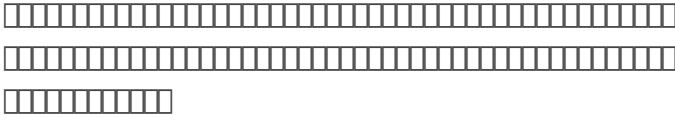


Chapter 25



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.

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