

Chapter 72



Translation

When the people do not fear authority,
a greater authority will come.
Do not crowd them in their dwellings.
Do not oppress them in their living.
Only by not oppressing
will one not be oppressed.
Therefore the Sage knows himself but does not parade himself,
loves himself but does not exalt himself.
He sets aside the one and takes up the other.

Word Notes

- 威 — "**authority**": Punitive authority, the intimidating power of the state.
- 足 — "**weary / to sate**": Sufficient, sated; interchangeable with "glutted" or "to have one's fill."

Chapter Explanation

Lead by Dao and De, and the people will have no need to fear punitive authority. They will naturally know reverence. In this way, without displaying anger, the ruler's authority is awe-inspiring — a great authority arrives of its own accord.

Therefore those who govern the state should not rely on their power to oppress the people. They should not glut themselves on the pleasures of sound, color, goods, and profit to nourish their own lives. Precisely by not seeking to sate themselves on sound, color, goods, and profit, they will be filled without seeking fullness and can renew themselves daily.

For this reason, the Sage seeks only self-knowledge, not self-display. He seeks only self-love, not self-exaltation. Therefore he sets aside the one — insatiable grasping — and takes up the other — humility and non-contention.

Discourse

All those who are fond of war and killing: outwardly they rely on military might to carve up all under Heaven, and inwardly they rely on punitive authority to slaughter their own people. They rely on the power of arms, acting with such cruelty and heartlessness, for no purpose other than to fill the pit of their desires — seeking to sate their ears with music, their eyes with color, their bodies with soft warmth, their mouths with rich delicacies. Beyond this, they would swallow up all under Heaven and make the myriad nations pay tribute, boasting of their fame and exalting their persons.

Consider the First Emperor of Qin, so self-aggrandizing that he believed himself to surpass even the Two Emperors and Three Kings. He seized the finest treasures of the six conquered states, built the vast Epang Palace, and carried off the women, children, jade, and silk of the six states to fill its chambers — all in pursuit of pleasures of the flesh-self.

They do not realize that those who rely on military might and political power to intimidate people — though people cannot help but be afraid — once that power is lost, it is like a tiger stripped of its claws and teeth; no one fears it any longer. Consider Napoleon: in the days of his ascendancy, the nations of Europe trembled before him. Yet once he lost his military power, he died a prisoner on a lonely island. Who feared him then?

Only the noble person who is divinely martial yet does not kill — without anger, yet more awe-inspiring to the people than the executioner's axe — possesses Heavenly rank and true nobility, which surpasses the authority of arms and punishment ten thousand times over.

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