

Laozi and the Tiger

—adapted from a tale from Northern China

Laozi is a legendary Chinese teacher and philosopher. He is traditionally known as the author of the *Daodejing*, “The Classic of the Dao and of Virtue” (see also page 11). Laozi also appears in several stories that illustrate his wisdom, often demonstrated in unusual ways. As is written in the *Daodejing*, “Sometimes great wisdom seems foolish.”

The tiger was raiding the village’s farm animals. He would creep down from his cave in the mountains to steal a pig one day and then a sheep the next day. The tiger was big and fierce, and the villagers were afraid.

“We need the wisdom of our teacher Laozi,” the villagers decided. “He will know how to get rid of this terrible tiger.” When Laozi agreed to help them, the villagers cheered. “Laozi will kill the tiger and save us!”

“I said nothing about killing the tiger,” responded Laozi. “Now, I need one man to help me, and a small goat.” A man named Wang brought Laozi a little goat, and they went to the tiger’s cave. The tiger was gone. Laozi put the goat in the cave. Unaware of any danger, the little animal curled up and went to sleep.

Laozi and Wang hid themselves and waited. The tiger returned and saw the sleeping goat. The tiger looked at it for a while. Then, the tiger began to lick the little goat, just like a mother cat washing her kitten. The goat awoke, and the two animals began to play together, happily leaping and tumbling. Then they lay down together to sleep. Laozi and Wang quietly returned to the village.

The next day, a woman clutching her baby rushed into the village from the farm fields. “A huge snake tried to attack my baby!” she said. “But a strange creature chased it away. It was half man and half tiger!”

The day after, a stranger walked into the village. He was



holding the little goat. “The tiger that threatened you is gone,” he said. “I was that tiger. Once I understood how to give and receive happiness, I was transformed.” The villagers cheered, and Laozi smiled.