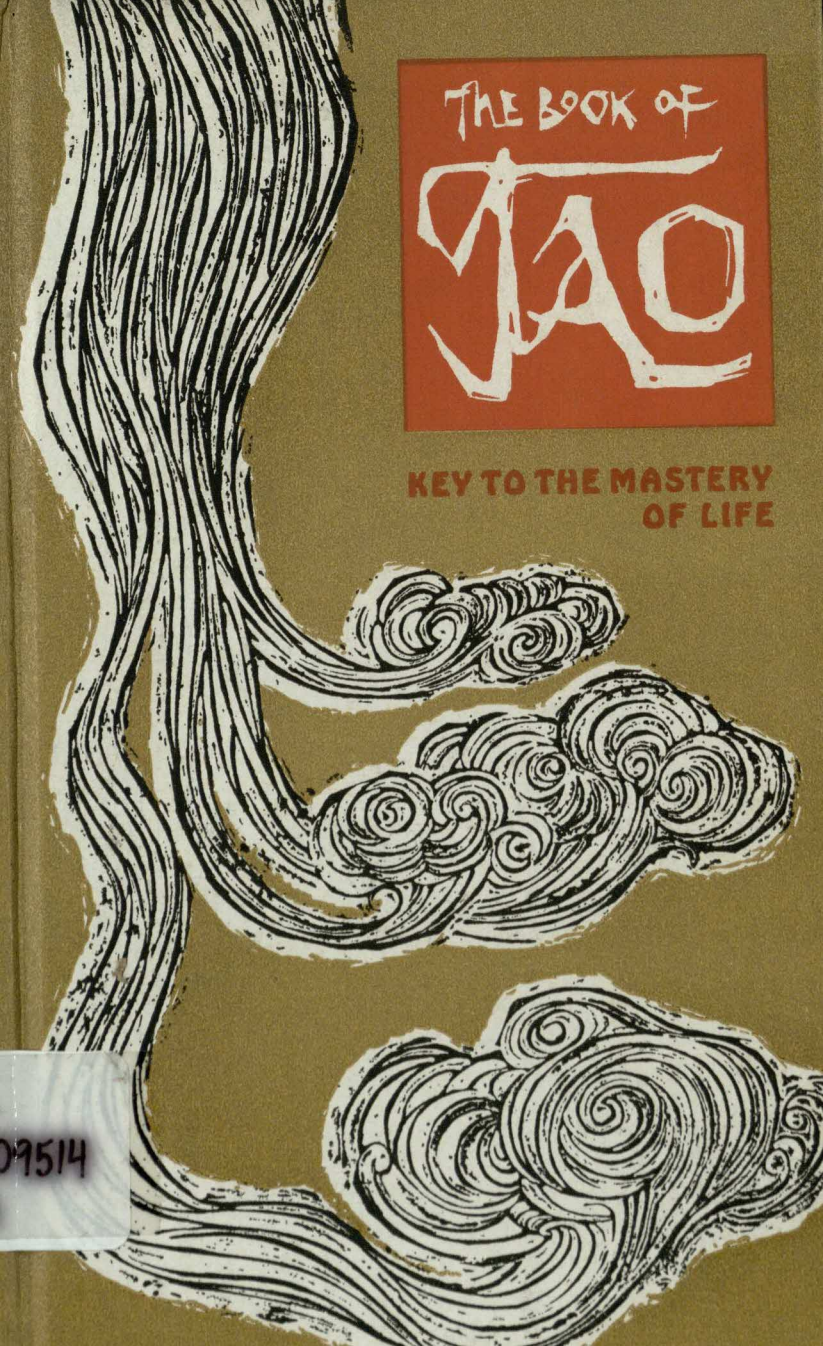


THE BOOK OF

# TAO

KEY TO THE MASTERY  
OF LIFE

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THE  
BOOK  
OF TAO

TRANSLATION BY  
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—  
ILLUSTRATED BY  
JEFF HILL



Within the pages of  
this little book  
lies the key to the  
Mastery of Life

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*Alfred*

THE *Tao Teh Ching*, "the book of Tao and how to attain it," is at least 2,500 years old. As an ancient nature philosophy it is surely much older, having been passed down from one generation to another before the advent of writing.

Tao (pronounced *Dow*) is a word which defies literal translation into English. It has been translated as Nature, The Way, Ultimate Reality, Truth, God, Enlightenment, or The Absolute. None of these is adequate.

Teh (pronounced *Duh*) has also been variously translated: as Integrity, Virtue, Character, Honor, Reason, Best Conduct, Intelligence or True Wisdom. It is the highest human attainment; but again, it defies accurate translation.

Ching means "book."

Legend has it that the *Tao Teh Ching* was written by Laotse — which in Chinese would sound like *Louts*. Laotse means "worshipful master" or "wise teacher." When Laotse was ninety years old, so the legend goes, he left his work as Keeper of the Archives to go into the hills, there to await death. But the frontier guards would not let him pass until he had written down his wisdom for future generations. Thus, the *Tao Teh Ching* was written.

There is no known original manuscript of *The Book of Tao* in existence; all we have are copies of copies. It is composed of eighty-one sutras or "strands of thought" in five thousand Chinese picture-words. Most translations list the sutras in strict numerical order despite the fact that, over the centuries, they appear to have become disarranged. The present version is divided into four parts, with sutras arranged according to content. The traditional sutra number is listed in brackets at the end of each.

The symbol of Tao is Yin-Yang. The basic circle of this symbol denotes the universality of its application. The black portion (Yin) and the white portion (Yang) allude to the nature of conflict, of differences, of paradox. In it is the interrelationship of male and female, the interplay of winter and summer, day and night, right and wrong, liberal and conservative, simple and difficult, etc. In the darkest Yin there is a spot of Yang; in the lightest Yang there is a trace of Yin.

*The Book of Tao* was never meant to be scholarly. It was spoken, perhaps chanted, before writing was known, in simple language so that everyone could, with thought, understand it. That is also the object of this translation.

# PART I · TAO

## SUTRAS ON THE NATURE OF TAO



The Tao described in words is not the real Tao. Words cannot describe it. Nameless it is the source of creation; named it is the mother of all things.

To see Tao the observer must be motiveless. Those with selfish motives see only the surface, not the innermost depths. These two kinds of observers look alike but differ in the insight of their observations.

They look alike because they are both human; within humanity is the key to the door of creation. [1]

## PART II · TEH

### SUTRAS ON THE NATURE OF TEH



The Teh follows Tao.

Tao is like a dream: invisible; intangible; obscure. It is invisible yet there is form to it. It is intangible yet there is a feel to it. It is obscure yet there is method to it. The method is true and so there are signs of it.

From ancient times until now the signs have never ceased by which we can see the beginning. How can I know the nature of the beginning? By these signs! [21]

## PART III · YIN-YANG\*

### SUTRAS ON THE NATURE OF PARADOX



The world will follow, without fear of evil,  
serene, peaceful, secure, one who follows  
the great symbol of Yin-Yang.

Music and good food will stop the passing  
stranger, but Tao, offered by the spoken  
word, seems unappealing, tasteless.

Looked for, it cannot be seen; listened for,  
it cannot be heard; applied, it cannot be  
exhausted. [35]

\* Yin is the Mystic Female (black)  
Yang is the Mystic Male (white)

## PART IV · TAO AND THE STATE

Taoist philosophy in leadership,  
education, government, and war



### *The Tao of the Ancients*

The ancient followers of Tao: so wise, so subtle, so profound, so deeply understanding that they were themselves misunderstood. They must therefore be described:

Cautious, like crossing a stream in mid-winter; observant, like moving in fear through hostile land; modest, retiring like ice beginning to melt; dignified, like an honored guest; genuine, like natural, untouched wood; receptive, like an inviting, open valley; friendly, like muddied water, freely mixing.

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