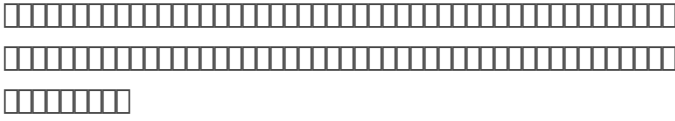


Chapter 57



Translation

Govern the state with uprightness,
deploy the army with surprise,
win all under Heaven through noninterference.

How do I know this is so?
By these signs:

The more taboos that burden the world,
the poorer the people become.
The more sharp instruments the people possess,
the darker the state grows.
The more cleverness and skill people cultivate,
the stranger the novelties that arise.
The more laws and decrees proliferate,
the more thieves and bandits flourish.

Therefore the Sage declares:
I act without acting, and the people transform on their own.
I love stillness, and the people right themselves.
I do not interfere, and the people prosper.
I am free of desire, and the people return to the uncarved.

Word Notes

- 日 — "ever deeper," "all the more": a sense of deepening further, intensifying.

Chapter Explanation

Govern the state with uprightness. Deploy the army with surprise. Win all under Heaven through noninterference. How do I know that all under Heaven can be won through noninterference? Because when all under Heaven is burdened with many taboos, the people fear violating the prohibitions, lose their livelihoods, and grow ever poorer. When the people are

furnished with many sharp instruments of convenience, where there are mechanical affairs there must be mechanical minds; people treat one another with cunning and stratagem, and the state grows ever darker. When people prize cleverness and skill, strange and useless novelties multiply all the more. When one governs people by laws and decrees, the more conspicuous these become, the more thieves and bandits flourish. All of this is the consequence of meddling. Therefore the Sage says: **I act without acting**, and the people naturally transform themselves. **I love stillness**, and the people naturally right themselves. **I do not interfere**, and the people naturally prosper. **I am free of desire**, and the people naturally return to the uncarved.

Discourse

I, this young student, upon reading this chapter, came to understand that learning is not a pedantic and useless doctrine, and that followers of Dao are not pedantic and useless people. It is simply that governing a state through Dao and transforming the people through De means one is unwilling to deploy one's methods of Dao lightly — for fear of awakening the people's calculating minds, which would only throw the state into ever greater turmoil.

When military force becomes unavoidable — when the fate of the state and the lives of the people hang in the balance — then the person of Dao can indeed achieve victory through surprise and rescue the world from calamity. But the "surprise" they employ is not cunning stratagems or deceitful ruses; it is not brute force or freakish valor. It is simply that which surpasses people's expectations — something different from the way others wage war.

Confucius, for instance, did not consider wrestling a tiger barehanded or wading a river on foot to be the truly remarkable thing; rather, he regarded facing every undertaking with apprehension and succeeding through careful counsel as truly remarkable.

The Marquis of Wu, Zhuge Liang, did not consider capturing Meng Huo to be the remarkable thing — he considered releasing Meng Huo to be remarkable. And it was not one release that was remarkable, but seven releases.

As for the Marquis of Wu playing his lute atop an empty city to turn back Sima Yi's forces, or Zhang Zifang playing his flute on a mountaintop to scatter the Hegemon-King's army — these are but lesser instances of the marvelous.

For the person of Dao does not consider it marvelous to win battles by filling the cities with slaughter and filling the fields with slaughter. What they consider marvelous is retiring the troops with a laugh and a jest, ending war and stilling strife. Military force is used only to rescue the world from chaos. Once chaos is quelled, military force is no longer employed, and one returns to honoring Dao and treasuring De, to clarity, stillness, and nonaction.

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