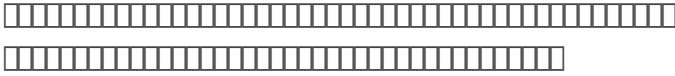


# Chapter 21



## 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.
- 眇 — "**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.

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