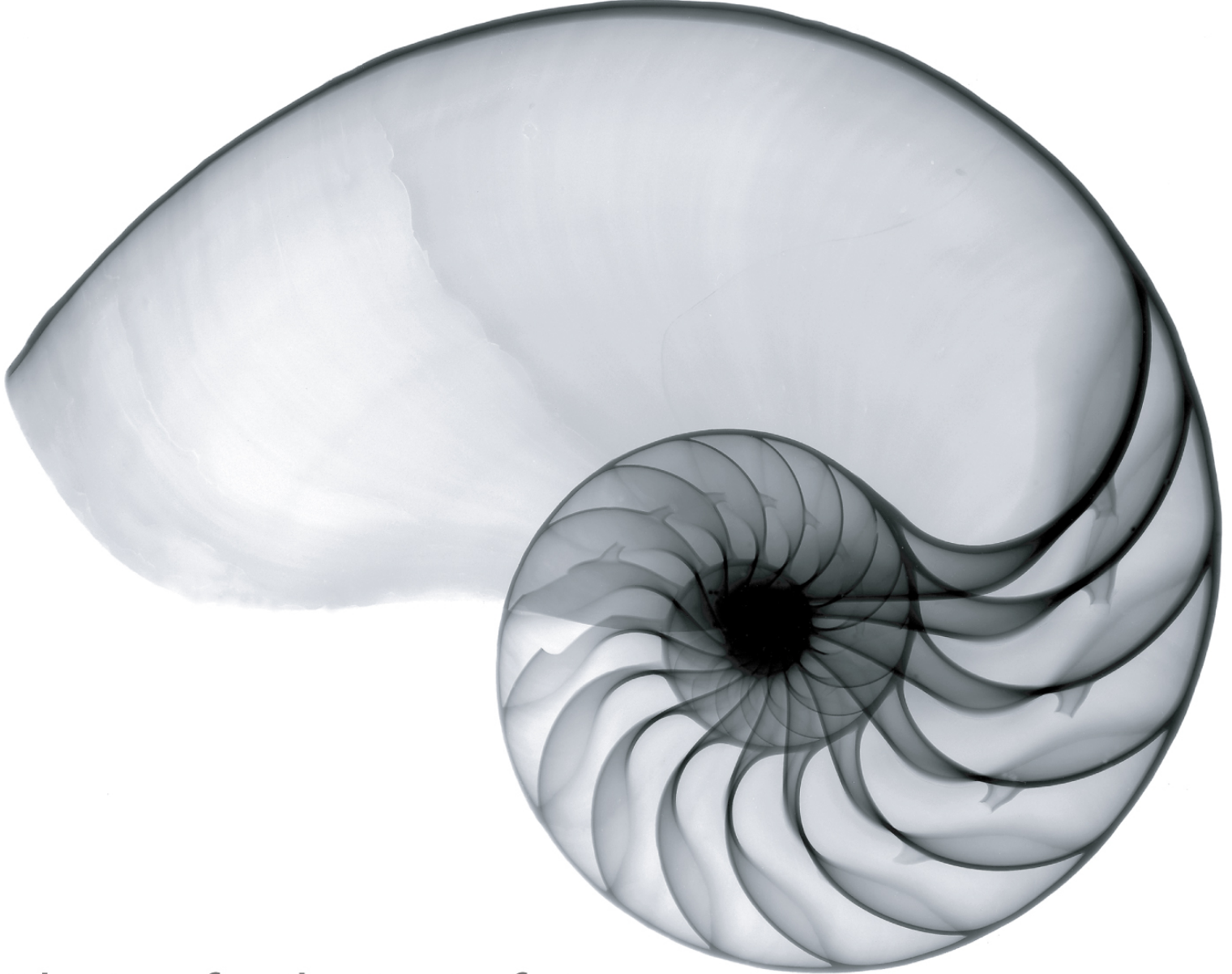


Everyday Tao Te Ching

A Renegade's Practical Guide to Happiness Today



The Tao for the Rest of Us

Pat O'Bryan

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The Tao for The Rest of Us

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You are enjoying an excerpt from Pat O’Bryan’s *Everyday Tao te Ching*. The complete book includes a full introduction, plus each of the 81 chapters of the original *Tao te Ching* rewritten for the 21st century accompanied by a beautiful full-page photo.

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Foreword

Most interpretations and translations of the Tao are either written in archaic language or are very direct translations from the original Chinese. And, since the Tao was written for kings and princes, most versions mirror the original high-brow intent.

Reading these ‘modern’ translations I find my mind retranslating them into today’s casual English. I conduct mental gymnastics to adapt cautions for kings into something I can use. Here. Today. And it’s distracting and tiring.

So I started rewriting the Tao—for myself. Why?

The Tao works!

That’s why.

I’ve been studying the Tao, off and on, since 1975. And, for the better part of 40 years, I keep coming back to the Tao because, when I remember to use it, my life is better. I’m happier. It’s easier to stay in the moment.

As I mentioned, I originally began writing this for myself. I wanted a simple and straight-forward version of the Tao. I wanted it to sound like somebody talking directly to me. I wanted a version I could read and understand without wearing my brain out.

That’s not to say that reading the Tao is a mindless exercise. It’s important to reflect and consider the world within us and around us as we read. But, hopefully, when you read this version, you won’t have to do mental back-flips.

Chapter Zero

In *The Tao of Zen* Ray Grigg says “Zen is Taoism dressed up as Buddhism.” If you turn that sideways, then “Taoism is Zen stripped of Buddhism.”

The collision happened a long time ago, but here’s the story.

Bodhidharma was an Indian Buddhist monk who lived during the 5th–6th century CE. He is traditionally credited as the transmitter of *Chán* (Sanskrit: *Dhyāna*, Japanese: Zen) to China, and regarded as its first Chinese patriarch.

When he left India, he was carrying a fairly traditional brand of Buddhism. When he got to China, he encountered the (well established) philosophy of Taoism. As the “new” Buddhism collided with the “old” Taoism, a new philosophy was formed. We know it as Zen.

Time passed. People are what people are. Over time, Taoism and Buddhism acquired the trappings of religion: ghosts, gods, fables, and rituals.

Luckily, we can peer through the mists of time to the origins of Taoism.

In typical Taoist fashion, the father of Tao philosophy either was or wasn’t a gentleman named Lao Tsu. Lao Tsu means “old fellow.” And he lived in the 6th century BCE or the 5th century BCE. Or maybe the 4th. Here’s how Wikipedia puts it:

According to Chinese traditions, Lao Tsu lived in the 6th century BCE. Some historians contend that he actually lived in the 5th–4th century BCE, concurrent with the Hundred Schools of Thought and Warring States Period, while some others argue that Laozi is a synthesis of multiple historical figures or that he is a mythical figure.

It doesn’t matter. At this distance, it all looks the same. We’ll call the person (or persons) who wrote the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tsu.

And leave history to the historians.

The important thing is the book. Without the *Tao Te Ching*, and subsequent works based on it, we wouldn’t have this amazing and powerful philosophy. Zen Buddhism wouldn’t exist. And, Buddhism would probably not have penetrated so deeply into Western thought—if it appeared at all outside India.

Alan Watts, D.T. Suzuki, Allan Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac—the early beacons of Buddhism in the West—found

their way to Buddhism through Zen. And, without Taoism, there would have been no Zen.

So, what is this amazing philosophy?

The *Tao Te Ching* is divided into 81 chapters. There is no apparent order to the chapters, except that the first chapter had to come first.

In studying the Tao, I've noticed that the teachings can be categorized into eight lessons. Eight lessons is absolutely arbitrary, but by dividing the Tao into categories, patterns emerge from the apparently random chapters.

1. Tao, the Watercourse Way
2. Just Do Your Work and Move On
3. Enough is Enough
4. Wu wei—Most of the time nothing is the right thing to do. Let it Be.
5. Contrast—No right or wrong. Just different sides of the same thing.
6. What Is
7. Skillful Means
8. The Power of Nothing

Tao for the Rest of Us is the Tao in 8 categories. These are the categories I came up with. I encourage you to make your own distinctions, create your own categories and come to your own conclusions.

Your understanding of the Tao will depend greatly on what you bring to it.

I think it's a mistake to just read the Tao, nod wisely, and then put the book away. Dig in. Read a chapter and then restate it in your own words. Think about how the lesson in that chapter can be applied to your life.

I encourage you to read and compare other versions of the Tao. I assembled several versions and some companion texts at www.EveryDayTaoTeChing.com. Compare them side by side and come to your own conclusions.

The reason the Tao has lasted so long is because it is so practical. It works. It's not dependent on faith. You don't have to pretend to see things. If you "get" the lessons and apply them, your life really will be better. You'll be happier, and more successful—however you define success.

And, let me assure you, some of the earlier Tao practitioners would describe success in ways that have nothing to do with "dressing for," or material possessions. Once you understand the Tao, your definition of success will probably change, too.

There really are no rules. The Tao offers practical guidelines, but it's up to you to apply them to your life. You can't get it wrong as long as you do it.

Why I wrote this book.

In 1975, I was wandering around the auditorium at what was then North Texas State University with a copy of the course catalog and my registration forms. A music major, I had registered for all the music courses I was qualified to take, but needed one more elective.

As I wandered from table to table, as confused as a college sophomore from East Texas could be, I was literally grabbed by the shoulders by a longish-haired young man who turned out to be the Oriental Philosophy professor.

He offered me a C or better, guaranteed, if I would sign up for his senior-level Oriental Philosophy class. This was a deal that was too good to pass up. I needed 3 credits towards my degree. He needed butts in seats so he could get paid.

Growing up behind the pine curtain of East Texas, I didn't hear the word Philosophy. Anything resembling religion that didn't involve the King James Bible was a ticket to Hell.

I knew, instinctively, that that was probably wrong, but I'd never been exposed to any alternatives.

In that class, I was introduced to Lao Tsu, Chuang Tsu, and the Western writers who brought Tao, Zen and Buddhist teachings to the West. I felt like I was home. While I'm still learning how to apply the Tao to my life, the times I succeed are the times I'm happiest.

Now, almost forty years later, I've studied the Tao. I've read several dozen translations and treatments, and I'm amused but not surprised that they pretty much contradict each other.

So, I decided to write my own. The ones I'm specifically going to contradict are in the public domain. They were written a long time ago and were translated from the Chinese texts.

Although the translations are not consistent, the larger teachings are.

The original authors were writing for people who could read at the time: rulers, kings, advisors to rulers and kings, and assorted royalty. And early English-language translations continued to illuminate the path for a ruling class without much consideration for the rest of us.

This is a Tao for the rest of us. A Tao dressed in old blue jeans and t-shirt. It's not about how to rule others, or what others should be doing. It's about how to use this amazing information to be happy.

Everyday Tao Te Ching



There is a path.

You're on it.

Even when it feels like you're lost, you're still on the path.

Recognize and embrace your path.

Others will try to tell you what path to follow—they're wrong.

Nobody can point you to your path.

You can't tell anybody else where their path is.

You're always on the path, but you'll know you're on the path when you live fully in the world as it is. Try to live in the world "as it should be" and you'll feel lost.



Wise people have followed the Tao forever.

They walk carefully, like on thin ice.

They're alert, as if they sense danger.

They're as courteous as a good guest.

Imagine the answer you're seeking is written at the bottom of a stream—can you wait until the mud settles to read it?

Can you sit still until the right answer appears?

Wise people don't seek enlightenment because they know you don't seek what you already have.



The Tao causes things to happen as they should without using force. The Tao accomplishes all by flowing. If it's hard and requires force, you're doing it wrong.

When you're with the Tao, you don't need force.

Leaders tend to make things worse because they think they need to do stuff.

If they only knew how simple it could be, the world would be a better place.



The Tao: compassion, moderation, humility.

Be brave with compassion.

Live moderately, so that others may live.

Lead with humility.

With compassion, bravery becomes wisdom.

With moderation, you will have the means to give to others.

People willingly follow a humble leader.

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A skillful orator can tell beautiful lies.

A plain speaker can tell the ugly truth.

The wise person separates content from delivery.

The wise man doesn't need to persuade you. The persuaders are not wise.

The wise man does not accumulate surplus wealth just to have it. He gains so he can help others, which, in the long run, makes him richer.

Do your work and move on—don't wait to be praised.

The Tao nourishes by not forcing.

The Tao wins by not competing.

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My thanks to the photographers who make their work available in the public domain. And a special thanks to Dr. Bert Myers for allowing me to use his incredible x-ray image of the Nautilus. Be sure to see his other work at bmyersphoto.com.

(The full version of Everyday Tao te Ching includes 81 photographs paired to each of the 81 Tao chapters.)

Afterword

For more about Everyday Tao Te Ching and a comparative analysis of some of the versions used in the preparation of this volume visit www.EveryDayTaoTeChing.com.

There you will find thought-provoking articles, analyses, comparisons and musings on the application of Tao in every day life. Join the community and share your own.

About the Author

Pat O’Bryan is a best-selling author, artist, and musician and an award-winning songwriter.

He lives with his wife-like girlfriend Betsy and their eccentric cat Ming in an off-the-grid cabin in the Chihuahua Desert of west Texas.

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About Everyday Tao Te Ching

Originally written some 2,500 years ago Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching endures as a powerful and relevant guide—for kings, princes, and captains—yet modern translations remain difficult to read.

In Everyday Tao Te Ching, Texas artist and musician Pat O'Bryan updates the Tao for the twenty-first century. Shedding high-brow language and archaic cautions, Pat offers a Tao Te Ching that would be comfortable in blue jeans and a t-shirt.

Simple, yet thought-provoking, chapters paired with powerful photographs create an imminently accessible Everyday Tao Te Ching—the Tao for the rest of us.



Author photo: Betsy Blaydes

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