



gentle flame, some a roaring fire. When you lump them all together and cook them at once, of course it turns out badly. If you want them done right, you need a great cauldron, ample water, and a perfectly blue flame — the method of nonaction. Follow the principle that the great soup is left unseasoned: use no special ingredients, and what comes forth will have a natural flavor. But people in this world prefer rich, heavy tastes, so I did not dare cook it that way." I laughed heartily and said: "Not only can you not cook properly — you even talk big and mock the world!" But now, as I, this young student, annotate this chapter and encounter the words "governing a great state is like cooking a small fish," I realize that what he said was the language of Dao. His understanding is no less than that of Cook Ding, who served Lord Wenhui.

And I came to a further realization: Laozi himself was a great master of the culinary arts. What a pity that he was hidden away as Keeper of the Archives! Had he been put in charge of cooking, he would surely have produced the most marvelous and nourishing flavors to feast all under Heaven — surpassing even the legendary "salt and plum" counsel of the minister Fu Yue. As for Chen Ruzi, who cut meat with such meticulous evenness — he would not even be worth mentioning.

I imagine that Laozi, in cooking his small fish, would certainly have used the method of "the great tailor does not cut." Since his cooking does not hack and carve, his governance would surely not harm the people. Since it does not harm the people, the spirit of harmony would be summoned forth, and there would be no natural disasters or human calamities. The state could enjoy lasting peace and enduring stability.

What is the reason for this? Let me try to explain the underlying principle. In all the cosmos, what brings people and the myriad beings into existence is the qi of yin and yang. The power that governs yin qi is called "ghost." The power that governs yang qi is called "spirit." To speak of them as one, we call this "Heaven." (The "heavens" spoken of in the Buddhist scriptures are stages within a system of learning — they are not the Heaven that governs yin and yang.) To speak of this as the sovereign over yin and yang is to call it Shangdi — the Lord on High — or the True Lord, the True Ruler. (The "Shakra" of the Buddhist scriptures is comparable to saying "the ruler of such-and-such a country" — he is not the one and only Lord on High.) (In my earlier annotations to the *Daqian Tushuo*, what I called "the Lord on High" referred only to the spirit-lord governing the yang-qi portion. The "Lord on High" I speak of here is precisely what the *Book of Changes* calls the Supreme Ultimate.)

The Lord on High is the sovereign of all Heaven, Earth, people, and things — just as the human heart is the sovereign of the entire body. Even if it is merely the skin that is injured, the heart inevitably feels pain. Therefore, if the people are harmed without cause, the Lord on High inevitably feels pain. Toward the dead and wounded, a feeling of grief and compassion arises. The moment grief and compassion arise, yang qi weakens. Toward those who have done the harming, a feeling of pain and loathing arises. The moment pain and loathing arise, yin qi grows strong. Once yin qi grows strong, demons hold authority and scatter all manner of freakish disasters and sudden calamities far and wide. Moreover, the people and creatures born in such a time are largely imbued with this baleful, harsh, and killing qi. Those with wasp eyes and a leopard's voice, born cruel by nature — this is precisely because they have absorbed the most of this qi. People born imbued with such qi will inevitably carry out great slaughter, and all under Heaven falls into chaos.

When this chapter says "the ghosts do not work their wonders" and all the rest — this is the principle behind it.

Someone said to me: "Whether your words are correct need not be debated. Since you say the Lord on High and the myriad beings are like one body, then the one who harms is the Lord on High, and the one who is harmed is also the Lord on High. The Lord on High has harmed himself. Would the Lord on High then punish himself? It is as if one's own hand injures one's own foot — would the heart then command the foot to punish the hand?"

I said: "You know one thing but not the other. You understand the form but not the spirit. When I say the Lord on High punishes people, I do not mean it in the way that superstitious folk and shamans describe it. It is the natural principle within the transformation of qi. The Lord on High does not deliberately punish anyone — all beings bring consequences upon themselves. When people slaughter and harm one another, yin and yang fall out of harmony, and all manner of disasters brew forth. The appearance of punishment manifests naturally."

"Furthermore, you say that one cannot punish oneself. But in truth, self-punishment permits not even the slightest leniency — you simply do not realize it. I once tested this through personal experience. One day I was using my right hand to cut paper with a knife. I pressed too hard and slashed my left hand. My heart ached terribly, and I felt compassion for the left hand and resentment toward the right. I glared at the right hand for a long time. The next day, the left hand had stopped hurting, but the right hand had swollen up. My insides felt unwell too. I called a doctor to take my pulse. The doctor said: 'The heart pulse is weak, and the liver qi is overactive. This is because you have experienced both grief and anger, causing yin and yang to fall out of harmony and the internal organs to attack one another. Once the heart is calm and at peace, you will naturally recover. Medicine cannot cure this.'"

"Hearing this, I was suddenly and completely enlightened. I realized that the discomfort in my organs was caused by the heart's agitation. The swelling and pain in my right hand came from the heart's resentment — in the moment of glaring with anger, a surge of malignant qi was sent crashing into it, and so it swelled. When I reflect on it now, I followed the doctor's advice and kept my heart calm and my qi at peace for a long while before I gradually recovered."

"I thought further: the left hand is my hand, and the right hand is also my hand. The left hand was already injured — would I truly wish for the right hand to suffer as well? Though I had no intention of making it suffer, in the moment of resentment the heart stirred and the qi issued forth without my awareness. The right hand hurt unbearably, and I could not call the qi back even if I wanted to. I realized then that when a person punishes himself — even those who fall ill from the seven emotions — they are punishing themselves without knowing it."

"And from this I further realized that the Lord on High's punishment of people works in precisely this way."

I then thought of King Wen, whose compassion extended even to dry bones, and King Tang, who removed three sides of the hunting net. These were not the benevolence of a soft-hearted woman — they were acts that harmonized yin and yang. Therefore the Sage's governance of all under

Heaven attends entirely to the root, not the surface. For all under Heaven to enjoy lasting peace in the future, there is no alternative but to be benevolent toward the people and cherish all things, and to nurture and warm the qi of Supreme Harmony.

Moreover, consider this: when I alone kept my heart calm and my qi at peace, my illness was cured. If all the people under Heaven kept their hearts calm and their qi at peace, would not all the illnesses of all under Heaven be cured as well?

---

Revision #2

Created 2026-03-10 22:37:12 UTC by Phil

Updated 2026-03-13 01:43:36 UTC by Phil