

the little book of
eastern
wisdom

sufi

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tao

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zen

Priya Hemenway

The Little Book of Eastern Wisdom
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INTRODUCTION

The spiritual traditions of the East have fascinated Westerners for centuries and the wisdom that evolved in lands that are far away is as meaningful for us now as it has been for thousands of years. Eastern wisdom has grown out of the spiritual awakenings of men and women who devoted their lives to inner transformation and their words speak to the human need for inner peace.

The art that developed alongside the spiritual practices of the East is beautiful. Temples that reach into the sky have been the gathering places of the devout for centuries, lavishly illustrated manuscripts preserve ancient knowledge, and paintings on walls glorify the spirit of all those who have contributed to humankind's search to understand who and what we really are.

We all know that life is mysterious. We all search for answers. This has always been the case and always will be. This little book of Eastern wisdom tells the stories, and presents the truths that ancient seekers discovered. Beginning with Sufism in the Middle East and traveling via Taoism in China to Zen in Japan, it traces the development of three very different paths of wisdom, paths that evolved as men and women, seekers of truth, charted their experiences.

Each of these three traditions brings forth wisdom of a slightly different hue. Sufism, the most recent to evolve, was born out of Islam, a religion of devotion to a single God. Its wisdom lies within the human heart, and Sufis speak to us of the Beloved or Allah. The wisdom of the Sufis has two distinct voices—one speaking to us in poetry from love's great heights and the other speaking to us in parables and tales.

Tao, the ancient wisdom of China, found its clearest voice in Lao Tzu and his immortal *Tao Tè Ching*, a short work that is based in centuries-long observation of the ways of the natural world. Lao Tzu, and those who follow him, practice a wisdom that is based on the eternally creative laws of nature.

Zen, one of the many flowerings of Buddhism, began with Gautama Buddha in India and was carried by a succession of great sages to Japan. Speaking to us through the voices of humor and pristine clarity, Zen is a wisdom which points to the truths that are experienced in the here and now.

The common thread that underlies all three wisdoms is the desire to untangle the mysteries of the soul. Understanding that we have somehow fallen asleep to our true nature, mystics and sages of Sufism, Tao, and Zen talk of awakening,

