

the initiative in lowering itself. If even the great state takes the lower position, the small state need not even be mentioned.

Discourse

This chapter discusses the foreign policy by which states should coexist — using De to win others' allegiance rather than military force, overcoming through yielding rather than through strength. The great state, as the one toward which small states naturally gravitate, should take the lead in humbling itself and treating the small states with generous accommodation, so as to preserve the peace of the world.

For great states habitually rely on power to bully others and on military force to swallow them up. They do not realize that when they act this way, the small states — far from daring to submit — will inevitably fear the extinction of their nations and their peoples. They will band together, many small states uniting, and fight the great state to the death. The great state, having something to rely upon, will inevitably grow arrogant. Once arrogant, its qi becomes bloated and dissipated. Once bloated and dissipated, it will inevitably be defeated in the end.

The small states, driven by fear, will inevitably return to the root when pushed to extremity. They will be able to endure humiliation and place themselves below others. Moreover, the many small states will share sympathy for their common plight, and feelings of mutual care will arise. They will be of one heart and one De. Their qi will be tragic and heroic. With tragic and heroic qi, they will inevitably triumph in the end.

But after their triumph, they will walk the same old path as the great state before them. Their cruelty toward the defeated will be even more severe. The defeated, now suffering under this cruelty, will inevitably rouse themselves to greatness and seek revenge. And so wars follow upon wars, with never a single day of peace.

Therefore one must take non-contention as one's contention and yielding as one's strength, humbly placing oneself below, in order to extinguish the calamity of war. Consider how the downstream flow of water dwells in the lowest place, contending with nothing — yet all the waters converge upon it. Is this not proof that through humility one becomes the destination toward which all gravitate?

The wars and slaughter of today's world have reached their utmost extreme. Why not try this marvelous remedy? If a state that possesses De and vision were to act with keen eyes and quick hands and try this method first — a great state would need three years, a middling state seven years, a small state ten years — there would certainly be great results. If it proved utterly ineffective, then not only may they burn the printing blocks and set fire to the books of this *Dao De Jing* — I myself would willingly accept the blame for deceiving the people and misleading the state.

Revision #2

Created 2026-03-10 22:37:14 UTC by Phil

Updated 2026-03-13 01:43:39 UTC by Phil