

# Chapter 76



## Translation

When a person is alive, the body is soft and supple.

In death, it is stiff and rigid.

When grasses and trees are alive, they are soft and tender.

In death, they are dry and brittle.

Therefore the stiff and rigid are companions of death;  
the soft and supple are companions of life.

Thus an army that grows too strong will not prevail;

a tree that grows too rigid will be felled.

The strong and great dwell below;

the soft and supple dwell above.

## Word Notes

- 可 — "**felled**": Read as gong. A tree grown rigid enough that its trunk can be encircled with clasped hands — and so it is cut down for timber.

## Chapter Explanation

When a person is alive, the body is soft and supple; when dead, the body becomes stiff and rigid. When grasses and trees are alive, they are soft and tender; when dead, they are dry and withered. Therefore the stiff and rigid are companions of death, and the soft and supple are companions of life.

For this reason, when an army is overly strong, a twilight air sets in and it cannot prevail. When a tree has grown strong, its trunk reaches the girth that can be clasped by the arms — and people fell it for timber. The strong and great dwell below; the soft and supple dwell above.

## Discourse

The principle of dwelling contentedly in softness and weakness, never contending for superiority, has already been discussed many times. This chapter sets forth the underlying reason once more.

Whatever has grown overly strong and dominant has thereby taken the path of death. All beings are like this; none can escape it. Therefore one who has grown strong must not remain in that position of strength. Only then can one endure.

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