



### THE HSIAO T'ZU KAO EMPRESS MA

*The Empress Ma (A.D. 1332-1382) and her husband, Emperor T'ai Tsu, were the founders of the Ming Dynasty. Their phenomenal rise from paupers to founders of a great empire has no parallel in Chinese history. The times were unique in that the rise of the Ming Dynasty restored Chinese rule after a century of Mongol domination. The Emperor T'ai Tsu had an intimate understanding of the needs of the common people and concentrated more power than any other monarch in Chinese history. He led the way to the restoration of Chinese culture and set about rebuilding China's bridges, temples, gardens, and walled cities.*

*The Empress Ma had the reputation of a devoted wife and confidant to her husband. She was considered wise, kind, and just; and perhaps in reaction to her background as a commoner, she refused to have any official titles awarded to her relatives, except for the title of prince for her late father. Her concerns were for those around her, and she constantly sought to moderate the Emperor's passionate temper. When the Emperor asked her last wishes on her deathbed, she is said to have replied: "That Your Majesty would strive for what is good, accept reproof, and be as careful at the end as at the beginning."*

## THE APPROPRIATE PERSPECTIVE

If the people do not fear authority,  
Then authority will expand.  
Do not disrespect their position;  
Do not reject their lives.  
Since, indeed, they are not rejected,  
They do not reject.

Therefore Evolved Individuals know themselves  
But do not display themselves.  
They love themselves  
But do not treasure themselves.

Hence they discard one and receive the other.

---

Evolved Leaders are encouraged, in this passage, to minimize the distance between their sense of their own position and the position of those whom they lead. In this way the psychological needs of the people are better understood, and the decisions of leaders are more aligned with those needs. Lao Tzu believed that the less people fear or focus upon the embodiment of authority, the more effective authority becomes. In order to develop and preserve this appropriate attitude, leaders should closely identify with those whom they lead. When they do not exhibit and enhance their higher position, they will discover self-knowledge. Moreover, by discarding any sense of self-importance they may have, they will find self-love and inner peace.



不自見。自愛。不自貴。故去彼取此。  
夫唯不厭。是以不厭。是以聖人自知。  
民不畏威。則大威至。無狎其所居。無厭其所生。



## NATURE

*Nature (天) is depicted by the character for heaven. The human form standing (人) with its arms outstretched (大) is defining its place in the universe. Above and superior to the human form (一) is the greater force of the cosmos, which refines and controls the rhythms of life.*

## NATURE'S WAY

Those bold in daring will die;  
 Those bold in not daring will survive.  
 Of these two, either may benefit or harm.

Nature decides which is evil,  
 But who can know why?  
 Even Evolved Individuals regard this as difficult.

The Tao in Nature  
 Does not contend,  
 Yet skillfully triumphs.  
 Does not speak,  
 Yet skillfully responds.  
 Does not summon,  
 And yet attracts.  
 Does not hasten,  
 Yet skillfully designs.

Nature's network is vast, so vast.  
 Its mesh is coarse, yet nothing slips through.

---

In the Taoist view, the way of nature is considered the ideal in behavior; it is a pattern to be followed in order to place an individual on the path of least resistance, in step with the Tao. In this passage, nature is described as an infinite network — a unified field of physical laws — that influences all actions, all thoughts, and all natural phenomena. Nothing escapes the laws of nature, and nothing escapes nature's notice and reaction. The Tao in Nature is intelligent and powerful. It achieves its plan without effort, and it responds to potentially unbalancing extremes with precision and accuracy.

不言而善應。不召而自來。禪然而善謀。天網恢恢。疏而不失。  
 天之所惡。孰知其故？是以聖人猶難之。天之道。不爭而善勝。  
 勇於敢則殺。勇於不敢則活。此兩者或利或害。



LAO TZU RIDING AN OX

## UNNATURAL AUTHORITY

When people do not fear death,  
How can they be threatened with death?  
Suppose people fear death and still do not conform.  
Who would dare seize them and put them to death?

There is always the Master Executioner who kills.  
To substitute for the Master Executioner in killing  
Is like substituting for the Master Carpenter who carves.  
Whoever substitutes for the Master Carpenter in carving,  
Rarely escapes injury to his hands.

---

Lao Tzu believed that people are inherently good-hearted, and that to maintain this state they require personal freedom, intellectual independence, and, most important, a life that is free of interference from above. When the organizational structures in which people live and work become oppressive, then people will no longer fear death as they reach for freedom.

The images of the Master Executioner and the Master Carpenter in this passage refer to the laws in nature that override all temporary social systems. In the Taoist view, to kill a human being — within the law or outside of it — is an unnatural act that ultimately tears apart the fabric of society. Lao Tzu's analogy in this passage, however, encompasses the damage that leaders will suffer when they exercise authority that does not reside either in themselves or in the organization. Any laws, restrictions, or punishments that inhibit the natural growth and independent development of the human mind will destroy both the organization and its leaders.



是謂代大匠斲。夫代大匠斲者。希有不傷其手矣。  
吾得執而殺之孰敢？常有司殺者殺。夫代司殺者殺。  
民不畏死。奈何以死懼之？若使民常畏死而爲奇者。