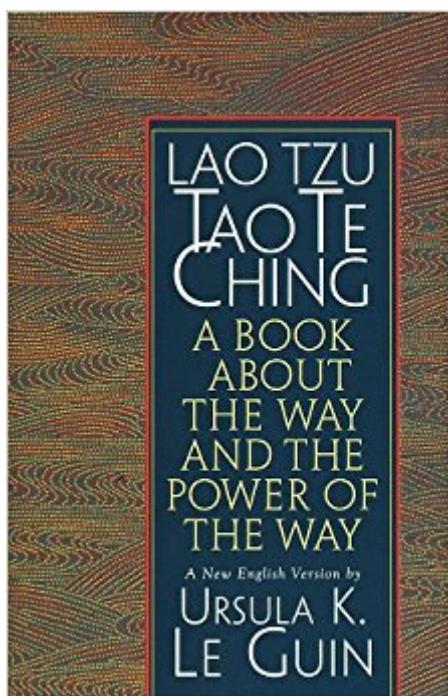


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Lao Tzu : Tao Te Ching : A Book About The Way And The Power Of The Way



Synopsis

No other English translation of this greatest of the Chinese classics can match Ursula Le Guin's striking new version. Le Guin, best known for thought-provoking science fiction novels that have helped to transform the genre, has studied the Tao Te Ching for more than forty years. She has consulted the literal translations and worked with Chinese scholars to develop a version that lets the ancient text speak in a fresh way to modern people, while remaining faithful to the poetic beauty of the work. Avoiding scholarly interpretations and esoteric Taoist insights, she has revealed the Tao Te Ching's immediate relevance and power, its depth and refreshing humor, in a way that shows better than ever before why it has been so much loved for more than 2,500 years. Included are Le Guin's own personal commentary and notes on the text. This new version is sure to be welcomed by the many readers of the Tao Te Ching as well as those coming to the text for the first time.

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Customer Reviews

Like Stephen Mitchell, acclaimed author and poet Ursula K. Le Guin has attempted a nonliteral, poetic rendition of the Tao Te Ching. She brings to it a punctuated grace that can only have been hammered out during long trials of wordsmithing. The wisdom that she finds in the Tao Te Ching is primal, and her spare, undulating phrases speak volumes. By making the text her own, Le Guin avoids such questions as "Is it accurate?" By making it her own, she has made it for us--a new, uncarved block from which we are free to sculpt our own meaning. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Reading [Le Guin's] translations is like taking a shared walk down a familiar trail where we discover rocks and water that we somehow missed before. . . . undeniably refreshing, capturing a language that is casual and clear, reflective and pointed, full of the wise humor of the Way."⁴ "Parabola" "A student of the Tao for several decades, Le Guin has created an English text that will speak to modern readers in a fresh and lively way, while conveying the humor, insight and beauty of the original."⁵ "Shambhala Sun" Ursula K. Le Guin's translation of the Tao Te Ching is a personal and poetic meditation. Through her own careful study of these ancient teachings, she brings the Way into contemporary life. Each day, I open this book at random and receive a contemplative gift. These words are akin to water in the desert."⁶ Terry Tempest Williams, author of Refuge "Among the many translations of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching, Ursula K. Le Guin's new version is a special treasure."⁷ "a delight. There is something startlingly fresh and creatively alive here, brought forth by Ms. Le Guin's intuitive and personal ingenuity. Her rendering has moved me to return to the original Chinese text with rejuvenated fervor, rejoicing in the ineffable sageness that lies in and between Lao Tzu's lines."⁸ Chuangliang Al Huang, founder of the Living Tao Foundation, coauthor (with Alan Watts) of Tao: The Watercourse Way

I am now reading, concurrently, chapter by chapter, three versions of the Tao Te Ching: Feng/English's, Stephen Mitchell's, and Ursula Le Guin's, which is my hands down favorite. I've owned the Gia-fu Feng/Jane English version for many years and I still love its clear and concise language, it's simple and direct style. Stephen Mitchell's version, in my side by side comparison, is seen to be a more interpretative rendition based on his own understanding of Lao Tzu's meaning. Rather than stay with Lao Tzu's imagery and metaphor, he packages it all up into a kind of exposition of the meaning he derives from those images. This approach may appeal to those wishing for a more conceptual understanding of this great work, but for me, it diminishes so much of the subtlety and a deeper intuitive conveyance of meaning that is only possibly through poetry. This is where Le Guin's version outshines and makes a quantum leap beyond the other two. She retains all the imagery, nuance and flavor of the poetry while capturing a feeling of playfulness and spontaneity. But beyond even that, I find that her ability to hold the paradox and enigma of Lao Tzu's mystical realization allows for a deeper, more inspired reading than the other two. To illustrate what I mean, please bear with me as I compare one stanza. This is Stanza 30 in the three versions: Mitchell: Whoever relies on the Tao in governing mendoesn't try to force issues or defeat enemies by force of arms. For every force there is a counterforce. Violence even well

intentioned, always rebounds upon oneself. The Master does his job and then stops. He understands that the universe is forever out of control, and that trying to dominate events goes against the current of the Tao. Because he believes in himself, he doesn't try to convince others. Because he is content with himself, he doesn't need others' approval. Because he accepts himself, the whole world accepts him. Feng/English: Whenever you advise a ruler in the way of Tao, Counsel him not to use force to conquer the universe. For this would only cause resistance. Thorn bushes spring up wherever the army has passed. Lean years follow in the wake of a great war. Just do what needs to be done. Never take advantage of power. Achieve results, but never glory in them. Achieve results, but never boast. Achieve results, but never be proud. Achieve results, because this is the natural way. Achieve results, but not through violence. Force is followed by loss of strength. This is not the way of Tao. That which goes against the Tao comes to an early end. Le Guin: A Taoist wouldn't advise a ruler to use force of arms for conquest; that tactic backfires. Where the army marched grow thorns and thistles. After the war come the bad harvests. Good leaders prosper, that's all, not presuming on victory. They prosper without boasting, or domineering, or arrogance, prosper because they can't help it, prosper without violence. Things flourish then perish. Not the Way. What's not the Way soon ends. Le Guin adds a note at the end of this stanza. She says, "The last verse is enigmatic: 'Things flourish then perish.' How can this supremely natural sequence not be the Way?" She then directs the reader to another note under a later stanza where she picks up on Lao Tzu's use of a "baby" metaphor to describe how one following the Way acts in the world. She writes: "What is eternal is forever young, never grows old. But we are not eternal. It is in this sense that I understand how the natural, inevitable cycle of youth, growth, mature vigor, age, and decay can be "not the Way." The Way is more than the cycle of any individual life. We rise, flourish, fail. The Way never fails. We are waves. It is the sea." So, rather than change the actual words to make the meaning more intelligible to our conceptual understanding, as in Feng/English, or simply avoid the whole issue by presenting a loose rendition that doesn't follow the original so closely, as in Mitchell, Le Guin presents the enigma as it is and then ponders and digs deeper to try to grasp what Lao Tzu was truly saying. She goes beyond a facile, generic understanding and comes up with something exquisitely profound. The Way isn't about how we're supposed to act in the world. It isn't about us as individuals at all. The Way is beyond all the flourishings and perishings of the temporal world of form. To live in the Way is to live rooted in the timeless, unchanging essence of our Being which simply is, always. Feng/English's and Mitchell's versions don't come close to penetrating into this realization. This is an example of why I consider Le Guin's version to be superior to the others. One minor quibble: Le Guin tells us that the Chinese word "Te" is usually translated as Virtue. She translates it as Power

throughout the book because she feels that the word Virtue in contemporary usage has lost its previous sense of "inherent quality and strength of a thing or person." I myself still prefer Virtue, maybe because I'm old fashioned and still think of Virtue in the old way, like the way Plato used it. Another word choice that I believe would convey the same meaning would be the "All-Good." That has both a feeling of Power and Virtue in it. As I said, it's a minor quibble.

Excellent translation by Ursula LeGuin, one of my favorite science fiction authors. I read a chapter(1 to 2 pages) every day, and get more and more from this book. I have given copies to loved ones.

Good to see this out again with the CD. I have the original with the cassette, but I don't have a cassette player anymore :) Ms. Le Guin's version of the Tao Te Ching is quite simple and too the point. She gets to the meaning without doing a straight translation/transliteration. Her notes are charming.

I loved this book and took my time reading it. Coming to it from time to time and let it speak to me. I hope it speaks to you as well.

He wrote this a long, long time ago in a world seemingly far, far away. The force? Maybe, but definitely a way to balance body, mind, and spirit. Very useful.

I have read various translations over the years and this is definitely one of my favorite. Ursula does a great job of capturing some of the original poetry and symmetry. This came with the book on CD as well and I love hearing Ursula read it. A very nice version of one of the great books of wisdom.

Stunning as is anything associated with Ursula K. Leslie Guinand a book to delve into as often as possible.

Deep thinking that shines a light on your soul and day to living.

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