

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

Lao Tzu's Poetic, Philosophical Treatise

# Tao Te Ching

Volume 3 of 14 (*Chapters 13-18*)

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*Tao Te Ching*  
*chapter Thirteen*

Success  
is as dangerous  
as failure.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*As dangerous as failure*

*Patriarchy's path of **yang**  
coerces us to chase after our dreams  
and actively seek  
to "make it happen."*

*How often  
could those dreams  
turn out to be nightmares?*

Hope  
is as hollow  
as fear.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*As hollow as fear*

*Hollow is sometimes translated  
as empty or void.*

*The primary duality mentioned by many Tibetan lamas  
is the dichotomy of hope and fear.*

*Others would describe that same duality  
in terms of avarice and aversion  
or greed and hate  
yet others prefer to describe it as pulling and pushing.*

*It is said that Gautama – the Buddha,  
described the seventh enlightenment factor of equanimity  
as joyfully, peaceful acceptance  
perched at the mid-point between craving and disgust.*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*What could we mean by hollow, empty, void or open?*

*“Void” could simply  
be a one syllable word  
to poetically express non-graspability.*

*Consider the following run-on sentence:  
“Both hope and fear  
are each as non-graspable  
as a vast, open expanse;*

*like the illusion of the infinite azure sky,  
on a bright and beautiful, cloudless day.”*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Yes, it does exemplify the use of the word “Void”  
as a simile for non-graspability  
but it is more than a trifle ungainly.*

*Could we not condense it down to read:  
“Hope and fear are each as non-graspable  
as a vast, open void”?*

*Or perhaps we could condense it more concisely  
and yet more cryptically as:  
“Hope is as void as fear.”*



What does it mean  
that success  
is as dangerous  
as failure?

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*How could both failure AND success be dangerous?*

*What could failure and success  
have in common?*

*They are both subject  
to interdependence.*

*They are caused by many factors,  
and in turn could be a primary,  
or at least contributing, cause  
of many effects:*

*directly or indirectly,  
immediately or eventually,  
overtly or subtly.*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*As such they are ever changing  
and hollow or void  
of anything permanent to grasp.*

Whether you  
go up the ladder  
or down it...

your position  
is shaky.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Shaky*

*Patriarchy's path of **yang** craves certitude  
and hates unpredictability  
however matriarchy's path of **yin**  
is quite comfortable with ambiguity.*

When you stand  
with your two feet  
on the ground...

you  
will always keep  
your balance.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*With your two feet on the ground*

*If taken literally,  
that could sound like an endorsement  
for the practice of chi gong;  
accept that this text was composed  
more than a millennium before chi gong's invention.*

*So let's approach this  
from the figurative perspective.  
What is the most grounding principal  
found in the Tao Te Ching?*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Simplicity's centered spontaneity.*

*And according to the fifteenth chapter of the Tao Te Ching,  
one cultivates it  
through a rather passive form of meditation.*



What does it mean  
that hope  
is as hollow as fear?

Hope and fear  
are both phantoms

that arise  
from thinking  
of the self.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Both phantoms*

*Just as in the first chapter,  
we are told that both the nameable and the un-nameable  
share the same dark nature...*

*here we are told that both hope and fear  
share the same empty, non-graspable nature;  
and that both arise from self-centered thinking.*

*But how do we transcend that tendency?  
Read on!*

When we do NOT see  
the self as Self,  
what do we have  
to fear?

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Do NOT see the self as Self*

*Clearly we must redefine our sense of self.*

*Read on!*

See the world  
as your Self.  
Have faith in the way  
things are.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*The world as your Self*

*Often we associate our circumstance, body, sensation, or mind,  
as our self-identity  
and cling to them desperately, selfishly, fearfully and greedily.*

*But if instead,  
we view our: community, continent,  
planet, galaxy, and multiverse,  
and the collection of all its denizens,  
as our Self...*

*then our ability for compassion and cooperation  
could multiply.*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*have faith in the way things are*

*In playful irony*

*Lao Tzu lampoons the faith*

*that is typically used to ignore reality*

*and instead see things as we want them to be...*

*by instructing us to use*

*faith's contrivances of mind and emotion*

*as mere curiosities*

*to courageously notice*

*and then insightfully relax into.*



Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Lao Tzu –the sage’s text inferentially guides us  
to cease pouring our energies  
into imagining the futures we dread as well as desire  
and then, respectively, actively strive to prevent or actualize.*

*Rather, we are encouraged to fully inhabit  
our experience of the present moment,  
allowing our awareness*

*to spontaneously, passively, vulnerably  
and non-conceptually dance  
among the perceptions of our circumstance, body, and mind  
whether they be they glorious or grotesque*

*and relax into  
our acceptance of them.*

Love the world  
as your Self;  
then you can care  
for all things.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Then you can care*

*All sentient beings  
have a fundamental instinct  
for self preservation.*

*Higher mammals tend to temper that  
with empathy and cooperation.  
The key is to blend that self preservation  
with an all-inclusive sense of Self.*

*By practicing Gautama – the Buddha's  
meditations of awareness and acquiescence  
every morning and every evening...*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*we'll find ourselves identifying less  
with **our** individual: circumstance, body, sensations and mind,  
and more with those  
of **ALL** beings everywhere.*

*Tao Te Ching*  
*chapter Fourteen*

Look,  
and it can NOT be seen.  
Listen,  
and it can NOT be heard.

**Reach,  
and it can NOT be grasped.**

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Look, listen, reach and it can NOT be seen, heard or grasped*

*Come, let us trade grasping and shoving  
for centered spontaneity;  
as active exploration is always trumped  
by passive, non-conceptual perception.*

Above,  
it is NOT bright.

Below,  
it is NOT dark.



Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Above or below it is neither bright nor dark*

*Expectation is a manifestation of rigidity  
as well as control  
and is a poor predictor  
of reality, as it is.*

*Far better it is, to cultivate  
passive, vulnerable, and non-conceptual perception,  
free from desire, aversion or agenda.*

Seamless,  
unnamable,  
it returns  
to the realm of nothing.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Seamless unnamable, it returns*

*This process of passive, desire-less, centered spontaneity,  
is complete, incomprehensible, ever-changing,  
and utterly non-graspable.*

Form

that includes all forms,

image

without an image...

subtle,

beyond all conception.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Form that includes all forms*

*The method of this path of yin, meets all needs,  
passively, vulnerably, and non-conceptually,  
utterly beyond the machinations  
of yang's "make it happen" mind-set.*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Image without an image*

*The contrived, active, hyper-analysis of our perceptions  
could be the chain that keeps us shackled  
to yang's patriarchy of:  
fear, greed, control, repression, scatteredness, and folly.*

*The passive, vulnerable, non-conceptual, visceral, perception  
of centered-spontaneity  
is the yin's gift  
of the spacious freedom of matriarchy.*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Subtle, beyond all conception*

*The prefrontal cortex of our intellect  
makes a tyrannical, Voldemort like master  
but a devoted Dobby like servant.*

*When over relied upon  
our intellect quickly tires,  
but when our perceptions are freed of:  
contrivance, scatteredness, agenda, and self-protection*

*our mind's creativity and intelligence  
are quick to spontaneously join in our adventures.*

*Come, let us experience  
the world anew, non-conceptually.*

Approach it  
and there is NO beginning;  
follow it  
and there is NO end.



Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*NO beginning or end*

*The quest for the perfect time, place and teacher  
can be a self-righteous dodge  
to ever avoid beginning.*

*As the Zen roshes say,  
“start where’re you’re at,”  
warts and all.*

*The path of the Tao  
is NOT a temporary antidote,  
to be abandoned once all symptoms have ceased,*

*but a life-long, lifestyle  
whose daily practice,  
is it’s own reward.*

You can NOT know it,  
but you can **be** it,  
at ease  
in your own life.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*NOT knowledge BUT existence*

*We are not separated from  
Sagehood, Buddhahood, or enlightenment  
by the absence of a subtle truth, an understanding  
or even a secret-handshake.*

*The goal is the path;  
the practice of simplicity, patience and compassion.*

*Through regular, consistent, enthusiastic and effective practice  
we master it to the point of practicing it:  
habitually, spontaneously, easily and effectively.*

*Practice the path,  
and mastery could take care of itself.*

Just realize  
where you come from:  
this  
is the essence of wisdom.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Where do we come from*

*Where do we come from?*

*The state of habitual, circuitous, yielding  
as explored in the fortieth chapter of the Tao Te Ching.*

*For that is how the particles  
generated by the big bang,  
coalesced into helium,  
which coalesced into the first stars,*

*which created the remaining natural elements,  
that upon those first stars demise  
were spewed across the expanse,*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*to accrete into solar systems such as ours,  
where our ancestors evolved  
only to be distracted from the power of going with the flow  
in a truly centered and spontaneous way.*

*How ironic it is that our greatest insights and creativity  
grow from acquiescing  
to that flow state.*

*Tao Te Ching*  
*chapter Fifteen*

The ancient Masters  
were profound and subtle.  
Their wisdom  
was unfathomable.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*The ancient masters*

*Real or imagined,  
the archetype of the ancient masters  
can inspire and guide our present moment journey  
upon the path of the Tao.*



There is **NO** way  
to describe it;  
all we can describe  
is their appearance.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*No way to describe it*

*Beware the scholar's trap of over-analysis.  
Sometimes the simple path,  
is not only the easiest  
but most effective.*

*So, like the children we once were,  
let's learn by mimicry.*

They were **careful**  
as someone crossing  
an iced-over stream.

**Alert** as a warrior  
in enemy territory.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Crossing and a Warrior*

*What could that journey look like?*

*Slow, mindful, alert and surrendered.*

**Courteous**

as a guest.

**Fluid**

as melting Ice.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Courteous and fluid*

*May our compassion manifest as consideration,  
and our thoughts, words and deeds  
flow unencumbered  
by preconception, agenda, or self-will.*

**Shapeable**

as a block of wood.

**Receptive**

as a valley.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Shapeable and receptive*

*How do we embody more of yin's  
shape-ability and receptiveness?  
By courageously letting-go of yang's  
agenda, self-will and preconceptions.*

*How sad it is that the **foolish**  
often denigrate the wise  
who fearlessly strive to embody these attributes of:  
vulnerable, acquiescent, non-conceptual, centered spontaneity.*

*Thus the foolish blind **themselves**  
to the laudable example of the wise.*



**Clear**  
as a glass of water.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Becoming clear*

*How do we become  
clear as a glass of water?*

*Through the passive and non-conceptual process  
of meditation of awareness and acquiescence.  
Let's read on...*

**Do you have the patience  
to wait  
until your mud settles  
and the water is clear?**

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*The patience to wait*

*“But I can’t stop thinking!”*

*is the lament of most new meditators.*

*But it is NOT our job to stop our thoughts.*

*What then is our job?*

*Merely to passively, acquiescently and non-conceptually **notice**  
our circumstance, body, communication and mind  
in harmony with each inhalation*

*and **relax***

*in harmony with each exhalation...*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*“But I can’t concentrate  
upon each distraction!”  
is a common lament.*

*But concentration is rigid  
and is of yang’s path.*

*So, as we traverse yin’s path of the Tao,  
let us practice a soft, gentle, passive, vulnerable  
and non-conceptual mindfulness.*

Can you **remain**  
unmoving  
until the right action  
arises by itself?

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Remain unmoving*

*It is not our job  
to solve every problem  
or “make it happen,”  
for that is the way of yang.*

*By cultivating centeredness,  
spontaneous: realization, utterance and action  
could take care  
of everything else.*

The sage  
does NOT seek  
fulfillment.



Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Not seek fulfillment*

*For seeking is grasping,  
and as such  
a manifestation of greed's craving.*

*Why is it that grasping  
could NOT lead to fulfillment?  
Because grasping and fulfillment are mutually exclusive.*

**NOT** seeking,  
**NOT** expecting,

she is present,  
and can welcome  
**ALL** things.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Not seeking*

*Not leaning forward in greed,  
not leaning back in revulsion  
she is vulnerability, passively and non-conceptually centered  
upon yin's path,*

*and as such her patience and compassion  
could manifest spontaneously  
toward all: things, beings and phenomena.*

*Tao Te Ching*  
*chapter Sixteen*

Empty your mind  
of all thoughts.  
Let your heart  
be at **peace**.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Mind and heart*

*Could there be a connection  
between the mind's thoughts and the heart's peace?  
Is thought suppression the answer?  
No, not even a little bit.*

*For suppressing a thought  
is like a mouse striving to escape a cat's hungry jaws  
by fleeing into a mouse hole,*

*the safety might seem profound,  
but peril is as close  
as the cat awaiting the mouse's exit,  
for it could not remain in there forever.*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*If suppression is not the answer  
then what is?  
Exhaustion.*

*Imagine a child's burst of energy  
after eating far too much sugar.  
Put the tyke in a bouncy house,  
and watch him or her harmlessly let off steam.*

*Likewise, with the right meditation  
even the thoughts of greatest: greed, terror, rage or despair  
could harmlessly exhaust themselves,  
leaving naught but enhanced  
mindfulness, insight and compassion in their wake.*

Watch  
the turmoil  
of beings...

but contemplate  
their return.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Their return*

*Their return to what?*

*Read on!*



Each separate being  
in the universe  
returns  
to the common source.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*The common source*

*What is this common source*

*to which each returns?*

*The habitual, circuitous yielding  
that is the epitome of yin's path.*

*It lends itself to cooperation and compassion  
for the limbic system of each mammal's triune brain  
evolved to be empathetic.*

Returning  
to the source  
is **serenity**.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Returning is serenity*

*Many fear the habit  
of circuitous yielding  
but in the experience of the author of the Tao Te Ching  
it is crucial to serenity.*

If you do **NOT** realize  
the source,

you stumble  
in confusion  
and sorrow.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Stumble in confusion and sorrow*

*Although some fear  
this habitual, circuitous yielding  
could lead to confusion and sorrow,*

*Lao Tzu – the Sage assures us  
that ironically this habitual, circuitous yielding  
could be our only hope  
of escaping those torments of confusion and sorrow.*

When you realize  
where you come from,  
you naturally become  
tolerant, disinterested, amused...

kindhearted  
as a grandmother,  
dignified  
as a king.



Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Where you come from*

*We come from  
circuitous, vulnerable, non-conceptual,  
yielding, habitual, centered spontaneity.*

*When we shed scatteredness and contrivance,  
like a soiled garment,  
we fill with compassion  
and are treated with respect.*

Immersed  
in the **wonder** of the Tao,  
you can deal  
with whatever life brings you...

and when death comes,  
you are ready.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Immersed in wonder*

*Children are prone to wonder,  
whereas adults can tend toward cynicism and anxiety.  
What could be the remedy for this?  
Yin's path of the Tao.*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*And when death comes you are ready*

*We spend most of our lives in denial  
of the inevitability of the end  
of our relatively brief, vulnerable, impermanent lives.*

*On the occasion when we face  
the specter of our mortality,  
we tend to ease our anxiety  
with hopes of postponing it*

*through exercise, sound nutrition,  
the latest advances in medicine,  
tactical defense*

*or an appeal to a real or imagined celestial being,  
be they solitary or numerous;  
for a happy, non-corporeal eternity.*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Despite our beliefs, strategies or denial,  
the impermanence of our physical bodies is a certitude  
and the persistence of our minds,  
in the absence of our brain is unlikely*

*for as neuro-scientists consistently observe  
the expression of mind seems to be directly related  
to the wholeness and function of our brain,  
who's tissues are eventually doomed to die.*

*We, however are not limited  
to either denial or desperation;  
there exists the third option of acquiescence.*

*For the Tao Te Ching teaches us  
to grow comfortable with uncertainty  
through the regular practice and habituation of  
vulnerable, yielding, non-conceptual, centered spontaneity.*

*Tao Te Ching*  
*chapter Seventeen*

When the sage  
governs...

the people  
are hardly aware  
that he exists.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Hardly aware that he exists*

*A master of yin's path,  
is NOT an authoritarian figure,  
vainly seeking glory  
through overbearing policies.*

Next best  
is a leader  
who is loved.

*Who is loved*

*A sage does NOT seek  
love, praise or popularity.*



Next,  
one  
who is feared.

*Who is feared*

*A sage of the path: yin does NOT  
bully, coerce or manipulate.*

The worst  
is one  
who is despised.

*Who is despised*

*A sage of the Tao  
is NOT cruel, ruthless or greedy.*

If you do **NOT**  
trust the people,  
**you** make them  
**untrustworthy**.

*If you do not trust*

*The fool who will NOT give  
the benefit of the doubt  
feels surrounded  
by the incompetent and malicious.*

The sage  
does NOT talk,  
he acts.

*Does NOT talk*

*The sage's enthusiasm leans  
NOT towards self-promotion,  
BUT towards the benefit of all.*

When his work  
is done  
the people say:

*“Amazing:  
we did it,  
all by ourselves!”*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*All by ourselves*

*The path of yang could appeal to the greedy  
seeking the adoration of the masses,  
whereas the path of yin is traversed by the peaceful  
who are spontaneously led to benefit all beings.*

*We could observe how the former's emphasis  
is upon his or her self,  
whereas the latter's focus  
is upon others.*

*Tao Te Ching*  
*chapter Eighteen*

When the great Tao  
is forgotten,  
goodness and piety  
appear.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Goodness and piety*

*In the absence of the circuitous yielding  
of centered spontaneity,  
the scattered contrivances leading to the superficial veneers of  
goodness and piety could appear.*



When the **body's**  
intelligence  
declines...

cleverness  
and knowledge  
step forth.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Cleverness and knowledge*

*The cleverness and mere data that could torrent  
from one being imprisoned in the narrow confines  
of one's own head*

*could be poor substitutes  
for the visceral intuition of intelligent wisdom  
that could flow from centered spontaneity.*

When  
there is NO peace  
in the family...

filial piety  
begins.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Filial piety*

*The contrived veneer of filial piety  
could be a poor substitute*

*for the family peace  
that could naturally flow  
from the simplicity of centered spontaneity.*

When the county  
falls into chaos,  
patriotism  
is born.

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)

*Patriotism*

*The superficial veneer of contrived patriotism  
could be a poor solution  
to the chaos that manifests*

*in the absence of the three treasures  
of simplicity, patience and compassion.*

Commentary – to Volume 3 (chapters 13 - 18)