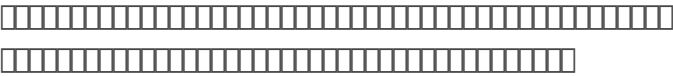


Chapter 80



Translation

A small state, few people —
let them have implements for tens and hundreds, yet never use them.
Let the people hold death close and not wander far.

Though boats and carriages exist,
none has reason to ride them.
Though armor and weapons exist,
none has reason to deploy them.

Let the people return to knotting cords.
Sweeten their food,
beautify their clothing,
give them peace in their dwellings,
give them joy in their customs.

Neighboring states lie within sight of one another —
the crowing of roosters, the barking of dogs
carry between them —
yet the people, from youth to old age,
never once visit.

Word Notes

- 徙 — "**to move/migrate**": To relocate.

Chapter Explanation

Let all the states under Heaven become small states. Reduce their populations. Teach them so that they have ten kinds, a hundred kinds of implements and yet do not use them recklessly. Teach these people to know how to hold life and death in reverence and not to migrate to distant places. Even if they have boats and carriages, there is no reason to ride them. Even if they have military uniforms and weapons, there is no reason to deploy them. Teach these people to return to the ways of high antiquity, using knotted cords to keep records.

Sweeten people's food and drink. Beautify people's clothing. Give peace to people's dwellings. Give harmony and joy to people's customs. Neighboring states see one another; the sounds of roosters and dogs are heard between them; yet the people, from youth to old age, do not visit one another.

Discourse

I, this young student, upon reaching this chapter in my commentary, could not help but dance for joy and declare: truly wondrous beyond measure! Truly wondrous beyond measure!

But people of this world do not understand. They will surely think that in today's age of global interconnection, the words of this chapter are utterly inapplicable. They do not realize that this chapter contains two kinds of principle — one that is most applicable precisely in an age of interconnection, and one that is applicable not only in an age of interconnection but will remain applicable even when civilization has advanced for thousands, ten thousands, a million years.

Let me try to explain.

The first: the principle of lament. The more interconnected the world becomes, the more savage the calamities of war. The wider the scope of interconnection, the larger the battlefields. The more convenient trains and steamships become, the more convenient also the transport of troops and supplies. Moreover, after interconnection: sometimes preaching provokes disaster; sometimes commerce provokes disaster; sometimes opening colonial territories provokes disaster. Once the calamity of war arises, the suffering is too cruel to bear describing.

With Laozi's divine sagacity, he had long foreseen this. Therefore he put forth the thesis of this chapter. He was not teaching people to abandon eating for fear of choking. He was deliberately speaking words that seem absurd, concealing within them boundless lament — to mock people, to shock people awake. If people could feel moved and awaken, the calamity of war could cease.

This principle, applied to the age of interconnection, can rescue us from the cruel disaster of armed warfare.

The second: the principle of evolution. When states are large, their power is great, and they often rely upon their strength to bully others. When populations are large, they become difficult to govern. And large populations inevitably mean large armies. If states were divided into equal nations — with no distinctions of large and small, for such distinctions only arise from comparison — and their populations reduced, then not only would states have no desire to annex others, and the people would be free from complexity and trouble, but with fewer people there would be fewer affairs. Only a simple government need be established, without the need to create many bureaucratic organs and squander gold and silver. Expenditures would therefore also be small.

Thus reducing the number of births is the marvelous method of addressing the root and clearing the source for governing all under Heaven.

Consider: whenever all under Heaven enjoys a brief peace, it is always after a great upheaval, when the population is sparse. Once peace comes, reproduction gradually increases. As

reproduction increases, resources become strained. From this strain, contention arises. Moreover, when a single set of parents bears several children, they cannot even keep up with feeding and clothing them — how could they have the strength to educate them? Difficulty in food and clothing is still a small matter. Not receiving a basic education, an entire lifetime spent in muddled confusion, as if dwelling in a dark hell — this is truly pitiable. And if they receive no education, can they still understand humaneness, righteousness, and moral principle? Add to this the difficulty of earning a livelihood, and they will inevitably break the law and create disorder. On the small scale, bandits swarm like bees; on the great scale, wars follow one upon another. This is the root cause of great chaos under Heaven.

Only reducing the number of births can preserve lasting peace in the world.

But this principle must come about naturally. It requires that the people's moral character and knowledge have all advanced to a high level — that they be pure, simple, honest, and generous, with desires gradually diminishing. Men would not marry until after age twenty-five; if they already have an heir, they would not remarry after the wife's death. Women would not marry until after age twenty-five; even without an heir, they would not remarry after the husband's death. The institution of one husband and one wife would be practiced in reality. From the sovereign above to the common people below, none would be permitted to take concubines. Husband and wife would treat each other with the respect due a guest, not drowning in indulgent desire. They would merely produce an heir so as to be free from the great sin of lacking posterity.

Husband and wife would both study the Daoist *Cantong qi* (*The Kinship of the Three*) and the Buddhist *Shurangama Sutra*, cultivating essence, qi, and spirit — to the point of attaining immortality or Buddhahood. Thereupon they would sever desire completely. In this way, each couple would produce only one son and one daughter to continue the line. With reproduction so reduced, rearing and education would naturally become easy.

Moreover, when people's desires are few, the children born to them would be physically robust with no early deaths, and mentally keen with no dullness. Thus the more civilization advances, the higher the caliber of persons becomes. Everyone would possess the conduct of a virtuous gentleman.

But by that time, there would be no degraded underclass, nor anyone performing hard manual labor or drudgery. Therefore each person would need to have ten kinds, a hundred kinds of machines — all hard labor and drudgery would no longer require human hands. Yet even with such convenience, because people would all be temperate and free of desire, they would not lightly use them, lest material resources be exhausted.

The people of that time would all devote themselves to inner cultivation and the pursuit of spiritual learning. When a task is finished, they would retire to solitary dwelling to nourish the spirit. They would prefer stillness and not prefer movement. Moreover, everyone would have a fixed livelihood, so there would be no vagrants. Therefore, though trains and steamships exist, they would only be used for transporting goods and conveying what one has and what one lacks — and that is all. As for military uniforms and weapons, there would be no need to transport them; they would simply be stored in the national treasury.

At this time, although scholarship would be extremely thorough, people would only silently grasp the essential meaning and would not recite or memorize written phrases. Even for spreading civilization, they would only use simple diagrams to convey meaning — like the Eight Trigrams of antiquity — or write a few simple and clear sentences. For the caliber of people being so high, one glance would suffice to understand; there would be no need for writings that run on page after page, full of ornamental rhetoric that is empty and useless.

As for contracts and evidence, none of these would be needed. All people would be true and sincere without duplicity, trusting one another by the heart. What use would such things have?

When Laozi speaks of returning to knotted cords, he is merely speaking in the most extreme terms to say: do not value empty formalities — and that is all.

The people's food and drink would all consist of grains and vegetables. (When Laozi says "sweeten their food," this means precisely the savor that comes from tilling and harvesting.) They would not eat meat or fish, because all things grow together without harming one another. Moreover, everyone would practice inner cultivation. Like the contemporary Dr. Wu Tingfang, who considers eating meat to be impure and does not eat it.

The people's clothing would all be fine and beautiful, seeking only what benefits the body — they would not want extravagance. They would be at peace in their dwellings and take joy in their customs, not reaching for what is high and seeking what is far, not chasing the new and craving the strange. Though neighboring states lie within sight of one another and the crowing of roosters and barking of dogs carry between them, still they would grow old and die without ever once visiting.

But this "never once visiting" is not being confined to one small corner, gazing at the sky from the bottom of a well. It is because the people's degree of evolution is so high that they can fully exhaust the heart and know their nature. All things are complete within one's own person. Their flood-like qi fills all between Heaven and Earth. The heart of Dao permeates beyond the six directions. The spirit roams the Great Void. They arrive without traveling. They are swift without haste. They see all the worlds of Heaven and Earth as if in the palm of their hand. (I have previously authored *Diagrams of the Great Thousand*, and I am able to see all of this within my own inherent nature.)

At that time, the human world would simply be Heaven — there would be no boundary between the human and the celestial. That is why they need not visit one another.

But such evolution is natural. If one tries to force it before the time is right, one will surely invite great disaster. It must follow the proper sequence. Even to begin would require at least several hundred years. For evolution to reach its ultimate culmination, no less than a thousand years or more would be needed.

This principle — however many years of evolution have passed — remains valid. Is Laozi's ideal of evolution not supremely lofty?

