

The Tao

Hieromonk Damascene

The Valley and the Spirit do not die," said the Ancient Sage.

"They form what is called the Mystic Mother,
From whose gate comes the Origin of heaven and earth."
And "this gate shall be shut", said the Ancient Prophet.
"It shall not be opened, and no one shall pass through it;
For the Lord shall enter by it."

The Mind spoke, and through His Word
Answered the earth's elemental moan.
Above that roaring cry
He answered with a still, small voice:
I will come. Will you receive me, then?
But no man heard that voice.
Only a small young woman,
Who had lived, unknown, in silence and purity
in the Great Temple,
Was given to hear it.
And in a still, small voice She gave voice to the whole earth.
She answered for all those beings and created forms
who could not speak,
She answered for all the people who could not hear.

Hieromonk Damascene [Christensen] (1961-) is a priest-monk of the Russian Orthodox Church. The "Ancient Sage" in this selection is Lao Tzu, author of the Chinese sacred text the *Tao Te Ching*, the two references to the "Ancient Prophet" correspond respectively to the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel.

Simplicity

And to the question of the Uncreated Mind,
She answered: Yes, I will receive You.
Be it unto me according to Your Word.

In Her the Way had found the lowest place
in the entire earth—
The nadir of the Valley,
The supreme humility, lowliness—
And there He came and made His abode.
He took flesh of Her whom He loved above all others
who dwelled on the earth,
Who was meek and humble like Himself.
And lowering Himself, emptying Himself, in His love,
to the lowest place,
He became a tiny child within Her, the Mystic Mother.

Because of Her profound and intangible humility,
Her gate, opened by no man,
Through which no one had passed,
Became the gate from which came
the Origin of heaven and earth.
Because She had returned to the state of the uncarved
block, the pristine simplicity,
She became the “mountain unhewn by the hand of man”
Whom the Ancient Prophet had foretold.
And the Spirit, the Breath of Heaven,
Rested upon Her, the Valley of humility, as He had upon the
first-formed world.

“Water”, said the Ancient Sage, “greatly benefits all things
But does not compete with them.
It dwells in lowly places that all disdain,
and so it is like the Way.”
The Way came down and emptied Himself in a lowly cave:
Not amidst human dwellings,
but in the home of lowly animals.
Born on a lowly bed, dirty straw strewn on the ground.

Happy, prosperous people slept in soft beds in the nearby inn.

But while other infants wept that night, He was silent.
And the sheep bleated like rippling water.

All the way down
To where you no longer calculate and think,
And care not what others think.
All, all the way down
To where you have nothing to lose,
Nowhere to go, nowhere to hide.
This is the point of emptiness.

"Emptiness penetrates the impenetrable,"
said the Ancient Sage.
"The softest things in the world overcome the hardest.
Through this I know the benefit of acting without desire."

Acting without desire,
You will see a flash of the beauty you had forgotten
From when you were a little child.

A little child does not calculate.
Humble, he has not yet formed the desires
which break the original unity and harmony.
Soft and yielding like water, his mind is therefore boundless.
Spontaneous, he accepts without thought the Course
that all things follow.

Therefore the Ancient Sage, follower of the Way, said:
"One who possesses abundant virtue resembles an infant
child.
This is the consummation of harmony."
And the Way, when He took flesh, said:
"Whoever shall humble himself as this little child,
The same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Again the Ancient Sage said:

“Controlling the breath to make it gentle,
One can be as a little child.
Then, when desires arise,
One can put them to death with the Way:
The Way of nameless Simplicity.”

Descending with the mind into the secret place of the heart,
And gently checking the breath,
Followers of the Way now call upon the Name of Him
who had once been nameless.
And the Way, who took flesh,
Puts to death all the passions of their flesh—
All pride, ambition, rancor, and resentment—
Purifying their hearts,
Re-creating them in His image,
The image of a pure and innocent child,
The image of the nameless Simplicity.