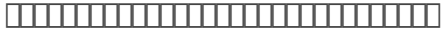


Chapter 6



Translation

The Valley Spirit never dies —
this is called the Mysterious Female.
The gate of the Mysterious Female
is the root of Heaven and Earth.
Continuous and subtle, as though barely there,
drawn upon, it is never spent.

Word Notes

- ㄅ — "**Valley Spirit**": The true spirit of the empty valley.
- ㄆ — "**mysterious**": True emptiness.
- ㄇ — "**female**": Wondrous existence; the generative, the receptive.
- ㄏ — "**continuous**": Subtle and unceasing.
- ㄏ — "**never exhausted**": Without toil or haste; its function is effortless.

Chapter Explanation

The true spirit within the void does not die — this is **true emptiness and wondrous existence**. **The gate of true emptiness and wondrous existence is the root of Heaven and Earth**. To return to the origin and restore the source, one must cultivate a continuous awareness — present, yet as if not present. Its operation is without effort or haste: functioning, yet as if not functioning.

Discourse

This chapter reveals the method of guarding the center and the workings of the center itself.

The circle of the character for "center" is the shape of an empty valley. The upper half of this circle is Heaven; the lower half is Earth. When "Heaven and Earth" appear as a pair, this "Heaven" is the relative heaven — the one that has an opposite. The vertical stroke through the center is the true spirit. Every person possesses this spirit. It is what the *Doctrine of the Mean* calls "the true nature endowed by Heaven." This "Heaven" is the one and only Heaven, which enfolds all heavens and all worlds. When Confucius revered and stood in awe of Heaven, this is what he meant. Otherwise — since Dao gives birth to Heaven and Earth, and the Buddha is the teacher of the gods — if

Confucius merely revered the physical sky, would that not be pitifully beneath his stature? And if the Confucian classics universally treat Heaven as the highest authority, would that not be degrading?

But in the post-celestial world, one's nature deteriorates into emotion, and emotion deteriorates into desire. Thereupon this spirit sinks downward, circulating within the circle — this is what the Buddha calls samsara, the cycle of rebirth. One must reduce desire and accord with emotion, and then gather emotion back into nature. When the vertical stroke through the center is revived, one can naturally pierce through Heaven and Earth — this is what Confucius called his "one thread."

One transcends into the void, indestructible through all eternity. Yet though one transcends into the void, one still pervades the space between Heaven and Earth, remaining the master and ruler of Heaven and Earth.

Why is this so? The left side of the character for "center" is the mysterious: when it stirs, it becomes yang; it is the beginning of Heaven and Earth. The right side is the female: when it stirs, it becomes yin; it is the mother of the myriad beings. The two sides are also like two halves of a gate. The vertical stroke is like the gate's hinge. When the hinge moves, it gives rise to the mysterious and the female; the mysterious and the female give rise to Heaven and Earth.

But once Heaven and Earth have been separated, this gate closes and does not open. The human being, as the full embodiment of Dao, is the same way. One must reopen this gate; only then can yin and yang resume their interchange. When yin and yang converge and merge into a single body, this vertical stroke can once again fill all of Heaven and Earth and transcend beyond them.

The method of reopening this gate is nonaction yet action, action yet nonaction. This is precisely what Mencius meant by "neither forget nor force." And yet later inner-alchemy practitioners clung to concrete images, claiming it refers to some specific acupoint or passage in the body. How could they have realized that Laozi's words are hardly limited to the acupoints of a single body?

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