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He who stands on tiptoe
doesn't stand firm.
He who rushes ahead
doesn't go far.
He who tries to shine
dims his own light.
He who defines himself
can't know who he really is.
He who has power over others
can't empower himself.
He who clings to work
will create nothing that endures.

61

When a country obtains great power,
it becomes like the sea;
all streams run downward into it.
The more powerful it grows,
the greater the need for humility.
Humility means trusting the Tao,
thus never needing to be defensive.

A great nation is like a great man;
When he makes a mistake, he realizes it.
Having realized it, he admits it.
Having admitted it, he corrects it.
He considers those who point out his faults
as his most benevolent teachers.
He thinks of his enemy
as the shadow that he himself casts.

If a nation is centered in the Tao,
if it nourishes its own people
and doesn't meddle in the affairs of others,
it will be a light to all nations in the world.

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If a country is governed with tolerance,
the people are comfortable and honest.
If a country is governed with repression, the
people are depressed and crafty.

When the will to power is in charge,
the higher the ideals, the lower the results.
Try to make people happy,
and you lay the groundwork for misery.
Try to make people moral
and you lay the groundwork for vice.

Thus the Master is content
to serve as an example
and not to impose her will.
She is pointed, but doesn't pierce.
Straightforward, but supple.
Radiant, but easy on the eyes.

66

All streams flow to the sea
because it is lower than they are.
Humility give it its power.

If you want to govern the people
you must first place yourself below them.
If you want to lead the people,
you must learn to follow them.

The Master is above the people,
and no one feels oppressed.
She goes ahead of the people
and no one feels manipulated.
The whole world is grateful to her.
Because she competes with no one,
no one can compete with her.

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The Master governs, the people
are hardly aware that he exists.
Next best is a leader who is loved.
Next, the one who is feared.
The worst is one who is despised.

If you don't trust the people,
you make them untrustworthy.

The Master doesn't talk, he acts.
When his work is done,
the people say, "Amazing:
we did it, all by ourselves!"

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The best athlete
wants his opponent at his best.
The best general
enters the mind of his enemy.
The best businessman
serves the communal good.
The best leader
follows the will of the people.

All of them embody
the virtue of non-competition.
Not that they don't love to compete,
but they do it in the spirit of play.
In this they are like children
and in harmony with the Tao.

3

If you overesteem great men,
people become powerless.
If you overvalue possessions,
people begin to steal.

The Master leads
by emptying people's minds
and filling their cores,
by weakening their ambition
and toughening their resolve.
He helps people lost everything
they know, everything they desire,
and creates confusion
in those that think they know.

Practice not-doing,
and everything will fall into place.

from:
Tao Te Ching.
translated by Stephen
Mitchell. New York:
Harper Perennial, 1988.