

TAO TE CHING: THE DEFINITIVE EDITION BY LAO TZU, JONATHAN STAR

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TAO TE CHING
THE DEFINITIVE EDITION



LAO TZU
TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
JONATHAN STAR

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Review

"It would be hard to find a fresh approach to a text that ranks only behind the Bible as the most widely translated book in the world, but Star achieves that goal. . . . As fascinating to the casual scholar as it is for the serious student." -NAPRA ReView "Jonathan Star's Tao Te Ching achieves the essential: It clarifies the meaning of the text without in the slightest reducing its mystery." -Jacob Needleman

From the Inside Flap

The TAO-TE-CHING, the ancient Taoist text written by philosopher Lao-Tzu in the sixth century B.C., has inspired millions of people from all different backgrounds. This beautiful edition contains Chinese characters alongside the English text and is illustrated with black and white drawings. Commentary from the translators helps to illuminate the ideas discussed in the text so that modern-day readers can fully appreciate the meaning.

About the Author

Jonathan Star is distinguished for his translations of works from Rumi to the Christian mystics. He is the translator of the celebrated Rumi: In the Arms of the Beloved and other works.

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TAO TE CHING: THE DEFINITIVE EDITION BY LAO TZU, JONATHAN STAR PDF

In a new approach to the Tao Te Ching, this acclaimed translator explores the full range of meaning for each Chinese character, allowing readers, in effect, to interpret the ancient wisdom book for themselves.

Not only is Ancient Chinese a challenge to translate, but it contains a minefield of arcane terms and expressions that often have no counterparts in English. So while the Tao Te Ching is one of the most widely read books in the world, it remains also one of the most misunderstood.

Tao Te Ching: The Definitive Edition helps to remedy this situation. In addition to his own masterful translation, Jonathan Star supplies the multiple meanings of each Chinese character. Readers can use Star's translation in the first half of the book, can create their own by using the multiple definitions in the second half, or can combine the two to discover the most profound.

Star's work elucidates how translators arrive at diffuse meanings, as well as how the ancient Chinese regarded different concepts and what they meant within the context of the Tao. The volume also includes useful commentary, a character dictionary, and other tools that illuminate the different meanings of the Tao. This definitive edition enables Westerners to comprehend the Tao more deeply than ever before.

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Most helpful customer reviews

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Just breathe

By Rosh

As with so many books, we endure the scholarly and erudite reviewers who claim to know which text and translation is the most recondite, the most accurate, the most true to the original. I don't know about all that. I know Lao Tzu was so important to Asian culture and life, and I know this book makes me feel whole again with each reading. I slow down, and his true words align the iron filings in my heart.

Let the educated debaters go on with their "Ten thousand things" arguing about translations and meanings. They miss the point. Get this book, make some tea, turn off the incessant rattlings in your brain and the screens in your home and relax to ancient wisdom that has influenced millions of hearts and minds for thousands of years...

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

The Tao is the way

By Paul Haspel

The Tao is the Way, and the Way is the Tao. But if you expect the "Tao Te Ching" to get much more specific than that, then I'm afraid you're likely to be disappointed. The Tao Te Ching is not a how-to – or, if you'll forgive the phrase, a Tao-to.

Author Lao Tzu is a highly revered figure in modern China – making it all the more interesting that, as scholar D.C. Lau of the Chinese University of Hong Kong points out in an informative foreword, there is no real way of proving the historicity, even the actual historical existence, of a monk who lived in the 6th century B.C. and was named ??, Lao Tzu. Therefore, stories about Lao Tzu – like the one in which Lao Tzu supposedly told a young Confucius to “Rid yourself of your arrogance and your lustfulness, your ingratiating manners and your excessive ambition. These are all detrimental to your person” (p. viii) – must be taken with the proverbial grain of salt.

What cannot be denied is that the "Tao Te Ching" – whoever its author(s), whatever the circumstances of its composition – provides the basis for one of the world's great philosophical and religious traditions. In its 81 short, poetic chapters, the "Tao Te Ching" invites the reader to approach life in a spirit of acceptance and humility. That emphasis is no accident, as the book was written during the Warring States period – a singularly turbulent and unstable time, when both ordinary citizens and powerful leaders were only too aware of the uncertainty of human affairs. Small wonder, then, that so many passages from the "Tao Te Ching" emphasize contentment, caution, endurance: “Know contentment/And you will suffer no disgrace;/Know when to stop/And you will meet with no danger./You can then endure” (p. 51).

On my first reading of the "Tao Te Ching," I found myself focusing upon areas where I could see the document's influence on Western culture. In Chapter V, for example, Lao Tzu writes that “Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs; the sage is ruthless, and treats the people as straw dogs” (p. 9). Sure enough, it turns out that Sam Peckinpah's violent and controversial film "Straw Dogs"

(1971), with its own thematic focus on ordinary people in a ruthless world, takes its title from this chapter.

And then there is Chapter XLVII, the chapter that may be my favorite from the entire "Tao Te Ching": "Without stirring abroad/One can know the whole world;/Without looking out of the window/One can see the way of heaven./The further one goes/The less one knows" (p. 54). Fellow Beatles fans will recognize at once that this passage from the "Tao Te Ching" provides the lyrical inspiration for "The Inner Light," a 1968 George Harrison composition that originally served as the B-side for the hit single "Lady Madonna." George's interest in the great religious traditions of the East is a matter of record, and it makes perfect sense that, amid the chaos of being a Beatle, he would have been drawn to the Tao Te Ching's message of letting go of the pursuit of material things in favor of seeking spiritual sustenance.

To my mind, one of the passages that is most explicit in defining the Way comes in Chapter VIII, when Lao Tzu writes that "Because water excels in benefiting the myriad creatures without contending with them and settles where none would like to be, it comes close to the way" (p. 12). Part of understanding the Way seems to involve the idea that the Way cannot be pinned down like a dead butterfly in a glass case; indeed, attempting to seize control of the Way will only take one further from the Way. "Go up to it and you will not see its head;/Follow behind it and you will not see its rear" (p. 18). In a way, Lao Tzu's Way reminds me of physicist Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle from quantum mechanics – the idea that one can accurately measure the position or the momentum of a subatomic particle, but not both. The only way to achieve some measure of knowledge is to let go of trying to know everything. How scientific, and how Taoist.

One can also, if one looks, find connections with the great religious traditions of the West. When Lao Tzu writes in Chapter 53 that "The great way is easy, yet people prefer by-paths" (p. 60), readers acquainted with the Judeo-Christian heritage might find themselves thinking of one of Jesus Christ's admonitions from the Sermon on the Mount: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). And Lao Tzu's call in Chapter 63 for his disciples to "do good to him who has done you an injury" (p. 70) will similarly bring to mind Jesus' call for his disciples to "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you" (Luke 6:27-28).

Helpful appendices to this edition of the "Tao Te Ching" deal with the problem of Lao Tzu's authorship of the "Tao Te Ching," as mentioned above, and with the nature of the work. There is also a glossary of authors and works from the tradition of classical Chinese philosophy, along with a chronological table that takes one all the way from the beginning of the Eastern Chou Dynasty in 770 B.C. through the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty in 225 A.D. – all very helpful for any reader for whom all this history may be relatively new.

I read the "Tao Te Ching" while my wife and I were in Beijing; touring the Temple of Heaven complex, a magnificent group of religious buildings associated with the Taoist faith, I wondered how many believers, during the 600 years since the complex's construction, had walked to or from a ceremony of harvest prayers reciting a favorite chapter from the "Tao Te Ching." I felt very fortunate to be acquainting myself with this world classic of literature, religion, and philosophy while traveling in the land from which it came.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

What is better left alone than rushed or forced

By Amazon Customer

Lao Tsu may be an influential, legendary figure in ancient Chinese culture, but his attributed work – a poem consisting of 81 separated chapters – transcends any state or continent and offers a heavily loaded simplicity

to all people. Where are you going? What are you trying to accomplish? What is better left alone than rushed or forced?

In solidarity with basic tenets of Buddhism, Taoism accepts nature and the progression of life events as they are without human muddling or interference. Tao does not force anyone to bend to its will, but exists outside of human interpretation of it. Readers can guess, but must remain satisfied with not having answers to every inquiry. The Tao is eternal.

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