



The Tao Te Ching

Lao Tzu (6th century BCE) Translated by James Legge (1815-1897)

Read by:	Frederic S. Piotrowski	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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The *Tao Te Ching* is an ancient Chinese classic text written by the sage Lao Tzu in the sixth century BC. Also spelled as *Tao Teh King*, *Daodejing* and *Dao De Jing*, and referred to in China simply as *Laozi* or *Lao Tzu*, it can be translated into English as “The Classic Book of the Virtuous Way”. (“Tao” means “way” “de” means “virtue” or “integrity”; and “ching” means “great book” or “classic.”) The first verse famously sets out the ineffable mystery of the Tao, which is nameless, beyond words and distinctions, passive, intuitive, and attentive to wu wei, or effortless action.

The book is a sequence of 81 short poems structured in two parts – the *Tao Ching* (chapters 1-37) and the *Te Ching* (chapters 38-81).

The style combines two elements: laconic, poetic, and memorable declarative statements and intentional contradictions that force the listener to reconcile the resulting ambiguities. The absence of grammatical connectors increases the ambiguity and gives rise to endless varying interpretations. The *Tao Te Ching* has a long and complex history and an abundant body of scholarship resulting from the study of three versions ranging from the second century BC to the third century AD. The oldest version dated prior to 300 BC was discovered in 1993 and consists of 800 slips of bamboo.

The *Tao Te Ching* is a fundamental text in both religious and philosophical Taoism and has greatly influenced Confucianism, Legalism, and Chinese Buddhism, which was originally introduced to China through Taoist concepts and terminology. It is a continuing source of inspiration to Chinese artists and is one of the most translated works in all of world literature.

Like all ancient figures associated with the establishment of religions, **Lao Tzu** is part historical figure and part legend. The name, which is spelled Laozi in modern usage and Lao-tse in older usage, means “Old Master”. He is held to be the author of the *Tao De Ching* and the founder of Taoism. He is regarded as a deity in religious Taoism and seen as a personification of the Tao. Emperors of the Tang Dynasty and holders of the Li surname claim him as founder of their lineage. The legendary Lao Tzu was a contemporary of Confucius in the 6th century BCE. Myths hold that he was conceived when his mother gazed at a falling star, that she carried him for 62 years in her womb, that he was born a full grown man with gray beard, and that he lived 990 years in his 13th incarnation as Lao Tzu. The historical Lao Tzu traditionally combines three stories. In the first, he was Keeper of the Archives at the Royal court of Zhou, a contemporary of Confucius, and a writer of a book in two parts. In the second, he was also a contemporary of Confucius and a writer of a book in 15 parts. In the third he was a Grand Historian and court astrologer to Duke Xian of Qin in the 4th century BCE. Historians, however, believe he lived in the Warring States period in the 4th or 5th century BCE. Whatever the facts, Lao Tzu has personified the essence of the Tao for centuries and attracted many millions of followers.