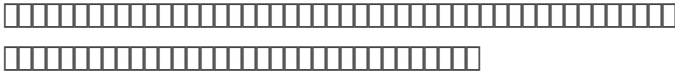


Chapter 56



Translation

Those who know do not speak;
those who speak do not know.
Block the openings,
shut the gates,
blunt the sharp,
loose the tangled,
soften the light,
merge with the dust —
this is called mysterious sameness.

Therefore it cannot be sought in closeness,
nor held at distance;
it cannot be turned to advantage,
nor made to suffer harm;
it cannot be lifted to honor,
nor cast into lowness.
Thus it is prized above all under Heaven.

Word Notes

- 远 — "**distant**": far, remote.

Chapter Explanation

Those who truly know Dao do not speak of it. Those who speak of it do not truly know. Those who truly know Dao **block their outward openings** and **shut their gates against what enters from without**. They **blunt their sharp edges, free themselves from entanglement, soften their light**, and **merge with the worldly dust**. This is called **mysterious sameness**. Why is it called mysterious sameness? Because one cannot draw near to such a person, nor keep distant from them; one cannot profit them, nor harm them; one cannot ennoble them, nor demean them. Therefore they are the most honored in all under Heaven.

Discourse

The great Dao is without sound or scent. It cannot be put into words. The moment one speaks of it, one falls into fixed appearances — and this is not truly understanding Dao. Those who truly understand Dao cast off their acuity and let fall their scheming; inwardly they give rise to no discriminating marks; outwardly they merge with others. What need have they for lofty rhetoric and sweeping pronouncements? And what need for endless argument and debate?

In an era of the Great Unity, everyone would be a person of noble character, so merging with others would naturally follow. But even in an era of chaos, when people's conduct is far from uniform, the person of Dao still merges with others. Yet though they merge, they are harmonious but not swept along — they differ from people of the world. People of the world seek closeness with, lift to honor, and turn to advantage those who are the same as themselves, while they hold at distance, cast into lowness, and cause harm to those who differ. The person of Dao is the same as others, yet no one can seek closeness with them, turn them to advantage, or lift them to honor — this is sameness that is not-sameness. And since no one can seek closeness with them, turn them to advantage, or lift them to honor, yet equally no one can hold them at distance, cause them harm, or cast them into lowness — this is not-sameness that is sameness. This is the most mysterious kind of sameness. Though on the surface they are the same as others, their inner spiritual nobility is something no one can actually reach.

The Confucian disciple Yan Hui, though he walked step by step when the Master walked and hastened when the Master hastened, still sighed in admiration: "The more I look up, the higher it seems; the more I bore into it, the harder it becomes; I see it before me, and suddenly it is behind." This is precisely the principle at work.

Yet people of the world fail to perceive this. They say that Mozi's "elevating sameness" — his political doctrine of enforced uniformity — originated with Laozi. They do not realize that Mozi's sameness is caught up in outward traces — it is external, institutionalized, coerced. Laozi's sameness is supremely mysterious. Laozi and Mozi are vastly different indeed.

Revision #2

Created 2026-03-10 22:36:58 UTC by Phil

Updated 2026-03-13 01:43:28 UTC by Phil