SAGESQUOTE

Laozi

老子

51 QUOTES

Tao Te Ching (道德經)

The philosopher of water, emptiness and the power that does not push.

DAOISM

老

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Inside this collection

Every entry below gives four things: the saying in English, the original Chinese as it stands in the text, the book or chapter it comes from, and who translated that line. Nothing here is copied from a modern edition.

- **51** sayings from Tao Te Ching (道德經).
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Laozi (老子). The Tao Te Ching is eighty-one short chapters about a way of acting that looks like doing nothing and accomplishes everything. This set gathers the passages readers return to most: on softness overcoming hardness, on knowing when to stop, on governing without forcing.

01 The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name.

道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 1
Trans. James Legge, 1891

02 Conceived of as having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth; conceived of as having a name, it is the Mother of all things.

無名，天地之始；有名，萬物之母。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 1
Trans. James Legge, 1891

03 All in the world know the beauty of the beautiful, and in doing this they have the idea of what ugliness is; they all know the skill of the skilful, and in doing this they have the idea of what the want of skill is.

天下皆知美之為美，斯惡已；皆知善之為善，斯不善已。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 2
Trans. James Legge, 1891

04 Therefore the sage manages affairs without doing anything, and conveys his instructions without the use of speech.

是以聖人處無為之事，行不言之教。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 2
Trans. James Legge, 1891

05 they grow, and there is no claim made for their ownership; they go through their processes, and there is no expectation (of a reward for the results). The work is accomplished, and there is no resting in it (as an achievement).

生而不有，為而不恃，功成而弗居。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 2
Trans. James Legge, 1891

06 The Tao is (like) the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fulness. How deep and unfathomable it is, as if it were the Honoured Ancestor of all things!

道沖而用之或不盈，淵兮似萬物之宗。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 4
Trans. James Legge, 1891

07 Heaven and earth do not act from (the impulse of) any wish to be benevolent; they deal with all things as the dogs of grass are dealt with. The sages do not act from (any wish to be) benevolent; they deal with the people as the dogs of grass are dealt with.

天地不仁，以萬物為芻狗；聖人不仁，以百姓為芻狗。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 5
Trans. James Legge, 1891

08 Much speech to swift exhaustion lead we see; Your inner being guard, and keep it free.

多言數窮，不如守中。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 5
Trans. James Legge, 1891

09 The highest excellence is like that of water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things, and in its occupying, without striving to the contrary, the low place which all men dislike. Hence its way is near to that of the Tao.

上善若水。水善利萬物而不爭，處眾人之所惡，故幾於道。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 8
Trans. James Legge, 1891

10 When the work is done, and one's name is becoming distinguished, to withdraw into obscurity is the way of Heaven.

功遂身退，天之道也。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 9
Trans. James Legge, 1891

11 Colour's five hues from the eyes their sight will take; music's five notes the ears as deaf can make; the flavours five deprive the mouth of taste.

五色令人目盲，五音令人耳聾，五味令人口爽。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 12
Trans. James Legge, 1891

12 Favour and disgrace would seem equally to be feared; honour and great calamity, to be regarded as personal conditions.

寵辱若驚，貴大患若身。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 13
Trans. James Legge, 1891

13 The state of vacancy should be brought to the utmost degree, and that of stillness guarded with unwearying vigour.

致虛極，守靜篤。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 16
Trans. James Legge, 1891

14 All things alike go through their processes of activity, and then we see them return to their original state. Returning to their root is called stillness.

夫物芸芸，各復歸其根。歸根曰靜，是謂復命。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 16
Trans. James Legge, 1891

15 He who knows other men is discerning; he who knows himself is intelligent. He who overcomes others is strong; he who overcomes himself is mighty.

知人者智，自知者明。勝人者有力，自勝者強。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 33
Trans. James Legge, 1891

16 He who is satisfied with his lot is rich; he who goes on acting with energy has a (firm) will. He who does not fail in the requirements of his position, continues long; he who dies and yet does not perish, has longevity.

知足者富，強行者有志。不失其所者久，死而不亡者壽。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 33
Trans. James Legge, 1891

17 When one is about to take an inspiration, he is sure to make a previous expiration; when he is going to weaken another, he will first strengthen him.

將欲歙之，必固張之；將欲弱之，必固強之。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 36
Trans. James Legge, 1891

18 The Tao in its regular course does nothing for the sake of doing it, and so there is nothing which it does not do.

道常無為而無不為。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 37
Trans. James Legge, 1891

19 Those who possessed in the highest degree the attributes of the Tao did not seek to show them, and therefore they possessed them in fullest measure. Those who possessed them in a lower degree sought how not to lose them, and therefore they did not possess them in fullest measure.

上德不德，是以有德；下德不失德，是以無德。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 38
Trans. James Legge, 1891

20 Thus it is that dignity finds its (firm) root in its (previous) meanness, and what is lofty finds its stability in the lowness (from which it rises).

故貴以賤為本，高以下為基。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 39
Trans. James Legge, 1891

21 The movement of the Tao by contraries proceeds; and weakness marks the course of Tao's mighty deeds. All things under heaven sprang from it as existing and named; that existence sprang from it as non-existent.

反者道之動，弱者道之用。天下萬物生於有，有生於無。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 40
Trans. James Legge, 1891

22 Scholars of the highest class, when they hear about the Tao, earnestly carry it into practice. Scholars of the middle class, when they have heard about it, seem now to keep it and now to lose it. Scholars of the lowest class, when they have heard about it, laugh greatly at it.

上士聞道，勤而行之；中士聞道，若存若亡；下士聞道，大笑之。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 41
Trans. James Legge, 1891

23 Its largest square doth yet no corner show A vessel great, it is the slowest made; Loud is its sound, but never word it said; A semblance great, the shadow of a shade.

大方無隅，大器晚成，大音希聲，大象無形。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 41
Trans. James Legge, 1891

24 The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced all things.

道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 42
Trans. James Legge, 1891

25 The softest thing in the world dashes against and overcomes the hardest.

天下之至柔，馳騁天下之至堅。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 43
Trans. James Legge, 1891

26 There are few in the world who attain to the teaching without words, and the advantage arising from non-action.

不言之教，無為之益，天下希及之。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 43
Trans. James Legge, 1891

27 Who is content Needs fear no shame. Who knows to stop Incurs no blame. From danger free Long live shall he.

知足不辱，知止不殆，可以長久。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 44
Trans. James Legge, 1891

28 Who thinks his great achievements poor Shall find his vigour long endure. Of greatest fulness, deemed a void, Exhaustion ne'er shall stem the tide.

大成若缺，其用不弊。大盈若沖，其用不窮。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 45
Trans. James Legge, 1891

29 Constant action overcomes cold; being still overcomes heat. Purity and stillness give the correct law to all under heaven.

靜勝躁，寒勝熱。清靜為天下正。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 45
Trans. James Legge, 1891

30 no calamity greater than to be discontented with one's lot; no fault greater than the wish to be getting.

禍莫大於不知足，咎莫大於欲得。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 46
Trans. James Legge, 1891

31 Without going outside his door, one understands (all that takes place) under the sky; without looking out from his window, one sees the Tao of Heaven.

不出戶，知天下；不窺牖，見天道。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 47
Trans. James Legge, 1891

32 He who devotes himself to learning seeks from day to day to increase his knowledge; he who devotes himself to the Tao seeks from day to day to diminish his doing. He diminishes it and again diminishes it, till he arrives at doing nothing.

為學日益，為道日損。損之又損，以至於無為。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 48
Trans. James Legge, 1891

33 The sage has no invariable mind of his own; he makes the mind of the people his mind.

聖人無常心，以百姓心為心。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 49
Trans. James Legge, 1891

34 To those who are good (to me), I am good; and to those who are not good (to me), I am also good;--and thus (all) get to be good.

善者吾善之，不善者吾亦善之，德善。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 49
Trans. James Legge, 1891

35 He who knows (the Tao) does not (care to) speak (about it); he who is (ever ready to) speak about it does not know it.

知者不言，言者不知。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 56
Trans. James Legge, 1891

36 Governing a great state is like cooking small fish.

治大國若烹小鮮。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 60
Trans. James Legge, 1891

37 (It is the way of the Tao) to act without (thinking of) acting; to conduct affairs without (feeling the) trouble of them; to taste without discerning any flavour; to consider what is small as great, and a few as many; and to recompense injury with kindness.

為無為，事無事，味無味。大小多少，報怨以德。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 63
Trans. James Legge, 1891

38 (The master of it) anticipates things that are difficult while they are easy, and does things that would become great while they are small. All difficult things in the world are sure to arise from a previous state in which they were easy, and all great things from one in which they were small.

圖難於其易，為大於其細。天下難事必作於易，天下大事必作於細。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 63
Trans. James Legge, 1891

39 The tree which fills the arms grew from the tiniest sprout; the tower of nine storeys rose from a small heap of earth; the journey of a thousand li commenced with a single step.

合抱之木，生於毫末；九層之台，起於累土；千里之行，始於足下。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 64
Trans. James Legge, 1891

40 (But) people in their conduct of affairs are constantly ruining them when they are on the eve of success. If they were careful at the end, as (they should be) at the beginning, they would not so ruin them.

民之從事，常於幾成而敗之。慎終如始，則無敗事。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 64
Trans. James Legge, 1891

41 That whereby the rivers and seas are able to receive the homage of all the valley streams is their skill in being lower than they; it is thus that they are the kings of them all.

江海所以能為百谷王者，以其善下之，故能為百谷王。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 66
Trans. James Legge, 1891

42 I have three precious things which I prize and hold fast: the first is gentleness; the second is frugality; and the third is shrinking from taking precedence of others.

我有三寶，持而保之：一曰慈，二曰儉，三曰不敢為天下先。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 67
Trans. James Legge, 1891

43 He who in (Tao's) wars has skill Assumes no martial port; He who fights with most good will To rage makes no resort. He who vanquishes yet still Keeps from his foes apart; He whose hests men most fulfil Yet humbly plies his art.

善為士者不武，善戰者不怒，善勝敵者不與，善用人者為之下。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 68
Trans. James Legge, 1891

44 To know and yet think we do not know is the highest attainment; not to know and yet think we do know is a disease.

知不知，尚矣；不知知，病也。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 71
Trans. James Legge, 1891

45 He whose boldness appears in his daring is put to death; he whose boldness appears in his not daring lives on.

勇於敢則殺，勇於不敢則活。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 73
Trans. James Legge, 1891

46 It is the way of Heaven not to strive, and yet it skilfully overcomes; not to speak, and yet it is skilful in obtaining a reply; does not call, and yet men come to it of themselves.

天之道，不爭而善勝，不言而善應，不召而自來。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 73
Trans. James Legge, 1891

47 Man at his birth is supple and weak; at his death, firm and strong. So it is with all things. Trees and plants, in their early growth, are soft and brittle; at their death, dry and withered. Thus firmness and strength are the companions of death; softness and weakness, the companions of life.

人之生也柔弱，其死也堅強。草木之生也柔脆，其死也枯槁。故堅強者死之徒，柔弱者生之徒。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 76
Trans. James Legge, 1891

48 It is the Way of Heaven to diminish superabundance, and to supplement deficiency. It is not so with the way of man. He takes away from those who have not enough to add to his own superabundance.

天之道，損有餘而補不足。人之道則不然，損不足以奉有餘。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 77
Trans. James Legge, 1891

49 There is nothing in the world more soft and weak than water, and yet for attacking things that are firm and strong there is nothing that can take precedence of it.

天下莫柔弱於水，而攻堅強者莫之能勝。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 78
Trans. James Legge, 1891

50 Sincere words are not fine; fine words are not sincere. Those who are skilled in the Tao do not dispute about it; the disputatious are not skilled in it.

信言不美，美言不信。善者不辯，辯者不善。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 81
Trans. James Legge, 1891

51 The sage does not accumulate for himself. The more that he expends for others, the more does he possess of his own; the more that he gives to others, the more does he have himself.

聖人不積，既以為人己愈有，既以與人己愈多。

Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 81
Trans. James Legge, 1891

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ONE TO KEEP

The highest excellence is like that of water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things, and in its occupying, without striving to the contrary, the low place which all men dislike. Hence its way is near to that of the Tao.

上善若水。水善利萬物而不爭，處眾人之所惡，故幾於道。

— Tao Te Ching (道德經), Chapter 8

Trans. James Legge, 1891

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