

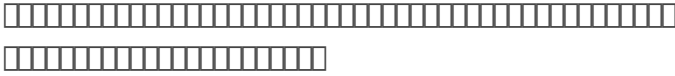
# Volume One (Chapters 1–37)

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# Chapter 1



## Translation

Dao that can be spoken is not the enduring Dao.  
A name that can be named is not the enduring name.  
The nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;  
the named is the mother of the myriad beings.  
In true emptiness, free of desire, one beholds its marvel;  
in wondrous existence, stirred by intention, one discerns its threshold.  
These two arise from the same source yet bear different names —  
both may be called mysterious.  
Mysterious, and again more deeply so:  
the gate from which all marvels issue.

## Word Notes

- 道 — "**Dao**": Dao means principle. It encompasses cosmic order and the ground of all reason.
- 可名 — "**can be spoken**": means it can be articulated in words.
- 恒 — "**constant**": means permanently abiding and indestructible.
- 名 — "**name**": means name-and-form — the conceptual image that a name designates.
- 可名 — "**can be named**": means it can be marked or designated.
- 妙 — "**marvel**": means numinous wonder.
- 阈 — "**threshold**": means the critical juncture — not "boundary" but a keyhole or pivot, the precise point where something works or opens.
- 玄 — "**mysterious**": means deep and far-reaching.

## Chapter Explanation

Any Dao that can be articulated in words is not the permanently abiding, indestructible Dao. Any name that can be marked or designated is not the permanently abiding, indestructible name. **The nameless** is the origin from which Heaven and Earth are born. **The named** is the mother from which the myriad beings are born. Therefore, being one with Dao — abiding in constant true emptiness, free of thought and intention — one observes the marvel of Dao. Dwelling in constant wondrous existence, with thought and intention, one observes the threshold of Dao. These two — true emptiness and wondrous existence — both emerge from the unspeakable Dao, yet they bear

different names. Both may be called deep and unfathomable. Deep and unfathomable, then yet more deeply unfathomable: this is the gateway from which all marvels issue.

## Discourse

This chapter teaches that Dao is the original source of Heaven and Earth and the myriad beings. De is the movement and turning of Dao. What Laozi speaks of as Dao and De proceeds from the standpoint of the pre-celestial void — numinously wondrous and beyond fathoming, without sound, without scent, impossible to seize or grasp. Confucius called him "like a dragon" — this was praise for his Dao and De. Like a dragon that now lurks, now leaps, now appears, now hides, whose transformations are impossible to predict, whose presence and absence cannot be known. His way of setting down words is likewise: if you cling to the post-celestial, to principles with form and substance, how can you ever glimpse so much as a single scale or claw of this dragon?

Yet though Laozi's words proceed from the standpoint of the pre-celestial void, they are at once supremely empty and supremely real, supremely without and supremely with. They possess substance and function, root and branch. This is not the kind of emptiness and nothingness that is useless.

Take this very chapter: it says that the true and enduring Dao cannot be spoken in words — "Dao" is merely a name provisionally and forcibly assigned. Since Dao cannot be spoken, neither can a name be forcibly imposed upon it. This is emptiness and nothingness, to be sure. Yet it is precisely because there is an unspeakable Dao that all speakable daos are born from it; precisely because there is an unnameable name that all nameable names are born from it. It is the origin of Heaven and Earth, the mother of the myriad beings. This is emptiness and nothingness that is not empty and nothing. Yet although it is not empty nothingness, the Dao from which Heaven, Earth, and the myriad beings are born can still neither be seen nor heard. It remains a having that does not have — having that returns to nothing. This is why these two — having and not-having — emerge from the same source yet bear different names, and both are mysterious beyond fathoming.

Human beings receive the full substance of Dao. Therefore one must embody Dao's naturalness. In true emptiness, observe the marvel of Dao. In wondrous existence, observe the threshold of Dao.

As for the words "threshold" and "marvel" — in later ages, alchemists interpreted them as "the Mysterious Pass, the single threshold." They claimed that once one's cultivation penetrates this single threshold, one can become an undying Golden Immortal. But such interpretations see only a single claw or scale; they do not know the dragon's full form. Bai Juyi once said: "Laozi does not speak of medicines. He does not speak of elixirs. He does not speak of ascending to the blue sky in broad daylight."

These two words — threshold and marvel — are certainly aspects of Dao's substance and function. But everything under Heaven — states, families, body, heart, nature, destiny, every single affair and every single thing — each without exception has its own threshold and its own marvel.

Consider this analogy: the spring of a lock is the threshold. When the key meets the threshold, the lock opens. The principle by which it opens — that is the marvel. If you do not understand the threshold and the marvel, you can break the lock apart and still not open it. But if you understand them, it is the easiest thing in the world.

Therefore, in this world of human affairs, the first thing is to understand the threshold and the marvel. Cultivate yourself without knowing them, and you will harm your own nature and destiny. Govern without knowing them, and you will ruin the state.

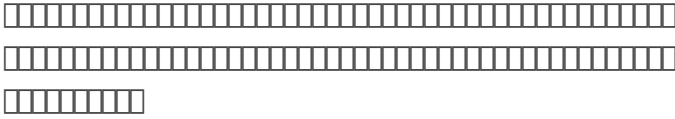
Scientists who build airships and steamships, flying through the skies and sailing the ocean depths — they succeed because they understand the threshold and the marvel of matter. Emperor Shun governed by nonaction and all under Heaven was ordered. Confucius served as minister for three months and the state of Lu was well governed. Both understood the threshold and the marvel of statecraft.

But while every affair and every thing has its own threshold and its own marvel, one need not seek to know them — they are known of themselves. The question is: what is the threshold and the marvel of Dao itself? At this very moment, the entire world is consumed by warfare and slaughter, in a state of utter devastation. People compete for power and seize profit with no regard for human decency. Where is the threshold that will save all under Heaven?

I, this young student, dare to cry out at the top of my voice and present to all my fellow countrymen across the world Laozi's secret for ending the slaughter. What is this marvel? It is the Dao of emptiness and nothingness. What is this threshold? It is De that cherishes life. Without these, selfish desire fills the breast and cruelty becomes habit — how could there not be warfare and slaughter?

Alas! These years of warfare and slaughter — the lives lost and ruined are no small number; the fortunes destroyed are no small sum. My fellow countrymen, my fellow countrymen — can we not awaken? Let all of us practice Laozi's Dao and De, turn back this tide of killing, and bring about the shared happiness of peace and well-being for all nations under Heaven.

# Chapter 2



Alternate editions read: 道 .

## Translation

When all under Heaven know beauty as beauty,  
ugliness has already arisen.

When all know goodness as goodness,  
what is not good has already arisen.

Therefore:

having and not-having give birth to each other,  
the difficult and the easy complete each other,  
the long and the short give shape to each other,  
the high and the low lean into each other,  
tone and voice harmonize with each other,  
before and after follow upon each other.

Thus the Sage dwells in the work of nonaction  
and practices the teaching without words.

The myriad beings arise, and he does not turn them away.

He gives them life yet does not possess them.

He acts yet does not presume upon it.

His merit is achieved, yet he does not dwell in it.

It is precisely because he does not dwell in it  
that it does not depart.

## Word Notes

- 美 — "**beauty**": means good, fine, beautiful.
- 丑 — "**ugliness**": means not good, bad.
- 善 — "**goodness**": means good, virtuous.
- 彰 — "**give shape to**": means to make visible by contrast.
- 倚 — "**lean into**": means to topple, to incline — suggesting that high and low define each other by their relative positions, each leaning toward the other.
- 和 — "**harmonize**": means to blend, to adjust into accord.

- □ — "**turn away**": means to push away, to decline.
- □ — "**presume upon**": means to depend on, to presume upon one's own ability.

## Chapter Explanation

When all under Heaven know that what is beautiful counts as beauty, many begin to feign beauty — and beauty ceases to be beauty. When all know that what is good counts as goodness, many begin to falsely profess goodness — and goodness ceases to be goodness. What is not good and not beautiful arises from within the good and the beautiful themselves. Therefore, **having and not-having** give birth to each other. **The difficult and the easy** complete each other. **The long and the short** give shape to each other by contrast. **The high and the low** lean into and define each other. **Tone and voice** blend with each other in harmony. **Before and after** follow one upon the other. For this reason the Sage **dwells in the work of nonaction** and **practices the teaching without words**. All the myriad beings arise, yet he does not turn them away; without seizing or choosing, he lets them follow their nature. He gives life to the myriad beings yet does not claim them as his own. He manages all affairs yet does not presume upon his ability. When great merit is achieved, he remains placid and at ease, never dwelling in it. It is precisely because he does not dwell in merit that his merit endures for ten thousand ages and cannot be taken away.

## Discourse

This chapter teaches that whenever named forms arise — these are beauty, these are goodness — they are also relative opposition. Where there is beauty, there is what is not beautiful; where there is goodness, there is what is not good. And what is not beautiful and not good is still born from beauty and goodness themselves. Therefore, post-celestial things with named forms are all insufficient to serve as the substance of Dao.

Yet although they are insufficient to serve as Dao's substance, to aim for the purely pre-celestial would also be without function or use. Without the post-celestial, the pre-celestial cannot be realized. The farthest reach of the post-celestial is itself the pre-celestial. Pre-celestial and post-celestial circulate in mutual alternation. Everything under Heaven that stands in relative opposition follows this same pattern. At the juncture where prior and subsequent cycle into each other, the threshold and the marvel emerge.

The Sage has observed this threshold and this marvel. He takes the pre-celestial as his foundation and employs the post-celestial, yet he is neither stained by nor attached to the post-celestial. Therefore, dwelling in the work of nonaction, he is naturally able to govern by composing himself. Practicing the teaching without words, he naturally achieves the effect Mencius described: "Wherever he passes, transformation follows; wherever he dwells, spirit abides." Although the myriad beings spring up in profusion, he follows their innate nature so that they naturally grow together without harming one another. Moreover, he gives life to the myriad beings yet does not regard it as De; he brings them to completion yet does not regard it as merit. He is utterly unconcerned and placid, for he considers the merit of giving life and completing things to be simply Dao's naturalness. Not only does harboring the thought of presuming upon De or dwelling in merit

negate that very merit, but even having the name or concept of merit and De already falls into post-celestial traces.

Yet even though the Sage acts this way, Dao's naturalness is such that if one dwells in merit, the merit vanishes; if one does not dwell in merit, it endures for ten thousand ages. Why is this so?

Consider this analogy: suppose a person has a sum of money. If he considers it public currency circulating for the common good of the world, not his private possession, and uses it for works of public benefit, that money will endure forever. All people of all ages will surely say, "This was left by such-and-such a great figure." But if he considers it his private possession and spends it on himself, the money is instantly gone.

All affairs in the universe follow this pattern.

Later people, failing to understand Laozi's true principle, turned around and said that Laozi's purity and nonaction obstruct human progress. Little do they realize that Laozi's nonaction is not the nonaction of a clay idol or wooden puppet that does absolutely nothing. It is nonaction that leaves nothing undone. One dwells in nonaction in order to employ action — only one does not become attached to action. For if one becomes attached to action, one can only perform small deeds, never great ones; one can act in one direction but not in ten thousand; and if one acts without ceasing, one will eventually be unable to act at all.

Why is this so? Consider: Western scholars place the highest value on rest. Everyone under Heaven sleeps. Rest and sleep are nonaction. Yet through rest one can restore vital spirits to full vigor and undertake every kind of enterprise. Is this not nonaction that leaves nothing undone? But if one acts without rest, within seven days one will certainly die. Is this not action that turns into nonaction — and indeed, absolute nonaction?

Consider another analogy: the electron in the expanse of space has no particular function. That is nonaction. Yet through the processes of mixing and combining, every single thing in the universe, when traced to its original substance, has been constituted through the electron. This is nonaction that becomes great action — there is nothing it does not do. But once a particular thing has been formed, unless its temperature or pressure changes, it cannot become yet another thing. The function of that particular thing is far less than the electron's original power of combination. And if temperature and pressure do not change, action cannot lead to leaving nothing undone. Moreover, wherever there is combination there must also be decomposition. When decomposition has run its full course and nothing remains to be divided, what remains is still the electron. Action in the end is unable to act — and in the end it returns to nonaction.

Consider yet another analogy: a skilled engineer oversees a number of machines. He sits there, neither moving nor at rest, watching each machine run. This is nonaction — and it is also desireless observation of the marvel. When a machine falters, he sees whether it needs water, or fire, or oil, or some other adjustment. This is action — and it is also desiring observation of the threshold. Having observed the threshold, the machine runs again. And once the machine runs, he returns to sitting, neither moving nor at rest. (Not moving means he sits without stirring. Not at rest means that although he does not move, he oversees all the machines — he is not in a state of empty

quiescence.) This is action, yet without clinging to it — and it returns to nonaction once more.

But if one clings to action: if a single machine breaks down and one devotes all one's energy to repairing it — or, having repaired it, remains anxiously watching it for fear it will break again — then all the other machines are neglected. Those that have stopped remain stopped. Those running at the wrong speed go on running wrong. Everything falls into chaos. This is clinging to action, and thus one cannot achieve nonaction that leaves nothing undone.

One can see that nonaction is supremely numinous and supremely wondrous. It is the substance and the mother of action. When people of the world say that Laozi's nonaction is useless and obstructs progress, they not only fail to understand Laozi and fail to understand nonaction — they do not even understand the principle of progress itself.

The progress of the study of implements moves from the pre-celestial into the post-celestial. This is the progress of action. When it progresses to its extreme and the material atoms are entirely expended, all people and things on the earth will be destroyed. Though it is called progress, in truth it is decline. This is not to say that the progress of the study of implements is bad — this kind of progress is also Dao's naturalness. Without it, there would be no world. I said in this chapter's discourse that if everything were purely pre-celestial, there would be no function or use — and this honors that kind of progress. However, because people of the world do not understand the underlying principle of progress and cling to a one-sided view, they recklessly disparage the ancients. Therefore I cannot help but argue from the root.

Let the reader examine this carefully, and not let my words obscure my meaning.

What Laozi teaches — dwelling in nonaction to employ action, achieving merit without dwelling in it, gathering action back into nonaction — this is the progress of the study of Dao. This is true progress.

In truth, what Laozi speaks of is also decline. For if Dao did not decline, the world itself could not exist, and there would be no way to articulate principles and teach them to people. Therefore, every dao that can be spoken or seen is a dao of decline. Decline carried to its extreme becomes progress; progress carried to its extreme becomes decline. Progress and decline cycle in alternation. In truth there is no such thing as progress, and no such thing as decline. It is merely that, comparing the study of Dao with the study of implements, one provisionally assigns names and calls the study of implements decline and the study of Dao progress. But the progress and decline of the study of Dao and the study of implements are themselves in mutual circulation.

After Laozi transmitted the five thousand words, Guan Yin, Zhuangzi, and Liezi developed many of his ideas. Though this may be called progress, it was all entrusted to empty words, laying the groundwork for what was to come, without producing visible results. When the Han dynasty arrived, right after the warfare and chaos of the Warring States, Cao Shen merely applied a portion of Laozi's Dao — and all under Heaven became pure and tranquil. Emperor Wen carried on his intent, and the realm was nearly free of punishments to impose — it had the flavor of the reigns of King Cheng and King Kang. Everyone esteemed the teachings of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi. This was the time when a portion of Laozi's Dao had progressed to its apex.

But when progress reaches its apex, decline must follow. As the study of Dao declined, the study of implements progressed. Europe's new learning had its origins in the Han era. And Laozi's study of Dao was transformed: first into Wei Boyang's alchemy, then into Kou Qianzhi's talismanic rites, and further into the heterodox theories of prayer, sacrifice, and occult practitioners, as well as the empty talk, vanity, and unbridled libertinism of the Jin-era literati. Things were in utter chaos.

And so Han Yu denounced all this as heterodoxy. The Song Confucians, failing to examine the matter, followed suit — and declared that the learning of Laozi was more poisonous than Yang Zhu and Mo Di.

By the present day, the study of implements among the Western nations has progressed to its apex. In military power, their green-smoke airships and lethal efficiency surpass ours ten-thousandfold. In national wealth, their ingenious manufactures and flourishing industry surpass ours ten-thousandfold. Our nation long ago lost its effective and true study of Dao, and we do not understand the study of implements either. How could we fail to be exposed by comparison, impoverished and enfeebled to the very brink of national ruin?

And so the zealous progressives, inflamed with the fervor of national salvation, without distinguishing right from wrong, heaped the entire blame for poverty and weakness onto Laozi. One voice was taken up by a hundred; the whole nation went mad. No one did not regard the learning of Laozi as poison. The study of Dao had truly declined to its nadir.

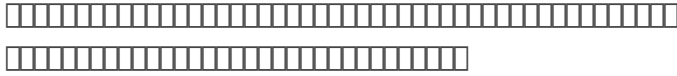
But when decline reaches its nadir, it must turn to progress. From this point forward, Laozi's true study of Dao will progress, and the Western study of implements will decline. Decline here is meant in the living sense — not extinction, but the ceasing of esteem. The study of implements will also advance alongside Dao's progress. The study of implements is a part of the study of Dao.

In former times, a mere portion of Laozi's Dao was sufficient to save our nation from warfare and slaughter. In the present day, the full measure of Laozi's great Dao will surely be sufficient to save the entire world from warfare and slaughter. This threshold, this marvel — I, this young student, have observed and discerned them over the course of several years.

I humbly wish that all people under Heaven would discuss Dao and deliberate on De, and progress together with the great Dao. If they only know how to worship competition, they will decline together with the study of implements.

Western scholars have illuminated the study of implements, enabling all people under Heaven to share the happiness of material civilization. I humbly wish to join with those who love Dao and illuminate the study of Dao, enabling all people under Heaven to share the happiness of Dao-civilization.

# Chapter 3



## Translation

Do not exalt the worthy,  
and the people will not contend.  
Do not prize goods hard to obtain,  
and the people will not steal.  
Do not display what stirs desire,  
and the heart will not fall into chaos.

Thus the Sage governs:  
emptying the heart,  
filling the belly,  
softening the will,  
strengthening the bones.

Ever guiding the people toward innocence  
and freedom from craving,  
so that even the clever dare not contrive.

Practice nonaction,  
and nothing remains ungoverned.

## Word Notes

- □ — "**the worthy**": means those of outstanding ability.
- □ — "**contend**": means to compete and seize.
- □ — "**goods**": means merchandise, commodities.
- □ — "**steal**": means theft.
- □ — "**desire**": means cravings, appetites.
- □ — "**empty**": means to make empty, hollow.
- □ — "**fill**": means to make full, substantial.
- □ — "**soften**": means to make gentle, yielding.
- □ — "**strengthen**": means to make firm, unyielding.

## Chapter Explanation

**Do not exalt the worthy** — this causes the people not to compete for reputation. **Do not prize goods hard to obtain** — this causes the people not to steal wealth. **Do not display the objects of craving** — this causes the people's hearts not to fall into chaos. For this reason, when the Sage governs: he **empties the heart** to rid it of extravagance; he **fills the belly** to restore it to simplicity; he **softens the will** to put an end to contention; he **strengthens the bones** to enable self-reliance. He always causes the people to be without cunning and without cravings, so that even those of talent and intelligence dare not engage in deceit or scheming. They settle peaceably into nonaction — and all under Heaven is effortlessly governed.

## Discourse

The order in which Dao generates is: one gives birth to two, two gives birth to three. One is the Dao of Heaven. Two is the way of mutual opposition and alternation between yin and yang. Three is the way of humanity — composed of the first and the second, the central pivot of Dao. Therefore, Chapter One expounds the Dao of Heaven. Chapter Two expounds the way of mutual opposition and mutual alternation. This chapter expounds the way of humanity: inner sagehood and outer kingship.

Outer kingship must be rooted in inner sagehood. One must possess Heavenly virtue before one can exercise the kingly way. Only when one can govern one's own person can one govern all under Heaven. In ancient times, Emperor Yao harmonized the myriad states entirely through his ability to brilliantly manifest exalted virtue. Emperor Shun's doubled radiance aligned with the ancient emperors entirely through composing himself and facing south.

Therefore the Sage governs all under Heaven by taking self-governance as the root. When one can govern oneself — emptying the heart, filling the belly, softening the will, strengthening the bones — all under Heaven is governed through nonaction.

If the heart is not empty, selfish desires abound. If the belly is not full, hunger and want abound. Mencius said, "To be without this is to be starving" — and starving is precisely not full. If the will is not soft, one becomes restless and impetuous. If the bones are not strong, one becomes timid and weak.

To empty the heart is to make it embrace all beyond the Great Void — possessing nothing at all. To fill the belly is to fill the space between Heaven and Earth, containing everything. A softened will means yielding one's own position to follow others — the modest, modest gentleman. Strengthened bones means shouldering the universe, standing on the earth with head touching the sky.

Emptying the heart is the ultimate realization of Mencius's unmoved heart. If the heart is already empty and void, from where could it be moved? Filling the belly is the result of nurturing the flood-like qi to fullness. Flood-like qi can fill the space between Heaven and Earth — hence, filling the belly. "Belly" conveys the sense of containing and holding. It certainly does not mean gorging oneself on wine and meat!

Softening the will corresponds to Mencius's "holding the will." Strengthening the bones corresponds to Mencius's image of inner virtue overflowing to the back.

When the heart is empty, the will is naturally soft, for the empty heart encompasses all beyond the Great Void — there is no will left to speak of. When the belly is full, the bones are naturally strong, for the flood-like qi is supremely great and supremely firm.

This — emptying the heart, filling the belly, softening the will, and strengthening the bones — also corresponds to the functions of the trigrams Qian, Kun, Kan, and Li in the *Book of Changes*.

Qian is the qi of Heaven, pure and void. Kun is the image of Earth, broad and thick. Hence the pairing of empty and full. Yet though Qian is the pure, void qi of Heaven, its three lines are all unbroken — its interior is supremely full. What is full should be emptied; hence: empty the heart. Though Kun is the broad, thick image of Earth, its six lines are all broken — its interior is supremely void. What is void should be filled; hence: fill the belly.

Li occupies Qian's position in the Pre-celestial diagram, acting in Qian's stead. But Li is fire and tends toward restlessness; hence: soften the will. Kan occupies Kun's position in the Pre-celestial diagram, acting in Kun's stead. But Kan is water and tends toward yielding; hence: strengthen the bones.

The numinous wonder within this cannot be known except through actual practice and personal experience. If one has practiced and attained realization, and then gains a position to carry out Dao, one need only rectify the root and purify the source. Then those cunning spirits will naturally bow their heads and fold their ears in submission, not daring again to use deceit and scheming to stir up chaos. Governing all under Heaven would be as easy as turning over one's hand.

In later ages, those who led the state lacked the Sage's true Dao and De. They merely took up the surface trappings. Today they exalt the worthy; tomorrow they amass wealth. Goods hard to obtain — most commentators interpret this as rare treasures, which is fair enough. But money is also hard to obtain, and is even more prized. The result is that everyone forms factions and cliques, each group promoting its own members. It reaches the point where people spend money to purchase reputation. High and low compete for profit, plundering one another — until they have become thieves who tunnel through walls and climb over fences.

Alas! When things have reached such a state, why not turn back and seek the root?

# Chapter 4



## Translation

Dao, in its harmony, is put to use,  
yet perhaps it never fills.  
Fathomless — it seems the ancestor of all things.  
It blunts the sharp,  
unravels the tangled,  
tempers its light,  
mingles with the dust.  
Profound and still — it seems as though it exists.  
I do not know whose child it is;  
it appears to precede the Lord on High.

## Word Notes

- 道 — "**harmony**": Harmonious blending.
- 深 — "**fathomless**": Deep and far-reaching.
- 祖 — "**ancestor**": Master, source.
- 挫 — "**to blunt**": To check, to restrain.
- 锐 — "**the sharp**": Keen, aggressive force; the sharp edge of competitive ambition.
- 解 — "**to unravel**": To loosen, to untangle.
- 乱 — "**tangles**": Confusion, disorder.
- 光 — "**light**": Radiance, brilliance.
- 尘 — "**dust**": The mundane world; worldly affairs.
- 深 — "**profound and still**": Clear, empty, and tranquil.
- 高 — "**the Lord on High**": Shangdi, the supreme sovereign deity.

## Chapter Explanation

Though Dao is utterly empty and without substance, it issues forth as a harmonious breath that is fully operative. It pervades everything within the cosmos and there is nowhere it does not fill. So profoundly deep and far-reaching that it cannot be fathomed, it seems to be the ancestor of the myriad beings. It blunts the sharp, competitive spirit; unravels the confused and tangled mind; does not display its own radiance; and mingles with the dust of the common world. Profoundly clear and empty, it seems to hold onto nothing — yet something does seem to remain. I do not

know whose child it is, or where it comes from; it appears to precede even the Lord on High.

## Discourse

This chapter speaks of the Sage who has "emptied the heart, filled the belly, softened the will, and strengthened the bones" — one who has attained Dao in his own person. He takes emptiness and nothingness as his substance, and harmony as his function. The character for "harmony" here is composed of "center" and "water," meaning "what flows from the center." What flows from the center is harmony; thus "Dao in its harmony" means centrality and harmony.

The breath of Supreme Harmony fills all of Heaven and Earth. It can give Heaven and Earth their proper place and nourish the myriad beings. Its aspect is vast and boundless, beyond description. And yet such a person does not presume upon his De, does not claim credit for his accomplishments. Gentle and supremely harmonious, he is just like an infant — serene and without desire. He tempers his own radiance — this is what Mencius calls "a sage who is great and transforming." It is the realm of "a spirit who is sagely and unfathomable." He freely mingles with the dust of the common world. This is not merely keeping oneself safe through wisdom; it is not merely avoiding startling or shocking the world. In truth, it is teaching by personal example, leading others to ever deeper understanding.

In the "Human World" chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, Qu Boyu teaches Yan He how to serve as tutor to the Crown Prince of Wei: "In outward form, nothing is better than to go along with him; in your heart, nothing is better than to be at harmony with him." This passage is precisely the footnote to "tempering one's light, mingling with the dust." When Guanyin manifests in all manner of bodily forms to teach the Dharma, the meaning is the same.

Most commentators interpret this as keeping oneself safe through wisdom. That is certainly correct, but it is only a one-sided explanation. Would the Sage merely preserve his own person?

Profoundly clear and still, beyond all scrutiny — his person seems to be above the world; his spirit truly transcends Heaven and Earth. And so the text says one does not know whose child he is, or where he comes from — it seems he precedes even the Lord on High. This is plainly Laozi recounting his own life story, speaking of his own virtue, painting his own portrait — displaying the living image of the man called "like a dragon" for all to see. And yet the text says "perhaps" and "seems" and "as if" — still soaring or leaping, now visible now hidden, now revealing a single scale, now revealing a single claw, keeping people from fathoming him.

The Daoist scriptures say Laozi preached the Dharma for twelve thousand days and manifested in transformation eighty-one times. Though I, this young student, understand the reasons behind this, the matter borders on the miraculous. In the secular world there is insufficient evidence to cite as proof, so I dare not insist on the point. Even if we discuss only the Laozi who served as Keeper of the Archives, some say he was a man of the Shang dynasty, others that he was a man of the Zhou dynasty. He served as a court archivist for many years yet left no notable memorial or proposal, as if he were an ordinary, unremarkable person. And yet Confucius — the greatest sage since the beginning of human history — looked up to him as a teacher and called him "like a dragon." After

Laozi departed through the Hangu Pass, no one knew where he went. Is this not the very mystery of a spirit whose transformations are beyond reckoning?

# Chapter 5



## Translation

Heaven and Earth are not benevolent;  
they treat the myriad beings as straw dogs.  
The Sage is not benevolent;  
he treats the hundred families as straw dogs.  
The space between Heaven and Earth —  
is it not like a bellows?  
Empty, yet never exhausted;  
the more it moves, the more it brings forth.  
Too many words hasten one's ruin;  
better to guard the center.

## Word Notes

- 𠄎 — "**straw dogs**": Dogs woven from grass, used in sacrificial rites. During the ceremony they are treated with reverence; afterward they are trampled underfoot.
- 𠄎 — "**bellows**": The smelter's instrument for fanning the furnace fire. It is hollow within and has no bottom.
- 𠄎 — "**nozzle**": The mouth of the bellows.
- 𠄎 — "**exhaustion**": Distortion, forced bending.
- 𠄎 — "**guarding the center**": Holding to the center, the middle way.

## Chapter Explanation

**Heaven and Earth are not benevolent** — they bring to life and they kill, leaving the myriad beings to their own natural course. They treat the myriad beings as **straw dogs**. **The Sage is not benevolent** — he gives and he takes away, leaving the hundred families to their own natural course.

**The space between Heaven and Earth** is just like **a bellows**: empty within, yet never distorted or exhausted. The more it moves, the more breath comes forth. If one speaks too many words, one repeatedly runs into dead ends. **Better to guard the center**.

## Discourse

This chapter is about Laozi observing the people and beings of all under Heaven. Regardless of what era, regardless of what country — there is none that does not live and die, die and live, going back and forth, turning upside down, suffering without limit. They are like a speck of dust spinning in the vast sky, unable to control their own course. Suddenly they spin upward; suddenly they spin down again. Up and down, up and down, without rest.

And yet if we trace the root cause of this suffering, we cannot help but lay it at the feet of Heaven and Earth. The people and myriad beings were all born of Heaven and Earth. Where there is birth, there cannot but be death. The very benevolence of Heaven and Earth in giving birth to things is, in fact, the very cruelty of Heaven and Earth in destroying them. Moreover, at the time of giving birth, no matter how wretched a thing may be, they give it life — seeming to value it greatly. At the time of destroying, no matter how fine a thing may be, they destroy it all the same — seeming to hold it in utter contempt. And so the text says they treat the myriad beings as straw dogs.

The Sage follows the natural course of Heaven and Earth, and does the same. But Heaven and Earth do not intentionally give birth to things or intentionally destroy them. The underlying principle of the space between Heaven and Earth is one of coming and going, of endless cycling. Heaven and Earth operate without intention: in giving birth to beings, they do not love them; in destroying beings, they do not hate them. They simply nourish what grows upright and topple what leans — leaving the myriad beings to their own natural course. If Heaven and Earth intentionally loved things, giving birth without ever destroying, then the process of transformation would reach exhaustion.

Therefore one must break through all names and forms, all names and words, empty the heart, and guard the center. One must transcend beyond Heaven and Earth — only then will one not be toppled and turned by the cycles of fate.

For Laozi foresaw that in later ages, those who study Dao would inevitably misunderstand the scriptures and become bound by them. Some would split into sects and factions. Some would drill into texts and literary niceties. Some would be obstructed by principles. Some would be fixated on doctrines. They would do nothing but mouth-level study and book-level morality — pedantic and useless, utterly without practical effect. Those of a lower sort would further degenerate into superstition, unable to rely on their own strength, depending on Heaven and Earth, looking up to sages and spirits for help. They do not realize that though Heaven and Earth are fond of giving life, they cannot protect a person; though sages and spirits are compassionate, they cannot save a person.

Even the words that sages, spirits, immortals, and buddhas use to instruct people — whatever can be spoken in words and pointed to by name — are all one-sided teachings, teachings with an opposite. Whatever has a good side also has a bad side. The Buddha said, "Inconceivable, inexpressible." Confucius said, "I wish to speak no more." And when Confucius spoke of the six virtues and six blindnesses — six virtues that, without learning to temper them, become six defects — he meant the same thing.

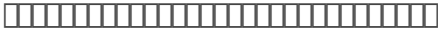
And so, having no choice but to argue from the root source, Laozi directly calls Heaven and Earth and the Sage "not benevolent" — this is to shatter people's superstitious dependence. When he

says "too many words hasten one's ruin," this is to shatter people's fixation on doctrine. "Guard the center" is to show people where their home lies. How lofty! How consummate! How miraculous and wondrous!

Long ago, Shakyamuni preached the Dharma as teacher of gods and humans, and his voice was the lion's roar. Laozi speaks the truth about Heaven and Earth and the Sage, enabling people to transcend above the realm of gods and humans — is this not the dragon's call? But when the lion roars, all the mountains tremble — it is more than enough to move people. The dragon's call, however, is subtle and hard to fathom. If you are not a kindred spirit, you will find nothing of interest in hearing it.

And so people are still happy to study the Buddhist scriptures. Laozi is simply not ranked alongside Confucius, the Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad. His book is even regarded as something like arsenic and poison. This is truly looking at a great sage whose spiritual transformations are beyond all reckoning — through the eyes of the mundane world.

# Chapter 6



## Translation

The Valley Spirit never dies —  
this is called the Mysterious Female.  
The gate of the Mysterious Female  
is the root of Heaven and Earth.  
Continuous and subtle, as though barely there,  
drawn upon, it is never spent.

## Word Notes

- ㄩ — "**Valley Spirit**": The true spirit of the empty valley.
- ㄩ — "**mysterious**": True emptiness.
- ㄩ — "**female**": Wondrous existence; the generative, the receptive.
- ㄩ — "**continuous**": Subtle and unceasing.
- ㄩ — "**never exhausted**": Without toil or haste; its function is effortless.

## Chapter Explanation

**The true spirit within the void does not die** — this is **true emptiness and wondrous existence**. **The gate of true emptiness and wondrous existence is the root of Heaven and Earth**. To return to the origin and restore the source, one must cultivate a continuous awareness — present, yet as if not present. Its operation is without effort or haste: functioning, yet as if not functioning.

## Discourse

This chapter reveals the method of guarding the center and the workings of the center itself.

The circle of the character for "center" is the shape of an empty valley. The upper half of this circle is Heaven; the lower half is Earth. When "Heaven and Earth" appear as a pair, this "Heaven" is the relative heaven — the one that has an opposite. The vertical stroke through the center is the true spirit. Every person possesses this spirit. It is what the *Doctrine of the Mean* calls "the true nature endowed by Heaven." This "Heaven" is the one and only Heaven, which enfolds all heavens and all worlds. When Confucius revered and stood in awe of Heaven, this is what he meant. Otherwise — since Dao gives birth to Heaven and Earth, and the Buddha is the teacher of the gods — if

Confucius merely revered the physical sky, would that not be pitifully beneath his stature? And if the Confucian classics universally treat Heaven as the highest authority, would that not be degrading?

But in the post-celestial world, one's nature deteriorates into emotion, and emotion deteriorates into desire. Thereupon this spirit sinks downward, circulating within the circle — this is what the Buddha calls samsara, the cycle of rebirth. One must reduce desire and accord with emotion, and then gather emotion back into nature. When the vertical stroke through the center is revived, one can naturally pierce through Heaven and Earth — this is what Confucius called his "one thread."

One transcends into the void, indestructible through all eternity. Yet though one transcends into the void, one still pervades the space between Heaven and Earth, remaining the master and ruler of Heaven and Earth.

Why is this so? The left side of the character for "center" is the mysterious: when it stirs, it becomes yang; it is the beginning of Heaven and Earth. The right side is the female: when it stirs, it becomes yin; it is the mother of the myriad beings. The two sides are also like two halves of a gate. The vertical stroke is like the gate's hinge. When the hinge moves, it gives rise to the mysterious and the female; the mysterious and the female give rise to Heaven and Earth.

But once Heaven and Earth have been separated, this gate closes and does not open. The human being, as the full embodiment of Dao, is the same way. One must reopen this gate; only then can yin and yang resume their interchange. When yin and yang converge and merge into a single body, this vertical stroke can once again fill all of Heaven and Earth and transcend beyond them.

The method of reopening this gate is nonaction yet action, action yet nonaction. This is precisely what Mencius meant by "neither forget nor force." And yet later inner-alchemy practitioners clung to concrete images, claiming it refers to some specific acupoint or passage in the body. How could they have realized that Laozi's words are hardly limited to the acupoints of a single body?

# Chapter 7



## Translation

Heaven endures, Earth abides.

The reason Heaven and Earth can endure and abide is that they do not live for themselves — therefore they can live forever.

Thus the Sage places himself last, yet finds himself first; regards himself as outside, yet his self is preserved.

Is it not because he is without self-interest that he can truly fulfill what is his own?

## Word Notes

- 己 — "**self-interest**": Acting for oneself; personal gain.

## Chapter Explanation

**Heaven endures long, Earth lasts far.** The reason Heaven and Earth can endure long and last far is that they give life to the myriad beings but **do not live for themselves** — therefore they can **live forever**. For this reason, the Sage **places himself last** in all things, yielding to others — yet his person ends up in front. He **regards himself as outside**, not contending for power and advantage — yet his self is preserved. **Is it not because he acts without self-interest?** By acting without self-interest, he is therefore able to **truly fulfill what is his own**.

## Discourse

This chapter says that Heaven and Earth were born of the Valley Spirit. The Valley Spirit does not die — no one has seen this. But that Heaven endures — this everyone knows. Since Heaven and Earth can endure, the Valley Spirit can be inferred.

The reason Heaven and Earth can endure is that they give life to the myriad beings but do not live for themselves. Giving life to all things yet not living for themselves — it would seem they should be swiftly exhausted. But the underlying principle governing the space between Heaven and Earth is cyclical. Heaven and Earth give life to the myriad beings, and after the myriad beings have come into existence, their vital energy still returns to Heaven and Earth. Moreover, the myriad beings

cannot exist outside of Heaven and Earth. Thus, for Heaven and Earth to give life to the myriad beings is to give life to themselves. If Heaven and Earth did not regard the myriad beings as one body with themselves and only looked after themselves, they would become merely a single isolated thing — how could that be worthy of being called Heaven and Earth?

The Sage stands alongside Heaven and Earth, and he too treats all under Heaven as one family, all nations as one person. He places himself last and regards himself as outside. Yet through the cycling of Heaven and Earth, what was placed last turns around and naturally ends up first; what was regarded as outside — his self thereby grows great beyond all outer limit, enduring through all ages.

Were it otherwise — if one cared only for oneself and scrambled to be first, if one cared only for oneself and scrambled to survive — everyone would seek to destroy such a person. How could he come first? How could he survive?

# Chapter 8



## Translation

The highest good is like water.  
Water excels at benefiting the myriad beings yet does not contend.  
It settles where others disdain to dwell —  
thus it draws near to the Dao.  
In dwelling, excel at finding the right ground.  
In heart, excel at depth.  
In giving, excel at benevolence.  
In speech, excel at trustworthiness.  
In governance, excel at bringing order.  
In affairs, excel at competence.  
In action, excel at timing.  
It is precisely through not contending  
that one remains free of blame.

## Word Notes

- 卍 — "**giving**": To bestow, to give to others.
- 卐 — "**fault**": Error, blame.

## Chapter Explanation

**The highest good** is just like water. **Water excels at benefiting the myriad beings** yet does not contend with anyone. It settles in the lowest and most humble places that **the multitude loathe** — and therefore comes **close to Dao**.

A person of the highest good: **in dwelling, excels at finding the right ground** — like water, which halts wherever it finds a hollow and does not choose its terrain. **In heart, excels at depth** unfathomable — like water, which is empty, clear, and still. **In giving, excels at benevolence** — like water, which nourishes all living things. **In speech, excels at trustworthiness** — like water, which never fails in its nature to flow downward. **In governance, excels at bringing order** — like water, which washes away filth and levels high and low. **In affairs, excels at competence** — like water, which sets all things in motion. **In action, excels at timing** — like water, which is endlessly lively and responsive. Having all these excellences and still not contending with anyone

— precisely because he does not contend, he is **entirely without fault**.

## Discourse

Alas! Today the world is in ruin. War and killing rage across the globe. The dead and wounded number untold tens of thousands. The fires of war have scorched untold tens of thousands of miles. If we trace the disease to its root, it is nothing but the disaster of competition — nothing but the disaster of competing for power and profit. In competing for power and profit, they have in fact lost power and profit. It is truly a great delusion from which they cannot awaken.

If every nation would revere the teachings of Laozi, yield and not contend, there would naturally be harmony, well-being, and joy — a world of genial warmth and radiant ease. How could there be this catastrophe without precedent in all of history?

And yet, when Laozi teaches people not to contend, he is by no means telling them to be pedantic and useless, devoid of any ability, weak and dependent, sitting idle and waiting for natural selection to eliminate them. He simply teaches people not to scramble for power and profit, so as to extinguish the fires of war for ten thousand ages. Moreover, he teaches people to excel at benefiting the myriad beings — to excel at ground, at depth, at benevolence, at trustworthiness, at governance, at competence, at timing — and thereby to possess extraordinary De and extraordinary ability. This is non-contention on the outside, yet contention for substance within; non-contention for position, yet contention for spirit. It is contending through non-contention — not seeking, yet naturally obtaining.

This teaching has a hundred benefits and not a single harm. It is precisely the perfect prescription for the illness of our time. Why do the people of every nation not give it a try?



This chapter says that among all things between Heaven and Earth, whatever has become full must ebb and recede; whatever has been sharpened to a fine edge must break. People of the world do not understand this principle. They know only how to scramble for power and seize profit, pursuing wealth and chasing rank. They do not realize that wealth and rank not only cannot long be preserved — they are also what everyone covets. They become the focus of universal resentment. If one relies on one's wealth and rank and grows arrogant, one only hastens one's own undoing.

Therefore, when the work is done and the name established, one should step back. To have and yet not possess; to be full and yet not complacent; to achieve merit and not dwell in it; to have not the slightest aggressive edge — only this accords with the natural course of the Way of Heaven. Only this can preserve oneself forever.

# Chapter 10

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## Translation

Carry the soul, embrace the One —  
can you keep them from parting?  
Concentrate the breath to utmost softness —  
can you be as an infant?  
Cleanse the mysterious vision —  
can you leave it without flaw?  
Love the people, govern the state —  
can you act through nonaction?  
The gates of Heaven open and close —  
can you abide as the feminine?  
Bright understanding reaches every direction —  
can you appear as though unknowing?

It gives them life and nourishes them.  
It gives life yet claims no possession,  
acts yet takes no credit,  
guides yet does not rule.  
This is called the mysterious De.

## Word Notes

- 魂 — "**soul**": The hun, the spirit-soul. JXZ glosses 魂 as 魂 (hun), the spiritual aspect of the soul.
- 魄 — "**spirit**": The po, the corporeal spirit. Together with 魂 (hun), they form the dual soul.
- 洗 — "**cleanse**": To wash, to purge.
- 瞻 — "**gaze**": To look, to observe. Here: the inner contemplative gaze.

- 心 — "**flaw**": Blemish, defect.
- 心 — "**the gates of Heaven**": The heart. JXZ glosses: "The heart can connect to Heaven."
- 心 — "**nurture**": To nourish, to sustain.
- 心 — "**control**": To govern, to rule over.

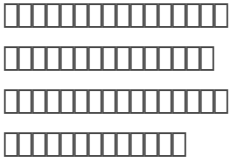
## Chapter Explanation

When the heart races outward, the hun and po separate. To **carry the soul, guard the spirit, and embrace the One** — can one keep them from parting? When one's breath becomes violent, the heart grows agitated. To **concentrate the pre-celestial breath and bring it to utmost softness** — can one be like the Supreme Harmony of an infant? To **cleanse away dust and grime, and open wide the inner gaze to penetrate the mysterious** — can one be free of all blemish? Once the self is cultivated, then to **love the people and govern the state** — can one do so through the clear stillness of nonaction? **The gates of Heaven can open and can close**, their transformations without limit — can one abide as the soft and receptive? To be **bright in understanding, reaching in all four directions** — can one appear as though unknowing? **It gives life** to the people of all under Heaven. **It nurtures** the people of all under Heaven. Yet having given them life, **it does not take possession**. Having acted on behalf of all under Heaven, **it does not presume upon its merit**. Having become **the leader** of all under Heaven, **it does not control**. This is the deep and far-reaching mysterious De, beyond all naming.

## Discourse

The opening four lines of this chapter are precisely the teaching of Mencius on nourishing qi and achieving an unmoved heart. Yet instead of saying "heart," the text says 心. JXZ glosses 心 as "hun" — the spirit of the heart — and in this there is already the sense of "restlessly stirring without cease." "Parting" refers to the post-celestial heart. The infant has not lost the pre-celestial breath and is able to refrain from using the post-celestial heart. By not losing the pre-celestial breath, one can then cleanse away the dust and grime, open wide the inner gaze, and observe all things above and below, ancient and modern — penetrating the mysterious, entering the subtle, without being confined to one partiality. One is not like the narrow-minded who see no further than a bean, drowning in old learning. Nor is one like those confined to the material, taking what they can see as real and what they cannot see as nonexistent. Therefore one can love the people and govern the state, with transformations without limit, responding to the myriad affairs. One's bright understanding reaches in every direction, without being confined to fixed opinions. One gives life to all under Heaven and nourishes them, without taking it as one's own possession or one's own achievement. One serves as leader of all under Heaven yet does not presume on authority to act imperiously. Moreover, one does not use laws and regulations to bind the people, but lets them naturally roam at ease within the realm of Dao and De. Such is the mysterious De — beyond all power of praise. In our nation, only Yao and Shun, who held the empire as a public trust, and in the West, only George Washington, who founded the United States, can be said to stand worthy of it without shame.

# Chapter 11



## Translation

Thirty spokes converge upon a single hub —  
in the hollow center, the wheel finds its turning.  
Shape clay to form a vessel —  
in the emptiness within, the vessel finds its holding.  
Cut doors and windows to frame a room —  
in the open space, the room finds its dwelling.  
Thus what is present gives advantage;  
what is absent gives purpose.

## Word Notes

- 辐 — "**spoke**": The spoke of a wheel.
- 毂 — "**hub**": The hub of a wheel, where the spokes converge.
- 揉 — "**knead**": To mix water with clay.
- 斲 — "**clay**": To shape clay into a vessel.
- 斲 — "**cut**": To chisel open.
- 牖 — "**window**": A window opening.

## Chapter Explanation

Thirty spokes converge upon a single hub. It is precisely **where the hub is hollow** that the wheel can turn, and the cart can carry people and goods to useful purpose. Clay is kneaded with water and shaped into a vessel. It is precisely **where the vessel is hollow** within that it can hold water and broth to useful purpose. Doors and windows are cut to make a room. It is precisely **where the doors and windows open** that people can dwell within to useful purpose. Therefore, having physical form is what makes something advantageous. Yet it is **the emptiness within that makes it useful**.

## Discourse

This chapter borrows the external to illustrate the internal, borrows the visible to illustrate the invisible. Even taking visible things on their own terms, their usefulness lies entirely in what is invisible. Implements below the level of form are rooted in Dao above the level of form. The invisible cannot benefit without the visible; the visible cannot function without the invisible. Dao must borrow implements to become manifest; implements must be rooted in Dao for their function to be great. Thus Laozi not only illuminated the study of Dao but also deeply understood the study of implements. For the Sage who apprehends Dao looks up and looks down, and there is nothing among the principles of Heaven, Earth, and the myriad beings that he does not understand. He simply does not make his name through any single skill. Confucius, for example, was learned and multitalented, yet could not be defined by any one accomplishment. And as for the feathered followers of later ages — they may not have been the true orthodox heirs of Laozi. Nevertheless, when the furnace-and-fire school smelted lead and refined mercury, this was precisely the principle that modern scientists call analysis and synthesis. When the adepts and masters of the arts produced wondrous skills and extraordinary abilities, and manufactured implements of war and defense, this was precisely the function that modern scientists call invention and manufacture. Yet at the time they were hated by despotic rulers, who feared these arts might be turned against them, and so denounced them as heretical sorcery and enforced severe prohibitions. Thus the transmission was lost and could not progress. Yet this is enough to prove that the study of Dao is not useless. One who truly possesses the study of Dao will naturally understand the study of implements. But later generations failed to perceive this and went so far as to say that the teachings of Laozi were enough to destroy a nation and extinguish its people. They truly did not know the real face of Laozi!

# Chapter 12

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## Translation

The five colors blind the eye.

The five tones deafen the ear.

The five flavors dull the palate.

Racing and hunting madden the heart.

Rare goods lead one astray.

Therefore the Sage nourishes what is within,  
not what the eye desires.

He lets go of that and holds to this.

## Word Notes

- □ — "**blind**": The eyes go blind.
- □ — "**deaden**": Quick, sharp — here meaning the palate loses its sense of taste.
- □□ — "**racing**": Chasing, driving at full speed.
- □□ — "**hunting**": Hunting birds and beasts.
- □ — "**lead astray**": To harm, to impede.

## Chapter Explanation

When the eyes are greedy for the five colors, they go blind. When the ears are greedy for the five tones, they go deaf. When the mouth is greedy for the five flavors, it loses all sense of taste. When the heart delights in racing about and hunting, it is driven to madness. Rare and precious goods lead people into harmful conduct. Therefore **the Sage nourishes what is within** and **does not chase what the eye desires**. He **lets go of that** outward pursuit and **holds to this** inward keeping.

## Discourse

This chapter teaches that sounds, colors, goods, and profit are all things external to the self. Greedy, insatiable pursuit of them injures one's life and destroys one's nature. Therefore the Sage abandons the external and cultivates the internal. Confucius said: "Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; act not contrary to propriety." The Bodhisattva Guanyin speaks of "no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind." All of these express the same meaning.

# Chapter 13

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## Translation

Favor and disgrace alike arrive as shocks.  
Hold great calamity as dearly as you hold your very self.

What is meant by "favor and disgrace alike arrive as shocks"?  
Favor is the lowlier thing:  
to receive it is a shock,  
to lose it is a shock —  
this is why favor and disgrace alike arrive as shocks.

What is meant by "hold great calamity as dearly as you hold your very self"?  
The reason I suffer great calamity  
is that I possess a body.  
Were I without this body,  
what calamity could touch me?

Thus, one who values his own body as he would value all under Heaven —  
to such a person the world may be entrusted.  
One who cherishes his own body as he would cherish all under Heaven —  
to such a person the world may be consigned.

## Word Notes

- 貴 — "**favor**": Imperial favor, patronage.
- 恥 — "**disgrace**": Shame, humiliation.

## Chapter Explanation

Both favor and disgrace arrive as a shock. The greatest calamity is none other than the body itself. Why do we say that favor and disgrace are like being shocked? Where there is favor, there is disgrace — disgrace springs from favor. **Favor is the lowlier thing.** Therefore when one receives favor, it is like being shocked — because one fears disgrace will follow. When one loses favor, it is also like being shocked — though now it is the startled relief that disgrace may be avoided. Why do we say the greatest calamity is none other than the body? The reason **I have great calamity** is that **I have this body**: with a body come desires, and from desires spring every kind of trouble. But **if I do not cling to this body** — having a body as though I had none — then **what calamity could I have?** Extending the argument: **one who values his own body as dearly as he would value all under Heaven** — to such a person the world may be entrusted. **One who cherishes his own body as dearly as he would cherish all under Heaven** — to such a person the world may be consigned.

## Discourse

Among all the people of the world, there are none who do not wish to obtain favor. For once favor is won, one may enjoy the splendor of palaces, the attendance of wives and concubines, the flattery of destitute friends and relatives. And so people curry favor and rush about, maneuver and worm their way in, heedless of propriety, shameless before all scrutiny. Yet if we trace the root cause, it is not that their original nature lacks goodness — it is simply that the desires of the body do harm. They do not realize that the one who can bestow favor can just as easily bring disgrace. The glory of favor is the very wellspring of humiliation. Moreover, those who fawn and flatter in pursuit of advancement cannot escape the shame of begging among the tombs in the eastern suburb. The place of greatest honor is the very place of greatest humiliation. Therefore the person of Dao and De regards favor as no different from disgrace. Receiving favor strikes him like a shock. And he knows that this grasping for favor springs entirely from the desires of the body. So he looks upon his body as though it were nothing. Having removed the root of the disease, this may seem like not caring for the body — but in truth it is the only genuine care for the body. He does nothing that is not humane; he takes no action that is not righteous. He will not let this body suffer the slightest stain. He cherishes this body more dearly than all under Heaven. The power and profit of a single province, a single circuit, a single county, a single district — these are things for which others scramble without rest. Yet he looks upon even all under Heaven, vast as it is, with cool indifference, utterly unmoved. So transcendent, so removed from the world — he may seem useless. But understand this: it is precisely the one who does not treat all under Heaven as his personal affair who can be entrusted with all under Heaven. History proves it. Emperor Shun regarded the empire as a worn-out shoe, and Emperor Yao entrusted all under Heaven to him — and Shun was able to carry on the brilliant legacy in harmony with the will of Heaven. Yi Yin would not glance at a gift of a thousand teams of horses, and though offered the emolument of the entire empire he would not desire it. King Tang entrusted all under Heaven to him — and Yi Yin was able to exile Tai Jia to Tong without usurping the throne, and in the end brought Tai Jia to dwell in humaneness and follow righteousness. Were it otherwise — were a man burning with ambition for office and hungering for wealth and rank entrusted with all under Heaven — how could he not plunder the common people to fatten himself? The argument of Laozi in this chapter, if applied to the employment of men, works equally on the grandest scale — all under Heaven and the state — and on the smallest — a single province, a single district, down to a single affair. It is as sure as

holding a written bond. Men like those who scramble for power and grasp at profit, who know nothing but their own bodies — entrust all under Heaven to them, and how could it possibly work? I, this young student, reading this chapter, am filled with boundless feeling.

# Chapter 14

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## Translation

Look for it and it cannot be seen — call it the invisible.  
Listen for it and it cannot be heard — call it the inaudible.  
Reach for it and it cannot be caught — call it the intangible.  
These three cannot be fathomed further;  
they merge and become one.

Its rising is not bright.  
Its sinking is not dark.  
On and on, an unbroken thread — it cannot be named,  
and returns again to nothing.

This is the shape without shape,  
the image without image —  
the elusive, the unfathomable.  
Approach it and you cannot see its face.  
Follow it and you cannot see its back.

Hold fast to the ancient Dao  
to master all that the present holds.  
To know the ancient beginning —  
this is the guiding thread of Dao.

## Word Notes

- — "**the invisible**": Describing what cannot be seen. JXZ: "a term for what is beyond sight and hearing."

- □ — **"the inaudible"**: Describing what cannot be heard.
- □ — **"the intangible"**: Small, subtle — that which cannot be grasped.
- □ — **"fathom"**: To question, to investigate to the end.
- □ — **"bright"**: Brilliant, luminous.
- □ — **"dark"**: Dim, obscure.
- □□ — **"ceaselessly"**: Continuing one after another, an unbroken thread.
- □□ — **"the elusive and obscure"**: Subtle and unfathomable.
- □ — **"thread"**: The guiding thread, the organizing principle.

## Chapter Explanation

**Look for it and you still cannot see it** — its name is "the invisible." **Listen for it and you still cannot hear it** — its name is "the inaudible." **Grasp for it and you still cannot catch it** — its name is "the intangible." These three — formless, colorless, soundless — **cannot be fathomed through questioning**. Therefore they **merge and become one**. All things have light and dark, yet **its upper aspect is not bright** and **its lower aspect is not dark**. It flows on without cease amid the affairs of daily life, yet still **it cannot be named**. It **returns again to the realm of nothing**. This is what is called **the shape without shape, the image without image**. This is what it means to call it the elusive and obscure — one cannot say it exists, yet one cannot say it does not exist. **Approach it and you cannot see its face. Follow it and you cannot see its back**. This is Dao, which has existed since antiquity. If one **holds fast to the Dao of ancient times**, one can thereby **command and employ all that the present holds**. The ability to **know how Dao began in antiquity** — this is **the guiding thread** of the one who has attained Dao.

## Discourse

Today the world's civilization — sound, light, electricity, and chemical transformation — has produced all manner of things in full profusion. Yet what exists today did not spring into being only now. It has existed since antiquity. It is simply that people today have newly discovered and brought it forth. And all that exists — where ultimately does it come from? Even if we progress for tens of thousands of years beyond the present, pushing inquiry to the point where there is nothing left to inquire into, there must remain something that cannot be seen, cannot be heard, cannot be conceived, cannot be expressed in words. This invisible, inaudible something is given the provisional name of Dao. It is the original source of all that exists. Because all that exists has form and sound, all that exists is subject to change and destruction. Dao has neither form nor sound, and therefore undergoes no change and no destruction. It is eternally new across the ages. If one grasps its guiding thread and holds fast to it, then all that exists will serve one's purposes. Laozi's two lines — **"hold fast to the ancient Dao to master all that the present holds"** — are truly the master key, the essential secret. Those in today's world who are fond of antiquity mostly cling stubbornly to the words and deeds of the ancients. They do not realize that these are merely the discarded traces of what has already passed. They are not the Dao of antiquity. The Dao of antiquity is the Dao of today. Dao knows neither ancient nor modern. If one can truly hold fast to the ancient Dao, one can command and employ all that the present holds.

# Chapter 15

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*Alternate editions read:* □□□□□□ .

## Translation

The skilled practitioners of old —  
subtle and wondrous, mysteriously penetrating,  
deep beyond all reckoning.

Precisely because they were beyond reckoning,  
we can only strain to describe them:

Cautious — as the yu-beast testing a winter river.  
Watchful — as the you-beast wary of all its neighbors.  
Grave — as a guest.  
Yielding — as ice about to melt.  
Solid — as unhewn wood.  
Open — as a valley.  
Murky — as turbid water.

Who can, being turbid, through stillness grow slowly clear?  
Who can, being still, through long movement slowly come alive?

Those who preserve this Dao do not seek fullness.  
Precisely because they do not seek fullness,  
they can wear thin without needing to be made new.

## Word Notes

- ☐ — "**the yu-beast**": A beast by this name. JXZ glosses: "The yu waits until ice has frozen solid before it will cross water in winter."
- ☐ — "**the you-beast**": A beast by this name. JXZ glosses: "The you climbs into trees and only comes down when it hears no sound of people."
- ☐ — "**grave**": Reverent, solemn.
- ☐ — "**yielding**": Dispersing, loosening.
- ☐ — "**solid**": Thick, substantial.
- ☐ — "**unhewn wood**": Wood that has not yet been carved into an implement. The primal, unadorned state.
- ☐ — "**open**": Empty, expansive.
- ☐ — "**murky**": Muddled, undifferentiated.
- ☐ — "**worn**": Broken, threadbare.

## Chapter Explanation

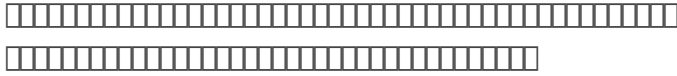
**The skilled practitioners of old** were supremely subtle, supremely wondrous, supremely far-reaching, supremely penetrating — so profoundly deep that they could not be fathomed. **Precisely because they could not be fathomed**, we can only **strain to describe them**. They were **cautious as the yu-beast testing a winter river** — proceeding with the utmost care. They were **watchful as the you-beast descending from a tree, wary of the presence of people** — full of the deepest apprehension. **Grave as a guest** in their reverence, without the least impertinence. **Yielding as ice about to melt**, without the least rigidity. Supremely **solid, like unhewn wood** in its unadorned simplicity. Supremely **open, like a valley** that receives all things. Supremely **murky, like turbid water**, concealing all brightness. And yet though they seemed turbid, they were in truth supremely clear — they simply did not take sharp discrimination as wisdom. The worldly, with their cleverness and self-assurance, may seem clear, but they are in truth turbid. **Who can hold to turbidity rather than grasping at apparent clarity**, muddling along in honest simplicity, and wait for stillness to bring slow clarity? **Who can remain at peace for a long while**, not acting rashly, and wait for that stillness to reach its limit and slowly give rise to life? Those who **preserve this Dao do not seek fullness**. Precisely because they do not seek fullness, they can **wear thin without rashly seeking to be made new**.

## Discourse

The preceding chapter described the mystery of Dao — how it is without sound and without scent. This chapter describes the sages of antiquity who were one body with Dao — how they too were subtle and unfathomable. Yet when we strain to fathom the unfathomable, their vigilance and apprehension, their depth and breadth, their magnanimous tolerance, their humble self-restraint — these dimly reveal the first glimmers of abundant De. But such a bearing is not something one can acquire in haste. If one seeks the gateway to entering De, one must find contentment in the plain and tranquil and take no delight in the novel and exotic. One must be humble and lowly, never seeking fullness. One must shed all entanglements, quietly nourishing clarity. One must be calm and steady, waiting for the heavenly impulse to stir of itself. Then one will naturally enter the realm of Dao. Yet when Laozi asks "Who can..." — I believe it is because the people of the world are

themselves rushing and scrambling, their hearts roiled by selfish desires, not a single moment free from the turmoil of fortune's currents. And so there is, in his words, the sigh of one who finds no kindred spirit in all the world.

# Chapter 16



## Translation

Attain the utmost emptiness;  
hold fast to perfect stillness.  
The myriad beings arise together —  
I observe their return.

All things flourish in profusion,  
yet each returns to its root.  
Returning to the root is called stillness;  
stillness is called restoring the mandate of life.

Restoring the mandate is called the constant;  
knowing the constant is called illumination.  
Not knowing the constant,  
one acts blindly and invites calamity.

Knowing the constant, one contains all;  
containing all, one becomes impartial;  
impartial, one becomes sovereign;  
sovereign, one aligns with Heaven;  
aligned with Heaven, one aligns with the Dao;  
aligned with the Dao, one endures —  
the body may perish, but one is never imperiled.

## Word Notes

- 一 — "**sincerity**": Utmost sincerity; wholehearted commitment.
- 返 — "**return**": To go back, to return to the origin.
- 萬 — "**profuse**": Abundant, teeming in great number.
- 危 — "**peril**": Danger, jeopardy.

## Chapter Explanation

**"Attain the utmost emptiness"** means bringing emptiness to its extreme. **"Hold fast to perfect stillness"** means guarding stillness with utmost sincerity. Although **the myriad beings arise together**, I do not follow along with their arising — I observe their cyclical return. When the myriad beings arise, their leaves grow and flowers bloom in great profusion, yet in the end each **returns to its root**. Having returned to the root, this is called **stillness**. Stillness is called **restoring the mandate of life**. Restoring the mandate of life is called **the constant**. Knowing the constant is called **illumination**. **Not knowing the constant**, one acts blindly and **invites calamity**. **Knowing the constant**, one does not follow the transformations of things but **contains all**. To contain all is to be **impartial and without self-interest**. To be impartial and without self-interest is to be fit to serve as **sovereign of all under Heaven**. The sovereign aligns with **Heaven**. Heaven aligns with **Dao**. Dao **endures forever**. Even after the **body perishes, one is never imperiled** — one exists for all eternity.

## Discourse

This chapter teaches that the great Dao takes emptiness as its constant state and existence as its change. Stillness is its constant state; movement is its change. What exists and moves must eventually return to non-existence and non-movement. Therefore, by holding fast to the constant Dao, even though the myriad affairs and beings of all under Heaven swirl in turmoil and confusion, I simply contain existence within emptiness and meet movement with stillness. I do not see their existence; I do not see their movement. I see only the unchanging constant Dao of all antiquity. Since I do not see their change, I am not swept along with things into change. I persist through all ages. Even though the body may perish, I still endure. Otherwise, if one follows along with the turmoil and confusion of things, one plunges into **the whirlpool of fortune** — how could one not be imperiled?



# Discourse

In ancient times, Emperor Yao governed all under Heaven and caused the people to live in carefree ease and radiant contentment, enjoying their days amid the light of Heaven's natural order. The people even sang: "We till the fields and eat, we dig the wells and drink — what has the emperor's power to do with us?" This was truly the scene of the highest.

But by the time of later generations of rulers — today they claim to be planning peace and stability for all under Heaven, tomorrow they claim to be seeking happiness for the hundred families — yet the truth is deception and fraud, nothing more than a cover for people's eyes and ears, a means to seize power and profit. Little do they know that the hundred families are not fooled by their deception. The people will inevitably rise up in opposition, look upon such rulers as enemies, and scorn them as though it were all a joke, until everything is thrown into utter chaos and the state is no longer a state.

Alas! The highest is no longer to be seen. If only we could see even the next-to-lowest kind of ruler — one who makes the people know to fear the law and gives them a legal order to abide by — that alone could bring a measure of temporary peace.

# Chapter 18



## Translation

When the great Dao falls into disuse,  
humaneness and righteousness appear.  
When cunning and cleverness emerge,  
great hypocrisy arises.  
When the six relations lose their harmony,  
filial piety and parental devotion appear.  
When the nation sinks into darkness and disorder,  
loyal ministers emerge.

## Word Notes

- 伪 — "**hypocrisy**": False, fake, pretense.

## Chapter Explanation

It was only **after the great Dao fell into disuse** that humaneness and righteousness appeared. **When the great Dao prevailed**, humaneness and righteousness could not be seen — there was no contrast to make them visible. When **cunning and cleverness emerged**, people began to practice **great hypocrisy and deception**. In a state of primal simplicity and undifferentiation, there was no need for cunning and scheming. It was only when **the six relations were not in harmony** that filial sons and devoted parents became visible as such. When father and son are naturally harmonious, filial piety and parental devotion cannot be distinguished as such. It was only during **times of darkness and disorder in the state** that loyal ministers stood out. In times of good governance, loyal ministers cannot be distinguished as such.

## Discourse

Mencius opens his mouth and it is always humaneness and righteousness. This chapter says humaneness and righteousness, that chapter says humaneness and righteousness — he expounds humaneness and righteousness with incisive clarity and promotes them with the greatest urgency. Yet Laozi flatly says “when the great Dao falls into disuse, humaneness and righteousness appear,” and even calls for severing humaneness and discarding righteousness. Without humaneness and righteousness, is one still a person? Not meeting even the standard of a person, what great Dao could there be? No wonder the Daoist school has been attacked and refuted by Confucian scholars

of earlier ages, who went so far as to say it was worse than Yang Zhu and Mo Di.

Yet what they do not realize is that, viewed from the outside, Laozi and Mencius appear to oppose each other. But when examined in their inner content, they are in fact **opposites that complete one another**, each with his own rationale.

Let this young student venture a reckless explanation of the great Dao and humaneness-and-righteousness, for the study of all under Heaven and all ages to come. Originally, the great Dao was utterly vacant and empty, possessing nothing whatsoever. At this stage it was provisionally named **the Ultimateless**. Then, as Dao was about to give birth to Heaven, Earth, and the myriad beings, it stirred with one movement into the great Dao, and there appeared the faintest trace of an incipient sign. At this stage it was named **the Supreme Ultimate**. The Supreme Ultimate divided into **the Two Modes**. These Two Modes, in Heaven's Dao, are named yin and yang, giving rise to the four images, the eight trigrams, the sixty-four hexagrams, and the three hundred eighty-four lines. In the human Dao, they are named humaneness and righteousness, giving rise to **the four beginnings and the eight virtues, the three hundred rules of ritual and the three thousand rules of deportment**.

When the great Dao differentiates, humaneness and righteousness appear — this too is natural. When Laozi says “when the great Dao falls into disuse, humaneness and righteousness appear,” this is the formulation of one giving rise to two. When he says “sever humaneness and discard righteousness,” this is the formulation of merging two back into one — returning to the root and restoring the source. He is by no means disparaging humaneness and righteousness. If one takes it as disparaging humaneness and righteousness, then in the Lower Volume he himself says “when Dao is lost, then comes De” — by that reading he would be disparaging even his own De. Would that not be contradicting himself?

It is simply that humaneness and righteousness are born from the great Dao. Laozi argues from the standpoint of Heaven's Dao, and therefore treats humaneness and righteousness as subordinate. Since the great Dao has already transformed into humaneness and righteousness, one must pass through humaneness and righteousness to regenerate the great Dao. Mencius argues from the standpoint of the human Dao, and therefore values humaneness and righteousness. Otherwise, consider: Mencius's overarching purpose was precisely to refute heterodox teachings and rectify the human heart. Yang Zhu and Mo Di were obstructing humaneness and righteousness, and Mencius regarded them as a flood of savage beasts. If Laozi were truly disparaging humaneness and righteousness, why did Mencius not utter a single word against him?

Moreover, although Mencius promoted humaneness and righteousness, he did not say outright “humaneness and righteousness” but rather “there is *also* humaneness and righteousness.” The word “also” already carries a sense of the extraordinary. In extraordinary times, humaneness and righteousness come to the fore. Valuing humaneness and righteousness was the remedy for the catastrophe of the Warring States. Otherwise, Confucius placed the highest value on humaneness yet spoke of righteousness only rarely. In the “Liyun” chapter's vision of the Great Unity, he speaks only of cultivating trust and fostering harmony, and does not say “humaneness, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom.” Is this not to suggest that Confucius and Mencius are also at odds?

In truth, what the sages said had its specific purpose in each case. Mencius spoke of humaneness and righteousness to rescue the calamity of the age of chaos and advance it toward the age of rising peace. Confucius spoke of cultivating trust and fostering harmony to advance the age of rising peace toward the Great Unity. Laozi spoke of Dao and De to advance the Great Unity toward transformation through sincerity. This is why I am planning to establish the International Society of Dao and De: first annotating Mencius, then the “Liyun” chapter, and then the *Dao De Jing* — precisely for this reason.

Some may ask: whether this explanation is right or wrong need not be debated. But since we are using humaneness and righteousness to save the present-day calamity of war, we need only promote the teachings of Mencius — why bother annotating the *Dao De Jing* as well? What they fail to understand is that this is speaking in terms of the broad outline. If we examine the fine points, speaking of humaneness and righteousness also involves Dao and De, and speaking of Dao and De also involves humaneness and righteousness. Within Mencius there is also the *Dao De Jing*, and within the *Dao De Jing* there is also Mencius. Humaneness and righteousness are the broad outline of Dao and De; Dao and De are the destination toward which humaneness and righteousness return. Without Dao and De there can be no humaneness and righteousness. Apart from humaneness and righteousness there can be no Dao and De. Humaneness and righteousness are certainly important — but Dao and De are also important!

As for this Discourse of mine: established scholars and elder masters will certainly denounce it as fabrication. Yet the ruin of learning in our country is precisely caused by clinging rigidly to the established doctrines of our forebears without daring the slightest further inquiry. This is why I brave reproach and offer this reckless interpretation.

# Chapter 19



## Translation

Sever ability, discard cunning —  
the people benefit a hundredfold.  
Sever humaneness, discard righteousness —  
the people return to filial devotion and loving care.  
Sever cleverness, discard profit —  
thieves and bandits cease to exist.

These three, as mere refinements, are not enough.  
Therefore, let the people have something to hold to:  
perceive the unadorned, embrace the unhewn —  
diminish self-interest, be without desire.

## Word Notes

- ㄣ — "**sever**": To cut off absolutely, to bring to an end.
- ㄣ — "**ability**": Capability, skill. Not "sagehood" — the author glosses this character specifically as "ability."
- ㄣ — "**the plain**": The original, unadorned substance.

## Chapter Explanation

**Without recourse to ability** and having **discarded cunning**, the people will naturally not compete through ability and cleverness — their **benefit will be a hundredfold**. **Without recourse to humaneness** and having **discarded righteousness**, the people will naturally not pursue the empty fame of humaneness and righteousness, and will **return to filial devotion and loving care**. **Without recourse to cleverness** and having **discarded profit**, the people will naturally not become greedy and deceitful, and **thieves and bandits will cease to exist**. These **three things** the Sage regarded as ornamental refinements, **insufficient** to transform all under Heaven. Therefore he taught the hundred families to find another allegiance — to perceive their original face, to embrace the genuine sincerity of pristine simplicity, to diminish self-interest, and to be without greedy desire.

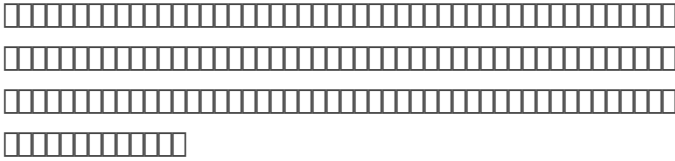
## Discourse

This chapter elaborates the meaning of the preceding chapter, teaching people to return to the pure simplicity and nonaction of high antiquity — the fine tradition of not recognizing virtue as such and not knowing the ruler's hand.

Yet Laozi also harbored a certain grievance. The customs of the age had grown thin and debased: everyone practiced deception and fraud, and things had reached the extreme. If a person did not resort to cunning schemes and deceitful stratagems, he could not survive in the world. It had almost come to the point where everyone in all under Heaven was the equivalent of thieves who tunnel through walls and climb over fences. If we trace this to its root cause, the blame lies with those old and deeply cunning ones who deceived people with false humaneness and counterfeit righteousness. Through mutual influence, this became the prevailing custom, flowing ever further downward, until it fermented into this wretched state of affairs. All the fine words the ancients spoke — humaneness, righteousness, sagehood, wisdom — were appropriated by deceitful schemers who used them as stock-in-trade for cheating people.

Laozi wished to set things right, yet he was buried away in his post as Keeper of the Archives, without political power, and could do nothing about it. Therefore he spoke from the reverse side, in order to startle the world awake. How could he truly have been disparaging sagehood, wisdom, humaneness, and righteousness?

# Chapter 20



## Translation

Abandon learning — be free of worry.  
Between assent and rebuke,  
how great is the distance?  
Between good and evil,  
what is the difference?  
What others fear,  
I too must not dismiss.  
Vast and boundless — it stretches on without end!

The multitude are merry and bright,  
as though feasting at a grand banquet,  
as though ascending the terrace in spring.  
I alone am still, giving no sign —  
like an infant who has not yet learned to smile.  
Adrift, unhurried, as though with nowhere to return.

The multitude all have more than enough;  
I alone seem to have lost everything.  
Mine is the heart of a fool —  
muddled and dim.  
The common people shine with knowing;  
I alone seem lost in shadow.  
The common people are sharp and sure;  
I alone am dull and withdrawn.  
Faint, as though dissolved in darkness;  
desolate, as though with nowhere to rest.

The multitude all have their purpose;  
I alone am stubborn and rough-hewn.  
I alone differ from others —  
and prize being nourished at the Source.

# Word Notes

- □ — "**assent**": A direct, straightforward response.
- □ — "**rebuke**": A crooked, evasive response.
- □ — "**vast**": Great, immense.
- □□ — "**merry and gay**": In a state of cheerful ease and delight.
- □ — "**still**": Tranquil, without attachment.
- □□ — "**drifting**": In motion, moving about.
- □□ — "**muddled**": Undifferentiated and unaware.
- □□ — "**bright and knowing**": Luminously clear.
- □□ — "**dull and confused**": Dim and unknowing.
- □ — "**darkness**": Not bright, obscured.
- □ — "**desolate**": Empty and still.
- □ — "**stubborn**": Foolish, intractable.
- □ — "**uncouth**": Crude, unrefined.
- □ — "**nourished**": To feed, to sustain.

## Chapter Explanation

Having **abandoned the learning** of worldly names and forms, one is **free of the worry** born of discrimination and calculation. Between the direct and the crooked, **how great is the distance?** Between good and evil, **what is the difference?** One simply listens and lets it pass. **What others fear**, I too cannot fail to fear. Yet I have transcended the cycles of Heaven and Earth — **vast and boundless, without end or boundary** — so what is there to fear?

**The multitude are merry and gay**, greedy for the pleasures of desire, **as though feasting at a great banquet, as though ascending the terrace** to enjoy fine music in spring. **I alone am tranquil**, showing no stirring of desire — **like an infant who has not yet learned to smile**, lively and free, moving as Heaven moves, without the slightest taint. **The multitude all have** self-satisfied hearts. **I alone seem to have lost everything** — empty and hollow through and through. **Mine is the heart of a fool** — muddled and murky! **The common people** draw excessively on their **brightness**; **I alone seem benighted**, knowing nothing. **The common people** are excessively sharp and **discerning**; **I alone am dull and confused**, making no distinctions. **Dim**, as though unknowing, **shrouded in darkness**. **Desolate**, as though with **nowhere to rest**. **The multitude all have** something to rely upon. **I alone am stubborn and uncouth**, as though without ability. In everything, **I alone differ from others** — yet I prize returning to the source, **nourishing myself with the pre-celestial**.

## Discourse

Confucius opens his mouth and speaks of learning. From learning comes delight, then joy, then the equanimity of not taking offense. Laozi, on the other hand, says "abandon learning — be free of worry." Being free of worry and not taking offense amount to the same thing. Learning and not-learning, however, stand in utter opposition. Yet people do not realize that Confucius taught from

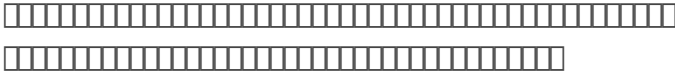
the standpoint of the human Dao, and therefore taught the path of learning from below to reach above. Laozi spoke from the standpoint of Heaven's Dao, and therefore needed no learning at all.

Moreover, what Laozi would have people abandon is not the learning Confucius spoke of. It is the learning of those worldly scholars who cling obsessively to names, forms, and appearances, who sort things into categories of good and evil, straight and crooked, until they fall into attachment to words and attachment to principles and phenomena — laboring in worry their whole lives without ever seeing Dao clearly. This is why he shatters it with one stroke: "Abandon learning — be free of worry."

Yet there are those who, while not falling into attachment to words or attachment to principles and phenomena, shrink from difficulty and settle for comfort. They look upon cultivation of Dao as climbing to Heaven. They cling to life and fear death, fear poverty and fear lowliness. Or they are entangled in desire, craving fine flavors and chasing sensory pleasures. Or they are self-satisfied and full of themselves, unable to receive with an empty heart. Or they exhaust their cleverness, or scrutinize petty affairs, or rely on wealth and status, or pride themselves on talent and ability. All of these are enough to obstruct Dao. One must shatter every last one and return to the state before birth — unknowing, unaware, in the muddled and dim primordial Heaven. Only then can one see one's original face. With the pre-celestial emptiness as nourishment, there is a nameless and indescribable true joy, compared to which the pleasures of grand banquets and spring terraces are inferior by ten thousand upon ten thousand times.

In the school of Confucius, only Yan Hui shed his cleverness and cast aside his cunning, appearing foolish all day long, with precisely this kind of bearing. That is why he could remain unchanged in his joy.

# Chapter 21



## Translation

The bearing of abundant De follows only Dao.  
Dao as a thing —  
elusive and obscure.  
Obscure and elusive:  
within it there is image.  
Elusive and obscure:  
within it there is substance.  
Profound and hidden:  
within it there is essence.  
Its essence is utterly real;  
within it there is evidence.  
From antiquity to the present,  
its name has never departed —  
through it, all origins are discerned.  
How do I know the nature of all origins?  
By this.

## Word Notes

- 玄 — "**profound and dark**": Deeply hidden, unfathomable.
- 索 — "**surveyed**": To pass through, to examine across time.

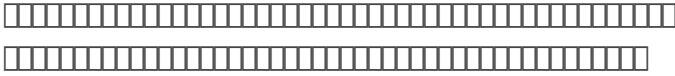
## Chapter Explanation

One whose **bearing** is that of **abundant De** follows only Dao. **Dao as a thing** is supremely subtle — **elusive and obscure**, impossible to see. Though it is impossible to see, within the **elusive and obscure** there is yet **image**. Within the **elusive and obscure** there is yet **substance**. In what is **profound and dark**, beyond fathoming, there is yet **essence**. Its **essence is utterly real**; within it there is **evidence** that can be relied upon. This Dao, **from antiquity to the present day**, has never lost **its name**. Through it, **all of Heaven, Earth, and the myriad beings** are surveyed. **How do I know** that Heaven, Earth, and the myriad beings issue from Dao? Because Dao is **elusive, obscure, profound, and dark** — it cannot be destroyed or extinguished.

# Discourse

One whose bearing is that of abundant De still follows only Dao — how much more must such a person nourish themselves inwardly through Dao. The divine subtlety of Dao cannot be called nonexistent, nor can it be called existent. To take it as nonexistent would be dead emptiness. To take it as existent would be to cling to form and appearance. Yet precisely within this space that is at once without and with, with and without, there is a formless image and a roughly formed substance. What are this image and this substance? If one could point to them concretely, one would already have lost their essential nature. Yet if nothing is said, people will fail to understand. Let me, then, venture to describe it: it is the pivot at the moment when the Ultimateless gives rise to the Supreme Ultimate — something inchoate and undifferentiated within. Though named image and substance, it remains profound and dark beyond fathoming. And within that profundity there is indeed true essence, with evidence that can be relied upon. If a person can embody this and put it into practice, they can unite with Dao and share in its eternity — enduring from antiquity to the present, never departing.

# Chapter 22



## Translation

The crooked shall be made whole;  
the bent shall be made straight.  
The hollow shall be filled;  
the worn shall be made new.  
With little, one gains;  
with much, one goes astray.

Therefore the Sage embraces the One  
and becomes the pattern for all under Heaven.  
Not displaying himself, he is luminous.  
Not asserting he is right, he becomes evident.  
Not proclaiming his merit, he achieves.  
Not praising himself, he endures.  
Because he alone does not contend,  
no one under Heaven can contend with him.

The ancient saying, "the crooked shall be made whole" —  
how could this be empty words?  
Truly, wholeness returns to him.

## Word Notes

- 曲 — "**crooked**": Bent to one side, partial.
- 窪 — "**hollow**": Sunken low, depressed.
- 迷 — "**goes astray**": Confused, led astray.
- 彰 — "**distinguished**": Made manifest, celebrated.
- 自 — "**proclaiming merit**": Declaring one's own achievements.
- 自 — "**proud**": Given to self-praise.

## Chapter Explanation

In all things, what is **crooked** can be made **whole**. What is **bent** can be made **straight**. What is **hollow** can be **filled**. What is **worn** can be made **new**. With **little**, one can **gain**. With **much**, one

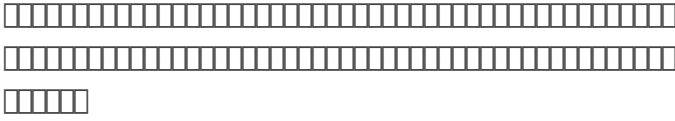
becomes **bewildered**. For this reason, **the Sage** holds fast to a single, undivided heart, making no distinctions whatsoever, and serves as **the pattern for all under Heaven**. He does not display **his own brilliance**, and therefore he is truly **luminous**. He does not insist upon **being right** or seek to distinguish himself, and therefore he is truly **distinguished**. He does not proclaim **his own merit**, and therefore he truly **has merit**. He does not boast of **his own strengths**, and therefore he truly **endures**. All of this flows from **non-contention**. Because he **does not contend**, no one under Heaven is able to **contend with him**. The ancients said "**the crooked shall be made whole**" — is this **empty talk**? Truly, without seeking it, wholeness comes of itself and returns to him.

## Discourse

This chapter teaches that the crooked, the bent, the hollow, the worn, and the little are what the world does not want. The whole, the straight, the full, the new, and the much are what the world fights to obtain. Yet people do not realize that among all things between Heaven and Earth, fullness and emptiness, waning and waxing, cycle without ceasing. Why contend? Moreover, the crooked and the whole, the bent and the straight, and all the rest — are they not mere projections of worldly delusion?

Therefore the Sage rises above all names and appearances, steps beyond all dualistic opposition, and rests in pure stillness without contention. Since he does not contend with others, even those who might wish to contend with him find no ground upon which to do so. Naturally, his reality and his name arrive together — without contention, he gains all of himself.

# Chapter 23



## Translation

Spare words — accord with the natural.

A whirlwind does not last the morning;  
a sudden downpour does not last the day.  
Who brings these about? Heaven and Earth.  
If even Heaven and Earth cannot sustain them,  
how much less can human beings?

Therefore, one who follows the way of Dao:  
in Dao, becomes one with Dao;  
in De, becomes one with De;  
in loss, becomes one with loss.  
One with Dao — Dao gladly receives them.  
One with De — De gladly receives them.  
One with loss — loss gladly receives them.

Where trust falls short,  
distrust will follow.

## Word Notes

- 𠄎 — "**spare**": Few, infrequent.
- 𠄎𠄎 — "**whirlwind**": A fierce gale.
- 𠄎𠄎 — "**sudden downpour**": A sudden, violent downpour.

## Chapter Explanation

Be **sparing in argumentative words** and follow the course of **the natural**. A **fierce gale** does not blow through an entire morning. A **sudden downpour** does not last an entire day. Who sends the gale and the downpour? **Heaven and Earth**. When Heaven and Earth act unnaturally, even they **cannot sustain it**. How much less so for **human beings**?

Therefore, one who **devotes oneself to Dao**: when meeting those who have Dao, **becomes one with them in Dao**. When meeting those who have De, **becomes one with them in De**. When meeting those who have lost the way, **becomes one with them in their loss**. Being **one with those of Dao**, Dao itself is **content and at ease**. Being **one with those of De**, De itself is **content and at ease**. Being **one with those who have lost**, loss itself is **content and at ease**. Otherwise, if one's **trust is insufficient**, no amount of forceful argument will make people **believe**.

## Discourse

The preceding chapter taught non-contention between the crooked and the whole, the bent and the straight, and all such dualities — this was to quiet the contending of people in the world at large. This chapter teaches sparing words to accord with the natural — this is to quiet the contending of people who study and teach.

For among scholars and students, once there is the slightest thread of illumination, each clings rigidly to his own view. Not only do they divide into sects and factions, attacking those who differ while sheltering those who agree — the ardent look at the scrupulous and call them too rigid, while the scrupulous look at the ardent and call them too reckless. Those of the lesser vehicle do not accept the greater vehicle. Those of the greater vehicle do not accept the lesser vehicle. And toward ordinary people in the world, they are even less willing to make room. So they argue back and forth, disputing without end, their writings running on page after page, their books so numerous they make the ox sweat and fill the house to the rafters. Yet the more they argue, the more entrenched each side becomes, and Dao grows only more obscure. Scholars who come after have no way to tell which side to follow, and people of the world dare not even approach. Is this not the very harm caused by contention?

Therefore, the consummate sage who stands above all others practices the teaching without words. Meeting those who have Dao, he becomes one with them. Meeting those who have De, he becomes one with them. Meeting those who have lost the way, he becomes one with them too. Not only does he become one with them — self and other dissolve, and all alike forget themselves in a shared contentment. He makes them feel as though seated in a warm spring breeze — drawing close to him, growing fond of him — until without knowing it they are quietly transformed in their very nature.

The *Doctrine of the Mean* speaks of acting from one's present station and being content in any circumstance. The Bodhisattva Guanyin manifests in every manner of form to teach the Dharma. In the *Zhuangzi*, there is Wang Tai, the footless man of Lu — he did not teach while standing, did not deliberate while seated, yet those who followed him went empty and returned full, without outward instruction yet inwardly transformed. Confucius called him a sage. All of them used this very method.

Otherwise, when people do not believe, forcing the point through argument only makes an already difficult thing more difficult still.

# Chapter 24



## Translation

Stand on tiptoe — you cannot hold your ground.  
Stride too wide — you cannot walk.  
Display yourself — you will not be luminous.  
Insist you are right — you will not be distinguished.  
Boast of your deeds — you will claim no merit.  
Flaunt your strengths — you will not endure.

From the vantage of Dao, these are  
leftover food and excess baggage —  
even creatures find them loathsome.  
Therefore one who has Dao does not dwell there.

## Word Notes

- 踮 — "**stand on tiptoe**": To raise oneself on the toes.
- 跨 — "**stride too wide**": To lift the legs in an exaggerated step.
- excess — "**excess**": Superfluous, redundant.

## Chapter Explanation

One who **stands on tiptoe** hoping to appear tall **cannot hold his ground**. One who **strides too wide** hoping to go far **cannot walk**. One who **displays himself** cannot be truly **luminous**. One who **insists he is right** cannot be truly **distinguished**. One who **boasts of his deeds** will have **no merit**. One who **flaunts his strengths** will **not endure**. Spoken in terms of Dao, these are called **craving too much food and craving too great a journey** — eating to excess and traveling to exhaustion. **Even creatures** find such behavior loathsome. Therefore **one who has Dao** does not do these things.

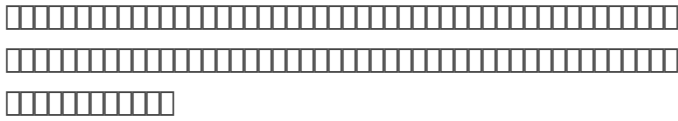
## Discourse

This chapter continues to develop the meaning of non-contention from the two preceding chapters. It further warns emphatically against the great harm of overreaching and rushing ahead — that even creatures find such behavior loathsome. If a person insists on contending recklessly, he falls

below even the level of creatures.

Yet Laozi's principle of non-contention is not the doctrine of spineless, shameless resignation. This has already been distinguished and clarified multiple times in earlier chapters. There is no need to say more here.

# Chapter 25



## Translation

Something there is, whole and undivided,  
born before Heaven and Earth.  
Silent, boundlessly open —  
standing alone, it does not change.  
Moving through all things, it does not falter.  
It may be called the mother of all under Heaven.

I do not know its name.  
I style it "Dao."  
Forced to name it, I call it "great."  
Great — it flows forth.  
Flowing forth — it reaches far.  
Reaching far — it returns.

Therefore: Dao is great.  
Heaven is great.  
Earth is great.  
The human being, too, is great.  
Within the world there are four greats,  
and the human being dwells among them.

The human being follows Earth.  
Earth follows Heaven.  
Heaven follows Dao.  
Dao follows what is naturally so.

## Word Notes

- 大 — "**boundlessly open**": Expansive, vast.
- 逝 — "**flows forth**": Goes, departs, passes onward.
- 域 — "**the world**": The realm, the cosmos.
- 王 — "**the human being**": JXZ reads 王 (wáng, king) as meaning 人 (rén, human being).  
The human being is the most numinous of the myriad beings; therefore it is called "king."

# Chapter Explanation

There is **a thing, formed in a single whole**, born **before Heaven and Earth**. It is **silent** and unmoving, **boundlessly open** and empty. It **stands alone** without counterpart, enduring through all ages yet **never changing**. It **circulates through everything** in all existence yet **never falters**. It gives birth to every being under Heaven, and may be called **the mother** of all. I do not know this thing's name. By way of a courtesy name, I call it **Dao**. Pressed to give it a proper name, I call it **great**. Being great, it can transform without leaving a trace — this is called **flowing forth**. Going far beyond all boundaries — this is called **reaching far**. Though it reaches far, it is right before us at this very moment — this is called **returning**.

Consider how those who voyage across the sea, upon reaching the farthest point, turn and come back — this is precisely what is meant by "reaching far, it returns."

Therefore, **Dao is great, Heaven is great, Earth is great, and the human being, too, is great**. Within the world there are **four greats**, and the human being holds one of them. Though the human being is but a small body, the heart's capacity extends beyond Heaven and Earth. If one is to bring this greatness to fulfillment: take **Earth** as one's model and **bear all things** without exception. Go further and take **Heaven** as one's model — as Heaven **covers all things** without exception. Further still, take **Dao** as one's model, which **gives birth to all things** without appearing to do so. And as Dao gives birth to the myriad beings as a matter of course, take **the natural** as one's model.

## Discourse

This chapter speaks at length of the subtlety of Dao and of Dao's function. Though Dao is mysterious and unfathomable, the human being, having been born from Dao, possesses the full substance of Dao. One need only turn back and seek it, bringing forth that full substance: following Earth, which is still and of deep De, bearing all things; following Heaven, which flows ceaselessly in its creative activity, giving life to all; following Dao, which gives birth to the myriad beings without appearing to give birth to them at all — everything in accordance with what is naturally so. Then one may share its title and stand as one of the four greats, transcending Heaven and Earth. Why stop at merely standing alongside them?

Earth, too, is in motion. Yet Earth is a solid body: its motion follows an orbit and a fixed measure, and it moves slowly. Heaven is of the nature of qi — its movement is constant and fluid, and all that is dispersed among the myriad beings belongs to it. This is why the ancients said "Heaven moves, Earth rests." Moreover, the Sage framed his argument on the basis of what the people could see, in order to reveal principle. Could it be that the Sage, whose learning spans the human and the divine, did not know that Earth moves?

To follow Dao is to give birth to the myriad beings without appearing to do so. All of it accords with what is naturally so. Then one may share its name and stand as one body with Dao, transcending Heaven and Earth — not merely joining them as the fourth among four greats.

# Chapter 26



## Translation

The heavy is the root of the light;  
the still is the master of the restless.

Thus the Sage travels all day  
yet never strays from his supply wagon.  
Though splendid vistas rise before him,  
he rests at ease, transcendent and unmoved.

How then can the lord of ten thousand chariots  
treat his own person lightly before all under Heaven?  
To be light is to lose the root;  
to be restless is to lose the master.

## Word Notes

- □ — "**restless, agitated**": Impetuousness, fidgeting haste.
- □ — "**a covered wagon for resting in**": A vehicle in which one sleeps and rests during travel.
- □ — "**baggage, provisions**": The supplies and stores loaded on the wagon.
- □ — "**at ease, composed**": Settled, peaceful.

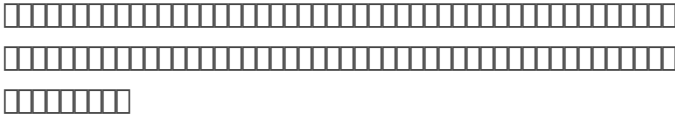
## Chapter Explanation

In all things, **the heavy is the root of the light**: what has weight serves as the foundation for what is light. **The still is the master of the restless**: what can be quiet commands what is agitated. Thus **the Sage travels from morning to evening, all day long, and never parts from the wagon bearing his provisions**. Even when the most magnificent and splendid sights appear before him, he sits steadily upon his wagon, **transcendent and unmoved**. How is it, then, that **the lord of ten thousand chariots** — the king of a state fielding ten thousand war-chariots — takes his own person lightly, rushing off to chase the world's splendors? He does not realize that **lightness loses the root** and **restlessness loses the master**.

## Discourse

The great earth is heavy; all the light myriad beings grow upon its surface, and it is the root of all. The sea is still; all the restless hundred rivers flow into it, and it is the master of all waters. A person who is light and frivolous cannot bear responsibility. A person who is restless and agitated cannot endure for long. Only one who is grave and composed can bear heavy burdens and reach far destinations. Therefore the Sage travels all day without clinging to stillness for its own sake — he moves through the world, yet never strays from his supply wagon, never daring to treat himself lightly. Though he be honored as the Son of Heaven, possessing all within the four seas, enjoying the utmost splendor the human world can offer — he not only regards these things as what he has always had; he looks upon them as one would a worn-out shoe. Transcendent, dwelling beyond the world, his heart utterly unmoved, he is not drawn along by outward splendor. How then is it that those of the utmost nobility — lords of ten thousand chariots, the proverbial "sons of a family worth a thousand in gold" — if we take this to mean only the sovereign of a great state, then must everyone apart from the sovereign not cherish their person? They lightly cast aside their person, abandoning themselves to passions and desires, soaring and fluttering in agitation, until they lose the root and lose the master. How truly lamentable.

# Chapter 27



## Translation

One skilled in traveling leaves no ruts or tracks;  
one skilled in speaking leaves no flaw to censure;  
one skilled in reckoning uses no tallies or counters;  
one skilled in closing uses no bolt or lock, yet what is closed cannot be opened;  
one skilled in binding uses no cord or knot, yet what is bound cannot be undone.

Thus the Sage is ever skilled at rescuing people,  
and so no person is cast aside;  
ever skilled at rescuing things,  
and so no thing is cast aside.  
This is called making insight manifest.

Therefore the good person is the teacher of the not-good,  
and the not-good person is the resource of the good.  
Not to value one's teacher,  
not to cherish one's resource —  
however clever one may be, this is great delusion.  
This is called the essential mystery.

## Word Notes

- □ — "**ruts**": Wheel-ruts left by a carriage.
- □ — "**flaw**": A defect, an imperfection.
- □ — "**to censure**": To count up another's faults.
- □ — "**tallies**": Counting sticks, an abacus.
- □ — "**counters**": Counting rods used for calculation.
- □ — "**bolt**": The horizontal crossbar used to bar a door.
- □ — "**lock**": A lock or latch.
- □ — "**knot, to bind**": To tie up with a cord.
- □ — "**to make manifest**": To display outwardly. JXZ's reading; standard interpretations render this as "concealing" or "inheriting."

## Chapter Explanation

**One skilled in traveling** leaves no ruts or tracks. **One skilled in speaking** has no flaw that can be pointed out or censured. **One skilled in reckoning** needs no abacus or counting rods to calculate. **One skilled in closing** uses no bolt or lock, yet what is closed cannot be opened. **One skilled in binding** uses no cord to tie a knot, yet what is bound cannot be undone. Thus **the Sage is ever skilled at rescuing people**, and so **no person is cast aside**. He is **ever skilled at rescuing things**, and so **no thing is cast aside**. This is called **making one's own insight manifest**. Therefore **the good person is the teacher of the not-good person; the not-good person is the resource of the good person**. If the good person does not value his standing as teacher, and does not cherish those who may serve as his resource — even if he is very clever, he is in fact profoundly deluded. This is the most essential and marvelous secret.

## Discourse

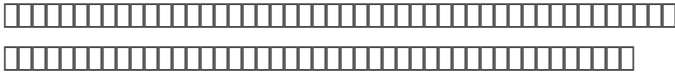
Mencius said: "Those who accord with the center nurture those who do not; those who have ability nurture those who lack it. If those who accord with the center were to cast away those who do not, and those with ability were to cast away those without, then the distance between worthy and unworthy would not amount to even an inch." The Buddhist scriptures say: "The Buddha ferries all beings across; all beings ferry the Buddha across." Western philosophers say: "Heroes create the times; the times create heroes." All of these illuminate the central meaning of this chapter and corroborate one another. One can see that the sages of all ages and all lands, without exception, are rescuers of people and things. Without exception, they bring all the people and things of the world to completion. And in doing so, they themselves attain great accomplishment. Therefore it is inevitable that one must borrow the people and things of the world in order to bring oneself to completion. Suppose Mencius had not encountered an age when human hearts ran wild and perverse doctrines ran rampant — he could not have become the Second Sage who championed orthodoxy and refuted heterodoxy. Suppose Shakyamuni had not encountered an age when human hearts were confused, when licentiousness, killing, greed, and violence raged — he could not have become the Buddha, the teacher of gods and humans. Suppose Washington had not encountered an age of despotic cruelty — he could not have become the foremost great man who created the United States. It is precisely because the world is in chaos and human hearts have gone bad that the perfect raw material for accomplishment is present. When the raw material appears, the person with keen eyes and quick hands seizes it first. Opportunity must never be lost. Alas! Today the entire globe is engulfed in slaughter, ruined beyond repair, in a manner unprecedented since antiquity. The world truly has reached the utmost extreme of chaos. Treacherous schemes and deceitful plots are ruthlessly inflicted upon even one's closest kin and dearest friends. Greed, violence, and cruelty treat people worse than animals. This too is unprecedented since antiquity. Human hearts truly have reached the utmost extreme of corruption. Since the corruption of the times and of human hearts is without precedent since antiquity, it follows that the raw material for accomplishing great heroes and great sages has also reached an unprecedented richness, and the circumstances for accomplishing great heroes and great sages have also reached an unprecedented ripeness. The great heroes and great sages who will emerge in the future to save the world must likewise be without precedent. And the people who assist those great heroes and great sages in saving the world will similarly be without precedent. The American President Wilson, along with England, France, and other nations, at the conclusion of the European War, established the League of Nations for Perpetual Peace to maintain lasting peace. If they can truly persevere

from start to finish and hold firm to the end, they too may truly be called great sages and great heroes without precedent since antiquity. Laozi calls those who rescue people and things "good persons." I go further and honor them with the title "beautiful persons." Confucius praised the music of Shun as "perfectly beautiful and perfectly good." A beautiful person ranks higher than a good person. Laozi says: "The good person is the teacher of the not-good." I say: "The beautiful person is the teacher of the not-beautiful; the not-beautiful person is the resource of the beautiful person." The *Book of Odes* says: "Of whom do I think? The beautiful one in the west. That beautiful one — the one of the west!" I chant this verse three times, and cannot help but send my prayers and blessings toward the west.

Now, everyone under Heaven who has the slightest human feeling wants to rescue people and things. Yet countless people who wish to rescue people and things find themselves unable to rescue anyone or anything. Why is this? It is because they are not skilled at rescuing people, not skilled at rescuing things. Laozi says: **"The Sage is ever skilled at rescuing people, and so no person is cast aside; ever skilled at rescuing things, and so no thing is cast aside."** Those who are skilled at rescuing people and things leave no visible trace. They rescue people through Dao, not through wealth. They rescue people through humaneness, not through petty kindness. They cause all the people under Heaven — men to find their proper occupations, women to find their proper homes. Each person is settled in their own livelihood. Even the old, the young, the disabled, and the infirm can support themselves through some skill. Even the most obstinate and intractable can be gently guided and persuaded until they return to the proper path. Naturally, no one is useless or worthy of being cast aside. As for rescuing things — likewise, each thing is given its proper use. Even the most poisonous and filthy things have their uses and are not to be discarded. Only then can all species dwell together without contention, and all things grow together without harming one another. As for philanthropists who give out clothing and meals — the merit they accumulate is certainly great. But those who receive such aid often develop a habit of dependence. As for buying captive animals and releasing them — this too has great merit, but it reaches very few. I do not say these things are bad; I say only that they cannot save all under Heaven. Confucius said: "The good person does not follow in others' footsteps, yet neither does he enter the inner chamber." How then can such a person rescue all the people and things under Heaven? Consider: throughout his entire life, Confucius never engaged in any charitable enterprise. He merely edited the *Odes*, established the *Rites*, and bequeathed teachings and set down laws. Naturally he was able to fulfill the nature of all people and things. Fulfilling the nature of all people and things — causing all people and all the myriad beings to find their proper place — that is what it means to be truly skilled at rescuing people and things. These two statements of Laozi's are truly of the most profound mystery. All great educators who enlighten the people's wisdom and nurture the people's virtue; all great industrialists who benefit the people's livelihood and enrich the people's welfare — all are contained within these words. The vulgar and undiscerning say that the learning of Laozi is quietistic nonaction, purely negative, a parasite upon the world. But consider carefully: the words of this chapter contain a great and active purpose. They go so far as to directly reproach those who merely keep themselves clean and pure, who embrace a philosophy of world-weariness, calling them "greatly deluded." Is the learning of Laozi really negativism? It is simply that Laozi's mode of action is nonaction that leaves nothing undone. Though ten thousand affairs swirl about him, he remains clear and still within himself. He grasps the essential principle, follows the natural momentum of circumstances, and acts without forcing, without artifice — that is all.



# Chapter 28



## Translation

Know the masculine, yet hold to the feminine —  
become a stream in the valley for all under Heaven.  
Constant De never departs;  
one returns to the innocence of the infant.

Know the bright, yet hold to the dark —  
become a standard for all under Heaven.  
Constant De never errs;  
one returns to the Ultimateless.

Know the glorious, yet hold to the humble —  
become a valley for all under Heaven.  
Constant De is at last complete;  
one returns to unhewn wood.

When unhewn wood is split, it becomes mere implements.  
The Sage employs the whole, and so becomes chief among all.  
Thus the great fashioner does not cut.

## Word Notes

- ☐ — "**masculine**": The male among birds; by extension, strength and assertiveness.
- ☐ — "**feminine**": The female among birds; by extension, yielding softness.
- ☐ — "**stream in the valley**": A mountain brook running through low ground.
- ☐ — "**the crossbar of a carriage**": The horizontal bar at the front of a carriage upon which one leans forward in a gesture of respect. In ancient times, when showing reverence from a carriage, one would bow forward and lean upon this bar.
- ☐ — "**to err, to deviate**": To go wrong, to miss the mark.
- ☐ — "**to cut apart**": To sever, to cleave.

## Chapter Explanation

One knows the masculine and its strength, yet **holds to the feminine**, taking softness and yielding as one's guiding principle. This is like **being a stream in the valley for all under Heaven**, positioning oneself in the lowly place. Being a stream in the valley for all under Heaven, positioning oneself in the lowly place — **the constant De never departs**, and one **returns to the harmonious qi of the infant**. One knows the bright and its radiance, yet **holds to the dark**, taking obscurity as one's guiding principle. This is like **being a crossbar for all under Heaven** — one who always bows low. Being a crossbar for all under Heaven, always bowing low — **the constant De never errs**, and one **returns to the emptiness of the Ultimateless**. One knows the glory of honor, yet **holds to the humble**, taking modesty and deference as one's guiding principle. This is like **being a valley for all under Heaven**, receiving all things with openness. Being a valley for all under Heaven, receiving all things with openness — **the constant De is at last complete**, and one **returns to the undivided wholeness of unhewn wood**. When **unhewn wood is split apart, it becomes implements** — each with only a single use. But when **the Sage employs this unhewn wood**, he can **become the chief of all who use implements** — his use is not limited to a single thing. Therefore **the great fashioner does not cut apart** the undivided wholeness of unhewn wood.

## Discourse

Confucius said: "The noble person is not an implement." This is precisely what "the great fashioner does not cut" means. For once a person has become an implement, he has only a single use and cannot serve many purposes. Moreover, he is used by others and cannot be his own master. Take machinery, for instance. If used by good people, it may revitalize industry or defend the nation and protect the people — rendering genuine merit to the world and virtue to humankind. Yet after prolonged use it eventually breaks down. Once broken, people cast it into the dung heap or the rubble pile. If used by brigands, it may destroy people's homes or take people's lives — an accessory to evil, hated by all the world through all the ages. Alas! Heaven brings forth raw talent that becomes implements for the world's use, and yet it comes to such an end as this. Is this not deeply lamentable? Is this not bitterly unjust? I, reaching this point in my words, cannot restrain myself from weeping aloud on behalf of all the talented individuals throughout all ages and all lands. Persons of brilliance and outstanding ability, people of extraordinary talent and remarkable skill — they exist in every age and every place. In truth they deserve to be called great implements, sharp implements, precious implements. Yet examine the historical record: how many of them achieved lasting merit or lasting virtue? The great majority were exploited by treacherous ministers, entrapped by ruthless strongmen, made accessories to tyranny, bringing disaster upon the nation and calamity upon the people. In their own time their reputations were ruined and their lives destroyed, hated by all. After death they left behind a stench that lingers for ten thousand years, reviled and cursed. The world hates them, curses them. I alone grieve for them, pity them. They were implements, used by others, unable to be their own masters. Only by becoming a noble person can one avoid being exploited.

Someone may ask: "If everyone becomes a noble person, with no one consenting to be used, and there are no more implements in the world — can things still function?" The answer is this: "The noble person is not an implement" does not mean having no use. It means holding within oneself the primal substance from which all manner of implements can be fashioned, yet not assuming a

fixed implement-form. When one sees clearly that the world cannot do without a particular implement, only then does one manifest a kind of divine implement — one possessing wondrous function yet having no fixed material form — to relieve people and benefit things. Once used, it returns at once to primal substance, and one is not appropriated by others. In former times, Confucius served as an overseer of livestock and as a keeper of granaries — this was a modest display of the divine implement's function for people to see. When he served as Minister of Justice and presided at the Jiagu conference, that was because he saw that things could not go on without the divine implement, and he briefly exercised its wondrous function to rescue the state of his father and mother. Yet when Dao could not prevail, he departed at once, never completing even three years in a post — this was returning the divine implement to primal substance. Min Ziqian, though possessed of virtue, firmly refused the Ji clan's summons. He did not dare venture forth to put it to the test — this was because he lacked the ability to transform from the heart and return to primal substance at will. Ran You levied taxes for the Ji clan; Zilu was killed in the turmoil in Wei — not only could they not transform, they could not even conceal their implements. Alas! Not being an implement — how difficult it truly is!

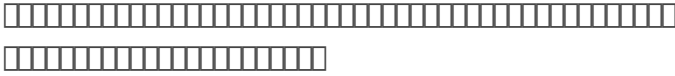
The method for becoming an implement at the right moment is the compass-rule of "following one's heart's desire without overstepping the bounds." Confucius transmitted this to Zengzi. Zengzi developed from it the method of the measuring-square. Zengzi transmitted it to Zisi. Zisi said: "In hewing a handle from a handle, the model is not far off." The "model" there is the same as the compass-rule. Zisi transmitted it to Mencius. Mencius said: "The compass and square are the utmost of circles and squares; the earlier sages and the later sages — their standard is one and the same." The "standard" there is also the compass-rule. And because there was no one to carry on the transmission, and the Way of the Sages was about to perish, they had no choice but to commit to writing even the wondrous method of returning to primal substance. Thus it is written: "Great and transforming — this is called sagely. Sagely and beyond all knowing — this is called divine." After Mencius, few have understood this wondrous method. Among scholars of repute, the most they could manage was to conceal their implements and wait for the right time, preserving themselves through wisdom. Beyond these, all others — heroes, warriors, literati, strategists alike — if employed by a good person, they became fine implements; if employed by a bad person, they became lethal implements. Only Zhang Zifang obtained this method from the Daoist tradition. When Zifang attempted to assassinate the First Emperor of Qin, he was still an untempered sharp blade that could not sheathe its edge. The Old Man of the Yellow Stone transmitted the method to him, and only then could he select, employ, and conceal implements. He manifested as a wondrous implement that set the great wheel in motion. He made use of the Hegemon-King of Chu's fierce implement to destroy the mighty Qin — avenging his lord and kin. He then made use of the Founder of the Han's great implement to destroy Chu — saving the people of all under Heaven. When the work was accomplished, he made his excuse and departed, returning to his primal substance. As for the Marquis of Huaiyin, the Marquises of Jiang and Guan, Xiao He, Cao Shen, and Chen Ping — though they served as generals, chancellors, marquises, and kings — they were merely accessories attached to the great wheel, nothing more.

Beyond Zifang, there was also the Marquis of Wu. Because Wang Mang had falsely invoked the Duke of Zhou, and Cao Cao had falsely posed as King Wen, the reputation by which sages sustained the world had been corrupted beyond repair. The Marquis of Wu wished to rectify this tradition of legitimate succession. Moreover, he was approached by the Former Sovereign with

utter sincerity. And so he revealed himself as an implement of loyalty and integrity. Yet whether leading armies abroad or governing at court, he never changed the garments and cap of his former days — he showed only half his implement-face. Even before leaving his thatched cottage at Longzhong, he already harbored the intention to withdraw. Even that half-revealed implement was one he planned from the start to return to primal substance. Regrettably, the times he encountered were unfavorable, and before he could dissolve the implement and restore the primal substance, the implement itself was shattered. From that time on, even fewer have understood this principle.

Today, the study of implements has been developed to its utmost. It has brought convenient transportation and advancing civilization, and I heartily welcome it. But there remains something higher: the state of not being an implement that becomes a divine implement; the divine implement that dissolves into no implement at all — the most exalted and wondrous study of Dao. I humbly wish to join with all the humane people under Heaven to arise together and investigate it. If the people of the world regard this as pedantic and refuse to inquire even once, then I still have a lesser teaching for preserving one's implement. I respectfully offer a single word of counsel: Conceal your implement and await the right moment.

# Chapter 29



Alternate editions read: 道 for 道 .

## Translation

Whoever would seize all under Heaven and impose upon it —  
I foresee he shall not succeed.  
All under Heaven is a sacred vessel:  
it cannot be imposed upon.  
Whoever imposes upon it shall ruin it;  
whoever clings to it shall lose it.  
Among all beings, some lead and some follow;  
some breathe warm and some breathe cool;  
some are strong and some are frail;  
some rise up and some fall away.  
Therefore the Sage sets aside the excessive,  
sets aside the extravagant,  
sets aside the extreme.

## Word Notes

- 道 — "**breathe warm**": To blow softly and warmly; gentle exhalation that warms.
- 道 — "**blow cool**": To blow sharply, producing cold.
- 道 — "**frail, weak**": Debilitated, emaciated.
- 道 — "**to fall away**": To crumble, to topple.
- 道 — "**extravagant**": Wasteful luxury.
- 道 — "**extreme, excessive**": Going beyond what is fitting; overdoing.

## Chapter Explanation

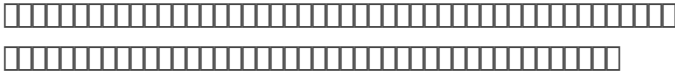
Whoever desires to **seize all under Heaven** and rule it by his own autocratic authority — **I foresee that he shall not succeed**. For all under Heaven is **a most honored and weighty implement** — a sacred vessel. **It cannot be ruled by one person's autocratic authority**. Whoever tries to rule by autocratic authority will be defeated. Whoever clings to power will lose it. For **among the myriad beings, some go ahead and some follow behind; some breathe warm and some breathe cool; some are strong and some are weak; some can bear up**

**and some fall away** — none of this is fixed or uniform. How can one person's autocratic rule possibly work? Therefore **the Sage does not force things** but follows the natural course of all beings. He merely **sets aside what is excessive, sets aside what is extravagant, and sets aside what is extreme.**

## Discourse

The supreme authority over all under Heaven is the most honored and precious vessel belonging to all the people. How can it be privately possessed by a single person? To snatch even a trifling possession from one person — that person will not willingly yield it. To snatch the precious vessel of all the people under Heaven — how can the people accept it? Therefore Laozi restrains human greed, saying that the sacred vessel of all under Heaven cannot be privately possessed by one person. Whoever seizes it by force will certainly be defeated. For the sacred vessel exists to preserve order and peace, to ensure the welfare of the people. If it is appropriated for one person's private use, harm inevitably spreads among the multitude, bringing disaster to all. Even without selfish or self-serving motives, one person's wisdom and deliberation are limited, while the affairs and principles under Heaven are inexhaustible. The geography of all under Heaven differs — some regions are warm, some cool, some rich, some lean. Human temperaments differ — some strong, some frail, some clever, some simple. Customs differ — some civilized, some undeveloped. How can one person's autocratic rule possibly work? Therefore the Sage who holds all under Heaven as a public trust selects the worthy and elevates the capable, instructing them to use this vessel to govern. He himself need not toil personally. He merely ensures that they do not overexert their strength, leaving room to maneuver, keeping things easy to turn about — so that strength is not exhausted and things do not break down.

# Chapter 30



## Translation

One who assists the ruler through Dao  
does not use arms to overpower all under Heaven.  
Such deeds readily rebound.

Where armies have camped,  
thorns and brambles spring up.  
After a great war,  
years of famine surely follow.

The skilled one achieves the fruit, nothing more —  
never daring to seize by force.  
achieve the fruit without boasting;  
achieve the fruit without vaunting;  
achieve the fruit without arrogance;  
achieve the fruit only because there is no other way;  
achieve the fruit without overpowering.

When things reach full vigor, they grow old:  
this is called departing from Dao.  
What departs from Dao comes to an early end.

## Word Notes

- 𠄎 — "**thorns and brambles**": Scrubby, thorny bushes that scratch.
- 𠄎 — "**fruit**": The fruit of a tree — sweet and beautiful on the outside, containing a kernel within. The outer sweetness corresponds to harmony; the inner kernel corresponds to humaneness.
- 𠄎 — "**arrogant**": Haughty, overbearing.

## Chapter Explanation

**One who assists the ruler through Dao** does not rely on military force to overpower all under Heaven. **The consequences of killing through military force readily rebound. Where**

**armies have encamped**, the people die or flee, the land goes uncultivated, and **thorns and brambles spring up wild**. **After a great war**, the grievance-qi of the dead permeates the atmosphere as pestilence, and **there are sure to be years of famine and catastrophe**. Therefore **one who is skilled at governing** carries within himself ceaseless generative humaneness that benefits all under Heaven, while outwardly appearing rounded and concordant, meeting others without contention — **that is all**. **He does not dare to seize dominance through military force**. Though he benefits all under Heaven through humaneness, still he **does not boast**. Though he benefits all under Heaven through humaneness, still he **does not vaunt his achievements**. Though he benefits all under Heaven through humaneness, still he **does not grow arrogant**. The generative humaneness within him, ceaselessly striving and renewing, cannot be halted — yet still he **does not push toward excessive dominance**. For **when the myriad beings reach full vigor, they grow old**. Growing old means **they have departed from Dao**. Having departed from Dao, **they come to an early end**.

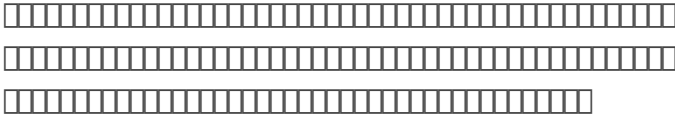
## Discourse

This single character "fruit" is the method of the heart that runs from beginning to end in the Daoist tradition — the method of **inner sagehood and outer kingship**. Its inner sagehood is **humaneness**. Its outer kingship is **harmony**. Its quality of running from beginning to end is **courage**. Now let us take an actual fruit as illustration. Its outer skin is lustrous in color, sweet and fragrant in smell; to see it delights the eye and gladdens the heart; to eat it pleases the palate and refreshes the spirit. It can be offered to spirits and gods; it can be presented to honored guests. Moreover, it is rounded and smooth — and of all shapes, the round rolls most easily. Is this not harmony? Is this not the great common path of all under Heaven? Is this not what the noble person does when he uses beauty and benefit to benefit all under Heaven? Within it lies hidden the kernel. Mencius said: "Humaneness is the heart of the human being." Is this not inner sagehood? From the kernel sprouts a shoot, grows leaves, flowers, and bears fruit; within the fruit a new kernel forms. From beginning to end, it generates life without ceasing. What extraordinary courage this is!

Now let us take the practitioners of the Daoist tradition as further proof. As a rule, their humaneness is concealed within; outwardly nothing shows. When the people of all under Heaven can be rescued, they rescue them; when they cannot, they let things take their natural course and await the appointed time of Heaven. Not only does this differ from the Confucian learning that exhausts human effort and then unites with Heaven, but it has both life-giving and life-taking aspects, differing also from Buddhism's great compassion and great mercy. When they have attained Dao, they mostly roam playfully through the human world, unconstrained by formalities, using this as a means to relieve people and benefit things. Their blending of light and mingling with the dust resembles the Buddhist approach, but differs from the Confucian way of proceeding step by step, carefully following the rules. Their outer kingship takes harmony as its operative principle. The Confucian tradition also aims at bringing about perfect equilibrium and harmony — likewise taking harmony as its operative principle. But Confucian harmony and Daoist harmony differ slightly. The Daoist, upon first entering the path of cultivation, pushes everything aside, paying no heed to human sentiments, not even sparing the body. "The reason I face great trouble is that I have a body." Yet once the body is perfected, one enters the world and establishes merit. When the work is done, one retires swiftly with the courage of one braving a torrent, leaving no

attachments behind. From start to finish, courage is the ruling principle. And this courage is the same across the sages of all three teachings. Not only the three teachings — the sages of all ten thousand teachings share it. For courage is the Dao of Heaven. Heaven moves ceaselessly in its creative activity, flowing on without rest. This "Dao of Heaven" is not the heaven of the lesser fruits of the human and celestial realms — students of Buddhism should discern this carefully. It is the common ground to which the sages of all teachings return. Therefore all ten thousand teachings are one and the same. If the people of all under Heaven today could awaken together to the principle of this fruit — storing humaneness and virtue within, displaying a rounded and concordant appearance without, and persevering from start to finish with courage — not only could the disasters of war be extinguished, but a world of great De and sincere transformation could be brought into being. The topic of the disasters of war in this chapter is elaborated in the Discourse on the following chapter.

# Chapter 31



## Translation

Now, fine weapons  
are instruments of ill omen.  
All beings may despise them;  
therefore one who holds to the Dao does not resort to them.

The noble person at home honors the left;  
in taking up arms, he honors the right.  
Weapons are instruments of ill omen,  
not the instruments of the noble person.  
Only when there is no alternative does he take them up,  
and even then holds calm composure as his highest principle.  
He prevails but finds no glory in it.  
To find glory in it  
is to take delight in killing.  
One who takes delight in killing  
cannot fulfill his purpose under Heaven.

In auspicious affairs, the left is honored;  
in inauspicious affairs, the right is honored.  
The lieutenant general takes his place at the left;  
the supreme general takes his place at the right —  
this signifies they stand in the rites of mourning.

When multitudes have been slain,  
weep for them in grief and sorrow.  
When victory is won,  
receive it with the rites of mourning.

## Word Notes

- 兵 — "**fine weapons**": excellent weapons of war; spirited, well-trained troops and sharp blades.
- 静 — "**calm, tranquil**": inner composure, serene stillness.

# Chapter Explanation

These brave and spirited troops, these keen and sharp weapons — these are **instruments of ill omen**. They take life and harm living beings. All creatures loathe them. Therefore **one who possesses Dao does not employ them. The noble person at home honors the left; when using arms he honors the right**. This shows that **weapons are instruments of ill omen — they are not the instruments of the noble person**. Only when there is a need to punish tyrants and rescue the people, to resist and repel external threats — only when **there is no alternative** — does he use them. Even then, **calm composure and disciplined restraint, with no displays of military might, is his highest principle**. Even if he **wins the victory**, he **does not consider it glorious**. To consider it glorious would be to **delight in killing people**. One who **delights in killing people cannot fulfill his purpose under Heaven**. Moreover, **in auspicious affairs the left is honored; in inauspicious affairs the right is honored. The lieutenant general stands at the left; the supreme general stands at the right**. This means **they stand in the rites of mourning**. This shows that weapons are indeed instruments of ill omen. **When multitudes have been slain** — weep for them in grief and sorrow. **When the war is won** — receive the occasion with the rites of mourning. Victory in battle is not considered something fine, and killing people is not considered a delight.

## Discourse

Oh, how dreadful and cruel are the calamities of war since antiquity! Oh, how pitiable are those who have died or been wounded in them since antiquity! And never have they been more dreadful and pitiable than they are today. Take the ancient "Lament for the Ancient Battlefield" by Li Hua and set it beside a map of the present European war. Look at them together. What a spectacle of grief and horror! Why is today's calamity of war uniquely more terrible than those of the past? Because today's calamity was brewed and fermented from the calamities of the past. If today's calamity of war is not brought to rest, tomorrow's will be fiercer still. And it will grow ever fiercer, ever more terrible, until there is no one left in the world. This principle Laozi stated thousands of years ago: **"One who assists the ruler through Dao does not use arms to overpower all under Heaven. Such deeds readily rebound. Where armies have camped, thorns and brambles spring up. After a great war, years of famine surely follow."**

For there is a universal law in the cosmos: where there is a cause, there is an effect; where there is a sound, there is an echo; where there is an original force, there is a reactive force — and the reactive force is greater than the original force. How so? Suppose you strike a suspended object with fifty horsepower of force, tilting it to thirty degrees. If there were no air resistance, that object would swing back and forth without end. And so the oscillations go on, back and forth, without cease. When Laozi says **"such deeds readily rebound,"** this is exactly what he means. When he says **"where armies have camped, thorns and brambles spring up"** — the thorns and brambles are the reactive force that comes afterward. They covertly refer to the warmongers and war-lovers who arise later. He does not call them persons — he calls them thorns and brambles. This expresses the most extreme loathing and detestation. Consider what thorns and brambles are: they grow in every direction without order, amounting to nothing of use, sprouting needles that

prick people and harm living things, extending their malignant influence. Where they grow, no one can walk; flowers, grass, and grain cannot flourish. Truly they are things of the utmost poison and the utmost evil. These thorns and brambles inevitably spring up in the very places once ravaged by armies. Wherever a land has suffered the calamity of war, afterward there will inevitably emerge a warmonger and lover of killing to avenge the former wrongs. Examine the history of all ages and all lands, and it is always so — there would be no end to the telling.

Consider: King Wu of Zhou, leading an army of humaneness and righteousness, punished the tyrant and rescued the people. Yet Wugeng still rebelled. The Duke of Zhou campaigned eastward for three years, killing his own elder brother. He then enfeoffed Viscount Wei at Song and Viscount Ji in Korea, treating them as honored guests rather than subjects. He cultivated virtue and practiced humaneness, and only then was the malignant qi finally dispelled and all under Heaven at peace. Had the Duke of Zhou employed the strategy of pulling up the roots and cutting down to the last stump, slaughtering the descendants of the Yin wholesale, the calamity of the Warring States would have erupted immediately — one would not have had to wait until after the Eastern Zhou. Given the humaneness of King Wen and King Wu, there was still a minor upheaval. How then can those who relied on military force to annex others, who took delight in killing, possibly avoid retribution?

This principle was stated not only by Laozi — the sages of China and the West alike have stated it. Everyone under Heaven knows it. Even the warmongers and lovers of killing know it. Since they know it, why do they still make war and delight in killing? Because the grievance-qi of those who died in war remains unresolved. It inevitably brews itself into disaster. A single person who dies bearing a grievance can cause three years of drought. How much more so when countless people bear grievances! Therefore **after a great war, years of famine surely follow** — or pestilence, or terrible drought, or every kind of calamitous disaster. This too can be verified point by point in the history of all ages and all lands. Even with the humaneness of King Tang, there was still a seven-year drought. The rest may be inferred.

Those who die in war are certainly to be pitied. But those who die in the years of famine are also blameless. And so the grievance-qi accumulates more and more, growing more virulent with time. It permeates the human world, awaiting its opportunity to erupt. When it encounters people with hearts inclined to war and domination, it concentrates within those hearts and drives them to cruelty — using them to vent its grievances. A person infected by this qi becomes violent, brutal, and ruthlessly inventive — if he wants to devise a lethal weapon, the idea comes to him at once; if he wants to devise a stratagem for storming cities and smashing defenses, it comes to him at once. For the people of lands once ravaged by war will inevitably seek revenge in later generations. The later generation and those who died before are of one qi. Like voices respond to one another; like qi seeks its like. As a magnet draws iron, the attraction is exceedingly easy to bring about. And so it comes to the point where nearly everyone is infected by this qi, nearly everyone lusts for war, nearly everyone is driven to a kind of madness — and nothing will satisfy them but mass slaughter. And the lands where they slaughter will afterward produce the same — and worse. Alas! War follows upon war — when will it end? This is truly cause for grief.

Now, fortunately, the European War has concluded and the peace conference has opened. Yet though the European War has ended, war in Asia is about to begin. Many peoples may not be

content. Many grievance-spirits may not rest. Though the Red Cross Society buries the remains — a deed of great merit, certainly — it dispels only the malignant qi clinging to the corpses. The grievances of the souls remain unresolved. The years of famine that lie ahead may well prove unavoidable. The calamities of war that lie beyond are cause for deep concern.

This is what I worry about day and night, racking my mind and exhausting my thoughts, unable to devise a solution. I humbly wish to discuss it with all the people of the world. When this matter is submitted to universal principle and tested against history, there is only one course: to promote and champion Dao and De, and thereby ensure no further disasters arise. In ancient times, after King Tang and King Wu punished the tyrants Jie and Zhou, they illuminated virtue and drew close to the people, rested the literary arts and laid down the military. And so they enjoyed peace for several hundred years. Had their descendants continued to advance, would the world not long since have become a world of Great Unity?

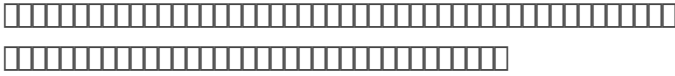
For weapons are lethal instruments. To use them is to kill. When the Sage punishes tyrants and rescues the people, he has no choice but to use them. Yet he treats the occasion with the rites of mourning. Those who kill and win battles — he still weeps over them in lamentation, not daring to honor them. And even refraining from honoring them is not sufficient to dispel the malignant qi. Nothing will serve but the cultivation of Dao and De. Dao and De are the qi of auspiciousness. They are the qi of warm, generative yang. Auspicious qi alone can dispel malignant qi. Yang qi alone can dispel yin qi. Mist and fog are formed from yin qi — when the sun shines on them, they disperse. Ice and frost are congealed from yin qi — when the warm yang breath steams upon them, they dissolve. Not only dissolve — they can even be transformed into warm currents of air. Seen in this light, the promotion and championing of Dao and De is the foremost and most wondrous remedy for saving the world today.

Previously, at the age of nine — it was 1915, the era of the European War's utmost ferocity — I was unable to bear sitting by while my fellow beings died and suffered in these terrible calamities. Forgetting my own meager virtue, youth, and years, I rashly undertook to establish the **International Society of Dao and De**, founded on the essential teachings of the sages of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. I composed a tract called "On the Cessation of War" and had the charter printed and distributed. But because the war was then at its fiercest, the Society was never formally established. Yet my aspiration remains unfulfilled, and this heart of mine will not die. Moreover, the present state of affairs and the future dangers are just as I feared. I cannot bear to remain silent. And so, unable to do otherwise, I have once more drafted a charter, to be submitted to the governments and major institutions of all nations, in the hope that a common effort will organize the International Society of Dao and De. It would bring together the great moralists of all nations, all religions, and all fields of endeavor. Gathering the thoughts of all, extending the benefits of all, everyone would together research the methods for saving the world. Once the research is complete, the great moralists of each locality, according to local political customs and conditions, would first lecture and teach in their own regions; afterward they would exchange lectures, trade knowledge, dissolve mutual prejudices, and lay the foundation for the Great Unity. Then great educators would give people proper knowledge, and great industrialists would give people material sustenance. (This last point may apply to our own country; Europe and America may not require it.) When people possess a moral heart, knowledge, and material sustenance — naturally they will regard human life as precious and human dignity as paramount.

They will no longer lust for war and killing. When people no longer carry the heart for war and killing, even if the grievance-spirits wish to drive them to evil, there will be no opening to enter. Moreover, seeing that the people of the world love one another and live in harmony, those spirits will naturally repent the sins of their former love of war and killing. They will cease to haunt the living. Not only will the calamity of war be brought to rest, but the years of famine too may be averted. With no more famine, no more war, the fellow beings of all nations will enjoy the happiness of eternal peace. What joy!

This is my humble and earnest aspiration. Otherwise — though I am foolish, I am not a raving lunatic, and I am not fishing for fame and reputation. How could I otherwise be heartbroken, my tongue worn raw, my tears exhausted and my ink spent, unable to contain myself? I humbly wish that the humane people of all nations will understand this heartfelt effort, and together offer their criticisms and their guidance. What good fortune that would be! What good fortune indeed!

# Chapter 32



## Translation

Dao has no fixed name.  
The unhewn wood, though small,  
none under Heaven dare treat it as a subject.  
If lords and kings could hold to it,  
the myriad beings would come as guests of their own accord.  
Heaven and Earth would join together  
and send down sweet dew —  
no one commands it, yet it falls in perfect balance.

When the first institutions were made, names arose with them.  
Once names exist,  
one must know where to stop.  
Knowing where to stop —  
this is how one forestalls the beginning of danger.

Dao's presence throughout all under Heaven  
is like streams and valleys flowing to the river and the sea.

## Word Notes

- 露 — "**dew**": Here specifically "sweet dew" (甘露), an auspicious omen signifying cosmic harmony.
- 均 — "**balanced**": Even, equally distributed.

## Chapter Explanation

**Dao** is truly constant and unchanging, yet it has no name. Having no name is precisely what makes it noble. Like the **unhewn wood** that has not yet been fashioned into implements and thus has no name — though one might call it small, no one under Heaven dares treat it as a subordinate. If lords and kings could hold fast to this whole and undivided unhewn wood, they could govern through nonaction, and **the myriad beings would each naturally find their proper place** — harmonious, joyful, and reverently at ease. When such harmony calls forth a response, **Heaven and Earth find their proper positions** and yin and yang join together, sending down auspicious sweet dew. This sweet dew moistens all things everywhere — no one apportions it, yet it

distributes itself in perfect, even balance.

But in the beginning, when the world had not yet reached the Great Accord, named institutions had inevitably to be established to govern all under Heaven. Once these named institutions exist and can sustain the world, one should **know where to stop** — one must not cling to names and forms. **Knowing where to stop** ensures that the unhewn wood is not exhausted, that the root source is not lost, and that one is therefore never in danger. One can then return to the root and restore the source, flowing on without ceasing. It is like Dao nurturing all things under Heaven with no discernible beginning — like rivers, streams, and mountain springs paying homage to the sea in an unending flow.

## Discourse

This chapter and the *Liyun* chapter of the *Book of Rites* are outer and inner expressions of the same truth. The *Liyun* opens by speaking of the Great Unity; here Laozi says **"the myriad beings would come as guests of their own accord."** When all people under Heaven treat one another as honored guests — harmonious, warm, and intimate — with no barriers of ruler and subject, high and low, no distinctions of "this territory" and "that boundary," and moreover when they love the people and cherish all beings so that "all things flourish together without harming one another" and one can peer into the nests of birds and the burrows of beasts — is this not the very picture of the Great Unity?

The *Liyun* speaks of being free from the calamities of flood, drought, and pestilence, and of the appearance of auspicious signs of every kind. This is precisely what this chapter means by **"Heaven and Earth join together and send down sweet dew"** — the confirming evidence of the Great Unity. The only difference is one of detail.

In the *Liyun*, after "scheming and contrivance arose, and warfare began from this," Yu, Tang, Kings Wen and Wu, and the Duke of Zhou brought forth the various categories of ritual, music, humaneness, and righteousness to give order to all under Heaven. In the end it returns to the Great Accord. In the state of the Great Accord, people do not indulge their emotions; being without emotions means that joy, anger, sorrow, and delight have not yet arisen. At this point there are no names that can be named — the named returns to the nameless. Without name, without form, following what is natural of itself — this is Accord. Accord is the station of the Sage. Confucius's "following one's heart's desire without overstepping the bounds" is exactly this Accord. Mencius said, "Joy, and then it lives. Once it lives, how can it be stopped? And when it cannot be stopped, one does not even know that the hands begin to dance and the feet begin to tap." This is the very picture of Accord. This Great Accord is the Great Unity carried to its ultimate point of evolution — following one's Heavenly nature, not knowing what is same or different. Not only is the thought of difference absent, but even the thought of sameness is unknown.

This chapter, coming after "fine weapons being instruments of ill omen," speaks of **"when the first institutions were made, names arose with them."** This too is because in an age of warfare, the nameless Great Dao cannot suddenly be applied to governance. One must first establish the named institutions of government and moral teaching. Yet Laozi does not specify

what these names are, for Laozi's Dao sets up no names or forms. Moreover, when Confucius came to inquire about the rites, Laozi had already conveyed to him everything about names. Afterward, Confucius edited the *Songs* and *Documents*, codified the rites and music, compiled the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and composed the *Classic of Filial Piety* — defining the distinctions of names in meticulous detail. Still fearing that people would not understand, Confucius seized upon Zilu's question about governing the state of Wei to declare plainly: "What is needed first is surely the rectification of names!" Wei was a poor and weak state, one where father and son defied each other and stirred up chaos. Confucius's meaning was this: in an age of disorder, the rectification of names is indispensable. Only in an age of great peace can one remove the names that bind people.

People today do not observe the conditions of the times. They rashly seek to overthrow the named distinctions of human relationships — this is to lead all people under Heaven into the ways of beasts. Truly a great delusion beyond comprehension!

Confucius had already set the distinctions of names in good order. Confucius was the "sage for this season" — he was by no means one who clung rigidly to names. If one savors the Classics carefully, one will understand this for oneself. There is no leisure here to discuss it further.

Therefore Laozi had no need to establish names again, nor to compete with Confucius for the saintly title of "teacher for ten thousand generations." Laozi's denigration of humaneness, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, his smashing of every name and form — all of this served as Confucius's rearguard. Readers should understand this.

Yet Laozi also feared that later generations would misunderstand, would disregard the conditions of the times and human sentiments, and would loftily preach nonaction — leading to the calamity of empty talk that ruins the state. And so he could not but say that "in the beginning there must be names." But he does not say what those names are, leaving room for Confucius. Laozi's way of framing his words reaches the height of subtlety — and the height of difficulty.

He then says that once names are established, one must stop — one must not cling to names, but cause the named to return to the nameless, back to the naturalness of Heaven. Then everyone follows their Heavenly nature in what they do — following to the point where there is nothing left to follow. Like Dao giving life to beings, flowing without obstruction. Like water returning to the sea, vital and never stagnant. This truly arrives at the realm where nothing can be named. Is this not the very mirror-image of the *Liyun*?

This is why I annotated the *Liyun* first and the *Dao De Jing* afterward — proceeding from the named to the nameless. The *Liyun* is not solely about names; the *Dao De Jing* is not solely about the nameless. To say that one proceeds from the named to the nameless is to speak in terms of the predominant character of each.

# Chapter 33



## Translation

To know others is cleverness;  
to know oneself is illumination.  
To overcome others takes force;  
to overcome oneself is true strength.  
To know contentment is wealth;  
to act with perseverance is resolve.  
Not to lose one's ground is to endure;  
to die yet not perish is true longevity.

## Word Notes

- 亡 — "**perish**": To be extinguished, to vanish completely.
- 寿 — "**longevity**": Living to a great age; here extended to mean life beyond physical death.

## Chapter Explanation

One who discerns right and wrong in others is called clever. One who perceives one's own gains and losses is called illumined. One who can prevail over others is said to have force. One who can prevail over one's own passions and desires is truly strong. One who knows contentment and does not covet is truly wealthy. One who strenuously practices Dao is a person of resolve. One who does not lose the ground on which one stands can endure long. One whose body dies yet whose spirit does not perish has true longevity.

## Discourse

The general import of the preceding chapters has often included arguments against using cleverness, against using strength, and against pursuing wealth. Reading them, one feels rather ill at ease. If people go about in a fog, feeble and without any backbone — can this really work? And though wealth may not be something one can demand, surely one cannot be entirely without an occupation, living off the charity of others. No wonder the study of Laozi has been reviled by the world!

It is only upon reaching this chapter that one grasps Laozi's true intent. He teaches us not to direct these qualities outward but to direct them inward. This is precisely what Confucius and Mencius meant by "turning inward and examining oneself."

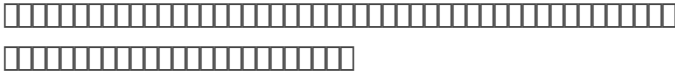
Otherwise — if one only seeks externally and pays no heed to what lies within — even one who knows others as shrewdly as Chao Cuo, who was hailed as "the Bag of Wisdom," still provoked the Rebellion of the Seven Kingdoms and could not escape execution. Even one as mighty as the Hegemon-King could not, for all his raging, bring peace to all under Heaven, and died at the Wu River. Even one as rich as Deng Tong could not escape starvation. But beyond the killing of the body and the ruin of the name — these are still small matters. When one seeks only from without, one is buffeted about by external things, and the original heart is let loose and does not return. To lose the original heart — this is what truly deserves our grief.

One must turn the light of observation inward, gather back the heart that has been let loose, examine one's own gains and losses, and cause the principle of Heaven to prevail over human desire. Then one accepts one's lot and finds joy in Dao. What is not rightfully mine — not a hair of it dare I take. Only then does the heart come to rest upon the "peaceful dwelling." Towering and immovable — wealth and rank, poverty and lowliness, might and arms — all seem as if they were nothing at all. The body may be killed, but the will cannot be seized. The body may die, but the spirit is never extinguished.

Stated in terms of what is hidden: this is like King Wen ascending and descending, at God's left and right. Stated in terms of what is manifest: this is like Confucius receiving the sacrificial offerings of a thousand autumns, honored and beloved by all under Heaven. This is truly to endure without decay, to enjoy longevity without limit.

Ha — if a person can embody this and put it into practice, does the study of Laozi really lead people astray?

# Chapter 34



## Translation

The Great Dao flows and overflows —  
it cannot be grasped as left or right.  
The myriad beings depend on it for life, and it turns none away;  
its work complete, it claims no credit.  
It loves and nourishes all things, yet does not lord over them.

Ever without desire —  
one might call it small.  
The myriad beings return to it, yet it does not hold itself as master —  
one might call it great.

And so the Sage never considers himself great,  
and thus his greatness is fulfilled.

## Word Notes

- 盈 — "**overflowing**": Flowing, drifting, never stagnant; implying ubiquity without fixation.

## Chapter Explanation

**The Great Dao flows and never stagnates.** It cannot be grasped by clinging to one side, whether left or right. The myriad beings all depend on Dao to live and grow, and Dao does not refuse them. When the work of bringing beings to life is accomplished, **it does not claim credit for what it has done.** It loves and nourishes all things, yet does not act as their master. Ever without desire — formless, soundless — one might call it "small." After the myriad beings have been born and transformed, they all return to it, and still it does not consider itself their master. From its capacity to receive all things in its emptiness, one might call it "great." For this reason, **the Sage never considers himself great** — and therefore achieves a greatness that is boundless, extending beyond all limits.

## Discourse

From ancient times, all who were fond of warfare relied upon nothing other than two things: cleverness and strength. With cleverness one can size up the enemy with uncanny precision; with strength one can win a hundred battles out of a hundred. What they covet is nothing more than a rich state and vast territory, lasting forever. All of this has already been demolished in the preceding chapters. This chapter further demolishes the ambition of swallowing others and aggrandizing oneself.

In all the universe, nothing is as great — without exterior boundary — as Dao. Dao gives life to all things and still does not lord over them. That is how it achieves its greatness.

In former times, the sage-rulers of our nation — Tang of Shang, Kings Wen and Wu of Zhou — learned this very method and, from small states, came to possess all under Heaven. Because they loved the people, the people were grateful. Love one person, and that person is grateful. Love all under Heaven, and all under Heaven submits — and one becomes the true king. One does not seek greatness, yet greatness comes of itself.

If one relies not on virtue but on military force: kill a person, and that person bitterly resents it. Kill all under Heaven, and all under Heaven gnashes its teeth — and one becomes a solitary man. Though one desires greatness, one is in truth small.

Our nation's First Emperor of Qin; Europe's Napoleon; and the then-present Kaiser of Germany — all stand as warnings from the past.

Alas! Even Dao, great as it is, having the grace of nurturing all things, still does not presume to call itself their master. How, then, can one think to annihilate other nations' territory and enslave other nations' people? Truly a great delusion beyond reckoning — hastening one's own destruction.

The First Emperor of Qin has already perished. Napoleon has already died. And the Kaiser was already placed under confinement. May this serve as a warning to all future First Emperors of Qin, all future Napoleons, and all future Kaisers of Germany.

# Chapter 35



## Translation

Hold the Great Image,  
and all under Heaven will come —  
coming without harm,  
in peace, in calm, in sureness.

Music and fine food  
draw the passing traveler to pause.

But Dao, when put into words,  
is bland — as though it had no taste.  
Look for it: nothing quite to see.  
Listen for it: nothing quite to hear.  
Yet use it — and it will never run dry.

## Word Notes

- 一 — "**stability**": Steady, composed, weighty; carrying connotations of solidity and security.
- 食 — "**food**": Bait; here fine food or delicacies used to lure.

## Chapter Explanation

If one takes hold of the formless **Great Image** and uses it to govern all under Heaven, the people of the world will naturally come in submission. When they come, they are not harmed but are made to be **at peace, calm, and secure**.

If instead one resorts to stratagems — setting out music and fine food as bait to lure people — even a passing traveler will stop. But when the music and food run out, the traveler departs all the same.

When **Dao** is spoken aloud, it is bland and without flavor. Look at it — it has no form, nothing to see. Listen to it — it has no sound, nothing to hear. Yet try to use it, and it proves inexhaustible.

# Discourse

In Laozi's era of warfare, there must have been many unscrupulous characters traveling among the states, instigating military conflict and stealing power and profit for themselves. The rulers and ministers of that time, seeing that the rhetoric of these men was enough to stir people to action — and enough to do harm — inevitably made use of them, keeping bands of retainers to expand their influence. Yet these retainers sat idle and ate without working, draining the state's resources. They sought only their personal comfort and inevitably brought harm to all under Heaven.

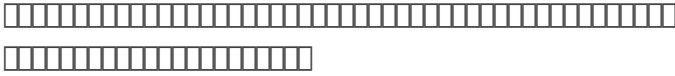
And so Laozi could not help but expose this great evil in advance. Savor closely the six characters "**music and fine food draw the passing traveler to pause**" — they capture perfectly the treacherous hearts and ugly faces of those who became retainers.

Those who became retainers were generally men without the standing of citizens. Had they possessed the standing of citizens, they would have been called hosts, not guests. Laozi calls them "passing travelers" because they had no constancy, no love for their country — they lived only by the creed of eating and watching plays. Like the cock-crowing and dog-stealing types of Lord Mengchang's household, they wheedled a few coins here and there. Day after day they haunted the singing halls and dancing pavilions, listening to music and melodies, squandering the state's currency and treasures. Day after day they feasted on lavish banquets, devouring the fat and marrow of the people. When the state fell and the ruling house was extinguished, they slipped away with perfect composure — casting off the old coat, marrying the new groom. They found the sage-ruler Liu quite superior to "that boy from the Sima family." (When Liu Yao conquered the Western Jin and carried off its empress, he asked her: "How do I compare to that boy from the Sima family?" She replied: "Your Majesty is a sage-ruler who founded a dynasty; he was an incompetent lord of a ruined state.") People like this are just like travelers at an inn — beyond occupying their room, eating their meals, and watching their entertainment, they are utterly indifferent to the innkeeper, the inn itself, and their fellow guests. No matter how well the innkeeper treats them, they cannot be kept for long.

Seeing this, those who hold power and influence would do far better — rather than using music and fine food to nourish these cock-crowing and dog-stealing types so lavishly — to take Dao as their master, to cease coveting influence, to stop employing petty men, and to govern through quiet nonaction. For nonaction can accomplish everything. From nothing, it brings forth something. This is the **Great Image** of all under Heaven. Hold fast to this Great Image and one can bring peace to all under Heaven. All under Heaven will naturally submit, and those who submit can be made to dwell in peace and security, free from the least anxiety.

This Dao, though its words come out sounding bland and flavorless — though it cannot be seen or heard, and lacks the bluster of the retainers' rhetoric — yet possesses this wondrous efficacy. It is nothing like those greedy devourers of music and fine food, those passing travelers who merely talk a fine game and accomplish nothing real.

# Chapter 36



## Translation

What is about to be contracted  
must first be stretched open.

What is about to be weakened  
must first be strengthened.

What is about to be cast aside  
must first be raised up.

What is about to be seized  
must first be given.

This is called subtle clarity.

The soft overcomes the hard;  
the weak overcomes the strong.

A fish must not leave the deep —  
a state's sharp instruments must not be shown to others.

## Word Notes

- 𠄎 — "**contracted**": Drawn together, compressed, diminished.
- 𠄎 — "**stretched open**": Spread out, extended, expanded.
- 𠄎 — "**leave**": To slip away from, to separate from.

## Chapter Explanation

What is about to be contracted must have already been stretched open. What is about to be weakened must have already been made strong. What is about to be cast aside must have already been raised to prosperity. What is about to be seized must have already been given. This is called a principle of the utmost subtlety yet also the utmost clarity. Therefore the soft can overcome the hard, and the weak can overcome the strong — all of this follows from the naturalness of Dao. Dao cannot be departed from, just as **a fish must not leave the deep water** — the moment it leaves, it dies. The state's **sharp instruments** must not be displayed boastfully to others. To strive for supremacy is to lose Dao.

# Discourse

At the extreme of triumph comes inevitable decline. At the extreme of yang comes inevitable yin. This is the universal law of waxing and waning, fullness and emptiness, revolving in cycles throughout the cosmos. From something as large as a state under Heaven down to a single affair or a single thing — nothing escapes it. The moment of supreme strength is precisely the starting point of supreme weakness. Laozi calls this "**subtle clarity.**" This principle is truly of the utmost subtlety and yet of the utmost obviousness. It is exactly what the *Doctrine of the Mean* means by: "Nothing is more visible than what is hidden; nothing is more manifest than what is subtle."

Only the Sage knows where the wind begins, knows that the distant is near, knows that the subtle is the manifest. The stronger one grows, the more one abides in lowliness and yielding. Since one does not position oneself in strength, there is nothing to weaken. Not only is there nothing to weaken, but one transcends entirely the realm of opposites — strong and weak, flourishing and ruined — and stands upon ground that is unchanging through ten thousand ages. This is to return to the substance of Dao.

But since people have never seen the substance of Dao, they will surely not believe it. Let us take the analogy Laozi offers and develop it carefully, so that all people under Heaven may see it together and know it together.

Dao's giving life to human beings is like water's giving life to fish — unborn and undying, mysterious and unfathomable: this is the substance of Dao. Born and dying, changing and inconstant: this is the function of Dao. Without motion and without rest, deep in an abyss that cannot be fathomed: this is the source of water. With motion and with rest, shallow and easily known: this is the current of water.

Human beings cannot depart from the substance of Dao; fish cannot leave the deep abyss. When a person departs from the substance of Dao, that person is trapped by the decrees of fortune. When a fish leaves the deep abyss, it is caught by the fisherman. When the fish floats to the surface, it no doubt relies on the convenience of its fins — it can swim up and down, it can catch small insects — and shows this boastfully to others. And yet, as the saying goes: "Careless storage invites theft; seductive adornment invites licentiousness." No wonder it falls into the fisherman's net.

Alas — within Laozi's words of warning lies a hidden compassion. May all people under Heaven embody this together.

There are those in the world who say this chapter teaches scheming and intrigue. Truly, "the humane see humaneness, the wise see wisdom."

# Chapter 37



## Translation

Dao abides in constant nonaction,  
yet nothing is left undone.  
If lords and kings could hold to this,  
the myriad beings would transform of themselves.  
Transformed, should desire stir,  
I would still it with the nameless unhewn wood.  
The nameless unhewn wood —  
even this shall be free of desire.  
Free of desire, resting in stillness:  
all under Heaven will settle into rightness of itself.

## Word Notes

- 𠄎 — "**still**": To settle, to calm, to stabilize; here used as a verb meaning to bring to composure.

## Chapter Explanation

**The Great Dao abides in constant nonaction**, yet from nothing it brings forth something — there is nothing it does not accomplish. If lords and kings could hold to this Dao, the myriad beings would naturally transform of their own accord. After they have naturally transformed, should any urge toward purposeful action arise, I would **still it with the nameless unhewn wood**. Even the nameless unhewn wood itself should be free of any desire to be used. Free of desire even for the unhewn wood, one rests in stillness. This is holding to Dao carried to its ultimate point. **All under Heaven will then settle into rightness of itself.**

## Discourse

The vital current of the entire scripture flows continuously; the meaning runs through as a whole. Truly it is a seamless unity — the whole is one chapter, and the eighty-one chapters are one chapter. Yet the meaning of this particular chapter answers to the tone of Chapter 1. Previous scholars were not without reason in dividing the text into two volumes and individual chapters.

The "nameless unhewn wood" of this chapter is the "name that cannot be named" of Chapter 1. "Even the nameless unhewn wood shall be free of desire" is a return to "the Dao that cannot be spoken" of Chapter 1. "Nonaction, yet nothing is left undone" is precisely Chapter 1's "the beginning of Heaven and Earth," "the mother of the myriad beings," and "the gate of all marvels." Chapter 1 opens by speaking of the constant Dao and closes with "mysterious upon mysterious." This chapter opens with "Dao abides in constant nonaction" and closes with "the nameless unhewn wood — even this shall be free of desire." "Nameless" is the mysterious. "Even the nameless unhewn wood shall be free of desire" is the mysterious upon the mysterious.

Chapter 1 moves from the nameless to the named, and from the named back to the nameless. This chapter does the same. The only difference is that Chapter 1 speaks of Dao's substance and function in the abstract, encompassing everything, while this chapter speaks of Dao's substance and function as applied specifically to bringing peace to all under Heaven — slightly more concrete than Chapter 1. Because the preceding chapters have laid bare the origins and consequences of warfare under Heaven in order to cut off the source of disorder, this chapter sets forth the Great Dao for governing all under Heaven as the final destination, bringing disorder back to rectitude and serving as the summation.

Moreover, it ties off the Upper Volume and answers back to Chapter 1 — achieving both purposes with a single stroke. This is why the arrangement cannot be otherwise.

From antiquity, all disorder under Heaven has arisen from the use of implements. In ancient times, Yao and Shun governed through nonaction and employed no implements at all. By the time of the Three Dynasties, the desires of the people had gradually awakened and customs had gradually declined. Moreover, Tang and King Wu faced the chaos of Jie and Zhou. And so they had no choice but to take the nameless unhewn wood that Yao and Shun had used to bring stability to all under Heaven and fashion it into a divine implement to quell the disorder. After using it once, they wished to return to the unhewn wood. But the people had not yet reached that level, and they dared not stop using it to sustain order. Yet they set down their original intention, each composing it as a *Book of Changes*, to await later generations.

Consider: the Xia dynasty's *Changes* was called *Lianshan*, "Linked Mountains." Above and below, all was mountain. Gen is mountain. The Xia *Changes* held to Gen — stopping, and stopping again. Gen means to stop. This is the meaning of ceasing to use the implement.

The Shang dynasty's *Changes* was called *Guicang*, "Returning to Storage." This means storing it away and not using it.

The Zhou dynasty's *Changes* did not take a new name but was simply called the *Zhou Changes* — meaning revolving back to the beginning, returning to the source.

Taking the three *Changes* together, the trajectory is: from stopping, to storing away, to returning to the root. What a pity that the descendants of the Three Dynasties' sage-kings produced no sage to carry on their work. Not only could they not stop using the divine implement, they used it without cease until it was worn out.

By the Spring and Autumn period, Guan Zhong saw that the divine implement was broken. Unable to repair it, and not even knowing how it was meant to be used, he dismantled it and refashioned it into sharp implements. The Five Hegemons used them to convene the feudal lords.

By the Warring States, even the sharp implements were broken. Shang Yang saw that the sharp implements were ruined and conceived a cruel heart: he fashioned lethal implements. During the Spring and Autumn period, Confucius wrote out the methods for repairing the divine implement, for using it, and for not using it. During the Warring States period, too, Confucius's teachings continued to circulate. What a pity that the world did not heed him.

Once the lethal implements appeared, the carnage of warfare became horrific beyond description. From that time forward, some used lethal implements, some used sharp implements, but none used the divine implement. As for governing without any implements at all — that had vanished entirely.

When it came to the West, not only were sharp and lethal implements used, but implements of even greater sharpness and lethality were devised. Only the American president Washington, after using sharp implements in a bloody war, stored them away and did not use them again. He can truly stand shoulder to shoulder with our nation's Yao and Shun. Beyond him, most used lethal implements to slaughter people — and Napoleon and the present-day Kaiser of Germany are the worst among them. The present-day Kaiser is worse still. Of all the lethal implements in the entire world, none are more lethal than Germany's — and none have suffered consequences more devastating than Germany's.

Can implements still be relied upon?

Alas! The catastrophic consequences of using implements have today reached their utmost extreme. Yet this catastrophe was one that Laozi foresaw long ago. Unable to bear sitting idly by, he warned posterity in advance, saying: "**The divine implement of all under Heaven cannot be acted upon.**" "**The state's sharp implements must not be displayed to others.**" "**Fine weapons are instruments of ill omen.**" And he pointed the way for posterity, saying: "**Still it with the nameless unhewn wood. The nameless unhewn wood — even this shall be free of desire. Free of desire, resting in stillness: all under Heaven will settle into rightness of itself.**"

Seen in this light, are not Laozi's words the perfect remedy for today's disease? Are they not the true path of evolution for the age to come?

I humbly wish that everyone would study them carefully.

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## Volume Two (Chapters 38–81)