

## The Wisdom of Lao Tzu

### *Of Being and Doing*

Lao Tzu, a Chinese philosopher and reputed founder of Daoism was born somewhere between 490 and 570 BC. According to tradition, he is the author of the Daodejing (Tao-te Ching) (Classic of the Way and Its Virtue), a philosophical treatise. By far the most translated Chinese literary work; this small book has had an enormous influence on Chinese thought and culture. It also has had a significant impact on Western culture in recent years.

Servant-leadership starts with being; who we are and are called to be. It is further expressed in doing; how, with God's help and guidance, we might be co-creators of the world. Lao Tzu, in the Tao wrote extensively and paradoxically about being and doing.

From the Tao, I offer you the following verse on leadership emanating from a servant disposition.

(Translation by Victor Mair.)

Preeminent is one whose subjects barely know he exists;

The next is one to whom they feel close and praise;

The next is one whom they fear;

The lowest is one whom they despise.

When the ruler's trust is wanting,

there will be no trust in him.

Cautious,

he values his words.

When his work is completed and his affairs finished,

the common people say,

"We are like this by ourselves."

A couple of observations are warranted here. First, I cannot over emphasize the allure of living in the world of close feelings and praise. For leaders, the pursuit of praise is a real temptation. Second, more common translation of the last line is, "When his work is completed and his affairs finished, the common people say, "We did this by ourselves." Once again, in the translation of this ancient masterpiece we have the continuum of being and doing.