God more easily and find rest in Him. When one ignores the external and focuses on the internal, one is naturally inclined toward the center without effort. Then, the loving power of God will bring him even closer to the center. The calmer one is, the less effort one uses; the less resistance one makes, the faster one moves.¹⁴⁷ This is the complete explanation of Lao Tzu's concept of "entering Tao effortlessly."

Section C. Effortlessness in Tao

Once a person has entered Tao, the effortlessness he utilized to get there fades as a method and comes into focus as a state of mind, an attitude, and a habit. In this state, one's effortlessness turns into the doing of Tao, who accomplishes everything, and the person does not need to do anything, but why?

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 114, 116.

¹⁴⁶ Madame Guyon, *Jian Yi Qi Dao Fa (A Short and Easy Method of Prayer)*, 30.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 32.

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To do nothing in Tao means: *“Do non-doing. Engage in disengagement. Savor the flavorless. Regard the small as big and the few as many. Repay evil with goodness”* (63:1-2). This state is not the same as passive decadence or docile fatalism. Outwardly, one appears content and amenable, when, in fact, he is inwardly connected with his root and mother and follows only Tao. This kind of effortlessness is more valuable than gold and riches to individuals, families, societies and humanity.

Obviously, we are concerned about individuals, which include you and me. The expression “Do non-doing” in Tao concurs with “total obedience” and “absolute submission” for Christians. Once a person has tasted the joy of tranquil eternity in prayer and has experienced real, concrete guidance and God’s protection, he ends up building an unshakable faith in Tao’s reliability and faithfulness. This person also enjoys intimacy between himself and the Holy One Jesus, who is his benefactor and friend. So, why would anyone be reluctant to give up worldly efforts?

Let us examine a picture that undeniably depicts God in action: the frequent and multi-faceted revelations in the Bible, the historical event of Jesus’ incarnation, the trail of history in the past two-thousand years, the faith of billions of people, spiritual insight and movement in one’s heart and soul, the beauty and harmony of the natural world that has kindled curiosity since one’s childhood, and the incomprehensible, mysterious wonders of the universe even today. This picture reveals a tremendous, hidden real world inside which one can live as an accepted child. When one feels oneness and connection with Tao, how is it possible to have any desire to thrive and conquer in this transient and illusory world?

Madame Guyon says: “The highest goal in religion should be the easiest to achieve; the most important sacred undertaking should be the easiest to accomplish. The things in the natural world are the same. It is like taking your boat to the ocean. Without your own power, you are taken into the sea without even realizing it. You

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would quickly, simply, and surprisingly reach your destination if you are solely in the intimate company with God.”¹⁴⁸

In the state of effortlessness, one gives everything to God without reservation. Madame Guyon adds to our understanding of this point: “Accept all that happens to us, knowing that all comes from God, not from human beings. It is like a gift [to God]. Once it is given, it is no longer under the control of the one who gives the gift.” That is a description of losing oneself in God’s will. It is natural and effortless for someone, such as Lao Tzu, who believes that Tao is alive and real, to lose himself in the will of Tao. Discarding the spiritual dissonance that comes from one’s own learning, worldly desires and personal will makes it easier to lose oneself in the will of God.

Basically, being “*effort free*” means to be at ease under all circumstances, remaining still and calm in God’s Tao, and not making efforts in the name of God. The philosopher Kierkegaard made a penetrating comment about himself: He thinks. What kind of effort can one make to pursue the kingdom of God? Should one find a profession so that he can exert benevolent influence? Kierkegaard’s firm reply is “No.” We must seek first the kingdom of God. Should we then give up our money to feed the poor? The answer is still “No, we must first seek the kingdom of God.” Oh, then perhaps, should we declare the truth to the world and tell people to seek the kingdom of God? Once again, the loud reply comes: “No, we must seek first the kingdom of God.” Kierkegaard concludes: “Hence, in a certain sense, we should do nothing. Yes, in a certain sense we must certainly do nothing. In front of God, we are totally empty. Learn to keep silent; being silent is the start. This is to ‘seek first the kingdom of God....’”¹⁴⁹

If one discards his own efforts, God will naturally enlighten his heart, just like water naturally flowing into a low and empty place. Perhaps that is what Jesus means by saying he who gives up his life

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 32.

¹⁴⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Shu Lin Cao Lian Li Zhan* (Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth) (Xue Sheng Fu Yin Tuan Qi, 1993), 105-106.

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will gain life and what Lao Tzu means by saying although the body falls away, one lives on. Therefore, the only way to pursue Tao is to discard all efforts. The mystery of Tao is in effortlessness, which includes making no effort in searching for Him.

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PART THREE: THE WAYS OF TAO— SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION

Chapter VII. Lesson Five: Unification

Following Tao begins with discarding selfish desires, intellectual arrogance, and worldly temptations. One then must move toward the path of tranquility, humility, and effortlessness, which leads to oneness with Tao.

If a person has not reached the point of unifying with Tao, he must continue his journey until he has reached his destination; otherwise, all of the prior steps are in vain. However, once one is in union with Tao, all these prior steps, which once seemed so difficult—discarding, tranquility, humility, and effortlessness—will no longer seem that way.

Section A. No Other Choice

We know that Tao, who works in reverse toward the world, invites people to return to the root and to Mother, enter into Tao, and inherit eternity. Nevertheless, living in this world makes it hard to live in reverse toward this world! Although at times experiencing joy and peace, one also participates in the struggle between Tao and the world that manifests itself every step in the pursuit of Tao. Perhaps someone has a divine experience of being in Tao in prayer, yet the burden of life immediately crushes down as soon as he opens his eyes; no sooner has one's heart quieted down to enjoy rest than worldly temptations descend when one leaves his place of worship. Clearly, the flesh is in a constant state of turmoil, human wisdom inundates the mind "in the name of God," and worldly currents cause one to tread helplessly. Even those who try to stay pure become contaminated.

Two-thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul cried out: "*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*"

(Romans 7:24). Modern people are in even deeper trouble as they deal with a myriad of fatal attractions—material things and never dying fruits of “wisdom.” When personally absorbed by this world, a person becomes numb and has no choice; however, when encountering God, a ray of light sheds upon his heart, and he is given a divine choice. Stepping onto this heavenly path, he will sense the powerful pull of the world, which could be described as one’s heart being torn from one’s body. What ensues is a painful struggle between seeking Tao and avoiding sin and punishment. The outcome of this struggle is astonishment at the reality of personal weakness, corruption, and sinful inclination, along with regret, self-loathing, and despair. Such a state can be described as the dilemma of sin and the flesh, a trap of Satan, and a predicament of death!

What a marvelous, providential predicament, however, because one is about to pass through a narrow door and enter into eternity. Having left behind temporality and illusion, one enters into eternal truth. The price is heavy, but small.

Indeed, for those who base their life on temporality, temporal things are everything; for those buttressed by illusion, illusion seems to be truth. However, when a person goes beyond temporality and illusion, these show themselves for what they really are—nothing.

Making this passage is demanding for seekers of Tao. Jesus, who often had large crowds following him, told a crowd one day that anyone who wants to follow him must give up everything. If someone wants to build a tower, he must estimate the cost to see whether he has enough money to complete it. Otherwise, if he lays the foundation but is unable to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him. Moreover, *“Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple”* (Luke 14:25-33). Jesus did not leave us with any other choices here.

No one has to linger near sin and death or continue to torture one’s self in the struggle between death and life, sin and righteousness. The only solution is to leave behind one’s old self and one’s entanglement with this world, keeping these pointers in mind:

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- (1) Calm down and be tranquil.
- (2) Humble yourself.
- (3) Do not fall prey to worldly snares.
- (4) Be indifferent to the seduction of selfish desires.
- (5) Do not yield to cunning human wisdom.

Suddenly, that person will find himself already sitting in Tao and being in a state of oneness with Tao. This is because eternal grace is so natural, and everlasting peace is so serene. Such peace comes like a ray of gentle light, revealing the oneness of truth, kindness, and beauty, just like the heart of Jesus.

In such a moment, one is not concerned with personal existence. One is definitely alive, but in that moment conscious no longer of self but of pure existence unbound by time and space. One's sensibility about this eternal and infinite existence attests to one's being alive in Tao, into whose life one has melted.

Some may say that this experience of uniting with Tao is simply too mysterious and incomprehensible. However, this experience gives human beings the power to transcend the temporal world. This deep faith empowers human beings to overcome the world and to connect with Tao. Being thus united with Tao, one's life will be accompanied by miracles. The experience of being in Tao will deeply impact daily life, becoming a haven during life's storms, everlasting water during seasons of spiritual thirst, and a release from nightmares. It will be the rock and blessing of one's life.

Section B. Oneness with Tao

1. The Meaning of Unification.

Lao Tzu asks: "*Who can unite his heart with Tao to achieve a seamless union?*" (10:1) and later affirms that "*The Holy One unites with Tao to be the vehicle to heaven for all people*" (22:2).

To worldly people who have strayed away from Tao, being united with Tao means to go back, back to the root, back to the mother,

back to brightness, back to simplicity, back to infinity, back to infancy. Lao Tzu compares this state of union with Tao to being an infant. A person resting in Tao is like an infant at his mother's bosom. He is in perfect harmony (55:2-3).

The incarnation of Jesus is the work of Tao in unification with human beings. Jesus often said, "*The Father is in me, and I in the Father,*" and "*I am in the Father and the Father is in me*" (John 10:38; 14:10-11). Jesus also said that his disciples must be one with him, just as he is one with his Father. The Spirit of God lives in them, although people do not recognize the Spirit of God.

2. The Process of Unification.

"He who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit" (I Corinthians 6:17). According to Madame Guyon, this union has a beginning, a development and a conclusion. In the beginning, one leans toward God and enters the divine presence. When one becomes closer to God, he grows more intimate with God. This intimacy becomes stronger and stronger until he is one with God, meaning that he is one with God in spirit.¹⁵⁰

Such oneness is a process of the Spirit of God moving. The only thing a person must do is to relax and set aside his self, allowing the Spirit of God to work in him.

To be united with Tao means to separate oneself from other things—the things that are the opposite of Tao, who works in reverse. This separation is Tao's movement. Human beings simply need to obey. Therefore, followers of Tao must avoid making efforts. Ironically, the more one tries to eliminate self, the more restless one's heart becomes. The simplest method, says Madame Guyon, is to pay attention to focusing only on loving God. This approach is like an infant who "sees" a monster does not fight it or look at it, but immediately hides himself in his mother's bosom.¹⁵¹ We human

¹⁵⁰ Madame Guyon, *Jian Yi Dao Gao Fa (A Short and Easy Method of Prayer)*, Chinese translation, 49.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 40.

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beings are so weak and limited in nature that it is impossible for us to defeat the self, the world, and Satan if we rely on human ability all by itself.

3. The Achievement of Unification.

What are the most important conditions for entering into pure union with God? Humble obedience to God's guidance and total elimination of self-directed efforts. When we do these things, we are acting in accordance with the purpose of creation because we are created in God's image. In this way, we place ourselves in a position of nothingness, from which we receive and accept everything that happens to us without discrimination. At that point, we are already dead. Our life is in Jesus' life, hidden together with Him in God. God is our life. God says: Anyone who sincerely looks for me must give his heart to me. He who gives up his life gains life; he who saves his life loses his life.¹⁵²

4. The Experience of Unification.

Enjoying God is the highest point of human existence. God is our joy. His only purpose for reaching out to us is to connect with human beings. Sensing the infinite union with my God, I am able truly to enjoy everything in my life. Whether alone or together with others, how peaceful and tranquil I am! There is no more groaning because of trials, and there is no need to prove anything. When we are closely united with the beauty and kindness of God, the will of the self totally disappears, and we can enjoy togetherness with God continuously. This kind of togetherness combined with prayer becomes a holy habit. All bodily senses become unusually calm and restful. Calmness and rest characterize the life of prayer, and through prayer, God shares His transforming love to all.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Ibid, 23, 45.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 14, 29, 43; Madame Guyon, *Xing Xian De Mo Ya* (*Sweet Smelling Myrrh*), 98.

Section C. Daily Application

Does being united with Tao mean that we have to retreat from daily affairs? Monks in the early church led a monastic life in the wilderness because of that line of thinking. In reality, unification with Tao does not require people to retire from the world, because this relationship brings a deep sense of trust and protection, the end result of eternal love and the pouring of Tao's life into one's own. One could compare this effect to caring parents who would never lose their connection with their children, no matter what happens. The love of a mother or a father permeates every action toward their children. Detachment is out of place and out of the question.

Indeed, "now" or "at this moment" contains the deepest mystery of faith. If one is searching for the Eternal One, HE is one's "now" forever. As a matter of fact, the Eternal One is around us, in front of us, and inside us at this moment. As long as we believe in Him, we possess the power and love connected with Heaven. This is the secret of peace and triumph in every moment of one's daily life.

The process of going from deciding to unite with Tao (faith) and achieving unification (prayer) to becoming accustomed to being one with Tao (living) is not a difficult one. To keep one's initial faith pure, special efforts are not necessary.

Life with God is totally different from life without God. In fact, life with God includes miracles, such as "he will not meet with tigers in his journey; he will not get wounded in battles" and "he finds what he seeks." Life with Tao also gives one the ability to see reality more objectively than before. For example, when I play with children, my stance is totally different from theirs. They are completely absorbed in the game, striving to win, even experiencing jealousy, hatred, bitterness, and fights. I too was once like that when I was a child. Now, when I play with my child, although I am involved, I am not personally absorbed in the game; I have bigger things and stand on a higher ground, with a larger vision. I know that the game is only temporary. If I win, I am not that excited. I am willing to offer my victory to my child; if I lose,

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I will not cry either, and I even caution my child not to overreact to the victory and thus avoid knocking over the teacups.

The person who is accustomed to being one with Tao lives in this world and deals with worldly affairs, just like an adult playing games with children. He knows that he is merely a guest of this world. He is different from the crowds of people who hustle and bustle as if enjoying a feast or being on the stage... who “see clearly” and “bargain shrewdly” (20:2, 5). Instead, he is inseparable from the eternal Tao. He realizes that gaining and sharing Tao, waking people up, and saving souls are serious matters.

On the other hand, worldly people are like children unable to detach from their games, treating illusions as reality, mistaking temporality as eternity. They wrack their brains and exhaust their life fighting for things that never can truly satisfy them. They eat and become hungry, drink and become thirsty. Greed pushes them to become personally absorbed in acquiring knowledge, wealth, fame, and status at the neglect of their own spirits. Tragically, the Bible reminds us that people’s hearts have become so calloused that they are not able to return to the true Tao (Matthew 13:14-15).

Section D. Jesus, Jesus!

Since the Holy One that Lao Tzu penned truly came to the world as the incarnate Christ to demonstrate, follow, and preach Tao, human hearts and history have experienced enormous transformation. Today, nearly everyone is living under His influence as expressed in the affirmation or rejection of the life and teachings of the Christ, Tao incarnated.

In this twisted and rebellious age, Jesus shines forth and lives forever among people in order to provide a real path for those who are willing to be united with Tao. This simple and easy path illuminates and exposes all illusory trails for ancient and modern seekers of Tao. If Lao Tzu were to see Jesus, how joyful he would be! *“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad”* (John 8:56).

Today is the day! The Holy One already has appeared, the path already has been revealed. Anyone who wishes to know the true Tao and live in eternity no longer needs to alchemize the medicine of immortality or practice the art of rejuvenation. When the true light dawns, all ignorance, doubt, and argument dissolve!

Tao has come to the world in person. The only thing that people have to do is to stand firmly on the historical Christ event, receive Jesus and feed on Him.

God sees more clearly than human beings. If one wishes to pull his one foot out of the worldly mire, another foot has to stand on firm ground. Stepping on emptiness and nothingness, one's foot would have no chance of getting out of the swamp. With both feet in the slough, one would sink deeper and deeper.¹⁵⁴ Jesus came to the world and declared firmly: *"I am the way and the truth and the life"* (John 14:6). Different from various powerless and lengthy moral admonitions, this proclamation comes directly from Heaven with the power of Heaven behind it.

"Follow the light of Tao, return to its brightness, you will then keep yourself from calamities. This is to inherit eternity" (52:6). Apart from all scholarly debates and speculations, this passage provides a simple and clear affirmation.

The Tao of Heaven, the Word of God, is in the person of the Holy One. Contemplate Him and embrace His image: a poor, humble, short-lived, unschooled son of a carpenter who completed the great salvation of Tao in three short years. *"The Holy One is good at saving people."* This event was not accomplished through his learning, power, or position, but through his humiliation, weakness, and sacrifice. He proclaimed that he was the Son of God, performed numerous miracles, uttered the Tao of Heaven as no one else could, lived out divine love, exposed the truth of human beings who live in sin and death, and revealed God's plan of redemption. Nevertheless, miserable, misguided, even wicked human beings still refuse to

¹⁵⁴ See Chinese history led by Confucius and Confucian culture.

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believe in Him. The Tao of Heaven is so holy and superb. How can human beings understand and accept Tao if they rely on their finite morality, wisdom, and life? *“What great virtue! How mysterious! How profound! They run contrary to human affairs”* (65:4).

Human beings nailed Jesus on the cross and at the same time nailed his unchangeable love on the humiliating cross.

Nonetheless, *“The Holy One disregards himself and finds himself enduring”* (7:2). He was resurrected.

“He who gives up his life for the world is trusted by the world” (13:4). He brings the love of God to the world with his own body and life, and the world relies on him.

“He who is humiliated and sacrificed becomes the king of the world” (78:3).

Followers of Tao, engrave this Jesus into your heart. Once your heart, will, and feelings enter into the real life of Jesus, you are in Tao.

The incarnate Jesus said: *“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life”* (John 6:63). Receive his words (the Tao) with sincerity of heart and soul. Listen to his words (the Tao), because they come from God.

When people cannot understand Tao, it is because they do not listen to his words. *“Tao, when spoken, lacks flavor”* (35:3), yet *“When the best man hears Tao, he practices it diligently”* (41:1); they cannot understand His words because they think they are so knowledgeable. As Lao Tzu puts it: *“The fewer the people who understand me, the more precious is what I have... The Holy One clothes himself in coarse garments hiding a treasure within”* (70:2-4). Jesus sets the record straight: *“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock”* (Matthew 7:24). Putting the words

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into practice is the meaning of returning to Tao and living long. *"Your body falls away; yet you live on"* (16:10; 52:3, 5).

O reader, when you feed on God's words and put them into practice, when you sense Him and are one with Him, His blood will flow through your blood and your heart will meet His heart. In that moment, it will be clear you are living in the great salvation God has offered to human beings. You will know that you are a friend of the Holy One, a child of God, someone with a spiritual home.

While we still have to deal with worldly affairs, we may often experience the feeling of boundlessness that comes from returning to the root and guarding the mother, entering into Tao and inheriting eternity. Such a sense of limitlessness blesses us with peace, joy, and happiness. That is a foretaste of what our lives will be like, once we make our final transformation upon leaving this world and enter the heavenly realm.

PART FOUR: METAPHORS OF FOLLOWING TAO

A. The First Metaphor: Light

Light is a powerful metaphor in both *Lao Tzu* and the Bible. When Lao Tzu compares Tao with light and portrays the Holy One as “*inheriting light*,” he is advising and encouraging people to follow and be united with the light (27:4; 52:6).

1. The Self-existent Light

Lao Tzu says:

*What can be seen but not perceived is called “Yi.”
What can be heard but not understood is called “Xi.”
What can be touched but not grasped is called
“Wei.” These three are beyond comprehension.
Together they become one. Above the one there is no
light; beneath the one there is no darkness. (14:1-3)*

The combination of “*YiXiWei*,” which is an incomprehensible word, sounds remarkably similar to “*Jehovah*” (see pages 2-4 in Part One, Chapter 1 for additional commentary on this topic). He is Tao, who models after himself.¹⁵⁵ He is brightness, the light of all life (John 1:4), just as the Psalmist sings: “*For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light*” (Psalm 36:9). Moreover, “*The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it*” (John 1:5). The bright light, as Lao Tzu depicts it, seems dim, because human beings cannot recognize it: “*Tao is bright but men take it to be dark*” (41:2).

¹⁵⁵ See Part One, Chapter I, Section A.

2. He Who Inherits Light

Lao Tzu says:

*The Holy One is good at saving people
and no one is abandoned.
He is good at saving all things,
and nothing is abandoned.
This is called following the light. (27:3-4)*

The light of the Holy One is full of gentleness, generosity, and mercy; it is the light of saving grace; clearly, this light is life giving. Jesus told people earnestly and repeatedly: *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”*; *“While I am in the world, I am the light of the world”*; *“A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light”*; and *“Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light”* (John 8:12; 9:5, 11:9; 12:35).

3. Follow the Light and Return to its Brightness

Lao Tzu says:

*Follow the light of Tao, return to its brightness.
You will then keep yourself from calamities.
This is to inherit eternity. (27:3-4)*

To follow the light, one must first recognize it. That is what Jesus means by trusting in the light, then returning to its brightness and becoming the children of light. The Bible says: *“Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God”* (John 3:19-21). This same passage also says that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Lao Tzu means exactly the same

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thing when he speaks about keeping one's self from calamities and inheriting eternity.

4. The Meaning of Light

Obviously, the light of Tao is not the same as the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars, which is visible to human eyes. Tao's light, which the spiritual eye sees, enlightens life.

The metaphor of light in relation to Tao has profound meaning. Here is some exposition on it:

First, light is full of glory. God is incomparably and indescribably majestic, honorable, and glorious. The qualities of magnanimity, expansiveness, universal love, unification, and infinity characterize Him. Jesus brought that glory to this world in a way that human beings could understand: *"The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

Jesus was never hostile to human beings, even though they crucified him with relish; his light illuminated people's hearts, even though they turned away from him and refused to acknowledge him; his glory covered humankind, even though he was treated as a dirt-poor, humiliated, weak man; he demonstrated God's glory, majesty, and honor, even though according to this world's standards and to human eyes, he did not represent glory, majesty and honor in any aspect of his life.

Why is it that people have no awareness that any human method is too limited to express God's greatness, majesty, love, and infinity? Jesus is the only way—the way that is contrary to this world, the way that works in reverse to human affairs, the way that demonstrates His boundless glory untainted by human impurity!

Besides being full of glory, light is pure. Tao is the absolutely purest light, absolute holiness and absolute kindness. Therefore, most human beings can neither see nor feel the light, or they are

afraid to approach the light, which would cleanse and transform them into spiritual newness. That is why Lao Tzu says the bright Tao seems to be dim, then proceeds to describe Tao as the highest virtue, the greatest honor, the most abundant benevolence, the most regenerating kindness, the utmost truth (41:2-4). The Psalmist sings: *"You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence"* (Psalm 90:8), and Jesus warns: *"If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"* (Matthew 6:23). *"The light within"* is the spirit of holy kindness that God bestows and the light of conscience. When the light becomes more and more dim in people's hearts, the darkness overwhelms worldly affairs!

Light is not only full of glory and purity, but also brightness itself. Seeing reality in such light means knowing the truth and keeping away from darkness. If a person cannot see the truth in the darkness, that means he is blind even though he can see physically. In spite of being aware of things in the dark, people cannot see and therefore are not sure. Lao Tzu says, *"Blind are those who think they can see; foolish are those who think they are wise"* (24:2). Blind people see only money, yet do not see wealth; they see only pleasures yet not happiness; they see only illusions not truth; they see only today, not tomorrow; they see only human beings, not the Creator. However, the Holy One makes them see the incarnate God in this world and leads them out of darkness into brightness. That is why Jesus persuaded people to walk in daylight and become the children of light, and that is why Lao Tzu advises people to follow the light and return to its brightness.

5. Bright and Peaceful

When seekers of Tao are walking on the path of light, their thoughts and ideas are naturally open and broad, and their life journey becomes peaceful.

When God's glory shines upon one's heart, one stands in awe of the great light, which often enlivens one's spirit. The great light makes us want to praise God; when we worship, our spirits are joyful.

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Something else about the great light—it bestows trust, which brings heavenly peace to our spirit.

When God's righteous, holy, and kind light shines upon our hearts, we cannot help but confess, repent and feel cleansed, fresh, beautiful and benevolent. This light both discloses and forgives our sins; it also makes us guilty and humble and at the same time brings us relief and makes us feel confident. Most amazingly, this light transforms us to be like a ray of light shining on other people and waking the world.

When God's light of truth shines upon our hearts, it is like the sunshine pushing away dark clouds, causing our spirits to break away from the falsity of all worldly illusions. In this great light, we see the overflow of human desires, the vain swelling of human wisdom, and the temporal world heavily polluted like a huge bubble filled with colorful illusions that are soiled, ever-changing, and gone with the wind. In this great light, we see millions of spirits imprisoned in the bubble, calling for salvation, groaning in worldly pleasures, searching for life in death!

God's light is the eternal homeland of one's spirit, seemingly far away yet right before one's eyes and seemingly deep down, yet close at hand. This is the voice of Jesus, with the familiar accent of the motherland, just like the calling of one's father, mother, brother, and sister to come home.

Because of the light of God, we have peace as human beings.

Because of His peace, we can enter into the bosom of God.

Because of being close to God's bosom, we can become a blessing to our fellow human beings!

B. The Second Metaphor: Water

1. Water and Tao

Like light, the first metaphor, the comparison Lao Tzu makes between Tao and water also reveals profound truths about Tao.

First, Lao Tzu writes: *“The highest good is like water, nourishing all things and not contending with them”* (8:1).

The highest kindness is Tao, who is like water nurturing everything without contending with anything. In the face of obstacles, water steers away, getting out of the way of anything forcing its way in. When attacked, water breaks; when poured, it flows; when heated, it evaporates; when cooled, it comes close together. Nevertheless, water dissolves into the sky and soaks into the earth, nourishing all things in the heavens and on the earth, like a benevolent mother with silent love or a good wife with quiet passion unobtrusively sustaining her spouse’s life. Who can disagree that Tao loves and upholds life and everything in a similar way? Even though human beings do not see or hear Him, He still supports humankind incessantly; His passion and love permeate above and below the earth, inside the universe and whatever lies beyond.

Second, Lao Tzu says: *“Nothing in the world is as soft and weak as water, yet for attacking the hard and strong, nothing works as well”* (78:1).

Indeed, water is incomparably soft, yet also incomparably powerful. Water turns around when blocked, yet nothing can really obstruct it; when something is thrown into water, water makes room for the object without being conquered; if attacked, water breaks, but does not disappear; poured out, it flows but does not perish; boiled, it evaporates without getting lost; cooled, it assembles, but does not yield. In storms, thunder, fire and stone, nothing defeats it. Why does water, the weakest of all, triumph over the strongest on earth? It is because water is forever the same, never changing and irreplaceable! No matter how one attacks it, beats it, folds it, burns

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it, and no matter what form it takes as ice, snow, frost, or dew, water is still water.

Lao Tzu reveals an extraordinary truth to people by relating characteristics of Tao with the characteristics of water: like water, Tao is unsurpassable. His matchless power is achieved by His gentleness. Lao Tzu cites the Holy One's words: "*He who is humiliated is the lord of the society; he who is sacrificed is the king of the world*" (78:3).

Third, Lao Tzu says: "*Dwelling in loathsome places and so coming close to Tao*" (8:2), and "*The sea gathers a hundred rivers because it lies low*" (66:1).

As the saying goes, human beings move upward; water flows downward. We can see that people do not appreciate the characteristics of water. Tao, however, is just the opposite. Like water, Tao dwells in lowliness and humility. Indeed, "*Tao works in reverse*," says Lao Tzu, and "*What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight*," says Jesus (Luke 16:15). The incarnate Tao, Jesus, took a form that is detestable to human beings: a "child born out of wedlock," born in a manger, with no degrees, no longevity, no wealth, no dignity, no social standing or influence, rejected, oppressed, nailed on the cross—he truly dwelled in a loathsome place!

Before comparing Tao with water, Lao Tzu says: "*The Holy One disregards himself and finds himself enduring*. Then, he asks: "*Is not all this because he is fulfilled in his selflessness?*" (7:2-3). After describing how the ocean gathers rivers, Lao Tzu comments about the Holy One: "*He does not contend; therefore, no one in the world contends with him*" (66:3-4). Obviously, Lao Tzu is comparing Tao with water. He also attributes the quality of water to the incarnate Tao, the Holy One.

Indeed, human beings move upward, yet Jesus stepped down to the lowly and loathsome place in total deviation from the common norms of people who fight for power, benefit, knowledge, and life. However, because he occupied the lowest position, Jesus becomes

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the ocean receiving hundreds of rivers, and is the king of all valleys. What else can human beings say in the presence of the weakest One who never contends with anyone? How extraordinary God is!

Finally, Lao Tzu writes these words: “*Knowing his strength of a male but keeping to a female’s loving tenderness, he thus becomes the stream for the world*” (28:1); and “*Tao guides the whole world to himself, as streams and valleys guide water to rivers and the sea*” (32:5). Tao retains his tenderness, although he knows his own strength, and thus becomes the stream for the world. This attraction works because Tao leads the world toward himself, just as streams channel all waters toward the ocean.

The picture of Jesus Christ in the Gospels is exactly the same. Anyone who follows Jesus in his heart is like water flowing into the ocean of life. In the ocean, the living water of life never dries up, because it is the home of all waters and the source of life. Rain, snow, frost, and dew ultimately come from it. Is it not true that everything the water nourishes has originated from the ocean? The lowest points on earth retain the water of life; in Jesus, the lowly Lamb of God killed on the cross, is where the Tao of God, the incarnate Word, resides!

2. Water and the Holy Spirit

Water is one of the most significant symbolic images in the Christian faith. The Bible says that before the sky and the earth were formed, the Spirit of God hovered over the waters (Genesis 1:2). Later, baptism with water became the symbol of faith. When Lao Tzu’s contemporary Isaiah prophesies about Jesus’ coming, he says: “*With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation*” (Isaiah 12:3); and “*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!*” (Isaiah 55:1). When Jesus entered the world, he compared water with the Holy Spirit. The verse below is very well known:

One day, as Jesus was going through Samaria, a woman approached to draw water. When Jesus asked for water, she refused to give

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it to him; then, Jesus said to the woman: *“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water”* (John 4:10). Since the woman did not understand his words, Jesus said: *“...Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life”* (John 4:13-14).

Later, Jesus said, referring to Isaiah 55:1: *“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him”* (John 7:38). His disciple John explained: *“By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive”* (John 7:39).

The Holy Spirit is Tao. God’s Word is Tao. The human heart is spirit. All descriptions about Tao, such as mysterious, shadowy, formless, deep, endless, shapeless shape, imageless image, matter within, image within, spirit within, faith within, solitary, changeless, independent, moving forever, and so forth, are obviously about the Spirit. Since images of the Spirit can be visible or invisible, Spirit can be called “non-being” and “pre-being.” Jesus told the Samaritan woman that a time is coming when worshipers will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, because *“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24). In other words, Tao is the imageless and formless being human beings can neither see nor hear. Tao is Spirit.

3. Water and Following Tao

Lao Tzu further uses water to describe Tao and explain the meaning of following Tao, after whom seekers of Tao must model themselves. Since the characteristics of Tao resemble water, followers of Tao also should be like water: gentle and obedient as water, nourishing and non-contending and willing to stay in a humble and loathsome position so that they can become streams leading fellow human beings to the living water of life.

I have been deeply moved by a few elderly Christians who are as gentle as water, not only by their words and actions and by their

ways of dealing with people and events, but also by their life and character. These dear people are so tender, kind, mild, and tranquil that they leave me in shocked awe and with an unforgettable impression. Their beauty and appeal can hardly be expressed in words, just as Lao Tzu describes: *"Watchful as if crossing a winter river, cautious as if in fear of neighbors, polite and respectful like guests, natural and genuine like melting ice, simple like uncarved wood, all embracing like a valley, earthy like muddy water"* (15:2). To seekers of Tao, herein is the deeper meaning of the metaphor of water: only humble people who stay low unite with the Tao of God. Everyone knows that a proud, protruding hill does not gather water. It is difficult for the Spirit of God to enter into those who are proud of their own wisdom and learning, indulging in wealth and fame, enjoying the pleasures of the flesh and the world. So, it is not a question of Tao not being fair. Simply put, if one refuses to stay low, how can water flow in? Without question, God can do anything; God may even flatten out all the "elevated" areas of which one is proud and turn them into "lowlands." This method is exactly how God shows his righteousness, fairness and justice.

God repeatedly says: Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the sorrowful, the hungry, the thirsty, and the pure in heart, for they will see God (Matthew 5:3-8). Lao Tzu also affirms: *"What is twisted shall be straightened; the wronged shall be rehabilitated; lowlands shall be filled; the dying shall be renewed; the needy shall be given; the plentiful shall be confused"* (22:1).

Humility is essential not only for gaining Tao, but especially for knowing Jesus. People rely on humility to cultivate their spiritual life and seek unification with Tao. "The replacement principle" goes like this: the amount of sand in the measuring cup is how much water will be squeezed out; if the cup is full of sand, water cannot be poured into the cup. Conversely, the amount of sand that is taken out of the cup is the amount of water that can be poured in. If the cup is emptied out, it can be totally filled with water.

If a seeker of Tao is filled with worldly desires and the arrogance of human wisdom, no matter how eagerly he prays for God's Spirit

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to enter him, it is useless. He does not have a clean room to welcome and host the beautiful Holy Spirit. The more “I,” or ego, that occupies his body, the less God’s Spirit is in him. Therefore, the process of pursuing God is a journey of emptying oneself.

God is trustworthy, and the amount of sand one empties out becomes the amount of gold God will put in; the amount of self-confidence one breaks is the amount of faith God will provide; the number of illusions one shatters will be the amount of truth God will give. Lao Tzu advises that people abandon their so called wisdom, learning, morality, craftiness, and profits—to give up everything that belongs to the self. One can reside in Tao only when everything has been poured out; then, one will find while seeking, have sins forgiven, and eventually return to the root, guard the mother and be united with Tao.

C. The Third Metaphor: Mother and Infant

1. The Role of Mother

Lao Tzu also compares Tao with the role of Mother, which is a kind of metaphor that corresponds to Christianity’s primarily fatherly role for God; a slight cultural difference exists even though the Bible has many references to God’s mothering, or nurturing. Since the Tao of God is the self-existent Being—beyond gender, beyond life and death, with no beginning and no ending—the terms “*Father*” and “*Mother*” are incomplete descriptions. While the term “*Father*” emphasizes masculine strength, the term “*Mother*” stresses feminine gentleness, but both are creators and sustainers—pointing to the male and female expressions of God’s image (Gen 1:26, 27). They symbolize the relationship between the Tao of God and all things in the universe.

First of all, there is Mother.

Lao Tzu opens his book with this expression: “*He can be called Pre- [Mother] because he gave birth to all that is*” (1:1-2); then, later on, he writes: “*An integrated being existed before the birth of*

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heaven and earth. How still! How void! Standing all by himself and never changing, he moves in and through all and is not wearied, worthy to be the mother of heaven and earth” (25:1-3); and “The world has a beginning; the beginning is the mother of the world” (52:1). The universe has a beginning. Heaven and earth have a mother. Lao Tzu’s concept, which is contrary to materialism’s anti-Creator credo, says that matter is not created and never disappears; the universe has no beginning and no ending. Lao Tzu’s view is in harmony with the Bible, even though there is no evidence that Lao Tzu experienced enlightenment by way of special revelation from God.

In the beginning, there is Tao; the heavens and the earth have a mother. The recognition of this revelation and the affirmation of this fact are the only true foundation for people to correctly understand themselves—whether they hail from the East or the West.

Secondly, return to the Mother.

Lao Tzu says: *“Knowing the mother, we know we are sons. Knowing we are sons, we must return to wait on mother. We can thus be safe and sound even when our bodies disappear” (52:2-3).*

Since we know that there is Mother, who gave birth to us and raised us, our identity as our Mother’s children is ascertained, pointing to the true relationship between human beings and Tao. Since we know that we are sons and daughters of our Mother, we should return and guard our Mother. Lao Tzu clarifies the actions human beings should take toward Mother. Notice the phrase *“must return to wait on,”* which indicates that human beings have strayed away and lost their identity. When people return to their “Mother’s land” and back to Mother’s embrace, even though their bodies fall away, they are safe and sound. This statement clearly describes the blessings and love God is eager to give.

Furthermore, at the end of Chapter 52, Lao Tzu specifically indicates how people can return. By now, this sentence should be very familiar to us: *“Follow the light of Tao, return to its brightness. You*

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will then keep yourself from calamities. This is to inherit eternity" (52:6). The Holy One is the savior of human beings who inherit the light (27:3-7), a point Lao Tzu brings up early on. Hence, relying on the light of the Holy One is the only path to return to the mother and to inherit eternity. The incarnate Jesus says: *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). Go back to Father, go back to Mother, and follow the light of the Holy One Jesus, who says: *"I am the light of the world."* How trustworthy the Word is! How miraculous His salvation is!

Thirdly, feed on Mother.

Lao Tzu not only stresses returning and guarding the mother, but also values "eating the mother." He says: *"I differ from all people because I value feeding on the mother"* (20:7). Crowds of people take pleasure in the world, hustling and bustling, bargaining and fighting, while Lao Tzu, seemingly lost and sad, values feeding on the eternal Tao (20:2-7). *"Feeding on the mother"* is for those who receive the eternal Tao and want to abide in Tao.

Without knowing about Jesus' Tao, Lao Tzu's *"feeding on the mother"* would have been extremely difficult to understand. Jesus clearly explains: *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world... I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him"* (John 6:51-56).

Indeed, those following Tao rely constantly on Tao's supply, just like infants who cannot stop nursing at their mother's breast. Jesus, who came to the world, provides food and drink to his followers by his words, spirit, light, love, weakness, humiliation, suffering, resurrection, and completely unique life. Jesus thus sheds light on Lao Tzu's words, which have not been understood for 2,600 years. In Jesus' light, Lao Tzu's hope has come true, and his prophecy finally has been fulfilled.

2. Human Beings as Infants in Tao

Lao Tzu mentions infants many times, for example: *“Who can overcome this flesh to be meek and gentle as an infant?”* (10:2), and *“He has the eternal virtue with him, enabling people to return to being infants”* (28:2). He describes himself: *“Like a newborn infant not knowing how to smile”* (20:3). Other references include: *“In this world, with his breath the Holy One makes people’s hearts simple. People fix their eyes and ears on him, and he treats them like children”* (49:4); and *“One who has abundant virtues is like a newborn infant”* (55:1).

When Jesus was in the world, he consistently asked his disciples to become like children: *“...I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me”* (Matthew 18:3-5). Earlier, Jesus prayed: *“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure”* (Matthew 11:25-26).

Infants do not express worldly greed and human transgression. They stay undistracted at their mother’s bosom. Infants have perfected the art of abandonment.

Nestling in the bosom of their mother, infants are tranquil, sweet, and satisfied. Infants have completed the art of tranquility.

Infants are soft, weak, gentle, obedient, humble and uncompetitive. The more challenged, pained, and attacked by wickedness they are, the deeper they hide in their mother’s embrace. Infants have accomplished the art of humility.

Infants never strive for things or rely on their own ability. Worldly riches, success, fame, and profit mean nothing to them. They know

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only their mother at whose bosom they have total joy, peace, and hope. Infants have achieved the art of effortlessness.

Have you noticed the beauty and sweetness of infants while nursing? Their expression is so arresting and their smile so pure, genuine and natural—even seemingly pious and holy. This picture conveys the union of life between a mother and her infant. The spiritual metaphor tells us that an infant's return to his mother is a complete return to rejuvenation of life. The infant is at one with Mother, heaven, earth, and the self. This state expresses "*the perfect harmony*" (55:2). The infant has fulfilled the art of unification.

3. The Mystery of Infants

Do human beings have wisdom? In the presence of God, it is better for them to be infants! That is true wisdom. A few years ago, my daughter was not able to comprehend how the signals on the TV tower could send "people" through the sky to the TV screen at home. Like my daughter, you and I cannot understand how God's Spirit can enter the hearts of believers and bring them new life. We know so little about the universe and about ourselves. There is a saying: "Human beings begin to think; God starts to laugh." When I first heard about this saying, I could not but help think about my daughter's childlike explanations about things and her judgments that often made me laugh.

In the presence of God, the Creator and Sustainer, human beings are like this, are they not? That is why Lao Tzu would rather be uncivilized and uncultivated "*like a newborn infant not knowing how to smile.*" He would rather not be like others who have more than enough and who "*see clearly*" and "*bargain constantly*" (20:3-5). To be as simple and inept as an infant is the highest wisdom, because all of us are infants in the hands of God.

Do human beings have abilities? Before the omnipotent Creator, how can human beings boast about their abilities? We have the ability to invent armaments, yet lack the ability not to use them to kill people. We have the ability to invent satellites and missiles, yet lack the ability not to use them to promote hatred among

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ourselves. We have the ability to build modern civilization, yet lack the ability not to use this ability for corruption and decadence. Indeed, we have the ability to enjoy pleasures, but lack the ability not to die. We have the ability to describe the phenomena of the universe (how), yet lack the ability to touch upon the ultimate reason for these phenomena (why).

Moreover, we human beings have the ability to rebel against God, yet lack the ability to escape from God's hands. We are infants in God's arms. Only when we finally admit this, will we truly abide in eternal virtue and become humble and gentle. Then we will be prepared to receive eternal wisdom and ability from God's Tao, the Word, who will enable us to accomplish everything without effort.

In the world, infants are the weakest and least powerful, yet they are the most protected. Why? Because they love without condition and receive without condition. Infants have no ability to be independent. They clearly reveal that inability. Ultimately, they have no choice but to be obedient, dependent, and pure, and totally relinquish control. Thus, the love of their mother nourishes them constantly and protects them. If a house were to come crashing down, the mother would cover her infant with her own body; if a bullet were being fired, the mother would shield her infant with her own life.

The purest love in the world is at a mother's bosom; the most divine love is in God's embrace. Nature, exemplified by the vast sky and the rich earth, is God's embrace.

We live in it just like an infant nestling at the bosom of his or her mother. God's love is infinitely deeper and more boundless than a mother's love. Jesus' words on the cross: "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34) sound like a mother speaking to a rebellious child, do they not?

Infants grow and become adults. It is impossible to turn the clock back and return to infancy and the bosom of one's mother. However, in the presence of the ruler of the universe, we are forever like infants, weak, incapable, naïve, and ignorant. God makes us return

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to our own true self, hoping for the return of prodigal children to be reunited to their parents and family responsibility.

A mother and her infant are connected emotionally and through their souls are connected so intimately and intensely that their communication transcends human language. In a similar but much deeper way, God is connected to His children emotionally and spiritually and makes dependence on earthly wisdom unnecessary. Jesus says: *“God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24). Since that is so, why does it seem so difficult for those with a purified heart to see God’s open arms? May we be counted among those who have eyes to see!

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