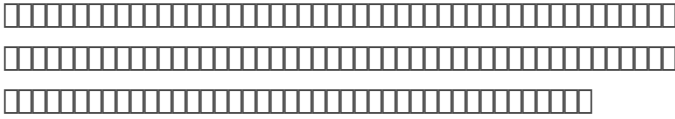


Chapter 31



Translation

Now, fine weapons
are instruments of ill omen.
All beings may despise them;
therefore one who holds to the Dao does not resort to them.

The noble person at home honors the left;
in taking up arms, he honors the right.
Weapons are instruments of ill omen,
not the instruments of the noble person.
Only when there is no alternative does he take them up,
and even then holds calm composure as his highest principle.
He prevails but finds no glory in it.
To find glory in it
is to take delight in killing.
One who takes delight in killing
cannot fulfill his purpose under Heaven.

In auspicious affairs, the left is honored;
in inauspicious affairs, the right is honored.
The lieutenant general takes his place at the left;
the supreme general takes his place at the right —
this signifies they stand in the rites of mourning.

When multitudes have been slain,
weep for them in grief and sorrow.
When victory is won,
receive it with the rites of mourning.

Word Notes

- 兵 — "**fine weapons**": excellent weapons of war; spirited, well-trained troops and sharp blades.
- 静 — "**calm, tranquil**": inner composure, serene stillness.

Chapter Explanation

These brave and spirited troops, these keen and sharp weapons — these are **instruments of ill omen**. They take life and harm living beings. All creatures loathe them. Therefore **one who possesses Dao does not employ them. The noble person at home honors the left; when using arms he honors the right**. This shows that **weapons are instruments of ill omen — they are not the instruments of the noble person**. Only when there is a need to punish tyrants and rescue the people, to resist and repel external threats — only when **there is no alternative** — does he use them. Even then, **calm composure and disciplined restraint, with no displays of military might, is his highest principle**. Even if he **wins the victory**, he **does not consider it glorious**. To consider it glorious would be to **delight in killing people**. One who **delights in killing people cannot fulfill his purpose under Heaven**. Moreover, **in auspicious affairs the left is honored; in inauspicious affairs the right is honored. The lieutenant general stands at the left; the supreme general stands at the right**. This means **they stand in the rites of mourning**. This shows that weapons are indeed instruments of ill omen. **When multitudes have been slain** — weep for them in grief and sorrow. **When the war is won** — receive the occasion with the rites of mourning. Victory in battle is not considered something fine, and killing people is not considered a delight.

Discourse

Oh, how dreadful and cruel are the calamities of war since antiquity! Oh, how pitiable are those who have died or been wounded in them since antiquity! And never have they been more dreadful and pitiable than they are today. Take the ancient "Lament for the Ancient Battlefield" by Li Hua and set it beside a map of the present European war. Look at them together. What a spectacle of grief and horror! Why is today's calamity of war uniquely more terrible than those of the past? Because today's calamity was brewed and fermented from the calamities of the past. If today's calamity of war is not brought to rest, tomorrow's will be fiercer still. And it will grow ever fiercer, ever more terrible, until there is no one left in the world. This principle Laozi stated thousands of years ago: **"One who assists the ruler through Dao does not use arms to overpower all under Heaven. Such deeds readily rebound. Where armies have camped, thorns and brambles spring up. After a great war, years of famine surely follow."**

For there is a universal law in the cosmos: where there is a cause, there is an effect; where there is a sound, there is an echo; where there is an original force, there is a reactive force — and the reactive force is greater than the original force. How so? Suppose you strike a suspended object with fifty horsepower of force, tilting it to thirty degrees. If there were no air resistance, that object would swing back and forth without end. And so the oscillations go on, back and forth, without cease. When Laozi says **"such deeds readily rebound,"** this is exactly what he means. When he says **"where armies have camped, thorns and brambles spring up"** — the thorns and brambles are the reactive force that comes afterward. They covertly refer to the warmongers and war-lovers who arise later. He does not call them persons — he calls them thorns and brambles. This expresses the most extreme loathing and detestation. Consider what thorns and brambles are: they grow in every direction without order, amounting to nothing of use, sprouting needles that prick people and harm living things, extending their malignant influence. Where they grow, no one

can walk; flowers, grass, and grain cannot flourish. Truly they are things of the utmost poison and the utmost evil. These thorns and brambles inevitably spring up in the very places once ravaged by armies. Wherever a land has suffered the calamity of war, afterward there will inevitably emerge a warmonger and lover of killing to avenge the former wrongs. Examine the history of all ages and all lands, and it is always so — there would be no end to the telling.

Consider: King Wu of Zhou, leading an army of humaneness and righteousness, punished the tyrant and rescued the people. Yet Wugeng still rebelled. The Duke of Zhou campaigned eastward for three years, killing his own elder brother. He then enfeoffed Viscount Wei at Song and Viscount Ji in Korea, treating them as honored guests rather than subjects. He cultivated virtue and practiced humaneness, and only then was the malignant qi finally dispelled and all under Heaven at peace. Had the Duke of Zhou employed the strategy of pulling up the roots and cutting down to the last stump, slaughtering the descendants of the Yin wholesale, the calamity of the Warring States would have erupted immediately — one would not have had to wait until after the Eastern Zhou. Given the humaneness of King Wen and King Wu, there was still a minor upheaval. How then can those who relied on military force to annex others, who took delight in killing, possibly avoid retribution?

This principle was stated not only by Laozi — the sages of China and the West alike have stated it. Everyone under Heaven knows it. Even the warmongers and lovers of killing know it. Since they know it, why do they still make war and delight in killing? Because the grievance-qi of those who died in war remains unresolved. It inevitably brews itself into disaster. A single person who dies bearing a grievance can cause three years of drought. How much more so when countless people bear grievances! Therefore **after a great war, years of famine surely follow** — or pestilence, or terrible drought, or every kind of calamitous disaster. This too can be verified point by point in the history of all ages and all lands. Even with the humaneness of King Tang, there was still a seven-year drought. The rest may be inferred.

Those who die in war are certainly to be pitied. But those who die in the years of famine are also blameless. And so the grievance-qi accumulates more and more, growing more virulent with time. It permeates the human world, awaiting its opportunity to erupt. When it encounters people with hearts inclined to war and domination, it concentrates within those hearts and drives them to cruelty — using them to vent its grievances. A person infected by this qi becomes violent, brutal, and ruthlessly inventive — if he wants to devise a lethal weapon, the idea comes to him at once; if he wants to devise a stratagem for storming cities and smashing defenses, it comes to him at once. For the people of lands once ravaged by war will inevitably seek revenge in later generations. The later generation and those who died before are of one qi. Like voices respond to one another; like qi seeks its like. As a magnet draws iron, the attraction is exceedingly easy to bring about. And so it comes to the point where nearly everyone is infected by this qi, nearly everyone lusts for war, nearly everyone is driven to a kind of madness — and nothing will satisfy them but mass slaughter. And the lands where they slaughter will afterward produce the same — and worse. Alas! War follows upon war — when will it end? This is truly cause for grief.

Now, fortunately, the European War has concluded and the peace conference has opened. Yet though the European War has ended, war in Asia is about to begin. Many peoples may not be content. Many grievance-spirits may not rest. Though the Red Cross Society buries the remains — a

deed of great merit, certainly — it dispels only the malignant qi clinging to the corpses. The grievances of the souls remain unresolved. The years of famine that lie ahead may well prove unavoidable. The calamities of war that lie beyond are cause for deep concern.

This is what I worry about day and night, racking my mind and exhausting my thoughts, unable to devise a solution. I humbly wish to discuss it with all the people of the world. When this matter is submitted to universal principle and tested against history, there is only one course: to promote and champion Dao and De, and thereby ensure no further disasters arise. In ancient times, after King Tang and King Wu punished the tyrants Jie and Zhou, they illuminated virtue and drew close to the people, rested the literary arts and laid down the military. And so they enjoyed peace for several hundred years. Had their descendants continued to advance, would the world not long since have become a world of Great Unity?

For weapons are lethal instruments. To use them is to kill. When the Sage punishes tyrants and rescues the people, he has no choice but to use them. Yet he treats the occasion with the rites of mourning. Those who kill and win battles — he still weeps over them in lamentation, not daring to honor them. And even refraining from honoring them is not sufficient to dispel the malignant qi. Nothing will serve but the cultivation of Dao and De. Dao and De are the qi of auspiciousness. They are the qi of warm, generative yang. Auspicious qi alone can dispel malignant qi. Yang qi alone can dispel yin qi. Mist and fog are formed from yin qi — when the sun shines on them, they disperse. Ice and frost are congealed from yin qi — when the warm yang breath steams upon them, they dissolve. Not only dissolve — they can even be transformed into warm currents of air. Seen in this light, the promotion and championing of Dao and De is the foremost and most wondrous remedy for saving the world today.

Previously, at the age of nine — it was 1915, the era of the European War's utmost ferocity — I was unable to bear sitting by while my fellow beings died and suffered in these terrible calamities. Forgetting my own meager virtue, youth, and years, I rashly undertook to establish the **International Society of Dao and De**, founded on the essential teachings of the sages of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. I composed a tract called "On the Cessation of War" and had the charter printed and distributed. But because the war was then at its fiercest, the Society was never formally established. Yet my aspiration remains unfulfilled, and this heart of mine will not die. Moreover, the present state of affairs and the future dangers are just as I feared. I cannot bear to remain silent. And so, unable to do otherwise, I have once more drafted a charter, to be submitted to the governments and major institutions of all nations, in the hope that a common effort will organize the International Society of Dao and De. It would bring together the great moralists of all nations, all religions, and all fields of endeavor. Gathering the thoughts of all, extending the benefits of all, everyone would together research the methods for saving the world. Once the research is complete, the great moralists of each locality, according to local political customs and conditions, would first lecture and teach in their own regions; afterward they would exchange lectures, trade knowledge, dissolve mutual prejudices, and lay the foundation for the Great Unity. Then great educators would give people proper knowledge, and great industrialists would give people material sustenance. (This last point may apply to our own country; Europe and America may not require it.) When people possess a moral heart, knowledge, and material sustenance — naturally they will regard human life as precious and human dignity as paramount. They will no longer lust for war and killing. When people no longer carry the heart for war and

killing, even if the grievance-spirits wish to drive them to evil, there will be no opening to enter. Moreover, seeing that the people of the world love one another and live in harmony, those spirits will naturally repent the sins of their former love of war and killing. They will cease to haunt the living. Not only will the calamity of war be brought to rest, but the years of famine too may be averted. With no more famine, no more war, the fellow beings of all nations will enjoy the happiness of eternal peace. What joy!

This is my humble and earnest aspiration. Otherwise — though I am foolish, I am not a raving lunatic, and I am not fishing for fame and reputation. How could I otherwise be heartbroken, my tongue worn raw, my tears exhausted and my ink spent, unable to contain myself? I humbly wish that the humane people of all nations will understand this heartfelt effort, and together offer their criticisms and their guidance. What good fortune that would be! What good fortune indeed!

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