

Story of Lao Tse

Anecdote narrated by Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj



Story of Lao Tse

Lao Tse was one of the greatest of philosophers of China in the fifth or sixth century BC. His teachings are similar to the highest philosophy of Ashtavakra in India. The king of that place happened to hear from time to time some tit bits of his teachings from his disciples and found them all highly elevating. Several times he requested Lao Tse to put all his teachings in a book which would help the posterity for a long time. The philosopher was adamant in his refusal to put his teachings in any book. He told the king, "I am trying to put in words the indescribable and the inconceivable. Whatever I say could not express even anything nearer to the truth and hence I will call it all a lie. I would not like to perpetuate it by writing a book which would be the greatest of lies."

When the king failed to persuade him, he began to torture him in various subtle ways so that finally the philosopher decided to quit that kingdom and go to some other. He took a small bag of his possessions for getting out but when he came to a police post, the police officer who was himself his disciple barred his way out. He told him, "Sir, the king has instructed us to apprehend you and to prevent you from smuggling out the most precious items which belong to this kingdom." The philosopher in all his innocence replied, "Sir please check my bag, which is my only luggage. I am not smuggling anything out." The police officer replied, "Sir you are born and grew up in this kingdom and you have knowledge par excellence. You are trying to smuggle out such a precious knowledge which cannot be obtained anywhere. Please put all your teachings of wisdom into a book here and now and you can walk out anywhere as a free man."

Thus, Lao Tse was compelled to write a book of his teachings under compulsion and till today this gem of a book is something which is precious and rare.

**** Hari Om****

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