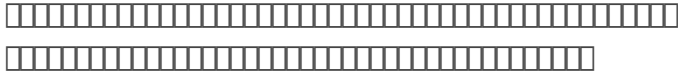


Chapter 42



Translation

Dao gives birth to the One;
the One gives birth to Two;
Two gives birth to Three;
Three gives birth to the myriad beings.

The myriad beings carry yin on their backs
and hold yang in their arms;
the settling breath between them makes harmony.

What all people scorn —
"the orphaned," "the bereft," "the unworthy" —
yet these are the titles kings and lords claim for themselves.

So it is with all things:
diminish them, and they grow;
add to them, and they diminish.

What others have taught, I too teach:
"Those who are violent and overbearing
do not come to a natural end."
I take this as the sovereign principle of my teaching.

Word Notes

- 負 — "**carry on the back**": To bear upon one's shoulders.
- 損 — "**diminish**": To reduce, to decrease.
- 益 — "**gain**": To increase, to benefit.
- 垂 — "**descending**": Hanging down, settling downward. This is JXZ's non-standard gloss; standard readings interpret the character as surging or rushing together.
- 主 — "**sovereign principle**": Ruler, master, governing authority. JXZ glosses this as equivalent to "sovereign." Thus "the sovereign principle of my teaching" means the ruling maxim. Standard readings take it as "father of my teaching" or "foundation."

Chapter Explanation

Dao gives birth to the single breath of primordial void. This single breath divides into two, giving birth to yin and yang. Yin and yang combine to give birth to the Three Powers — Heaven, Earth, and the Human. The Three Powers give birth to the myriad beings. The myriad beings all carry yin on their backs and hold yang in their arms. Yin and yang settle and descend, generating the breath of Supreme Harmony.

In all affairs, the lower serves as the higher. What people despise most — "the orphaned," "the bereft," "the unworthy" — these are the lowest terms of all, yet kings and lords take them as their own titles. Therefore: diminish something, and it may actually benefit; increase something, and it may actually suffer harm. This is the principle that humility invites benefit and self-satisfaction invites loss.

What the ancients used to teach, I too teach: the violent and overbearing will surely not die a natural death. I shall take this as the sovereign principle of my teaching.

Discourse

The Buddhist scriptures say: "Ignorance trembles, and suddenly there appear mountains, rivers, and the great earth." Indeed, Heaven, Earth, human beings, and all things are born from the deluded stirrings of the great Dao. Human beings, born endowed with these deluded stirrings, find that their qi easily soars upward and their natures easily incline toward ambition and the love of strength.

Yet when qi soars, it scatters. When one's nature runs to ambition and force, it is damaged. Therefore the teaching of the sages is to make what soars settle back down, and to make what is ambitious and forceful dwell in humility and lowliness — so that one may return to the pre-celestial. This and nothing else.

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