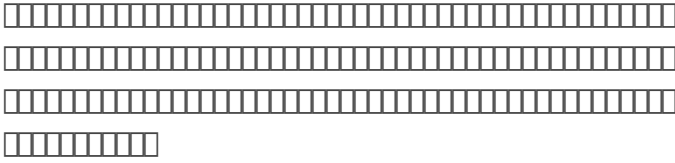


Chapter 38



Translation

Upper De does not regard itself as De —
and so it truly possesses De.
Lower De never departs from De —
and so it lacks De.

Upper De practices nonaction, with nothing done for a purpose.
Lower De acts, and acts with purpose.
Upper humaneness acts, yet without purpose.
Upper righteousness acts, and acts with purpose.
Upper rites acts, and when no one responds,
it rolls up its sleeves and compels them.

Therefore: lose Dao, and only then comes De;
lose De, and only then comes humaneness;
lose humaneness, and only then comes righteousness;
lose righteousness, and only then come rites.

Now rites are but the thinning of loyalty and trust,
and the forerunner of disorder.
Foreknowledge is the flower of Dao,
and the beginning of folly.

So the great person dwells in the substantial, not the thin;
abides in the fruit, not the flower.
Therefore: discard that and take this.

Word Notes

- 正 — "**righteousness**": Proper measure; what is fitting and due.
- 礼 — "**rites**": The forms and ceremonies that regulate human affairs.
- 忠 — "**loyalty**": Devoting one's whole heart.
- 信 — "**trust**": True sincerity.

- ☐ — "**flower**": The blossom of a plant — that is, outward display, not the fruit.

Chapter Explanation

A person of upper De does not regard himself as possessing De, and therefore is able to possess De. A person of lower De strains to hold on to his De, and therefore lacks true De. A person of upper De acts without deliberate intention, simply following his nature, and so has no need for purposeful action. A person of lower De acts with deliberate intention, and so engages in purposeful action. A person of upper humaneness practices humaneness, yet without purposeful action. A person of upper righteousness practices righteousness with purposeful action. A person of upper rites practices rites, but the ceremonies are so numerous that no one responds, and so he cannot help but bare his arms and force compliance.

Only after losing Dao does De appear. Only after losing De does humaneness appear. Only after losing humaneness does righteousness appear. Only after losing righteousness do rites appear. Rites are the thinning of loyalty and trust, the beginning of disorder. Those who possess foreknowledge use their cleverness outwardly — this is Dao's outward show. But when brightness reaches its extreme, darkness follows: this is the beginning of folly. Therefore the great person dwells in the substantial and does not dwell in the meager. He stands upon what is real and does not stand upon what is showy. Hence he discards the empty forms of intellect and takes the solid De of loyalty and trust.

Discourse

The Upper Volume speaks broadly of the great Dao, establishing the original source for all that exists, and corresponds in structure with the *Book of Changes*. The Lower Volume speaks in detail of the utmost De, providing the great practical application for governing the state and bringing peace to all under Heaven, and illuminates the various classical texts in mutual correspondence. This chapter is the guiding principle of the Lower Volume.

What is called upper De is precisely what the *Doctrine of the Mean* calls "the utmost De, without sound or scent" — and it is also what the *Great Learning* calls "illuminating luminous De until reaching the utmost good." When luminous De has been illuminated to the point of the utmost good, there is no De left to illuminate. "Being able to illuminate lofty De" and "being able to illuminate luminous De" — these were the efforts of earlier stages. At this point one has become one body with Dao. What De remains to be named?

The natural order of the great Dao's cycle is as follows. Descending five stages from Dao, one arrives at rites. Dao has neither name nor form; it is only when it first stirs to move that the life-giving De appears. Yet this generative impulse lies hidden within, and only when it ceaselessly gives rise to life does it receive the name humaneness. But the creation of beings requires measure and distinction, and measure and distinction constitute righteousness. When righteousness is pressed to its extreme it necessarily becomes strict, and strictness requires ceremonies and adornment — hence rites. This too is a natural order, a progression the sages could not avoid.

But when rites are used to constrain people's hearts, the inevitable corruption is a fondness for empty forms at the expense of true sincerity. Moreover, rites take strictness as their guiding principle. "Heaven above, marsh below" — the distinction between high and low, noble and base, permits not the slightest transgression. When strictness becomes excessive, most people cannot bear it, and resistance arises. Every manner of stratagem and cunning is devised. When people meet one another with cunning, deceptions multiply without end, and all under Heaven grows ever worse.

Confucius too, in the *Liyun* passage on the Small Tranquility, says: "And so schemes were employed, and warfare arose from this." But in the passage on the Great Unity he speaks only of "practicing trust and cultivating harmony," without mentioning humaneness, righteousness, rites, or cunning at all. Dao moves in a cycle. From humaneness, righteousness, rites, and cunning, it must turn to trust. Trust is the root of the four sprouts. When one does not speak of humaneness, righteousness, rites, and cunning, true humaneness, righteousness, rites, and cunning are naturally present within it. Trust, moreover, is the fruit of Dao, while rites and cunning are its flower.

In the present age the world is full of deception and guile, and most people say that the human heart has grown too corrupt, embracing pessimism. I, this young student, alone hold to optimism, for I believe that once Dao has flowered it must bear fruit. Where there is falseness there will be sincerity. This is truly the sign that the world of the Great Unity is taking shape.

Laozi's disparagement of humaneness, righteousness, rites, and cunning, and his exaltation of loyalty and trust, speak precisely to the present day. If we examine the history of our nation: the sovereigns of high antiquity were utterly simple and unaffected, plain and practicing nonaction while the people transformed themselves — this was the age of Dao. When Emperor Yao illuminated his lofty De, and Emperor Shun's mysterious De ascended and was heard, and they transformed all under Heaven through De — this was the age of De. Yu the Great tamed the waters, leveled the land, and made the heavens whole, putting resources to use and enriching life — this was the age of Humaneness. Kings Tang and Wu punished tyrants and rescued the people — this was the age of Righteousness. The Duke of Zhou refined and perfected the rites and teachings, bringing culture to its fullest development — this was the age of Rites. From the Zhou dynasty onward, all who governed employed schemes and cunning — this was the age of Cunning. Today the governance and diplomacy of every nation, the arts of the scholar, the farmer, the artisan, and the merchant, have reached the very pinnacle of cunning.

From this day forward, the age of Cunning ends and the age of Trust opens. Once the age of Trust opens, all under Heaven attains the Great Unity. Trust is practiced and harmony is cultivated. Peace endures forever. Nations that lack trust and harmony will weaken. People who lack trust and harmony will not survive. This is the great Dao's course: from seedling to spreading branches, to leaves, to flower, to the full, round, splendid fruit — bringing all people under Heaven to share in blessedness, as a matter of natural course.

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