

When all under Heaven know beauty as beauty, ugliness already exists;

when all know good as good, not-good already exists.

Therefore, being and non-being give birth to each other,

difficult and easy complete each other,

long and short contrast with each other,

high and low incline toward each other,

sound and tone harmonize with each other,

front and back follow each other.

Thus, the sage manages affairs through non-action,

teaches without words,

lets the ten thousand things arise without rejecting them,

produces them without claiming ownership,

acts without depending on them,

and achieves success without taking credit.

Because he does not claim credit, his achievements never depart.

Interpretation:

When people universally recognize beauty, ugliness is created;

when people universally recognize goodness, what is not good appears.

Thus, opposites define and give rise to each other —

existence and non-existence, difficulty and ease, length and shortness, height and lowness, sound and tone, before and after.

The sage, therefore, does nothing yet governs all;

teaches without speaking;

allows all things to develop naturally without interference;

does not possess what he gives life to;

does not rely on what he accomplishes;

and when his work is done, he does not cling to it.

Because he does not cling, the fruits of his work remain.

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