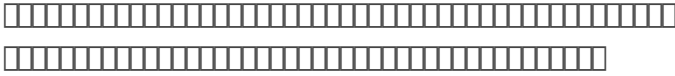


Chapter 52



Translation

All under Heaven has a beginning —
take it as the mother of all under Heaven.
Having found the mother,
know thereby the children.
Having known the children,
return and guard the mother:
to the end of your days, no danger.

Stop up the openings, close the gates —
to the end of your life, no exhaustion.
Open the openings, press on with affairs —
to the end of your life, beyond rescue.

To perceive the small: this is called clarity.
To guard the yielding: this is called strength.
Use its radiance,
return again to its clarity —
bring no calamity upon yourself.
This is called practicing the constant.

Word Notes

- 口 — "**openings**": the mouth; by extension, the sense-openings through which spirit and energy leak out.
- 凶 — "**calamity; misfortune**": disaster, ruin.

Chapter Explanation

All things under Heaven have a beginning, a root-source that serves as **the mother of all under Heaven**. If a person can find this root-source — having **found the mother**, he can then **know the children**. Having **known the children**, he must then **return and guard the mother**. By returning to the root and restoring the source, even when the body perishes, there is no danger.

How can one guard the mother? **Stop up the mouth** and **close the gates** so that essence and spirit do not leak out. Then throughout one's entire life, there is no need for toilsome striving — success comes naturally. But if one **opens the mouth** and **presses on to accomplish affairs**, then throughout one's entire life, nothing can save him.

Being able to **perceive the infinitely small beginning** of things is called **clarity**. **Guarding the infinitely yielding mother** is called **strength**. **Use the radiance** that shines outward, then **draw it back and return to the root-clarity**. Do not let it flow out and never return, leaving a lifetime of calamity upon yourself. This is called **practicing the true and constant Dao**.

Discourse

This chapter embodies the principle stated in the *Book of Changes*: "To reckon what has passed is to follow the forward direction; to know what is to come is to go in reverse. Therefore the *Changes* reckons in reverse."

The pre-celestial gives birth to the post-celestial in the forward direction. Following the current downstream, one inevitably reaches exhaustion. Therefore one must reverse course and return to the pre-celestial. But since the pre-celestial has already given birth to the post-celestial, the pre-celestial on its own is spent. It is as though once the mother has given birth to the child, the mother has grown old. One must reunite child and mother in order to restore the original face.

This chapter says: "Having found the mother, know thereby the children" — this is tracing from the pre-celestial root-source to discover the post-celestial. "Having known the children, return and guard the mother" — this is using the post-celestial to return to the pre-celestial. "Stop up the openings, close the gates" — this is the method for returning to the pre-celestial. It is precisely what Confucius taught Yan Hui as the four prohibitions: "Do not look at what violates propriety, do not listen to what violates propriety, do not speak what violates propriety, do not act on what violates propriety." It is what the Buddhist scriptures call "no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind." Only in this way can one pass from conditioned existence back to the unconditioned — truly constant and unchanging.

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