

# The Tao of Trust -- *From the Ancient Chinese Perspective*

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Edited by Robert Porter Lynch

## Trust According to Ancient Chinese Wisdom<sup>1</sup>

In the Ancient Chinese tradition, three writers addressed the issue of trust and its importance in maintaining a healthy society. Lao Tzu wrote the *Tao Te Ching*, a short but insightful book on the inner way of being. In the Western world we would think of this as the "Way of Nature," or the "Path of the Holy Spirit." Many of his insights were developed further by Sun Tzu and Confucius.

### ***The Three Treasures*** (from Lao Tzu ~500 BC)

The nobility of great wisdom is in its utter simplicity and humility.  
That is the way of the Holy Spirit of Nature....

There are three cherished treasures to hold and protect;

The first is *Compassion*,  
By which one finds *Courage*.  
When a man cares he is unafraid.

The second is *Fairness*,  
By which one maintains a *Reserve of Energy* to reach widely.  
When he is fair he leaves enough for others.

And the third is *Humility*,  
By which one finds *Influence* to assume leadership.  
When he is humble he can grow....

Those who are fearless  
while discarding compassion,  
Seek extravagance  
while discarding fairness,  
Lust for glory  
while discarding humility,  
Cannot endure --  
Living in fatal tension and conflict!

The compassionate warrior will be the winner,  
and if compassion is your defense you will be secure.  
Compassion is the protector of Heaven's salvation.  
(excerpts from Verse #67)

### ***The Three Calamities*** (from Lao Tzu)

There is no calamity greater than greed;  
No misery greater than a malcontent;  
No fault greater than selfishness.  
(excerpts from Verse #36)

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<sup>1</sup> \*Author's Note: I consulted 26 different translation versions Lao Tzu to reconcile what often were awkward, divergent, or inconsistent phrasing when trying to modernize the language of a very ancient Oriental text

***Great Leaders*** (from Lao Tzu – ~500 BC)

The best competitor wants his competition  
To be at their best,  
But does not make competition his goal.  
This is how to win the cooperation of others.

So it is said: he shines who rules  
By uniting with his people,  
By placing cooperation ahead of competition.

All embody the virtue of non-aggression.  
Not that they don't love to compete,  
But they do so in the spirit of play,  
Aligning the energy of people  
To be in tune with the harmony of others.

This is the ultimate principle of the ancients.  
(excerpts from Verse #68)

***Virtues of Humility and Innocence -- Holding of Opposites*** (from Lao Tzu ~500 BC)

Know the ideal of the light,  
While holding the reality of the dark.  
Be the guiding light  
By harbouring the highest standard of excellence;  
Being the highest standard,  
You become one  
With the primal source of the Holy Spirit of Nature.

Know the glories of greatness,  
While holding the humility of the poor,  
Be the valley of the world  
Through which all waters flow;  
Being the flowing water,  
You become the compassionate fountain for others.

The eternal virtue does not depart;  
The greater whole is undivided,  
Returning to the eternal state of  
Simple innocence and child-like boundlessness.  
(excerpts from Verse #28)

## ***Empowerment and Trust*** (from Lao Tzu ~500 BC)

The greatest leaders empower others, acting subtly.  
Thus people do not know the real source of their power....

If the leader's trustworthiness is lacking,  
His people will become untrustworthy.  
If he has no faith in his people,  
His people become unfaithful to him....  
When he has accomplished his task,  
the people say, "Amazing: We did it, all by ourselves!"  
(excerpts from Verse #17)

Lao Tzu also some very insightful advice about competition and warfare. The great Chinese Taoist school of thought that included the classical strategist, Sun Tzu, author of the *Art of War* more than two millennia ago. Sun Tzu was actually a practitioner of the earlier master, Lao Tzu.

## ***Competitive Strategy*** (Lao Tzu ~500 BC)

....be flexible in moving ahead without advancing;  
Not charging in frontal attacks;  
Pushing back without using force;  
Decimating the enemy without engaging him.  
It is worth more to yield to gain better position  
than to triumph and lose all.  
In this manner one may deploy troops without marshalling them;  
Bring weapons to bear without exposing them;  
And exhaust the opponents strength without fighting them;  
Defend without hatred.

Prepare for action where there is no conflict;  
Advance against the enemy where the enemy is not.  
Look a man straight in the face and make no move;  
Open your hand and show no bared blades.

There is no greater disaster than to underestimate one's enemy.  
As long as there be a foe, value him, respect him, measure him, be humble toward him;

A leader becomes blinded when he severs connection  
to the Three Treasured Principles:  
– Compassion, Fairness, and Humility.

Arrogant haughtiness thus renders him unable to see the skills and cunning of his  
opponent,  
Endangering the very existence of what might remain of the three treasures,  
As he now must do battle with two enemies, one within and one outside.

When evenly matched forces oppose each other,  
The side that holds the three treasures shall win.  
(excerpts from Verse #69)

### ***Act without Contrivance***

If you overly esteem talented individuals,  
People will become overly competitive.  
If you overvalue possessions,  
People will begin to steal.  
The Master leads by emptying people's minds of valueless desires,  
And weakening their self-serving ambitions,  
While strengthening their commitment to work together;  
Preferring simplicity and freedom from desires,  
Avoiding the pitfalls of erroneous knowledge and wrong action.  
Not by doing it himself,  
But by delegating and empowering others to act wisely,  
By letting the people have no cunning and no greed,  
So that those who dare to scheme will not dare to meddle.

Act without contrivance,  
And nothing will be beyond control  
(excerpted from #3)

### ***The Masterful Teacher***

The caring traveler leaves nothing to despoil the land.  
The wise speaker does not find fault and endless blame.  
The accurate accountant leaves no working to be completed;  
The perfect container needs no lock to remain closed;  
The elegant knot leaves no end to become entangled.

Thus the Master is willing to elevate everyone,  
And doesn't know the meaning of rejecting anyone.  
She is there to help all of creation, so that no one is forsaken.  
She doesn't abandon even the smallest creature,  
Nor overlook the slightest detail,  
Nor reject the paradox and contradiction.  
She is always there to see to things exactly so that nothing is lost.  
This is called the insight of following and embracing Nature's inner light.

For the wise, who understand the good, must guide the weak;  
Never turning away those who seek.  
The wise use the bad as raw material for learning;  
And so the imperfect is the tool of the perfect man.

Those who neither value the sage,  
Nor care for her lesson are greatly deluded,  
Though they may think of themselves as learned.  
If the sage does not honor and respect those who wish to learn,  
Confusion will result; You will become deluded no matter how smart you are.  
This is the essence of wonder and the secret of prime importance.

(from #23)

***From Confucius***

Confucius was also quite clear about the role of trust:

People never recognize a leader who has no trust.

Unless you make a contract based on mutual trust and social justice,  
it will never be carried out smoothly.

When asked what his politics were, Confucius replied:

It is to provide people food, protect people with armaments, and gain trust from people.

When asked further “Which should we abandon first if our country is forced to  
abandon food, weapons, or trust?” Confucius stated:

Abandon weapons first, then food.  
But never abandon trust.  
Trust is more important than life.  
More people can be born,  
but trust is never regained.