Nagarjuna's Tree of Wisdom: A Translation

Dennis Waller, Nagarjuna

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The Tree of Wisdom is about the love you find and how you share it with others. It's about how you're going to spend your time, about the give-and-take, and how we treat each other. It's all about the friends you make. It's all about the choices you make. It's on the importance of forgiving and being forgiven. To live a life that is pure in faith and heart. To strive to stay on the path. To find the way of the masters that have gone before us. To recognize the path that they forge for us and the wisdom to see it.

All of our lives we have pretended and hidden our feelings from others. We have tried hard to believe that there is this distance between us. In this misperception, we thought we could find comfort in isolation. But this comfort is fleeting when the soul speaks up in a longing for something more meaningful. It's about how to stop pretending and start being true to yourself. It's about stopping to make excuses and taking responsibility for your actions.

All of our life has been a struggle in trying to be free but the reality is the life you have created has been all about you. This is because you have allowed your ego to rule over you. In this realization comes a sense of freedom, a release from your self-imposed prison. When you have the key, you can unlock the doors of this dungeon and step into the light of the divine love of the way. Once in the light, you'll see that we all are brothers and sisters, all part of something bigger than we can imagine. In this oneness, there is a liberation of knowing that life and death are only illusions. Yes, the *Tree of Wisdom* contains this timeless knowledge for those who quest for it, that have a thirst for the cool waters of the fountain of life.

The *Tree of Wisdom* by Nagarjuna is a treatise on morals and ethics written over 2,000 years ago. This commentary on moral living is very similar to other text such as the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu, the *Hsin Hsin Ming* by Seng Ts'an, the *Enchiridion* by Epictetus, and *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius. It's remarkable that this is only the second English translation of this ancient text from this incredible Indian philosopher. The first translation into English was done by W.L. Campbell in 1918. At the time of Campbell's translation, there was so already much lost to history in the allegories that the meaning couldn't be extrapolated for all the verses. This version has been interpreted into a more modern new age style yet it still possess the essence of the message that Nagarjuna implied. I prefer to use the word interpretation over the word translation as this is more of a rendering constructed to clarify the meaning in such a way that it is easy to grasp the concepts. However, there are a few verses that have been left in the original Campbell translation as their relevance hasn't changed.

The primary difference between the *Tree of Wisdom* and the *Tao Te Ching* is the *Tree of Wisdom* takes a more "matter of fact" practical approach to life where the *Tao Te Ching* is more spiritual and esoteric. Both texts have the same basic underlying principles, they are just different paths to the same goal. The text itself consists of 260 verses containing just over 8,000 words. In the tradition of Buddhism, there are a few verses that will leave you confused. This is natural as in the contemplation of the verse, the understanding will become clear. One major difference in this translation and Campbell's is the use of the word "way". Where the word "way" is used, it is to imply the way of the *Tao Te Ching*. This is to serve in helping give a clearer understanding the principles that the text is conveying. I encourage those who are not familiar with the *Tao Te Ching* to read it as the two texts complement each other.

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