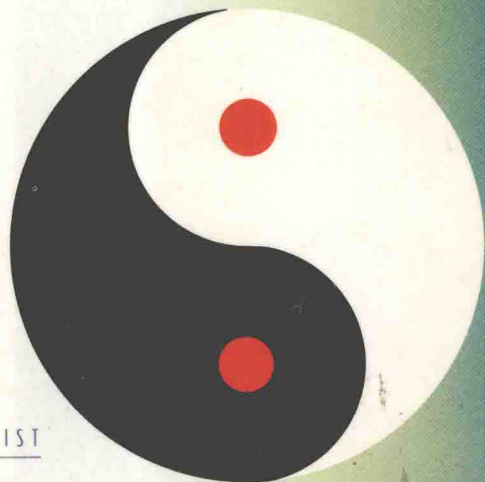


# THE TAO OF INNER PEACE

Formerly titled THE TAO OF PEACE: A Guide to Inner and Outer Peace

"Especially important are [Dreher's] examples of individual action and her many annotations.... Her lessons are quite useful. This is an important subject for the 1990s and one that promises to bring a renewal of environmental consciousness." — BOOKLIST



# DIANE DREHER

THE TAO  
OF INNER  
PEACE

DIANE DREHER



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*To all who seek new patterns of peace  
and walk the path with heart.*

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# INTRODUCTION

“Why did the ancients cherish the Tao?  
Because through it  
We may find a world of peace,  
Leaving behind a world of cares,  
And hold the greatest treasure under heaven.”

(TAO 62)<sup>1</sup>

SEEKERS for centuries have found inner peace by following the *Tao Te Ching*. Translated more than any book but the Bible, Lao Tzu's volume of 5000 words has helped people live through turbulent times by revealing the deep source of peace within.

Lao Tzu wrote the *Tao* over twenty-five centuries ago as a handbook for leaders. In ancient China, to lead wisely meant to live wisely, to seek personal balance and integration with the cycles of nature. Lao Tzu's teachings assume special importance today as we seek not only peace of mind but peace in our world. Searching for new patterns of harmony in everything from holistic health, psychology, and physics to ecology and social action, people are rediscovering the wisdom of the *Tao Te Ching*.

Peace, Lao Tzu realized, is an inside job. Only when we find peace within ourselves can we see more clearly, act more effectively, cooperating with the energies within and around us to build a more peaceful world. The *Tao* teaches that our actions have far-reaching consequences, stressing the importance of balance and the intimate relationship between ourselves and our environment. Seeing beyond the shifting tides of circumstance, we recognize the patterns of ebb and flow underlying all of nature. The *Tao* teaches patience, precision, and timing. Detaching from problems, we discover solutions. We

learn to stop resisting and flow with the natural patterns, bringing greater joy and harmony to our lives.

The *Tao* leads outward, promoting successful action because it first leads inward. If we look beneath the clamor and clutter of our lives, we recognize our inner rhythms, which are part of the overarching rhythms of nature. By honoring these rhythms we bring greater peace to ourselves and our world.

The title of the *Tao Tê Ching* underscores the vital relationship between inner and outer peace. *Ching* means simply a sacred book. But *Tao* means “the way,” at once a path and principle of order. Translators have called it the single principle underlying all creation, the laws of nature, the truth, and the source of all life. The Chinese character for Tao\* combines a head, representing wisdom, with the symbol for walking. A literal translation would be walking the path of wisdom, combining theory with praxis.

The word *Tê* means virtue or character. Its Chinese symbol combines the signs for “to go,” “straight,” and “the heart.” Transcending inner conflict, *Tê* means living authentically, according to our true character. With the wisdom of *Tê* we combine intuition with compassion; our actions are congruent with our deepest feelings. The *Tao Tê Ching* is the path that leads straight from the heart.

Lao Tzu wrote that “peace is the goal of the way by which no one ever goes astray.”<sup>2</sup> This new discussion of Lao Tzu’s classic describes the Tao as the path to inner and outer peace. Drawing from many passages in the *Tao Tê Ching*, the book presents the lessons of Tao in thematic order, beginning with peace of mind, then extending outward to the world around us.

Section 1 introduces the Taoist principles of dynamic balance, cyclical growth, oneness, and harmonious action. Section 2 shows how cooperating with these principles brings greater peace to our lives. Sections 3 and 4 describe the principles operating in nature and all our relationships. Section 5 demonstrates how we can use the lessons of Tao to build a more peaceful world.

On the surface, the book follows a linear progression, relating Taoist principles to the individual, to nature, then to problem solving

\* To differentiate between *Tao*, the shortened title of the *Tao Tê Ching*, and Tao, the concept, I have italicized only the former from this point on.

and politics. For the *Tao* teaches that peace grows outward from enlightened individuals. Yet we become enlightened by following the patterns of nature. Transcending linear organization, the *Tao Tè Ching* portrays life as a unified process. A recent translator has called its organization “holographic,”<sup>3</sup> each chapter reflecting the greater wisdom of the whole. In this book, too, each chapter echoes the central message of Tao: our participation in an inclusive oneness, a process much larger than ourselves. This is at once the journey and the destination, the key to the *Tao of Peace*.

The lessons of Tao are explained with modern parallels and real life examples, many of them drawn from my own life and work. Personal assessments and exercises will help you apply these lessons to your life.

The Tao is a lifelong path, and I, too, am just beginning. The more I work with its principles, the more I realize their power to release new sources of joy and creativity, new solutions for all of us.

I suggest you read this book slowly, one chapter at a time, applying the lessons to your life by doing the personal exercises. Give yourself enough time to work with each one.

The Tao is a path of reflection and cooperation. You might want to work through some of the exercises with a friend or family member, reinforcing what you learn and sharing the way of Tao.

Each chapter opens with a quote from the *Tao Tè Ching*, which you may use as a theme for meditation. How does its message relate to you?

Each chapter closes with an affirmation, reinforcing your oneness with an essential lesson of Tao. It can be a powerful tool in changing your consciousness and bringing greater peace to your life. Say this affirmation out loud to yourself in the morning. Or make a copy and review it throughout the day.

The *Tao* teaches that all life is process. We and our world are continuously evolving. As we follow our path into the future, we can move from turmoil and imbalance to restore our oneness with nature and one another. The *Tao* offers us new sources of power and inspiration, a vision of peace to transform ourselves and our world.

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SECTION  
I

THE  
WAY:  
THEN  
AND NOW



## BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

“A tree that reaches past your embrace grows from  
one small seed.

A structure over nine stories high begins with a handful  
of earth.

A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.”

(TAO 64)

How did you begin your search for peace? I began mine with political activism in the sixties. My college friends and I marched, protested, and worked for social change. For a while, I felt personally empowered by the protests. We saw ourselves on the evening news and felt we were making a difference. In time our country even pulled out of Vietnam. But by the mid-seventies, most of us were exhausted and disillusioned. Placing all our hopes in some distant cause, we had ignored our personal needs. Many of us even wondered who we were.

So we plunged into the human potential movement, seeking solace in encounter groups, hot tubs, bodywork, and a colorful procession of gurus. The Maharishi, Maharaji, Bhagwan, and Werner Erhard all sold their own brands of inner peace. Blocking out the conflict around me, I went from Gestalt groups to gurus to physical therapies. Hundreds of classes, workshops, and self-help books later, I was a certified massage practitioner, teaching yoga at a holistic health center in northern California. My friends and I tried very hard to be peaceful. But something was missing. The conflict remained.

Most people are still at war with themselves and one another. We



run through days of competition, confrontation, and mounting frustration, driven by the fear that we're "not good enough." At home and on the job, our lives are filled with stress. Our economy is troubled, our future uncertain, and the divorce rate has never been higher. Caught in a struggle between our ideals and grim necessity, we wrestle with the contradiction between what we are and what we "should" be. We live in the richest nation in the world, yet we are chronically insecure and defensive. Every day assaults us with new crises and conflicts on the evening news.

My personal search led to the *Tao Te Ching*, which offers a simple yet comprehensive vision of personal and planetary peace. In the *Tao* inner and outer peace are intrinsically related, as we are related to everything in our world.

Instead of waiting for the right guru or political leader to bring us the answer, the *Tao* asks us to take responsibility for our lives, to follow its path of action and contemplation. Through a shift of attitude, we can begin to experience greater peace right now. By seeing the larger patterns, we can take effective action, moving beyond competition to cooperation, harmonizing with the natural principles underlying all existence from the smallest cell to the largest social organism.

### *Self-Assessment*

Let's begin by identifying any areas of our lives where we're not at peace. Do any of these statements sound familiar?

*I'm not at peace in my body.* It breaks down, knots up in tension, keeps me awake at night, aches, limps, gets into accidents, develops false growths, overeats, craves drugs or alcohol, feels awkward, fat, thin, old, weak, or powerless.

*I'm not at peace in my career.* It's filled with stress, tension, disappointment, problems, obnoxious people, impossible deadlines. I feel nervous, insecure, angry, closed in, held down, trapped, fearful, unhappy.

*I'm not at peace in my relationships.* I feel angry, resentful, jealous, fearful, anxious, insecure, bored, trapped, limited, manipulated, dominated, misunderstood, unable to communicate honestly with people I care about.