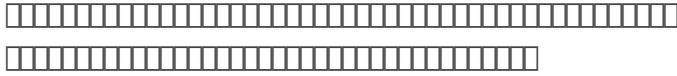


Chapter 16



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.
- 衆 — "**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?

Revision #2

Created 2026-03-10 22:34:32 UTC by Phil

Updated 2026-03-13 01:42:05 UTC by Phil