

The Great Way



*The mountain is the mountain
And the Way is the same as of old.
Verily what is changed Is my own heart.*

— Anonymous

The Way spoken of by the world's great teachers is not one single path, yet all paths lead to the same destination. Traveled by the pilgrim, the Way is the path to Life. It is the quest for our own personal holy grail. The Way stretches out before us, endless. It leads beyond the horizon, yet it begins with a single step.

Once the Way is chosen, there is no turning back. We may stop and rest awhile. We may tarry here and there for as long as necessary. We may even fall asleep by the side of the road. But we will eventually awaken no matter how long we sleep. Then, recognizing that the day's shadows are falling long across the path, we stir ourselves, cinch up our belts, and continue forward.

If we do not know where the Way begins there are those who can show us. If we become lost, there are those who can give us directions. If we need company, there are those who will be our traveling companions. But they can walk with us just so far. Eventually they must part, bidding us good journey, knowing that the path we travel is a path we must take alone.

The *New Testament* book, *Acts of the Apostles*, tells us that sometime after the death of Jesus, his friends and disciples formed a community in Jerusalem. The name of this community, *Acts* tells us, was called "the Way." This gathering of the Way was not

a Christian community, however, because Christianity had yet to be invented. Rather, the Way was the religion of Jesus, not the later religion about him.

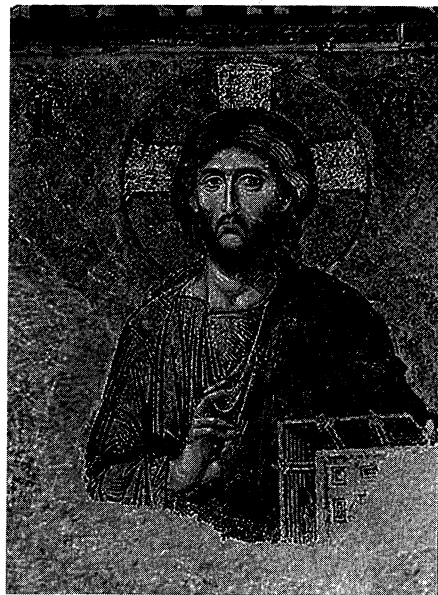
Acts of the Apostles tells us that Saul of Tarsus, later to become Paul, the apostle of Christ, initially persecuted the Way: ". . . if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." (*Acts* 9:2). Later, the author of *Acts* has Paul say, "I persecuted the Way to death." (*Acts* 22:4).

Acts leads us to believe that Paul—once he renounced his old ways and began preaching his unique gospel of the Christ—became the friend and co-worker of the leaders of the Way in Jerusalem: James, the brother of Jesus, Simon Peter, and John. But the author of *Acts*—written

around the end of the first century—was trying to rehabilitate Paul's reputation as an adversary of these men.

In the letter to his church in Galacia, Paul wrote that, three years after his "conversion," he went to Jerusalem, hoping to work hand in hand with James, Peter, and John.

But in the end, the differences between Paul and the leaders of the Way turned out to be irreconcilable. Paul finally opposed these men openly, and after he verbally attacked Peter in Antioch, the followers of the Way went one direction, and Paul's Christianity went another (*Galatians* 1:11–2:14).



Nevertheless, *Acts* insists that Paul himself taught "the Way" (*Acts* 19:9; 19:23). He even insists that Paul was a Nazarene like Jesus (*Acts* 24:5) and then states that the sect of the Nazarenes and the sect of "the Way" were one and the same (*Acts* 24:14).

Finally, the author of *Acts* mentions "the Way" one last time when he tells the story of Paul's trial for heresy. Antonius Felix, procurator of Judea, under whom Paul was being tried on this occasion, was himself said to have "accurate knowledge of the Way" (*Acts* 24:21), and apparently Paul didn't measure up.

While "the Way," as a designation for Jesus' particular wisdom tradition, appears in *Acts of the Apostles* seven times, these references alone are not sufficient evidence that Jesus' disciples were actually known by this name—since the name appears nowhere else in the *New Testament*. Yet Jesus *did* use the term when describing the difficulty of the spiritual path:

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to Life. And those who find it are few.

—*Matthew* 7:13; *Luke* 13:24

Hsin Hsin Ming, the Third Chinese Patriarch of Zen, blended Taoism with Buddhism, and his commentary on the Great Way offers a different perspective:

The Way is not difficult for those who have no preferences. When love and hate are both absent, everything becomes clear and undisguised. Make the slightest distinction, however, and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart. If you wish to see the truth, then hold no opinions for or against anything. To set up what you like against what you dislike is the disease of the mind.

This is a true statement, but there's a catch. Who among us has no preferences? Who does not discriminate? Who does not hold opinions? It takes a lifetime of spiritual work to develop the dispassion that Hsin Hsin Ming speaks of, and only a small



minority of people in every age will do so. So the Zen Patriarch's statement is full of irony. He is telling us how life could be—how easy the spiritual path would be—if we no longer made distinctions between things. Jesus and Hsin Hsin Ming are saying the same thing in different ways.

For Lao Tzu and Taoism, the Way includes the meaning of "spiritual path," but implies a great deal more. Tao, the Way, is the *flow* of life. It is the "way of things." It is the force that moves in all things, permeates all things, governs all things. The Way cannot be manipulated, nor can it be resisted. It cannot even be known.

Tao will do what Tao does. As little people in the vast scheme of things, we succeed in life only when we let Tao flow through us, and around us, freely. Conversely, we make a good deal of trouble for ourselves every time we attempt to resist the ways of Tao. Can we make the wind stop blowing?

Lao Tzu tells us that we can only be happy, and the things we do can only be successful, if we *yield* to Tao—surrender to the way things are. Rather than a great tree resisting the wind,

and sometimes breaking, we should become like bamboo, yielding and supple. Then the wind will flow through unhindered, and bamboo will not break. Happiness in life is the result of accepting everything just the way it is. Serenity is achieved when one no longer wishes for "something else."

The principle of the Great Way applies to the individual, but it also applies to nations. Lao Tzu tells us that any nation that resists change will eventually doom itself. Any ruler who does not govern the people according to the principles of the Way will ruin both the nation and himself. Today we say, "Go with the flow." If we want inner peace and outer harmony in society, we have to learn not to push the river.

To live in the Way, we must get out of the way. We cannot grasp the Way, so we must accept it with humility. And the more we simplify our lives—the more we bring it in alignment with Tao—the richer our lives will be.

The Buddha agreed: "If you seek to embrace the Way through the path of learning, the Way will not be understood. If you observe the Way with simplicity of heart, great indeed is the Way." Krishna says this also: "Both lust and aversion to the things of nature arise from man's lower nature. Do not come under their powers. These are enemies of the Way."

Lao Tzu often refers to Tao as the "Way of heaven." Jesus called Tao the Kingdom of heaven, or the Kingdom of God. Later orthodox Christians misunderstood Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom and believed that it was some sort of perfected world that would be ushered in at the end of time. Jesus, however, taught that the Kingdom was already here—here, there, everywhere. To recognize the Way, the Kingdom, one needs to develop eyes that see. And if we do, we will discover that the Kingdom, the Way of heaven, is not only everywhere around us, it is within us as well.

The Kingdom of God is within you and all around you, yet you do not see it.

The Gospel of Thomas; parallels: Luke, Mary, Dialogue of the Savior

Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you.

The Gospel According to Matthew; parallels: Luke, Thomas

Judas asked Jesus, "How do we find the Way?" Jesus answered, "By developing love and compassion."

Dialogue of the Savior

The Kingdom is not coming in any way that you can observe. The Kingdom of God is already here—within you.

The Gospel According to Luke; parallels: Thomas, Mary

Why should there be a reservoir when there is a flood everywhere?

The Upanishads

Listen to the Way which is called the eternal.

The Upanishads

Those who find the Way are those who have love and forgiveness in their hearts.

The Bhagavad Gita

Those who seek to find the One without ceasing, will find the Lord dwelling in their own hearts.

The Bhagavad Gita

The Way holds all things within Itself. Like the vastness of the universe, it lacks nothing, and nothing needs to be added to it.

The Third Chinese Patriarch of Zen

Listen carefully and faithfully to the Way—for it is mighty.

The Sutra of Forty-two Sections

No one can understand the Way unless they have pure hearts.

The Dhammapada

Before you set foot on the path, master yourself.

The Dhammapada

The Way is complete in itself. All blessings come from it, and it holds nothing back from anyone.

The Tao Te Ching

In bygone days men of wisdom honored the Way by declaring that it could be found by all who seek it.

The Tao Te Ching

The perfect man is one whose sins are forgiven. He becomes one with the Way.

The Tao Te Ching

The Way is empty, the Way is full. There is no way to describe what it is. Find it within yourselves.

The Tao Te Ching

The Way you have found is not known even to the angels. It proceeds from the One.

Follow it.

Dialogue of the Savior

When I came among humanity I opened the door to the Way. I showed you the path that you must follow. You will find it within yourselves.

Dialogue of the Savior

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

The Gospel According to Matthew; parallel: Luke

I have revealed to you the most secret doctrine . . . those who are able to see it have seen the Light.

The Bhagavad Gita

The light that resides in the sun shines light on all beings. It enters the Earth as my Being, for I nourish all things.

The Bhagavad Gita

There are two paths that are eternal: the path of light and the path of darkness. One path leads to liberation, the other leads to sorrow.

The Bhagavad Gita

Words cannot describe what the Way is, but do not lose sight of it, for then it might be lost forever.

The Buddha

Those with a pure heart, and who seek the Way without ceasing, will find it. It is like cleaning glass until the dust is removed.

The Dhammapada

Once you have crossed the river, leave the raft behind. This is the Way I have taught you.

The Majjhima Nikaya Sutra

The secret of the Way waits for those who have overcome desire.

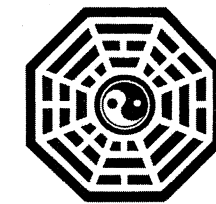
The Tao Te Ching

I seek to understand and walk the Way, so that I do not lose sight of it. The Way is not complex, nor is it hidden from anyone. People just choose to ignore it.

The Tao Te Ching

The Way is mighty, yet people prefer smaller paths.

The Tao Te Ching



Open the door to the Way that is within you,
so that you may be a guide to those
who wish to follow you. Encourage
all those who are ready to follow the
Way and receive its blessings.

The Second Apocalypse of James

The Kingdom is within you, and one
who knows himself will find it.

*Papyrus Oxyrhynchus; parallels: Thomas,
Luke, Mary, Dialogue of the Savior*

I am a beacon of light to those who see Me.
I am a mirror to those who look for Me.
I am a door to those who knock on
Me. I am a Way for you, the traveler.

The Hymn of Jesus from The Acts of John

God allowed man to look outward,
but in seeing the outer, the inner is ignored.
Those who see the eternal,
turn their gaze within.

The Katha Upanishad

When the mind becomes still,
when thinking ceases, this is
the beginning of the supreme path.

The Katha Upanishad

I am the Way for the traveler.
I am the Master who watches in silence.
I am your friend and your shelter.
I am the beginning and the
end of all things.
I am the seed of the Universe.
I am the supreme treasure.

The Bhagavad Gita

Seeking within, you will find stillness.
Here there is no more fear or
attachment—only joy.

The Dhammapada

It is good to practice the Way,
and to seek truth. Being in harmony
with the Way is even better.

The Kevaddha Sutra

Those are fortunate who have eyes
to see the great Way. They know that
there is no other path to purifying
the intellect. Seek this Way.

The Dhammapada

He who knows the Way does not let it
show. Neither does he seek to be rewarded
by anyone. Those who know the Way
find their reward within themselves.

The Tao Te Ching

Those who say they have found the
Way, have not. That which is eternal,
cannot be spoken of. It lies within.

The Tao Te Ching

When the wise man hears of the Way,
he tries hard to follow it. When the average
person hears of the Way, he tries to keep it,
but eventually loses it. When those who are
ignorant hear of the Way, they just laugh.
If people didn't laugh at it,
it wouldn't be the Way.

The Tao Te Ching

Follow Me and leave the dead
to bury the dead.

The Gospel According to Matthew; parallel: Luke

It is easier for a camel to pass through
the eye of a needle than for a rich man
to enter the Kingdom of heaven.

The Gospel According to Matthew; parallel: Luke

Hurry, now, to follow the Way, for it is
plain to seek but hard to walk upon.

The Epistula Apostolorum

True humanity is within you.
Seek and you will find it.

*The Gospel of Mary [Magdelene];
parallels: Thomas, Matthew, Luke*

Many are the paths of men, though all those
paths end in Me for those who love Me.

The Bhagavad Gita

The Way of the transcendent is
difficult for mortals to attain.

The Bhagavad Gita

Let those who are wise seek the Way.
Those who find it will not return.

The Bhagavad Gita

Follow the way of righteousness,
for it leads to the highest goal.

The Bhagavad Gita

Those who follow the Way are like
dry grass. They need to be protected
from the flames of desire.

The Sutra of Forty-two Sections

It is hard for those with power
and wealth to follow the Way.

The Kavaddha Sutra

To live according to the Way is not easy
or hard. But it is impossible for those
who are fearful and lack commitment.

The Third Chinese Patriarch of Zen

To follow the Way is goodness. To
conform to the Way is greatness.

The Sutra of Forty-two Sections

Act in harmony with the Way, and you will
become the Way. Nurture the Way within
yourself, and you will live a virtuous life.

The Tao Te Ching

The Way rewards those who embrace it.
Misfortune waits for those who abandon it.

The Tao Te Ching

If you seek the Way through learning, you
will not understand it. If you seek the Way
with a humble heart, then you will find it.

The Tao Te Ching

To have knowledge of the Way is good.
Conforming to the Way is best.

The Tao Te Ching

Value only those things in life which are eternal. Search for these things within yourself. Let everything you say come from the harmony that is within you. For I tell you, the living God is within you, and you are in Him.

Dialogue of the Savior

Do not seek deliverance because others persuade you. Let your motivation come from that which is already within you.

Dialogue of the Savior

When you perceive those things outside of you as the same as those things within you, and when you unify the male with the female within you, then you will enter the Kingdom of heaven.

The (Second) Apocalypse of James

Attachment and aversion to objects is natural. But do not let either have power over you. These states of mind are enemies of the Way.

The Bhagavad Gita

Following the Way is to be non-attached to worldly things. You will be in harmony with the Way when you no longer see the difference between sorrow and good fortune.

The Bhagavad Gita

Those who seek union with the Way, no longer live in delusion. Therefore, leave delusion behind and become one with the One.

The Bhagavad Gita

One who reinforces the ego by seeking fame, while ignoring the Way, is pursuing that which does not exist.

The Sutra of Forty-two Sections

The Way is perfect. The knowledge of One-ness brings serenity.

The Third Patriarch of Zen

It is impossible to follow the way if you believe in dualism.

The Sutra of Forty-two Sections

Seeking things of the world will result in disaster. The Way of heaven is to retire from the world.

The Tao Te Ching

The Way is empty; it cannot be filled up. It is like a vast lake that never becomes dry.

The Tao Te Ching

The Way can be compared to a raging river that rushes to the sea.

The Tao Te Ching

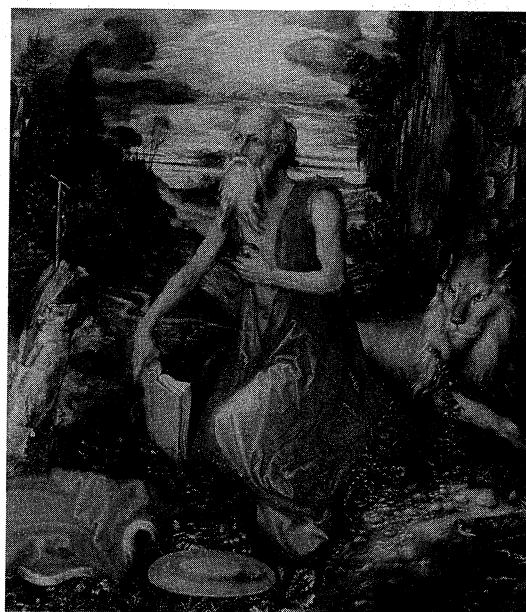


If you think the Kingdom of God is above you, then birds will find it first.

If you think it is in the ocean, then fish will discover it before you do.

Look . . . the Kingdom of God is within you and all around you.

The Gospel of Thomas; parallels: Matthew, Luke



The Way is not in the sky;
the Way is in the heart.

The Buddha

One can know the world without
ever leaving home. The Way can be
recognized without a window.

The Tao Te Ching

