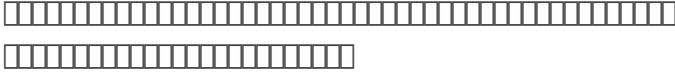


Chapter 34



Translation

The Great Dao flows and overflows —
it cannot be grasped as left or right.
The myriad beings depend on it for life, and it turns none away;
its work complete, it claims no credit.
It loves and nourishes all things, yet does not lord over them.

Ever without desire —
one might call it small.
The myriad beings return to it, yet it does not hold itself as master —
one might call it great.

And so the Sage never considers himself great,
and thus his greatness is fulfilled.

Word Notes

- 𠄎 — "**overflowing**": Flowing, drifting, never stagnant; implying ubiquity without fixation.

Chapter Explanation

The Great Dao flows and never stagnates. It cannot be grasped by clinging to one side, whether left or right. The myriad beings all depend on Dao to live and grow, and Dao does not refuse them. When the work of bringing beings to life is accomplished, **it does not claim credit for what it has done.** It loves and nourishes all things, yet does not act as their master. Ever without desire — formless, soundless — one might call it "small." After the myriad beings have been born and transformed, they all return to it, and still it does not consider itself their master. From its capacity to receive all things in its emptiness, one might call it "great." For this reason, **the Sage never considers himself great** — and therefore achieves a greatness that is boundless, extending beyond all limits.

Discourse

From ancient times, all who were fond of warfare relied upon nothing other than two things: cleverness and strength. With cleverness one can size up the enemy with uncanny precision; with strength one can win a hundred battles out of a hundred. What they covet is nothing more than a rich state and vast territory, lasting forever. All of this has already been demolished in the preceding chapters. This chapter further demolishes the ambition of swallowing others and aggrandizing oneself.

In all the universe, nothing is as great — without exterior boundary — as Dao. Dao gives life to all things and still does not lord over them. That is how it achieves its greatness.

In former times, the sage-rulers of our nation — Tang of Shang, Kings Wen and Wu of Zhou — learned this very method and, from small states, came to possess all under Heaven. Because they loved the people, the people were grateful. Love one person, and that person is grateful. Love all under Heaven, and all under Heaven submits — and one becomes the true king. One does not seek greatness, yet greatness comes of itself.

If one relies not on virtue but on military force: kill a person, and that person bitterly resents it. Kill all under Heaven, and all under Heaven gnashes its teeth — and one becomes a solitary man. Though one desires greatness, one is in truth small.

Our nation's First Emperor of Qin; Europe's Napoleon; and the then-present Kaiser of Germany — all stand as warnings from the past.

Alas! Even Dao, great as it is, having the grace of nurturing all things, still does not presume to call itself their master. How, then, can one think to annihilate other nations' territory and enslave other nations' people? Truly a great delusion beyond reckoning — hastening one's own destruction.

The First Emperor of Qin has already perished. Napoleon has already died. And the Kaiser was already placed under confinement. May this serve as a warning to all future First Emperors of Qin, all future Napoleons, and all future Kaisers of Germany.

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