

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.

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