

Chapter 70



Translation

My words are easy to understand,
easy to put into practice.
Yet none beneath Heaven can understand them,
none can put them into practice.

Words have a root.
Affairs have a master.
It is only through not knowing this
that they do not know me.

Those who know me are few;
those who follow me are precious.
And so the Sage wears coarse cloth
and holds jade at his heart.

Word Notes

- 粗 — "**rough cloth**": A coarse, broad garment of woven animal hair — the kind worn by people of low station.

Chapter Explanation

My words are very easy to understand, very easy to put into practice. Yet none beneath Heaven can understand them, none can put them into practice. The words I speak have an ultimate root. The affairs I speak of have a master and sovereign. It is precisely because no one has grasped my root principle, my sovereign tenet, that they do not know me. Those who know me are few — and so my Dao is all the more precious. For this reason, the Sage wears coarse cloth — the garb of a lowly person — on the outside, yet holds jade at his heart. How hard it is for people to perceive this!

Discourse

Laozi's words, in their broad purport, simply urge reverence for Dao and De, abhorrence of war and battle, and the practice of clarity, stillness, and non-contention. These are the most level, the most ordinary of principles — easy to understand and easy to put into practice. Yet people of the world either dismiss them as pedantic and useless, or exalt them as something mystically extraordinary; or they apply them narrowly, treating them merely as a technique for personal cultivation; or they look at them askance, branding them outright as heterodox teachings. All of these people see only the coarse cloth on the outside and fail to see the jade held at the heart.

Whether the people of the world know Laozi or not is of no great consequence in itself — it is a matter of the gravest consequence for the whole world. If there were truly someone who grasped his genuine root principle of revering Dao and De and abhorring war and battle — and understood that it is not pedantic and useless, but contains real principle — and took it up and put it to the test, it would truly be a blessing for every nation on the globe.

Revision #2

Created 2026-03-10 22:37:40 UTC by Phil

Updated 2026-03-13 01:43:55 UTC by Phil