



THE  
RECOVERY  
OF *love*

PAPER NINE

*Pathways: The Tao Te  
Ching and the I Ching*

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A Series of Discussion Papers by

DAVID CADMAN



We now come to two ancient, but utterly relevant teachings for our troubled time: The Tao and the I Ching.

I have several translations of The Tao and two of my favourites are the translation by Stephen Mitchell<sup>1</sup> and the one by Ursula K. Le Guin,<sup>2</sup> (who we have already met because of her novel *The Dispossessed* referred to in Paper 6). Others that I have enjoyed are those by Ellen M. Chen,<sup>3</sup> which is scholarly with lots of notes and comments, and, most recently, by Rosemarie Anderson,<sup>4</sup> which is special interest to me since she sets the Tao within the realm of the Divine Feminine.

In Mitchell's translation, the opening stanza of the Tao Te Ching, says:

The tao that can be told  
is not the eternal Tao.  
The name that can be named  
is not the eternal Name.<sup>5</sup>

And Ursula Le Guin's version is:

The way you can go  
isn't the real way.  
The name you can say  
isn't the real name.<sup>6</sup>

At once I am caught off guard, for my own Western culture insists on naming and knowing, on possessing and controlling. What can I do?

Well, I can listen and explore.

For me, The Tao is *the most wonderful* expression of wholeness and connection, of relationship, and it is a teaching that honours the darkness, which Ursula Le Guin calls the mystery and the hidden. Stephen Mitchell translates it as follows:

Yet mystery and manifestations  
arise from the same source.  
This source is called darkness.

Darkness within darkness.  
The gateway to all understanding.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast to the Christian, and indeed the Quaker, emphasis on The Light, darkness as the gateway to all understanding is exactly what I have found, and to find it expressed in this way is very reassuring. Rosemarie Anderson translates it as follows:

Dark beyond dark is  
The door to all subtleties.<sup>8</sup>

Dark beyond dark.

The Tao is thought to have been written down in China by Lao-Tzu some time in the last five hundred years BC. Nothing much is known about Lao-Tzu, but he was probably the archive-keeper of one of the small kingdoms of his time,<sup>9</sup> and he may have been an older contemporary of Confucius. Some regard the verses as a treatise on the art of government,<sup>10</sup> whilst others find it to be more of a philosophy of life. In any event, it offers a way of perceiving ourselves and our relationships with each other that is quite contrary to present Western culture. It is not, as is sometimes supposed, simply a treatise on not-doing, not at all, rather it is a teaching of doing in ways that are integrated and self-less, where “we can’t tell the dancer from the dance.”<sup>11</sup> There is a softness and a gentleness to the teachings, but also a strength and a firmness, and of all the great world religions the teaching of Lao-Tzu is “by far the most female.”<sup>12</sup> Here is Stephen Michell, who uses both the feminine and the masculine in his description of the Tao:

The Tao is called the Great Mother:  
empty yet inexhaustible,  
it gives birth to infinite worlds.<sup>13</sup>

And Rosemarie Anderson, who, in her early thirties, travelled to Asia and studied the etymology of Chinese characters, says this:

To my surprise, I discovered that the Tao was profoundly feminine! Never could I have predicted that because, in the

English translations I read, the Tao is commonly referred to as 'It' throughout the poems. How could so many translators, almost all men, not have noticed that the Tao is consistently referred to as 'mother', 'virgin', and 'womb of creation', all of which are clearly feminine and hardly gender neutral?... I could not possibly refer to the Tao as anything other than 'She'.<sup>14</sup>

And later, in a section titled 'The Divine Feminine Tao', she says:

The tenderness and hiddenness of the Tao signal Her Feminine nature...Not only is the Tao's nature uniquely feminine, but creation is described as a solo act rooted in the immortal void, the dark womb. Endlessly returning to source, all creation passes through her womb and then into the world.<sup>15</sup>

The book of the Tao is composed of eighty-one 'chapters', each of which is made up of a small number of short verses or stanzas, and the text presents verse after verse which challenge our present instrumental and controlling mode of being. It suggests a more receptive mode, a discipline perhaps, of surrender and attentiveness:

Therefore the Master  
acts without doing anything  
and teaches without saying anything.  
Things arise and she lets them come;  
things disappear and she lets them go.  
She has but doesn't possess,  
acts but does not expect.  
When her work is done, she forgets it.  
That is why it lasts forever.<sup>16</sup>

Leadership is said to require a care of those who are led, without the pomp of authority. It is service to others: "Do your work and then step back. The only path to serenity."<sup>17</sup> It offers virtues of simplicity and generosity

In dwelling, live close to the ground.  
In thinking, keep it simple.  
In conflict be fair and generous.  
In governing, don't try to control.  
In work, do what you enjoy.  
In family life, be completely present.<sup>18</sup>

Another feature of the text is the apparent paradox in which opposites are resolved into complementarities:

There is a time for being ahead,  
a time for being behind;  
a time for being in motion,  
a time for being at rest;  
a time for being vigorous,  
a time for being exhausted;  
a time for being safe,  
a time for being in danger.<sup>19</sup>

Or these:

If you want to shrink something,  
you must first let it expand.  
If you want to get rid of something,  
you must first allow it to flourish.  
If you want to take something,  
you must first allow it to be given.  
This is called the subtle perception  
of the way things are.

The soft overcomes the hard.  
The slow overcomes the fast.<sup>20</sup>

The Tao never does anything,  
yet through it everything is done.<sup>21</sup>

Yielding not dominating is the way of the Tao, it nourishes and

completes all things.<sup>23</sup> As Ursula Le Guin has it:

The Way is hidden  
in its namelessness.  
But only the Way  
begins, sustains, fulfils.<sup>24</sup>

And there is always integration: for when male and female combine, all things achieve harmony.<sup>25</sup> I note that these words are akin to the later gnostic teachings in the *Gospel of Thomas*, that “when you make the female into a single One so that the male is not the male and the female is not the female...then you will enter the Kingdom.”<sup>26</sup>

The Tao is the mother of all things:

The Tao gives birth to all beings,  
nourishes them, maintains them,  
cares for them, comforts them, protects them,  
takes them back to itself,  
creating without possessing,  
acting without expecting,  
guiding without interfering.  
That is why love of the Tao  
is the very nature of things.<sup>27</sup>

And is at ease:

The Tao is always at ease.  
It overcomes without competing,  
answers without speaking a word,  
arrives without being summoned,  
accomplishes without a plan.<sup>28</sup>

The Tao is full of compassion:

I have just three things to teach:  
simplicity, patience, compassion.<sup>29</sup>

In these ways, and of course in so much more, this ancient teaching directly challenges those things we have some to believe to be true, those things that have shaped our language and our ways of being: consumption and greed give way to simplicity; control and aggression give way to compassion; pace and competition give way to patience; opposites are resolved in their complementarity; the soft overcomes the hard.

And for the purpose of this book, moving on from what we have discovered in Paper 7, The Tao offers 'another language', a language of integration, connection and relationship. And as I read it, in its many versions, I begin to see that the Tao is Love. There is nothing that can be said about the Tao since the Tao is beyond words, and the same can be said of Love. In such a place, we come to Silence, resting there and watching Love flow through us. For me, Love is the energy of the Tao, or rather it is the movement of the Tao, from and to. Or.... But then we are caught once more in words.

So if now we are told that everything that is is interconnected and is part of a whole, our world, the universe, the cosmos, then the whole is the Tao and the fabric of the interconnection is Love, the weave, the flow of waters from a divine spring, running through streams and rivers back to the ocean of Oneness. From Oneness comes Twoness, the yin and yang that form the apparent opposition before the coming of Threeness, reconciliation through Love, and the arising of all that is:

Man follows the earth.  
Earth follows the universe.  
The universe follows the Tao.  
The Tao follows only itself.<sup>30</sup>

To which I would say:

And the following is Love,  
And that which follows is Love.

Only in Love can the Path of the Tao be discerned, be known,

and, as a wave, become manifest in the energy of life. Expressed in Nature. Look all around you. Listen to the Silence in the night, for it is from the Darkness that Light arises. And as soon as Love is named it has gone, back into the darkness from whence it came. Following on from Paper 2 in this series, and inspired by the Tao, I would say this:

Follow with love,  
but do not follow.  
Love is always waiting for you.  
There in the darkness.

Make some tea.  
Offer it to a friend,  
and set it down.  
Ask her:  
“Would you like cake?”

Everything is Love.  
And Love is nowhere to be seen.

The tide is rising and falling.  
The moon grows large and small.  
The sun arises from the East,  
and sets in the West.  
The breeze runs through the reed bed.

Love at work.



The I Ching or Book of Changes precedes The Tao, beginning as an oral shamanic teaching over four thousand years ago, when, we might note, magical powers were most commonly associated with women. The edition that I use is the one translated Richard Wilhelm and translated into English by C. F. Baynes. It was first

published in 1950, but my copy is a later edition that was published in 1997.<sup>31</sup> It has a Preface by Carl Jung.

The systemisation of the I Ching and its expression in a more masculine form began in the Golden Age of Fu Xi, perhaps two thousand years BC, and was completed later in the time of King Wen, of the Chou dynasty, about one thousand years BC, and then of his son, the Duke of Chou, as the older matriarchal world was being overcome by forms of patriarchy. At this time it was also interpreted and shaped by Confucius. During this expanse of time, the earlier oral teachings of the I Ching were systemised into a series of trigrams and hexagrams, based upon single and broken lines, the single line being yang (masculine, odd numbers) and the broken line being yin (feminine, even numbers). These formations were interpreted and used for guidance and divination. At the beginning, the system is based upon two hexagrams, one representing the masculine and the other the feminine. Note, at this point, that the reference to masculine and feminine is not to be taken as a gendered separation of male and female. These masculine and feminine qualities are found in all of us, men and women alike.

The masculine, or *yang*, qualities are referred to as Heaven and the feminine, or *yin*, qualities as Earth, the former being creative and the latter receptive. In integration, the creative *yang* falls down and into the receptive *yin*, and the *yin* rises up towards the *yang* – in all of us and in all that is.

Let's begin with a look at some of the hexagrams, which are constructed by the casting of three coins to decide whether the line is odd or even – heads for example might be a three and tails a two and the lines are combinations of the count of the casting of the coins.

The first hexagram of the I Ching is Ch'ien,<sup>32</sup> which is said to be The Creative. It is represented as six solid lines, one on top of the other, two trigrams, one above the other:



It is an expression of yang and represents the primal power, which is light-giving, active, strong and of the spirit. It is conceived as motion, both in the cosmos and in each one of us. In the coming together of the to trigrams, its image is heaven above and below.

The course of the Creative alters and shapes beings until each attains its true specific nature, then it keeps them in conformity with Great Harmony.<sup>33</sup>

In its qualities of 'sublime' and 'success' it is connected to Love:

To sublimity, which, as the fundamental principle, embraces all other attributes, it links love. To the attribute success are linked the mores, which regulate and organise the expression of love.<sup>34</sup>

And through 'furthering' and 'perseverance' it is connected to justice and wisdom.<sup>35</sup> This link between love, justice and wisdom is of great importance at a time when justice is so often separated from love and wisdom and expressed assertively as little more than a bundle of rights.

Because the first line (the bottom line) of the hexagram is a nine (cast as three heads in the casting of the coins), it is a change line, which means that after the first divination or guidance the Hexagram then has to be read again, this time with a broken line at the bottom.

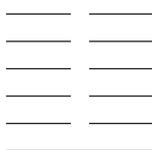


Now it is Kou, Coming to Meet,<sup>36</sup> which indicates that whilst the principle of darkness, the *yin*, has been eliminated, furtively and unexpectedly it begins to rise again from within and below.<sup>37</sup> As the number of broken yin lines of darkness increase in number from below, high summer of full light takes its first steps towards darkness, autumn and then winter.

When the hexagram is made of six broken lines and becomes the second hexagram,<sup>38</sup> K'un, and is called The Receptive:



Now, it represents the utter dark, yielding, receptive power of *yin*. It's image is the earth. However, the first line of K'un is again a change line, and so when it is reversed it becomes Fu.<sup>39</sup>



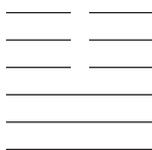
This hexagram is called The Turning Point, the time of utter darkness is past, and the light is returning. In December-January, the days lengthen as the light of *yang* begins to increase from the bottom of the hexagrams upwards.

Between these two, between high summer and the utter darkness of winter, or in the movement from the utter darkness to the full light, we have in-between times. In August-September, we have the upward movement of darkness, P'i,<sup>40</sup> which is said to be a time of standstill and decline. This time is judged to be Stagnation, a time when it is said that heaven and earth are out of communion.<sup>41</sup>



And then, in February-March, when the lightness is moving upwards and the darkness is declining, we have is T'ai,<sup>42</sup> a time

of peace. This is a time when the influences are said to be in harmony.<sup>43</sup>

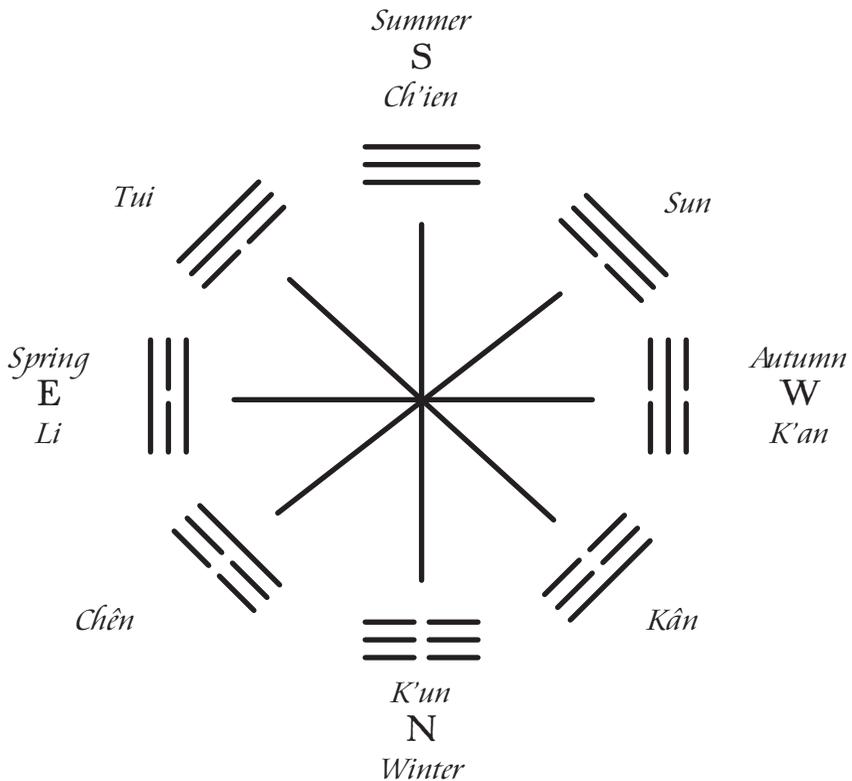


At first sight, it would seem that light is more propitious than darkness. For if this was not the case, why would Hexagram 12 be seemingly more harshly presented than Hexagram 11. But perhaps there is another reading. Consider the sequence in terms of the wheel of the year: Full light, the summer solstice (Hexagram 1), begins to give way to rising darkness (Hexagrams 44 and 33). At the autumn equinox (Hexagram 12) there is a momentary pause. But it is only momentary as the darkness continues to rise until, at mid-winter solstice (Hexagram 2) it has entirely received or taken in the weakening light. In this state, in this darkness and within the earth, the light rests, is healed and transformed so that as it rises (Hexagrams 24 and 19) and the new shoots begin to appear, snowdrops and crocus, until at the spring equinox (Hexagram 11) all is once more in balance, reinvigorated and full of the potential for its flourishing. Thus it proceeds with rising light (Hexagrams 34 and 43) until we come, again, to the summer solstice. From there, once more, it returns.

Last night, when I woke in the early hours of the morning, I realised that this movement of darkness and light is what brings life to the earth, through the incarnation of light, through the belly of the goddess. Without this, the creative light of heaven cannot be brought to life, is unable to be reborn.

But however this might be, we must see that, at all times, the feminine and masculine energies are moving, never static. As the Buddha said: coming to be coming to be, ceasing to be ceasing to be. The following diagram, taken from a lecture by Brenda Crowther for Ubiquity University in March 2021, shows the cycle of the year represented by the trigrams of the I Ching. It is interesting to see that, in this form, the North is at the bottom of the circle and South at the top, which, of course fits the Celtic

idea of Winter as being related to the darkness of the Earth and Summer to the light of the Sky. Within this, each cross and diagonal lines links a feminine and a masculine character in a sacred marriage.



And in the centre is the axis of the world, or the tree of life. This also relates to the Celtic notion of the Great Tree with its roots in the Earth and its branches reaching up into the Sky. In fact it is a picture of the prayer that appears in *Love and the Divine Feminine*:

In the East it is morning,  
The breath of life,  
Hear my prayer.

In the South comes noontide,  
The energy of Fire.  
Hear my prayer.

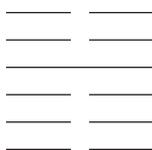
In the West it is evening,  
The waters of reflection.  
Hear my prayer.

In the North comes the darkness,  
The wisdom of the earth.  
Hear my prayer.

And in the centre is the Great Tree,  
Above and Below.

Divine Father,  
Divine Mother,  
Hear my Prayer,  
And let my cry come unto thee.<sup>44</sup>

By way of example, this interplay of the feminine and masculine is shown in the sixteenth hexagram, Yü, which is called Enthusiasm<sup>45</sup> or Delight.<sup>46</sup>



Here the feminine yin is held in the fourth line from the bottom by the masculine *yang*, which binds the feminine together, but is yet supported by the feminine. The upper trigram is thunder, and the lower the earth, so the energy of thunder arises from the midst of receptivity of the earth:

When, at the beginning of summer, thunder – electrical energy – comes rushing forth from the earth again, and the first thunderstorm refreshes nature, a prolonged state of tension is resolved. Joy and relief make themselves felt....The enthusiasm of the heart expresses itself involuntarily in a burst of song, in dance and rhythmic movement of the body. From immemorial times the inspiring effort of the invisible sound that moves all hearts, and draws them together, has mystified mankind.<sup>47</sup>

In this way the sky and the earth are connected in the lightning and the thunder, the predominant darkness of the feminine and of the earth uniting with a single charge of light, the masculine, and from this great energy, enthusiasm, erupts. This kind of mysterious and yet evident integration of the masculine and feminine energies, so difficult to describe in Western language, is expressed throughout the I Ching and challenges us to question all that we know about the apparent opposition of the feminine and the masculine. In a way, it releases us from the limitations of our language and offers us a myriad of possibilities for integration.



I was born from the darkness of my mother's belly into the darkness, of early December, as the dying light moved towards the winter solstice. And then, before I was one month old, the year had turned, as the darkness once more gave birth to the light. And perhaps this is why I have come to feel that darkness is misunderstood. In very many cultures and, especially in many religious teachings, darkness is described as a place we should move away from, a lower realm that we should transcend in order to reach the higher realm of light. It is even assumed to be associated with evil and, of course, with death. This is not how it is for me. In the Celtic tradition the day, or the month, or the year, always started in darkness – the evening gave rise to the following day, the dark phase of the moon to the new moon, the feast of Samhain,

on the first of November, began the year. We begin by entering the darkness, and the light always arises out of darkness. And, of course, it is in the darkness that healing and transformation take place. The seed falls into the earth as the light gives way to darkness, and in the darkness of the earth it is transformed into a shoot, which remains in the nurturing darkness ready to come forth as the light returns. It is not the light but the darkness that gives it birth.<sup>48</sup>

For me, the fascination of the I Ching lies not in its judgements and sayings, but its formation, in its concept of the relationship between the feminine and the masculine expressed as darkness and light, and in the ways in which these qualities are woven together in an ever-changing flow of pattern and rhythm. It is this that offers the possibility of imagining an ungendered discourse, a discourse in which gendered characteristics become ungendered qualities. The discourse of darkness and light and the link with the observable passages of the day and seasons of the year, provides a form of Language, a language of relationships, a language on integration. We may, because we sometimes need images, speak of a woman or a man, a goddess or a god, but the reality behind and beyond the image is ungendered.



In this third set of papers, which I have titled 'Pathways', we have continued to explore languages that take us beyond the narrow confines of patriarchy. I have deliberately chosen texts that speak of an integration of feminine and masculine qualities. We have heard of propositions that seek to replace dominance with partnership, we have explored the possibilities of a relational discourse and we have looked at what might be meant by principles of Harmony. Finally, we have looked at two great and ancient teachings, The Tao and the I Ching. There has been plenty here to encourage us to discover, to express and to put into practice another language which speaks of integration, compassion and Love.

To see what this might lead to in practice, we now need to look at some examples of the Work of Love.

# Endnotes

1. Lao-Tzu, *Tao Tè Ching: The Book of the Way*, translated by Stephen Mitchell, Kyle Cathie, 1988.
2. Lao-Tzu, *Tao Tè Ching: A Book About The Way and the Power of the Way*, translated by Ursula K. Le Guin, Shambala, 1998.
3. *The Tao Te Ching: A New Translation with Commentary*, translated by Ellen M. Chen, Paragon House, 1989.
4. *The Divine Feminine Tao Te Ching: A New Translation & Commentary*, translated by Rosemarie Anderson, Inner Traditions, 2021.
5. Op cit, Stephen Mitchell, Chapter 1.
6. Op cit, Ursula K. Le Guin, Chapter 1.
7. Op cit. Stephen Mitchell, Chapter 1.
8. Op cit, Rosemarie Anderson, Chapter 1.
9. Op cit, Stephen Mitchell, vii.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid. ix.
13. Ibid. Chapter 6.
14. Op cit, Rosemarie Anderson, 3.

15. Ibid. 11.
16. Op cit, Stephen Mitchell, Chapter 2.
17. Ibid. Chapter 9.
18. Ibid. Chapter 8.
19. Ibid. Chapter 29.
20. Ibid. Chapter 36.
21. Ibid. Chapter 37.
22. Ibid. Chapter 40.
23. Ibid. Chapter 41.
24. Op cit, Ursula K. Le Guin, Chapter 41.
25. Op cit, Stephen Mitchell, Chapter 42.
26. *The Gospel of Thomas*, translated by Jean-Yves Leloup and translated into English by Joseph Rowe, Inner Traditions, 1986, 19.
27. Op cit, Stephen Mitchell, Chapter 51.
28. Ibid. Chapter 73.
29. Ibid. Chapter 67.
30. Ibid. Chapter 25.

31. *The I Ching*, translated by Richard Wilhelm, translated into English by C. F. Baynes, Bollingen Series XIX, Third Edition 1967, twenty-seventh printing, 1997.
32. Hexagram 1.
33. Op cit, Richard Wilhelm and C. F Baynes, Eds, 5
34. Ibid. 6-7.
35. Ibid. 7.
36. Hexagram 44.
37. Op cit, Richard Wilhelm and C. F Baynes, Eds, 170.
38. Hexagram 2.
39. Hexagram 24.
40. Hexagram 12.
41. Op cit, Richard Wilhelm and C. F Baynes, Eds, 52.
42. Hexagram 11.
43. Op cit, Richard Wilhelm and C. F Baynes, Eds, 48.
44. David Cadman, *Love and the Divine Feminine*, Panacea Books, 2020, 91.
45. This teaching comes from a webinar given by Brenda Crowther for the Ubiquity University on 18th March 2021.

46. Alfred Huang, *Understanding the I Ching*, edited by Daniel Nesbitt, Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2014, 39.
47. Op cit Richard Wilhelm and C. F. Baynes, Eds, 68.
48. This story is told as the story of The King Who Lost His Memory in the Appendix of my book, *Love and the Divine Feminine*.