

Live softly

The Little Book of Dao



Preface

Dear reader,
This little book wishes to be small,
portable,
simple.

When I first read these texts,
in various English translations,
I saw how different their voices were.
That is why I began translating them myself.
Not to fix what is already fixed,
but to give words to what became clear to me;
in the hope that it may also open something for you.

With a small encouragement (thank you, Joline),
these words took shape.

Thus also came into being:
Dao, Het Al
Daoism: Yuzi & Wenzi.
These editions are available in paperback
(hardcover exclusively via Brave New Books).

These works do not seek scholarship,
but simplicity.
Not explanations that accumulate,
but space in which something may appear.

Thanks to Delphine,
for the careful proofreading.

Live softly,
go with Dao.

Roland

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Dao De Jing
Book of the Way

1

The Dao that can be described
is not the eternal Dao.
The name that can be spoken
is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the eternal real.
Naming is the origin of the separation of all manifestations.
Freed from desire,
you can see the hidden mystery.
Through desire,
you can only see the manifestations.
Yet mystery and reality arise from the same source.
This source is called darkness,
darkness born from darkness:
The beginning of all understanding.

2

When beauty is recognized as beauty,
the recognition of ugliness arises.
When the good is recognized as good,
the recognition of the bad arises.
There is no being without non-being,
no difficulty without ease,
no long without short,
no high without low,
no before without after,
no young without old.
Therefore the wise acts without doing,
spreads insight through example.
What arises, the wise lets arise;
what passes, the wise lets pass.
The wise has, but does not possess.
The wise acts and lets go,
Accomplishes the task without expectation;
thus the result endures forever.

3

Do not exalt talent,
this brings competition.
Do not value wealth,
this encourages theft.
Do not display possessions,
this leads to envy.

4

Dao is empty,
yet it can be used without ever being exhausted.
Dao is bottomless,
the source of all things.
It blunts the sharp,
untangles the knot,
softens the light,
it is one with heaven and earth.
Deep and still, Dao exists forever.
Its origin is unknown;
it is older than time.

5

Heaven and earth have no preference;
they regard everything as equal.
The wise has no preference;
the enlightened regards all people as equal.
Dao is like a bellows;
its emptiness is an inexhaustible force.
The more you use it, the more it enriches you.
To argue about it is unnecessary;
remain in the center.

6

Dao never dies;
it is called the eternal source.
The root of Dao is subtle and deeply feminine.
Dao is continuous and inexhaustible.
Use it, and you will never exhaust it.