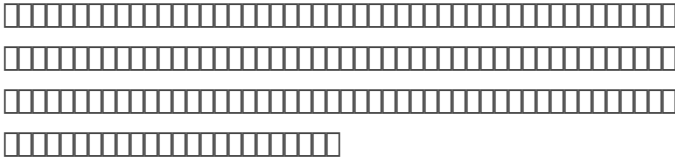


Chapter 39



Translation

In ages past, those that attained the One:
Heaven attained the One and so was clear;
Earth attained the One and so was still;
spirits attained the One and so were luminous;
valleys attained the One and so were full;
the myriad beings attained the One and so had life;
lords and kings attained the One and so set all under Heaven right.
All of this flows from the One.

Were Heaven unable to be clear, it would crack;
were Earth unable to be still, it would quake;
were spirits unable to be luminous, they would cease;
were valleys unable to be full, they would run dry;
were the myriad beings unable to live, they would perish;
were lords and kings unable to set things right
yet holding themselves noble and high — they would stumble.

Therefore the noble has the lowly as its root;
the high has the low as its foundation.
This is why lords and kings name themselves
"the orphaned," "the bereft," "the unworthy" —
is this not taking the lowly as one's root? Is it not so?

Therefore: assemble carriage upon carriage, and there is no carriage.
Do not wish to gleam and glitter like jade,
nor to stand aloof and apart like stone.

Word Notes

- □ — "**still**": Peaceful, tranquil.
- □ — "**right**": To set right, to make correct.
- □ — "**crack**": To split apart.

- ☐ — "**cease**": To stop, to expire.
- ☐ — "**dry up**": To be used up, exhausted.
- ☐ — "**stumble**": To trip and fall.
- ☐ — "**worthy**": Goodness, nourishment. "The unworthy" is a royal self-deprecation.
- ☐ — "**carriage**": A vehicle.
- ☐☐ — "**gleaming and glittering**": Small in appearance; self-precious yet petty.
- ☐☐ — "**aloof and apart**": Not fitting together; self-elevated yet isolated.

Chapter Explanation

In ages past, those that attained the One: Heaven attained the One and so was clear. Earth attained the One and so was tranquil. Spirits attained the One and so were numinous. Mountain valleys attained the One and so were brimming. The myriad beings attained the One and so grew and flourished. Lords and kings attained the One and so were able to set all under Heaven right. That Heaven, Earth, humans, and all beings are able to be clear, tranquil, numinous, brimming, alive, and upright — this all proceeds from the same principle.

Were Heaven not to attain the One, having no means to be clear, it would crack. Were Earth not to attain the One, having no means to be tranquil, it would give way. Were spirits not to attain the One, having no means to be numinous, they would fade. Were mountain valleys not to attain the One, having no means to be brimming, they would run dry. Were the myriad beings not to attain the One, having no means to live, they would perish. Were lords and kings not to attain the One, having no means to rule all under Heaven, yet still occupying the lofty seat of honor, they would stumble.

Therefore the noble must not consider itself noble, but take the lowly as its root. The high must not consider itself high, but take the low as its foundation. This is why lords and kings call themselves "the orphaned," "the bereft," and "the unworthy." Is this not taking the lowly as one's root? Is it not so?

In all affairs under Heaven, one must combine many lowly elements to form what is noble — just as a carriage must combine wheels, shafts, crossbars, and canopy to become a carriage. Try to combine several complete carriages, and you cannot form a single carriage. Therefore lords and kings must not aggrandize or elevate themselves; only then can they set all under Heaven right. One must not desire to gleam and glitter like jade — prizing oneself yet actually being petty — nor to stand aloof like stone — elevating oneself yet actually being isolated.

Discourse

Confucius said, "My Dao is threaded through by one thing." The One is the great substance of Dao, and therefore Heaven, Earth, humans, spirits, and the myriad beings cannot afford to lose it. This "One" means pure and undivided — nothing else.

Clear and abiding above, covering all things without exception: this is Heaven's One. Tranquil and abiding below, bearing all things without exception: this is Earth's One. Pervading all beings,

leaving nothing untouched, present everywhere: this is the One of the spirits. Empty and open, receiving all things without exception: this is the One of the mountain valleys. Ceaselessly revolving in its cycles, giving rise to life without end: this is the One of the myriad beings.

If Heaven and Earth and the myriad beings can all attain the One, then human beings — the most luminous of the myriad beings, the very heart of Heaven and Earth — and lords and kings, the exemplars of all the people, must guard the One all the more. For lords and kings, guarding the One simply means being like Heaven in covering all things without exception, like Earth in bearing all things without exception, like spirits in being present everywhere, like valleys in receiving all things without exception, and like the myriad beings in ceaselessly giving rise to life. Pure and undivided, and nothing else.

But if they aggrandize and elevate themselves, looking down upon all others, making no distinction between right and wrong, crooked and straight, and only distinguishing noble from base, high from low — how could they ever set all under Heaven right?

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