

Dao De Jing : The Way and Its Power

Lao Zi

Translation by Patrick Edwin Moran



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## Introduction

### The School and its Origins

According to tradition, the Dao De Jing is older than the Zhuang Zi, but the written versions of the text use vocabulary that suggests a time of composition later than the lifetime of Zhuang Zhou (fl 350-320 B.C.). The earliest extant texts also come from the period near the end of the Zhou dynasty. However, there are indications that the Dao De Jing may have passed down in an oral tradition for quite some time before being written out.

The authorship of this book is entirely a mystery. The name associated with it, and by which it is often named in Chinese, is 老子 *lǎo zǐ*. The second Chinese character means "master," so it fits in with the general pattern of naming Chinese teachers, e.g., 莊子 *zhuāng zǐ*, which is translated as Master Zhuang. But 老 *lǎo* is not a family name. It means "old," so 老子 *lǎo zǐ* cannot mean Master Lao. On top of that, Chinese does not give any indication of the sex or the number of a noun unless a separate word or number is used to make an express indication of these features. So 老子 *lǎo zǐ* could just as well refer to a collection of old masters, some male and some female.

I will speak of "the author" simply as a matter of convenience. If the book did indeed pass down through an oral tradition, then the idea that there was a single author is almost impossible to accept. But the collective authorship spoke for a single tradition.

All too often the Dao De Jing has been declared to be an expression of some kind of quietism, and to advocate a disdain for and withdrawal from society, but an open minded

examination of the text will demonstrate that it is an intensely political book, and is written with the intention of providing good advice to anyone who seeks to be a steward of mankind, a servant of the people, and a power for the preservation of all people from harm.

The Daoists want power, but not the power to push other people around. Instead, they want the power to preserve people from harm. They are wary of crash programs and of trying to force nature to comply with human whims. In order to act effectively, it is necessary to understand the way things really work. In order to understand how things work, it is necessary to have a fully objective outlook.

For the sake of power to serve the community, the Daoists seek what they call "wú wéi," or "non-action," and they seek to put aside all subjective factors of judgment. "Non-action" is a limit case, a theoretical perfection of action so subtle and effective that it gets needed things done with no expenditure of energy. Seeing how things really work, and so being able to approach the level of perfect efficiency require an absolutely objective awareness of the real world.

To become truly objective, humans need to learn how to put aside the subjective factors that distort their judgments. The methodology used in pursuit of this radical kind of objectivity is only hinted at in the Zhuang Zi and is not mentioned in the Dao De Jing. Instead, the Dao De Jing examines how desires and other kinds of subjective motivation cause humans to fabricate a world of discrete entities out of an original undivided domain of

experience. Some of the entities that humans construct are very seriously flawed. For instance, for reasons that have no basis in reality some humans are regarded as witches and may be killed on that account. Another example is the way that a huge edifice of nonsense is constructed on a few "marker characteristics," resulting in people believing that they know the most important features of any given human being once they know his or her skin color, nose shape, or eye shape, and very little more. Few would believe that knowledge of skin color gives a correct prediction of height, but many seem to believe that the same answer gives a true indication of intelligence.

The Daoists understand that information about the world does not come to human experience as discrete components that minds must then synthesize into a comprehensible unity, but as a continuum that each human mind must dissect into manageable discrete components. Rather than having any doubt about the existence of the universe, they firmly believe in the power of nature as is compellingly evinced in events such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and the pervasive energy that the sun provides to support all life, etc. What they see as problematical, however, is the fact that the discrete entities with which humans deal in thought are figments of the creative powers of individual human minds. While essential for human survival, these fabrications ought only to be regarded as provisional approximations. They inevitably leave some things out and may easily create things for which there is no true empirical grounding. When humans enculturate and educate other humans, they have a powerful influence on the discrete entities that their children and students learn to impose on the continuum that is their actual empirical experience of the world. If they teach a way of carving reality up

that oversimplifies or otherwise distorts reality in the minds of their students, then they create problems for all of them.

Lao Zi speaks of the universe as it stands before human minds go to work on it as 樸 pú, the "Uncarved Block," and teaches that humans 制 zhì fabricate this block to make the things of the world, the "myriad creatures." Doing so is a normal and needed part of human existence. But the process can go wrong in many ways. Hemlock can be confused with wild parsley. Goats can be taken for a species of sheep. Mentally ill human being can be taken as being possessed by Satan or as being witches. Perhaps the most violent consequences occur when different groups of humans conceptualize the universe in ways that contradict each other. Religious followers who have similar conceptions of God and even use cognates of the same word to name God can fall into violent conflicts over the slight differences among them.

When things go wrong with the constructions that humans impose upon their raw experience and by which they both create their world and understand it, then these problems force those who are unwilling to continue to suffer under these burdens to attempt some remedy for them. It is relatively easy to make corrections in one's store of information pertaining to supposed matters of fact. It is much more difficult to make changes that would affect one's system of core beliefs.

The Daoists appear to have regarded the values propagated by the Confucians as problematical, and perhaps they first questioned the ontological status of those values, asking, in effect, "What were their true foundations?" In chapter thirty-eight, Lao Zi says:



The highest benevolence does things and does not have anything by reason of which it does things. The highest righteousness does things and has reasons for which its get things accomplished. The highest propriety does things, but nobody responds, so it takes off its gloves and gives them a shove. So after the Way is lost there is virtue. After virtue is lost there is benevolence. After benevolence is lost there is righteousness. After righteousness is lost there is propriety. Now propriety is the mere scrapings of loyalty and trust, and the leading edge of disorder.

This passage shows a clear process of degradation of social wholesomeness under the force of Confucian indoctrination.

Whatever the exact genesis of the Daoist interest in epistemology, they pursued their studies with the clear awareness that the creative powers of the human mind have the capacity to construct what others have called models, "useful fictions," etc., and that these things may be potently problematical. They therefore centered their attention on these constructs and how best to deal with them.

## The Mystery With No Hidden Text

Like the purloined letter in Edgar Allen Poe's detective story, things that are in plain sight may long remain hidden. Western readers of the first chapter of the Dao De Jing may not be familiar with the rhetorical dependence of classical Chinese on parallel constructions. Perhaps the fact that the first chapter hits the reader with powerful assertions of a paradoxical nature can account for the failure of even native speakers of Chinese to see that there is anything going on beyond assertions about the impossibility of making positive statements about the infinite.

Chapter one alternates statements about one aspect of reality that goes beyond ordinary human experience with statements about another aspect of reality that is a regular matter of ordinary sense experience.

Odd-numbered sentences deal with the Dao, embryos, and ineffable efficacies -- things that create effects in the world that are totally beyond our comprehension. They are "behind" our world of experience, but not in it.

Even-numbered sentences deal with names, breasts, and "fringes" (an example of which would be the stripes in a tiger's coat -- something that is entirely on the surface and gives no necessary information about what is on the inside).

In the sentence that follows these three pairs, Lao Zi says that it is always the case that one can observe members of the first class, but only providing that one is "without desire." (Careful reading of the rest of the book suggests that by "desires" he means to include all kinds of emotional reactions -- not only desire but also

such emotional factors as fear, anger, etc.) And, lest the reader mistake the first assertion to mean that it would be best for humans to deaden all subjective reactions to things, he goes on to teach that one can observe members of the second class, but only providing that one has desires (and other affective components).

Lao Zi has painted the picture of a universe with two aspects, the noumenal and the phenomenal, and he goes on to assert that these two aspects themselves emerge from a state in which they were somehow merged. After they emerged it became possible to give them two names, the noumenal and the phenomenal, or the "unavailable to sense awareness" and the "available to sense awareness." But before they emerged they were one and human awareness at that stage would be analogous to the non-perception of light and darkness of a person who has been blind from birth. This state is described as "the most dark and mysterious of all the dark and mysterious things."

### Lao Zi's Recommendations For A Better Life

Lao Zi believes many human problems to be of their own making, and their solution to lie in righting the misconceptions, over-generalizations, selfish striving, meddling, and other such counterproductive states and activities. Many human problems are tied to misconceptualizations, untested values, assertive behavior intended to protect one's own system of beliefs and one's own privileges, and so forth. Mistakes regarding simple matters of fact that are not laden with heavy value burdens can easily be changed, but core values and assumptions may be protected to the death even though they are ultimately detrimental to the individual.

To open the parts of one's model of reality that are the most heavily defended so that the model may be made more accurate and less dysfunctional requires putting aside fear and all other emotional investments. Only then can one lower one's defenses and become able to see oneself, other people, and the world in a more objective way.

## Terms

Dao (Pronounced like the Dow of "Dow Jones.") I have translated this word as "the Way." It literally means "road," and in this book it is used to refer to the pattern and process behind all of the activities that occur in the universe.

De (Pronounced like the "duh," of stupefied surprise.) I have translated this word as "virtue," but the reader should keep in mind that this word has two aspects: One is a goodness of character, and the other is power.

Jing (Pronounced like the "jing" of "jingoism.") A jing is a canonical text.

Lao (Pronounced so as to rhyme with "cow.") This word simply means "old."

Zi (Pronounced like the "dz" in "adz," or like the "dds" in "adds." This word, added to a name as a title of respect, means "master, teacher.")

Tian Xia (Pronounced as "tien sya.") Literally, these words mean "beneath heaven." They were the ordinary way for people of Lao Zi's time to refer to "the whole world."

## Texts

The version collated and commented upon by Wang Bi in the third century A.D. is generally the best available. Wang was a fine scholar who presumably had available to him texts from the previous several hundred years. Except for a few places, his version has stood the test of time very well. In 1973, two somewhat different versions of this book, written on silk, were disinterred from the tomb of a man who was buried in 168 B.C. These texts often use the simplest forms of Chinese characters, i.e., they use the parts of present day characters that represent their pronunciation but they fail to write out the parts of these characters that clarify their meaning by putting them in certain broad categories. For instance, if someone were to write that their teacher usually hung his coat on a hall-tree, then the meaning would be clear. But if the writer just said that he hung his coat on a tree, then the meaning might easily be misunderstood. Neither text is in perfect condition, and even if the two texts are used in an attempt to fill in the missing places and complete characters that have become partially obscured, the full text could not be recovered. There may have been even better texts extant at the time of writing of the two silk texts. We must do our best to determine the best version of the text with what we have currently available.

I have written in more detail about these matters in *Three Smaller Wisdom Books*, University Press of America, Inc., 1993. (ISBN: 0-8191-9214-7 and 0-8191-9251-5)

## Chapter One

As for ways, if one can be directed along it, it is not the constant Way. As for names, if it can be given as a name, it is not a constant name. Nameless is the beginning of Heaven and Earth. Named is the mother of the myriad creatures. So always be without desire in order to observe its ineffable efficacies, and always be with desire in order to observe its outer fringes. These two come out together and are differently named. Together, they are spoken of as the dark and mysterious. The most dark and mysterious of all the dark and mysterious is the portal of the multitude of ineffable efficacies.

## Chapter Two

All beneath Heaven know the beautiful to be beautiful. Thus there is the ugly. All know the good to be good. Thus there is the bad. So being and not-being are mutually born. Difficult and easy are mutually completed. Long and short are mutually formed. High and low are mutually (inverted =) inverse. Voice and musical accompaniment mutually harmonize. Fore and aft (mutually follow =) are constituted only if one thing follows the other. Therefore the Sages take their stand on things that are done without much ado. They carry forth a wordless teaching. All kinds of things arise from this process of mutuality, and the Sages reject none of them. Things are produced and are not possessed. Things are done yet nobody takes credit for them. Meritorious tasks are accomplished and yet nobody stakes a claim on them. For it is only by not claiming them that they are not lost.



## Chapter Three

Do not elevate worthy people, to avoid having the people struggle. Do not value things that are hard to acquire, in order to avoid having the people steal. Do not display desirable things in order to avoid disordering the minds of the people. Therefore the governance of the Sages [works by] emptying their minds, filling their bellies, weakening their aspirations, strengthening their bones, and always making the people be without knowledge and without desires. They make those who have knowledge not dare to act on it. By carrying forth without ado there will be nothing that is not well regulated.

## Chapter Four

The Way is empty, yet in use it seems to be inexhaustible. It is an abyss that would appear to be the ancestor of the myriad creatures.

Blunt your sharpness. Untangle your confusions. Harmonize your glare. Meld your dust.

Oh! How clear! It seems to persevere. I do not know whose child it may be. It is the foreshadowing of something before God.

## Chapter Five

Heaven and Earth are not benevolent. They take the myriad creatures to be [ceremonial] straw dogs.<sup>1</sup> The Sages are not benevolent. They take the common people to be straw dogs. The space between Heaven and Earth is like a bellows. It is empty, but it does not run out. The more it moves the more it produces.

Saying too much is bound to end up producing empty words. It would be better to keep things to oneself.

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<sup>1</sup> In early China, figures were made of straw for use in ceremonies, and after the ceremonies were over the straw figures were discarded. See the "Tian Yun" chapter of the *Zhuang Zi*.

## Chapter Six

The valley spirit is undying. It is called the dark and mysterious female. The portal of the dark and mysterious female is spoken of as the root of Heaven and Earth. It is a wispy something that perhaps only seems to exist, yet it is effortless in its action.

## Chapter Seven

Heaven is everlasting and Earth is enduring. The reason that Heaven and Earth are able to be long lasting is that they do not themselves give birth (i.e., produce something that exists outside of themselves). That is why they endure. Therefore the Sages put themselves in the background and so they come to the fore. They put themselves aside and so they are preserved. Is it not because of their not having any selfish interests that their personal ends are secured?

## Chapter Eight

The highest good is like water. Water is good at benefiting the myriad creatures without struggling at it. It resides in the places that the multitudes of human beings all detest. It therefore comes close to the Way.

Residences are appreciated for their settings. Hearts are appreciated for their depths. Gifts are appreciated for their benevolence. Speech is appreciated for its credibility. Government is appreciated for its getting things well regulated. Deeds are appreciated for their effectiveness. Actions are appreciated for their timeliness. Now it is only when there is no struggle that there will be no lingering resentment.

## Chapter Nine

To hold onto something and fill it all the way up is not as good as stopping in time. If one keeps on testing and sharpening something, then it cannot long remain undamaged. If gold and jade fill up one's halls, there is nobody who can preserve them. If one becomes arrogant on account of wealth or noble status, then one calls forth one's own punishment. When one completes a meritorious task, then fame will follow and one must retreat. That is the way of Heaven.

## Chapter Ten

Nurture the earthly spirit and hold fast to unity; can you avoid lapses? Unify your lifebreath and make it perfectly flexible; can you be like a child? Cleanse the dark and mysterious mirror; can you make it without flaw? Love the people and regulate the nation; can you do so without ado? In the opening and closing of the heavenly gate, can you take the female part? Extend your perceptivity fully in all directions; can you do so without [accumulating] knowledge? Produce and cultivate them. In producing them, do not be possessive. Do things [for these creatures] without taking credit for them. Be senior to them and yet do not lord it over them. This is spoken of as the dark and mysterious virtue.



## Chapter Eleven

Thirty spokes join at a single hub. It is the empty place [in the center] that gives the vehicle its function. Roll clay to make vessels. It is the empty space within that gives the utensil its function. Bore doors and windows to make a [cave] dwelling. It is only where there is a void that the dwelling has its function. So that which is solid forms a thing's configuration, and that which is void provides for its function.

## Chapter Twelve

The five colors cause the eyes of human beings to go blind. The five musical notes cause the ears of humans to become deaf. The five flavors cause the mouths of human beings to lose their discrimination of tastes. Galloping in the hunt causes human hearts to go mad. Rare goods cause human beings to do harm. Therefore the Sages act for the bellies of humans and not for their eyes. Therefore they get rid of that and take up this.

## Chapter Thirteen

Favor and disgrace both lead to fright.

Great suffering is intimately connected with having a (body =) self.

Why is it said that both favor and disgrace lead to fright? Those who received favor are the ones who reside in an inferior position. If they receive favor it results in apprehension. If they [later on] lose favor it also results in apprehension. That is what "Favor and disgrace both lead to fright" means.

Why is it said that great suffering is intimately connected with having a self? The reason that I can experience great suffering is that I have a self. At the point that I cease to have a self, what suffering could I experience?

Now he who takes his own self to be more valuable than dominion over the world may be entrusted with the world. And he who loves his own self more than running the world may be given guardianship of the world.

## Chapter Fourteen

If you look right at it but do not see it, it is named "the evanescent."

If you listen for it but cannot hear it, it is called "the rarified."

If you grab for it but cannot get it, it is called "the infinitesimal."

These three [characterizations] cannot be given any more exhaustive investigation, so they will be muddled together as "the One."

From above it is not dazzling.

From beneath it is not dark.

Wispy, wispy, it cannot be named.

It retreats into not being any thing.

It is called the shape without any form, and

The image without any [corresponding] thing.

It is called the obscure and the wildly evasive.

If one goes forward to meet it, one will not see its head.

If one follows it, one will not see its tail.

Grasp the Way of antiquity in order to control the things of the present.

Be able to know the ancient beginnings. They are spoken of as the Thread transversing the Way.

## Chapter Fifteen

Those of antiquity who were good at being officers of the government were subtle, possessed of ineffable efficacy, dark and mysterious, penetrating [in their awareness], and so deep that they could not be perceived. It is only because they cannot be perceived that they are given a forced description:

Oh, how cautious, as though fording a river in winter.

Oh, how apprehensive, as though in fear of those on all four sides.

Oh, how deferential, as though a guest.

Oh, how riven, as though ice on the verge of melting.

Oh, how wholesome, just like the Uncarved Block.

Oh, how receptive, as though a valley.

Oh, how murky, as though turbid or impure.

Who are able to be murky and impure in order that they will eventually purify through tranquility?

Who are able to be peaceful in order that they will gradually stir themselves into motion?

Those who protect this Way do not desire fullness, and by not being full they are able to get worn out and yet become newly complete.

## Chapter Sixteen

Go all the way to extreme vacuity. Preserve a wholesome tranquility. The myriad creatures arise side by side and I use their voidness and tranquility to see their recapitulations. Now the myriad creatures, profusely vibrant, return again to their root. To return to the root means to be tranquil. We speak of this as returning to the Mandate. Now the Mandate implies constancy, and experiencing constancy implies enlightenment. If one does not experience the constant, one will heedlessly give rise to ill-omened things. To know constancy is to be receptive. To be receptive means to be impartial. To be impartial means to be kingly. To be kingly means to be heavenly.<sup>2</sup> The heavenly is [with] the Way. Being in accord with the Way, one is everlasting. One's body may perish yet one will not be in danger.

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<sup>2</sup> "Heavenly" is to be understood as meaning "produced by Heaven," i.e., natural.

## Chapter Seventeen

In the highest antiquity, nobody knew that [the rulers even] existed. Next, people became close to [the rulers] and lauded them. Next, they feared them. After that, they despised them.

When there is insufficient trust, then there will be untrustworthiness. Oh, how distant they were in not speaking lightly.

When meritorious acts were completed and the results followed, the common people all said, "We did it all by ourselves."

## Chapter Eighteen

When the great Way is abandoned, benevolence and righteousness will come into existence. When knowledge and wisdom emerge, great artifice will come to be. When the six kinds of family members fall out of harmony, then there will be filial piety and compassion. When the whole country becomes benighted and disordered, then it will have loyal ministers.

【 PEM: "Benevolence" and the other such terms are meant ironically. 】



## Chapter Nineteen

Extirpate Sageliness, discard wisdom, and the benefit to the people will increase one hundred fold. Extirpate benevolence, discard righteousness, and the people will return to filial piety and compassion. Extirpate ingenuity, discard profit, and there will be no more bandits or thieves. Because these three [principles] have received insufficient elaboration, they are hereinafter given an epigram:

Show forth the unbleached silk,  
Embrace the Uncarved Block,  
Diminish selfishness and desire,  
[Cut off study,  
And you will be worry free.]

## Chapter Twenty

How much difference is there between "aye" and "nay"?  
 How much difference is there between good and bad?

"What other people fear, one can but fear."  
 Oh, how wild and reckless they are in their failure to hit the mark!

The multitudes are bright and beaming, as though they were  
 enjoying the Great Sacrifice or as though ascending the terraces in  
 the springtime.

Oh, how placid am I alone, like one who has yet to give the  
 slightest inkling,  
 like an infant who has never yet smiled.  
 Oh, how listless am I, like someone who has no refuge.  
 The multitudes all have more than enough, while I alone seem to  
 be short on something.  
 I have the mind of an stupid person!  
 Oh, how chaotic!  
 The common people glisten and shine.  
 I alone am dusky and muddled.  
 The common people pry into everything.  
 I alone remain closed off and melancholy.  
 Oh, how agitated they are, like the sea.  
 Oh, how stormy they are, like a wind that will never come to a  
 stop.  
 The multitudes all have their ways and means.  
 I alone am doltish and vile.  
 I alone am different from others,  
 and value drawing sustenance from the Mother.

## Chapter Twenty-one

The acceptingness of the the great virtue follows from the Way alone.

As for the sense in which the Way is a "thing,"  
It can only be [described as being] elusive and obscure.  
Oh how obscure!  
Oh how elusive!  
Within it there are foreshadowings.  
Oh how obscure!  
Oh how elusive!  
Within it there are creatures.  
Oh how profound!  
Oh how obscure!  
Within it there is a seminal essence.  
Its seminal essence is extremely pure.  
Within it there is something worthy of trust.  
From antiquity down to the present, its name has never perished,  
And by that means one is able to inspect the multitude of  
progenitors.  
By what means do I know the characteristics of the multitude of  
progenitors?  
By this!

## Chapter Twenty-two

Crumpled and as a result complete, crooked and as a result straight, deeply hollowed out and as a result full, worn out and as a result new, depleted and thus refilled, a plenitude and thus delusional — For that reason the Sages embrace the One in order to serve as exemplars for all beneath Heaven. They do not show themselves off and therefore they shine brightly. They do not justify themselves and therefore they are resplendent. They do not boast on themselves, and therefore they have merit. They do not brag on themselves, and therefore they stand senior to all. Now it is only because of their not struggling that nobody in all beneath Heaven is able to contend with them. Could it be empty words when in antiquity people said: "Crumpled and as a result complete" ? When one is truly complete then one will return [to the Way].

## Chapter Twenty-three

Sparse locutions are nature's way.  
So a violent wind will not last all of one morning.  
A rain squall will not last an entire day.  
Who produces them? Heaven and Earth.  
Heaven and Earth have never kept things going for long. How  
much more can humans do?  
So as for those who do things in accord with the Way,  
Their way is the same as the Way;  
Their power is the same as the Power<sup>3</sup>.  
Their losses are the same as Loss.  
The Way delights in acquiring those who are in accord with the  
Way.  
Power delights in acquiring those who are in accord with Power.  
Loss also delights in acquiring those who are in accord with loss.  
When there is insufficient trust, then there will be  
untrustworthiness. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Power" is another way of translating what is elsewhere in this translation called "virtue."

<sup>4</sup> The last sentence repeats a sentence from chapter 17.

## Chapter Twenty-four

Those who stretch on tiptoe cannot stand [firm].

Those who straddle their legs far apart cannot walk.

Those who put the spotlight on themselves are not luminous.

Those who justify themselves are not resplendent.

Those who are self aggrandizing do not have merit.

Those who boast on themselves will not be senior.

Regarding their position in relation to the Way it is said:

Creatures always loathe excesses and excrescences,

and so those who have the Way will not get involved with them.

## Chapter Twenty-five

There is a creature, turbidly formed,  
born before Heaven and Earth.

Oh how silent,  
Oh how desolate.

In isolation it stands, without changing.

It moves in all directions and yet it never gets in danger.

It can serve as the mother of all beneath Heaven.

I do not know its name, so I give it a sobriquet, "the Way."

If forced to give it a true name I would have to call it "Great."

To be great means to go forth. To go forth means to get far away.

To get far away means to return.

So the Way is great, Heaven is great, Earth is great, and the king is also great.

There are four greats in the domain, and the king is one of them.

Humans emulate Earth, Earth emulates Heaven, Heaven emulates the Way, and the Way emulates the "self thus" (ultimate autonomy).

[ PEM: What a thing "returns" to is perhaps its equilibrium state. ]

## Chapter Twenty-six

Heaviness is the root of levity.

Tranquility is the ruler of haste.

For that reason, the Sage stays in action all day long,  
yet never leaves his supply wagon.

Only in his official residence and grounds  
does he reside in transcendent peace.

How could the master of a myriad chariots trivialize his own  
person as it relates to all beneath Heaven?

Lacking gravitas one loses one's root.

Acting hastily one loses autonomy.



## Chapter Twenty-seven

Good traveling leaves neither ruts nor footprints.

Good speaking has neither flaw nor cause for blame.

Good counting involves no counting rods.

Good closures have no bolts and yet cannot be opened.

Good bindings involve no ropes and yet cannot be untied.

For that reason the Sages are good at rescuing people, and so they cast nobody aside.

They are good at rescuing creatures, and so they do not discard creatures.

That is called practicing illumination.

So good people are the teachers of people who are not good, and bad people are the raw materials of the good people.

If one does not hold one's teacher in esteem,

if one does not love one's raw materials, then,

even though knowledgeable, one is yet greatly benighted.

This is spoken of as the most important of the ineffable efficacies.

## Chapter Twenty-eight

Know its masculinity, but keep to its femininity and be a ravine to all beneath Heaven.

If one is a ravine to all beneath Heaven, then the constant virtue / power will not leave one, and one will return to the condition of an infant.

Know its whiteness, but keep to its blackness and be a pattern for all under Heaven. When one is a pattern for all under Heaven, the constant virtue / power will not be found lacking, and one will return to the limitless.

Know its glory, but keep to its ignominy and be a valley to all beneath Heaven. If one is a valley to all beneath Heaven, then there will be a sufficiency of the constant virtue / power and one will return to the state of the Uncarved Block.

When the Uncarved Block is sundered then there will be (utensils =) tools of government. But when the Sages use the Uncarved Block it is transformed into the dean of all officials. Verily, the greatest fabrication does not rend apart.

## Chapter Twenty-nine

If one would take all beneath Heaven and control it, in my view such a one would get no respite. All beneath Heaven is a holy vessel, and cannot be controlled. Those who would control it destroy it, and those who would grasp it lose it.

Now some things lead and some things follow,  
Some things inhale and some things exhale,  
Some things are strong and some things are weak,  
Some things are nurtured and some things are destroyed.

For that reason the Sages get rid of extremes, get rid of extravagances, and get rid of arrogance.

## Chapter Thirty

Those who use the Way to aid the rulers of men will not use warfare to take over all under Heaven by force. Such actions are good at rebounding on their perpetrators.

Where an army has trodden, thorns and brambles will spring up. In the wake of a great army, there must be years of bad crops. So the good cases are when events are taken to a satisfactory conclusion and then dropped. Dare not use the ways of conquest by force. When plans come to fruition, do not become arrogant. When plans come to fruition, do not boast. When plans come to fruition, do not brag. When events come to fruition it is just an unavoidable result. When events come to a conclusion, do not try to dominate.

When creatures come to their prime, then they will age, and that is spoken of as going against the Way. Whatever goes against the Way will come to an early end.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Yan Ling-feng follows the Wang Bi text for the last sentence and reads 不 as a mistake for 否 pǐ, which means "to go against," or "to act contrary to," in the sense of moving contrary to the flow of a great river or something of that sort. See Chapter 55.

## Chapter Thirty-one

Fine weapons are ill-omened instruments. Creatures always abhor them. Therefore those who have the Way do not get involved with them. When the morally noble man is in residence at court he values the left hand [ministers]. When he goes to war he values the right hand [ministers]<sup>6</sup>. Weapons are inauspicious utensils, not the utensils of a morally noble man. They are only to be used when there is no other way out. [And then] placidity and blandness are advised. Victory is not a beautiful thing. Should one [hold it up as a] beautiful [thing], that would be to exult in killing people. Now those who take joy in killing others will never achieve what they intend in the world. Truly, in the case of auspicious events one makes the left hand ascendant, but in the case of inauspicious events one makes the right hand ascendant. For that reason the lesser generals take their places on the left side, and the high generals take their places on the right side. That means that one ought to treat [military] affairs with the rites of mourning. When great numbers of people have been killed, they are wept for with sorrow. After a war has been won, it is commemorated with the rites of mourning.

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<sup>6</sup> Those who stand on the right side of the ruler are the officials who tasked with dealing with mourning and inauspicious events.

## Chapter Thirty-two

The Way is always nameless. Although the Uncarved Block is (small =) unobtrusive, there is nothing in all under Heaven that can subordinate it. Lords and kings, if able to preserve it, will [draw in] the myriad creatures as clients, and Heaven will cleave to Earth in order to let fall the sweet dew, so, without the people giving any command, it is equitably self [distributed].

Once fabrication [of the Uncarved Block] commences, there are names. Names having been given, one should know enough to stop. It is by knowing when to stop that danger is avoided.

All [creatures] under Heaven resort to the Way just as the streams and valleys pass [their contents] on to the great rivers and eventually to the sea.

## Chapter Thirty-three

Those who know about other people are wise, but  
Those who know about themselves are enlightened.  
Those who overcome other people are forceful, but  
Those who overcome themselves are strong.  
Those who know when they have enough are wealthy, but  
Those who persevere may achieve their aspirations.  
Those who do not lose their own niche will last long. But  
those who die and yet do not perish have everlasting life.

## Chapter Thirty-four

The great Way is like a flood. It can go in any direction.  
The myriad creatures depend on it for life and do not get cast aside.

When meritorious acts are accomplished, [the Way] does not claim possession [of them],  
But clothes and nurtures the myriad creatures without lording it over them.

Those who are constantly free of desires may be said to be insignificant, but  
The myriad creatures take refuge in them and are not ruled by them, and so  
they can be termed great.

On account of their not ever taking themselves to be great,  
They can achieve their own greatness.



## Chapter Thirty-five

Take hold of the great Image, and all under Heaven will come your way.

They will come your way and no injury will be done —

The highest degree of peace and security.

Because of music and alluring tastes, passersby will stop to visit.

[But] how bland are the verbal expressions of the Way, tasteless.

Look right at it and there is not enough to be seen.

Listen for it and there is not enough to be heard.

Use it and there is never enough [lost] to finish it off.

## Chapter Thirty-six

If you would get something contracted, you must firmly draw it out.

If you would get something weakened, you must firmly strengthen it.

If you would get rid of something, you must firmly cause it to flourish.

If you would snatch something to you, you must firmly give it away.

This is called the subtle discernment.

The pliant and weak overcome the rigid and strong.

Fish cannot be removed from the abyss, and

The bladed instruments of the state cannot be brandished before the people.

## Chapter Thirty-seven

The Way is always without ado and yet there is nothing it fails to do.

If the nobles and kings could manage to preserve it, then the myriad creatures would transform by themselves.

Should they transform and yet desire arise anew, I would suppress it by means of the nameless Uncarved Block.

{By means of] the nameless Uncarved Block, [they] will in future be without desire.

Stilled by desirelessness, all beneath Heaven will in the future become settled on their own.

## Chapter Thirty-eight

The highest virtue is not virtuous. It is for that reason that it has virtue.

The lowest virtue never loses its virtue. It is for that reason without virtue.

The highest virtue does not have anything that it does, and has nothing by reason of which it does things. The lowest virtue does things, and it has things by reason of which it does things. The highest benevolence does things and does not have anything by reason of which it does things. The highest righteousness does things and has reasons for which its get things accomplished. The highest propriety does things, but nobody responds, so it takes off its gloves and gives them a shove. So after the Way is lost there is virtue. After virtue is lost there is benevolence. After benevolence is lost there is righteousness. After righteousness is lost there is propriety. Now propriety is the mere scrapings of loyalty and trust, and the leading edge of disorder.

The earliest insights are the detritus of the Way, and the beginnings of benightedness. For that reason, the great men base themselves on its richness and substantiality, and do not reside in the thin spots. They base themselves on its (concreteness =) wholesomeness, and do not reside in its detritus. So they get rid of that and take up this.

## Chapter Thirty-nine

Of those in antiquity who got the One:

Heaven got the One in order that it might be clear.

Earth got the One in order that it might be tranquil.

The spirits got the One in order that they might be spiritually responsive.

The valleys got the One in order that they might be full.

The myriad creatures got the One in order that they might have life.

The lords and kings got the One in order that they might be upright in this world.

What made them the most perfect was the One.

Should Heaven lose that by which it is pure, I fear it would surely split.

Should Earth lose its that by which it is tranquil, I fear it would surely quake.

Should the spirits lose that by which they have spiritual responsiveness, I fear they would surely stand exhausted.

If the valleys did not have the means to be filled, they would probably run dry.

Should the myriad creatures lose that by which they have life I fear they would become extinct.

Should the lords and kings lose that by which they are noble and high, I fear they would fall.

Now the noble takes the humble as its base, and

The high take that below as foundation.

It is for that reason that the lords and nobles call themselves "the orphaned," "the friendless," and "the unworthy."

Does this not mean taking the worthless as the root? Is that not so?

So the highest praise is to receive no praise.

Do not desire to be glistening like jade.

Rather, be gritty like rocks.

## Chapter Forty

To return is the action of the Way.

Weakness is the function of the Way.

All of the myriad creatures in the world are born from substantiality.

Substantiality is produced from the void.

[ PEM: By "returning" the Dao De Jing may mean the return to an equilibrium state. If a system such as water in a pot is changed by throwing in an ice cube, convection currents will be established and remain in action until the body of water reaches a new common temperature in all its regions. The ice initially pulls the temperature down in one region of the pot, but later the pot of water returns to equilibrium. ]

## Chapter Forty-one

When the highest knights hear of the Way, they assiduously put it into operation.

When the middling knights hear of the Way, it is as though it is there and yet it is not.

When the lowest knights hear of the Way, they roar with laughter. If they were not to laugh, it would not qualify as being the Way.

Now an old saying reports:

The bright Way appears to be dark.

The advancing Way seems to be retreating.

The smooth Way seems to be rough.

The highest virtue is like a valley.

The greatest (whiteness =) purity seems to be sullied.

Generous virtue seems to be insufficient.

Established virtue seems to be flimsy.

Vigorous virtue seems to be mired down.

The greatest square is without corners.

The greatest vessel is late to be completed.

The greatest voice is an inaudible sound.

The greatest image is without any form.

The Way is hidden away in namelessness.

Now, it is only the Way that is good at bestowing and good at completing.

## Chapter Forty-two

The Way produced the one. The one produced the two. The two produced the three. The three produced the myriad creatures. The myriad creatures bear Yin (the feminine principle) on their backs and clasp themselves around Yang (the masculine principle). They blend these [two] lifebreaths in order to create a harmony. Human beings only fear to be orphaned, friendless, and hapless, but the dukes and kings take these terms as self appellations.

Verily, creatures may either be diminished and so ultimately augmented, or augmented and so ultimately diminished. What other people teach I also teach. "Desperados do not come to good ends." I will take that to be the father of my teaching.



## Chapter Forty-three

The most supple of all things beneath Heaven ride roughshod over the hardest. The immaterial can enter into seamless solids. It is for that reason that I know the benefit of non-action. Few in the world attain to wordless teaching and the benefits of non-action.

## Chapter Forty-four

Which is dearer, your name or your person? Which counts for more, your person or your acquisitions? Which is a greater sickness, gain or loss? It is for that reason that great lusts incur high costs, and massive accumulations imply heavy losses. Know what is enough and avoid disgrace. Know when to stop and so avoid danger. That way you can long endure.

## Chapter Forty-five

A great completion may look like a deficiency, yet there is no impairment in its function. A great fullness may look like a void, yet use will not impoverish it. Something that is truly straight may appear to be crooked. A great dexterity may appear to be clumsiness. A great eloquence can look like halting speech. Agitation overcomes the cold, and placidity overcomes the heat. Purity and tranquility assure the things of the world their normality.

[ PEM: The equilibrium state, the state where homeostasis is maintained in an organism, is desirable. Without intending any ethical judgments, these states are what are normal to things. ]

## Chapter Forty-six

When all under Heaven has the Way, they turn the chargers back to manure the fields. When all under Heaven loses the Way, then war horses are raised even on the sacrificial mounds at the outskirts of cities.

There is no greater transgression than giving rein to desire. (This sentence is not present in the Wang Bi version of the text.) There is no disaster greater than failing to recognize when you have enough. There is no greater retribution than [attaches to] having desires for things. Verily, the sufficiency of knowing when you have enough is a constant sufficiency indeed.

## Chapter Forty-seven

Know all beneath Heaven without going out your door. See the Way of Heaven without peering out your window. The farther one goes the less one knows. For that reason, the Sages does not go anywhere and yet they know, do not look and yet they see with illumination, does not do anything and yet they have accomplishments.

## Chapter Forty-eight

Engage in study to be augmented daily. Engage in the Way to be diminished daily. Through many iterations of diminishment you will arrive at non-action. By means of non-action, nothing will fail to be done. Taking control of the world is always done by means of not meddling. When things reach a pass where people meddle, then such people will be insufficient to take on the world.

## Chapter Forty-nine

The Sages do not have fixed minds. They take the minds of the ordinary people to be their own minds.

The good people I treat as good, and those who are not good I also treat as good. So doing yields goodness.

Those who are trustworthy I trust, and those who are not trustworthy I also trust. So doing yields trustworthiness.

In their interactions with all under Heaven, the Sages minimize themselves and make their own minds chaotic for the world's sake. The ordinary people all strain their ears and eyes. The Sages treat them all as little children.

## Chapter Fifty

In situations wherein one may exit and secure life or enter and secure death, the followers of life are three out of ten, the followers of death are three out of ten. In seeking to further their lives, those who move in the direction of deadly perilous situations are also three in ten. Now why is this? Because their aim is for the richness of their own lives.

Now I have heard that those who are good at protecting their lives may travel by land and never encounter a rhinoceros or tiger. They may enter combat zones and yet not wear armor or carry weapons. The rhinoceros finds no point at which to gore with its horn. The tiger finds no place to sink its claws. Weapons find no spot to lodge their blades. Now why is that? Because they have no vulnerable points.



## Chapter Fifty-one

The Way gives birth to them. Virtue nurtures them. Creatures give them form. Power configurations mature them. For that reason, none of the myriad creatures fail to venerate the Way or fail to esteem virtue.

Those who venerate the Way and esteem virtue have not been commanded to do so by anyone. It is always an autonomous act.

So the Way produces them, nurtures them, grows them, cultivates them, gives them peace, raises them, and gives them shelter. It produces them but is not possessive. It does things for them and does not take credit for so doing. It is senior to all but does not rule over them. That is called the dark and mysterious virtue.

## Chapter Fifty-two

The world has a beginning. It serves as the mother of the world. Having acquired the mother, you can use it to understand the children. Once you know these children, you can come back to hold fast to their mother, and thereby even though you are sunk you will not be in danger.

Plug up your crevices, close up your doors, and all through life you will not exert effort. Open your crevices, advance your endeavors, and all through life you will be in need of rescue.

To perceive the minute is called being enlightened. To preserve flexibility is called being strong. Use your light to return to illumination, and you will not suffer the calamity of abandoning yourself. In so doing you depend on the constant.

## Chapter Fifty-three

If in some minor way I should come to possess knowledge and employ it on the great Way, so doing would only merit trepidation. The great Way is extremely smooth, yet people love to find byways.

The royal court is kept immaculate while the fields are choked with weeds. The granaries are extremely depleted, yet the rulers wear ornamented silks, bear sharp swords, eat and drink to satiety, and have an excess of wealth and treasures. So doing is called banditry and excess. That is indeed contrary to the Way.

## Chapter Fifty-four

What is well established cannot be uprooted. What is well clasped cannot slip free. Your children and grandchildren will never fail to provide sacrifices [to your ghost].

When you cultivate it in yourself, this virtue will then be genuine. When you cultivate it in your family, this virtue will then be more than sufficient. When you cultivate it in your community, this virtue will be enduring. When you cultivate it in your nation, then this virtue will be abundant. When you cultivate it in all under Heaven, then this virtue will be all-pervading.

So use your self to observe [other] selves. Use your family to observe [other] families. Use your community to observe [other] communities. Use your nation to observe [other] nations. Use all under Heaven to observe all under Heaven.

How do I know the way the world is? By this.

## Chapter Fifty-five

When you are possessed of a richness of virtue you may be compared to an infant. Wasps, scorpions, vipers, and snakes will not inject their venoms. Fierce animals will not seize it. Raptors will not clutch it in their claws.

Infants' bones are weak, their muscles are supple, and yet their grips are firm. They have yet to experience the coupling of male and female, and yet they have full erections. That is the highest level of seminal essence. They howl for the entire day without getting hoarse. That is the highest level of harmony. To know harmony means to be constant. To know constancy means to be enlightened.

To augment life is called bad cess. For the mind to wrench control of the lifebreath is called forcing things. When a thing reaches its prime [by such a means] it begins a decline. That is called a retrograde way. Whatever is on a retrograde way will have an early end.

[ PEM: See Chapter 30. ]

## Chapter Fifty-six

Those who know do not talk. Those who talk do not know. Plug up your crevices. Close up your doors. Blunt your sharpness. Unravel your tangles. Temper your glare. Homogenize your dust [with that of the world]. So doing is called the dark and mysterious identification.

Truly: They cannot be made to be intimate, and they cannot be alienated. They cannot be benefited, and they cannot be injured. They cannot be ennobled, and they cannot be debased. Therefore they are the nobility of the world.

## Chapter Fifty-seven

Use uprightness to regulate the nation. Use guile to wage war. Take over the world by not meddling. How do I know that things are this way? By this.

When the world is burdened with many taboos, the people become evermore impoverished. When the ordinary people have many sharp weapons, the nation will be increasingly benighted. When human beings become more clever and ingenious, weird creatures will burgeon and flourish. When laws and commandments gain growing prominence, then robbers and thieves will proliferate.

Therefore the Sages say:

I am without forceful action and the people become transformed by them-selves. I love tranquility and the people will become upright on their own account. I am not meddlesome and the people prosper by their own activities. I am without desire and the people become wholesome (like the Uncarved Block) without outside intervention.

## Chapter Fifty-eight

When their governance seems to be withdrawn and melancholy, the people will be fully wholesome. When their governance tries to pry into everything, the people will become dour. Disaster lurks in good fortune. Good fortune is hidden in disaster. Who knows the limit [of this series] or of its irregularity?

The upright cycles over again to being guileful. The good cycles over again to be pernicious. Surely the days of the bafflement of people have lasted long. For that reason, the Sages square things and yet do not cut them. They probe and yet they do not slash. They straighten out but they do not force others into line. They shine and yet are not dazzling.



## Chapter Fifty-nine

In ordering the people and in serving Heaven, there is nothing that can compete with frugality. Only frugality is spoken of as an early coming into compliance. An early compliance is spoken of as a double accumulation of virtue. A double accumulation of virtue means that there is nothing that cannot be overcome. Since there is nothing that cannot be overcome, nobody can know how far it can go. Since it has unknowable limits, the nation may thereby be in one's possession. If one has the mother of the nation, then one can long endure. That is spoken of as having deep and firm roots, a long life, and the way of observing things for the long term.

## Chapter Sixty

Regulating a great kingdom is like cooking small fish. When the Way is used to manage all beneath Heaven, its earth-returning ghosts will not extend [into the world of human affairs]. It is not [only] that the earth-returning ghosts will not extend, but that what does extend [into the world of human affairs] will not injure people. It is not [just] that what extends will not injure people, but that the people of extraordinary abilities will not injure people either. Now, when the two of them (the spiritual forces and the humans of the highest ability) do no injury to each other, their virtues will intertwine and reinforce each other.

## Chapter Sixty-one

Great nations are like the lower river course, and they are the females in the world. The intercourse [among the nations] under Heaven is such that the females always overcome the males by means of their tranquility because tranquility is lower. {Therefore it is appropriate to be lower.}

So when great nations are below the smaller nations they can take in the smaller nations. If small nations are below the greater nations then they can be taken in by the larger. So perhaps one is below in order to take in [others], or is below in order to be taken in. The greater nations do no more than desire to unite and nurture all humans. The smaller nations do no more than desire to enter [into cooperative relationships] and serve human beings.

So if each of the two [groups of nations] is to get what it desires, it is fitting that the greater nations put themselves below [the other nations].

## Chapter Sixty-two

The Way is the sanctum of the myriad creatures. It is the treasure of the good people, and it is that by which the people who are not good are protected. How can people who are not good be discarded? Beautiful words can be used to market [things] to people. Respectful behavior can serve as an offering given to people. So in the enthronement of the Son of Heaven, or in the installation of the Three Ducal Ministers\*, even better than presenting a jade ceremonial disk formally delivered by [coach] being drawn by a team of four would be to kneel while presenting this Way.

Why was this Way ennobled in antiquity? Is it not said: "By it one obtains without seeking. By it one escapes from one's transgressions"? Therefore it holds noble status in the world.

\* The three ducal ministers are the Grand Tutor, the Grand Preceptor, and the Grand Protector.

## Chapter Sixty-three

Act by non-activity. Take not meddling as one's way of conducting business. Let flavors be non-flavors. Take as great the small. Take as many the few. Requite enmity with virtue. Plan for difficult challenges while they are yet easy. Do great things while they are still small. All the difficult things in the world must be done while they are still easy. All the great things in the world must be done while they are yet small.

So the Sages never do big things, and therefore they can have great accomplishments.

Now what is lightly agreed to must [eventually] diminish trust. When one exaggerates the easiness of something, there must [eventually] be increased difficulties. Therefore the Sages treat things as though they were especially difficult and therefore they will never experience any difficulties.

## Chapter Sixty-four

When things are at peace they are easy to maintain. When things have yet to reveal the slightest inkling they are easy to plan for. When things are crisp they are easy to break off. When things are minute they are easy to disperse. Do things before there is anything to deal with. Regulate things before they fall into disorder. A tree of two arm-spreads in circumference was produced from a tiny sprout. A terrace of nine levels arose from layers of dirt. A journey of a thousand miles begins with what is beneath one's feet. Those who do things defeat them. Those who cling to things lose them. Therefore the Sages do not do things and so never have failures. They do not cling to things and therefore they do not lose them. The way the people engage in affairs, they constantly ruin things when they are on the verge of success. Be as cautious about the end as about the beginning. Then you will not ruin things. Therefore the Sages desire to be without desire, do not value things that are difficult to acquire, learn how to unlearn, and return to what the multitudes of people have missed. In order to support the autonomy of the myriad creatures, they do not dare to meddle.

## Chapter Sixty-five

Those of antiquity who were good at faring the Way did not act in order to make the people bright but in order to veil them. The people are difficult to regulate on account of their great knowledge. So one who uses knowledge to regulate the nation is the injurer of the nation. To not use knowledge to regulate the nation is to bring blessings to it. Those who know these two things are the model. To have a constant awareness of the model is spoken of as the dark and mysterious virtue. The dark and mysterious virtue is profound and far-reaching. It counters the [inclinations of] creatures, and after that all arrive at the great confluence.

## Chapter Sixty-six

The reason that the rivers and the seas can be the kings of the hundred valleys is that they excel at staying below. On account of that they can be the kings of the hundred valleys. And so, if you desire to be superior to the people then you must in your speech humble yourself before them. If you want to guide the people then you must put yourself behind them. Therefore, if the Sages take their places on top then the people do not count them as a heavy burden. If they take their places as guides, then the people do not hold them to be an injury. For that reason, all in the world take joy in pushing [the sages] forward and never reach satiety.

On account of [the sages] not contending, none in the world are able to contend with them.



## Chapter Sixty-seven

All in the world say that my way is great but that it seems not to look right. Now it is only because it is great that it does not look right. If it looked right, it would long have been something minor.

I have three treasures that I hold fast to and protect. The first is called compassion. The second is called frugality. The third is not daring to be foremost in the world. Because of compassion one is able to be brave. Because of frugality one is able to be generous. And because one dares not be foremost in the world one is able to function as the chief among public servants. If one abandons compassion then bravery too [is lost], if one abandons frugality then generosity too [is lost], if one abandons putting oneself in the background one falls from the vanguard, and that means death.

Now if one uses compassion to wage war then one will win. If one uses compassion to guard things then they will be secure.

What heaven would rescue it protects by means of compassion.

## Chapter Sixty-eight

Those who are good at being knights are not warlike. Those who are good at warfare are not wrathful. Those who are good at overcoming their enemies do not join issue. Those who are good at employing others humble themselves before them. That is called the virtue of non-contending. That is called the strength of using the efforts of other people. That is called perfection in being a counterpart to Heaven.

## Chapter Sixty-nine

Those who use the implements of warfare have a saying:

"I do not dare to take the initiative and instead play the part of (guest =) respondent. I do not dare to advance an inch, and instead I retreat one foot. "

This is referred to as a formless movement, an armless shoving, destroying without having an enemy, and a weaponless wielding. There is no disaster greater than under-estimating one's enemy. To underestimate one's enemy is tantamount to losing one's treasure.

Now when opposing troops are of equal strength those who act in sorrow will win.

## Chapter Seventy

My words are extremely easy to know and to put into practice, but none in the world are able to understand them or put them into practice.

Words have ancestors, and events have rulers. Now it is only those who do not know this who do not understand me. Those who know me are few, and so I am ennobled. It is for that reason that the Sages wear coarse woolen clothing over the jade held to their bosom.

## Chapter Seventy-one

Those who know that they do not know are the highest. To not know when one does not know is a defect. It is only by treating defects as such that one can be defect free. The Sages are without defect because of their treating defects as such and eliminating them.

## Chapter Seventy-two

When the people do not fear dreadful things, then the most terrible things descend upon them.

Do not restrict their dwellings. Do not oppress their livelihoods. Now it is only by not oppressing them that they will not feel themselves oppressed. For that reason the Sages know themselves but do not let themselves be seen. They love themselves but do not exalt themselves. They get rid of that and take this.

## Chapter Seventy-three

Those whose bravery is expressed in daring will die. Those whose bravery is expressed in not daring will live. These two things may either benefit or injure. Who can know the reasons for what Heaven abominates. [Therefore the Sages treat these matters as especially difficult.] The way of Heaven is to not struggle and yet be good at winning, to not speak and yet be good at responding, to not beckon and yet have creatures approach of their own accord. It lies in repose and yet proves good at planning. The net of Heaven is cast far and wide, and its mesh is coarse, yet nothing can escape it.

## Chapter Seventy-four

If the people are not afraid of death then how can they be intimidated by the threat of it? If the people are caused to fear death under ordinary circumstances, and to take it to be a rare occurrence, then after I apprehend and execute someone who would dare risk execution themselves?

In the normal course of affairs there are executioners to execute people. To take the place of executioners to kill people is described as being like taking the place of a great woodsman to hew wood. Few of those who take the place of a great woodsman to hew wood escape injuring their own hands.



## Chapter Seventy-five

Famine is brought upon the people by their superiors' taxing so much grain. That is the reason they starve. The reason that it is difficult to regulate the people is that their superiors (have things to do =) meddle. That is why they are hard to regulate. The reason that the people take death lightly is the way their superiors seek the richness of life. That is why they take death lightly. Now it is only those who do not act for the sake of living who are good at valuing life.

## Chapter Seventy-six

In life people are supple and weak. In death they are stiff and strong. The myriad creatures, the grasses and trees, in life are supple and crisp. In death they are brittle and shrivelled. So things that are rigid and strong are the followers of death, and things that are supple and weak are the followers of life. For that reason, when soldiers believe themselves strong they will not win, when trees are rigid they get terminated. The rigid and great are in the inferior position, and the supple and weak are in the superior position.

## Chapter Seventy-seven

The way of Heaven is like the drawing of a bow. The top gets depressed and the bottom gets raised. What is in excess gets diminished and what is insufficient gets supplemented. It is the way of Heaven to diminish the excess to supplement the insufficient. The way of humans is otherwise. It takes away from those who originally have much too little in order to give to those who already have too much. Who is able to have more than enough in order to give to the world? Only those who have the Way. For that reason the Sages do things but do not take credit for them. When meritorious tasks are accomplished they do not claim credit for them. They do not desire to be seen as worthy.

## Chapter Seventy-eight

There is nothing under Heaven that is more flexible and weak than water, yet it is matchless in its ability to attack the hard and the strong on account of their not being able to change it. There is nobody in the world who fails to know how weakness overcomes strength and flexibility overcomes rigidity, yet there is nobody who can put [this knowledge] into practice. Therefore the Sages say:

The one who accepts the dirt of the nation is called the master of the altar of Earth and grain.<sup>7</sup> The one who accepts the ill-omened things of the nation is called the king of the world.

Correct words seem to be the opposite.

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<sup>7</sup>In ancient China the altar at which the king sacrificed to the Earth was constructed by forming a square retaining wall into which was placed dirt from each of the many domains of the whole country.

## Chapter Seventy-nine

After a great enmity is harmonized there will inevitably be unresolved resentments. How can that be considered a good thing? For that reason the Sage will take the left-hand (obligation) part of the contract tally and not impose demands on other people. Those who have virtue fulfill their contractual obligations. Those who do not have virtue manage skinning others. The way of Heaven does not play favorites. It always gives [support] to the good people.

## Chapter Eighty

A small country with few people: Even if they were to be supplied with the utensils of the squads and regiments they would not use them. Let the people take death as a serious matter and so not go far from home. Even if they had boats and vehicles there would be nobody who would ride in them. Even though they have shields and edged weapons, there would be no one who would brandish them. Let the people return to the use of knotted cords [to record information]. Let them enjoy their food, enjoy the beauty of their clothing, be at peace in their dwellings, and take joy in their own customs. Although neighboring countries may be in sight of each other, so that they can hear the sounds of each other's chickens and dogs, yet even though they live to a ripe old age the people would never travel back and forth.

## Chapter Eighty-one

Trustworthy speech is not elegant, and elegant speech is not worthy of trust. Good people do not engage in disputation, and those who engage in disputation are not good. Those who know things are not erudite, and those who are erudite do not know things. The Sages do not accumulate [wealth]. The more they do things for the people, the more they themselves will have. The more they give things to the people, the more they themselves will possess.

The Way of Heaven is to harvest and yet not to injure. The way of the Sages is to do things without struggling.





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