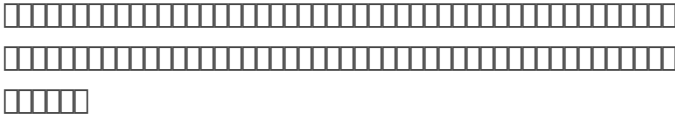


Chapter 23



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.

Updated 2026-03-13 01:42:19 UTC by Phil