

Zen
Teachings
on the
Taoist Classic



Tao
Te
Ching

TAKUAN
SOHO

Translated by

THOMAS
CLEARY



ABOUT THE BOOK

This version of the *Tao Te Ching* presents the classic in a unique light, through the eyes of a renowned master of the Rinzai Zen tradition. Takuan Soho, who lived from 1573 to 1645, was an acerbic, witty, free spirit; a painter, poet, author, calligrapher, gardener, and a tea master. He was also a confidant and teacher to shoguns and many other powerful and famous figures, among them the famed swordsman Yagyu Munenori, and (according to legend) Miyamoto Musashi.

True to the teachings of the *Tao Te Ching* itself, as well as to the tradition of Zen, Takuan draws from everyday experience and common sense, to reveal the basic sanity of nature and the inherent wholeness of life. Takuan reveals how the *Tao Te Ching* applies to a wide range of concerns, including health, personal relationships, and individual lifestyle. He interprets the text through a philosophical and psychological lens, and also elucidates its radical social and political concepts.

THOMAS CLEARY holds a PhD in East Asian Languages and Civilizations from Harvard University and a JD from the University of California, Berkeley, Boalt Hall School of Law. He is the translator of over fifty volumes of Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, and Islamic texts from Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese, Pali, and Arabic.

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TAO TE CHING

Zen Teachings on the Taoist Classic

LAO-TZU AND TAKUAN SŌHŌ

TRANSLATED FROM
CHINESE AND JAPANESE BY
THOMAS CLEARY



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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE *TAO TE CHING* (*Daodejing*) is one of the oldest and most beloved books in the world. Compiled in China more than two thousand years ago, during an era marked by militarism and despotism, the *Tao Te Ching* proposes a serene and unaffected way of life.

Thousands of commentaries have been written on the *Tao Te Ching*, the earliest known dating back as far as the third century B.C.E. These vary widely and touch upon virtually every aspect of human experience.

This translation of the *Tao Te Ching* presents the classic in a unique light, through the eyes of an authentic Zen master, the famed National Teacher Takuan Sōhō, who lived from 1573 to 1645.

Takuan began the practice of Pure Land Buddhism at the age of ten, and then took up Zen when he was fifteen. After attaining Zen enlightenment, he was made assistant teacher at Daitokuji, one of the most prestigious monastic centers in Japan. When he was later appointed abbot, however, he resigned after three days.

Takuan is noted for having refused invitations of powerful warlords, and was banished for protesting government regulation of religion. He eventually accepted the request of the emperor to teach, nonetheless, and also instructed the shogun.

Takuan lived in a time of transition in Japan, from a history of endemic warfare to a state of peace that was to endure for more than two centuries. He often emphasizes minimalism in government, especially in matters of warfare

and taxation. This reflects the concerns of his own time, but these also paralleled the problems of war-torn Chinese society in the original historical context of the *Tao Te Ching*. Its relevance in this respect today need hardly be emphasized.

Takuan's explanation of the *Tao Te Ching* interprets the philosophical and psychological meanings of the ancient text as well as its radical social and political concepts. He illustrates applications of the maxims in a wide range of connections, including health, personal relationships, and individual lifestyle. True to the teachings of the *Tao Te Ching* itself, as well as to the tradition of Zen, Takuan enlightens in simple, down-to-earth terms, drawing on the fabric of everyday experience, and the wellspring of common sense, to reveal the basic sanity of Nature and the inherent wholeness of life.

[1]

A WAY THAT CAN BE SPOKEN

A way that can be spoken is not the eternal Way;
A name that can be named is not a constant name.
There were no names in the beginning of heaven and
earth;
Attribution of names is the matrix of myriad things.
Whenever you have no desire, you can observe the
subtle;
Whenever you have desire, watch the openings.
These two have the same provenance but different
names;
Both are called mysteries.
The mystery of mysteries is called the gateway to
myriad subtleties.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

Lao-tzu's book is not like reading ordinary books; one should not get so caught up and bogged down in literal meanings. In some places, this book presents analogies derived right from Lao-tzu's basic intent. In some places it starts from analogy and works its way to the basic intent. So there is something difficult to grasp about what he is saying, like a dream, like a shadow. Just when you think you've found the basic idea, it's a metaphor; and when you think it's a metaphor, it's the basic idea. Even so, this in itself is Lao-tzu's basic intent, his way of proceeding. This is because his basic intent is emptiness. When you read

with this in mind, you should be able to understand. Otherwise, you can't.

To sum up Lao-tzu's approach, insofar as the world is as it appears, the Way too is as it appears. Thus it is not something to which people might contrive to attach various conceptions, judging this right and this wrong. In other words, the Way is *as is*.

"A way that can be spoken" means whatever can be called a way. "The eternal Way" is like saying the true Way. The true Way is the real Way that never changes throughout eternity. That is why it is called eternal. So if you say that the Way is just such-and-so, that is not the real Way. This is the fundamental meaning.

"A name that can be named" is a simile. This line is not about entry into the Way; what is said here is a simile. The idea is that the fact that "A way that can be spoken is not the eternal Way" is like the fact that "A name that can be named is not a constant name." Because you think this line expounds the Way, no matter what you say, it is insufficient; but when you see it as a simile in this way, that will be effective.

"A name that can be named" is like calling water "water." If it had always been called fire, we'd call it fire. So it is also with fire. The same thing, water, is called *shui* in Chinese, while in Japan it's called *mizu* in the capital, but people of the western provinces say *minzu*. That's the way it is—since names are all assigned by human beings, they can be changed at will, even now. To say they are not constant names means that just as there are originally no absolute names such as "water" or "fire," likewise "A way that can be spoken is not the eternal Way."

"There were no names in the beginning of heaven and earth" means that when the world began there were no names at all. "Attribution of names is the matrix of myriad things" means that we speak this way because after names

develop they become highly variegated. The “matrix” means the origin.

“Whenever you have no desire . . .” Desire is not just for fame and profit and sensuality; all thoughts are desires. Since the Way is freedom from bias and inclination, the Way is not perceptible except where you’re not concerned with anything. It is because your mind inclines to thought, fame, profit, and sensuality, that you cannot see the subtlety of the Way.

“Whenever you have desires . . .” Even though the Way cannot be seen except when you have no desire, people have eyes, so they see; they have ears, so they hear. Because such openings exist, there must also be desire. So the existence of desire in these openings is also subtle function. Since the presence of desire is the wonder in the openings, to speak of having no desire does not mean abandoning desire. Why? You can’t cut off your ears and eyes and throw them away. As long as there are openings, there must be desires.

Nevertheless, all existents are ultimately mental constructions. Therefore having desires is not the Way, yet abandoning them to be desireless is not the Way either. The point is that the Way is nothing in particular; it is *just so*.

To “watch” means to observe. The character for “opening” is interpreted in various ways, but “opening” is best. Since it says to “watch the openings,” it must refer to the subtlety in the openings.

“These two” refers to having no desires and having desires. “The same provenance” means they come from the same place. “The same” means it is the same for both having no desire and having desire.

“Mysteries” are mysterious subtleties. It’s not a mere matter of the mysterious being extra mysterious; it says this is “The mystery of mysteries.” “The gateway to myriad subtleties” uses the expression “gateway” to mean the place from whence they emerge.

This word “both” can be understood to refer to being and nothingness. “Having desires” is being, “having no desires” is nothingness.

[2]

WHEN EVERYONE IN THE WORLD KNOWS

When everyone in the world knows beauty is
considered beautiful,
this is ugly.
When everyone knows good is considered good,
this is not good.
So being and nonbeing produce each other,
Difficulty and ease make each other,
Long and short form each other,
High and low incline to each other,
Sound and voice harmonize with each other,
Before and after follow each other.
This is why sages attend to the business of not
contriving anything,
putting unspoken teaching into effect.
Myriad beings are created ungrudgingly,
produced but not possessed,
made without boasting,
the work completed without dwelling on it.
That simple nondwelling is why it doesn't leave.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

It seems to me that to say "Myriad beings are created," instead of saying "It gives life to myriad beings," is the sense of a later section, that "heaven and earth are not humane."

“Everyone in the world” means all the people in the world. “Beautiful” and “ugly” refer to form, like the beauty or ugliness of a person, or the beauty or ugliness of an object. “Good” and “not good” refer to what has no form, like people being good or not good. “Know” means thinking someone or something to be beautiful or good. If you think someone or something beautiful, your mind will be biased; because you have an inclination to seek good, already that’s bad, not good. When biased, you reject what is bad and not good; that rejection is not good, it is bad. Things of the world are such that, depending on the time, what is not beautiful can become beautiful, and what is not good can become good.

“Being and nonbeing produce each other” means that existence and nonexistence are interdependent, not separate things. All existence comes from nonexistence, and all nonexistence comes from existence.

By analogy, it is like foliage; leaves of trees come out after shedding, so this is existence from nonexistence. But then when autumn comes, the falling leaves disintegrate into nothing. This is nonexistence from existence.

The line “being and nonbeing produce each other” is the fundamental meaning; the five lines from “Difficulty and ease make each other” go directly into analogies. In all things there is harder and easier. As the folk saying goes, “A slow ox goes slowly and a fast ox goes slowly too.” That is to say, there is the difficult and there is the easy.

As for the “long” and the “short,” they refer to the forms of things, so that’s why they are said to form each other. In reality it means there are long things and short things. The same goes for “high and low.” “Incline” means that when there is a difference in elevation there is an incline, so it says, “High and low incline to each other.” The fact is that there are high places and there are low places.

“Sound” means the sound of everything that sounds, while “voices” means the human voice. It says they

“harmonize,” because where human voices are combined with the tones of string and woodwind musical instruments they blend nicely. But this too simply means there are voices and there are sounds.¹

“Following” means that where there is an order of precedence, then there is an order of succession. “Before and after” means that when there is something that goes before, then there is something that comes after.²

To “attend to the business of not contriving anything” means to just trust naturalness, and not make up anything, or make anything of it. To “put unspoken teaching into effect” means not discussing theories or imposing doctrines.

After this, down to “without boasting,” refers to Nature. From “Myriad beings are created” onward is also analogical. “Created” refers to the creation of myriad beings. For example, as heaven and earth give birth to all beings, they do not refuse because it is onerous, or refrain because it is bad. “Produced but not possessed” means once those beings are born, heaven and earth don’t keep them as possessions. “Made without boasting” means heaven and earth make them without conceit.

“The work completed” concludes the preceding three lines. In this way, though the great work of Creation is complete, no one takes the credit. That is why it doesn’t go away. What isn’t there doesn’t leave. No credit is usurped from the side—it doesn’t leave for that reason too.

Not refusing, not possessing, not boasting, not dwelling, and not leaving are all because of not minding.

[3]

NOT TO ESTEEM SAGACITY

Not to esteem sagacity causes the people not to
compete;
Not to value hard-to-get goods causes the people not to
steal.
Not seeing anything to desire makes the mind
undisturbed.
Therefore the government of sages empties the mind
and fills the belly, weakens the ambition and
strengthens the bones,
Always making people innocent and desireless,
Making the sophisticated not dare to contrive;
Act without contrivance, and all will be orderly.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

The word for “esteem” is read that way by all commentators but Mr. Hayashi,¹ who reads it to mean “take pride.” The sense of this is hard to understand if you don't really get Lao-tzu's meaning. On top of that, Mr. Hayashi sees it in conformity with the Way of sages, so he reads it to mean taking pride.

The sense of this line is that wise people, for example, should be wealthy and highly placed, but they are not necessarily so; good people should be fortunate, but they are not necessarily so; stupid people should be poor and lowly, but they are not unable to eat; bad people should be unfortunate, but they are not necessarily so. If you see

distinctions right away, the world doesn't hold together. Not to be so hasty, in contrast, is the natural state of heaven and earth—that way the world holds together.

However, while major criminals like murderers, robbers, and arsonists may not be identified for the time being, somehow they're found out, exposed in some unexpected way, and punished. The fortune of the very good is also like this.

This is how the world works. Even when it comes to great good and great evil, if there were nothing at all, heaven and earth would not stand. In any case, the world doesn't take peremptory haste. And this does not apply only to heaven and earth; the punishment and benefit of the spirits of Japanese Shinto are that way too. And so, therefore, is the way of national government. This is said on the basis of the idea that the world will not be orderly unless savants like Yao and Shun govern it without contrivance.²

Since ancient times, the order and disorder of nations has come from those of ability and intelligence concocting various novel rules. When such talented and intelligent people are esteemed, then everybody boasts of sagacity and plays at being wise. So it's not a matter of deliberately valuing sagacity and despising ignorance. This is Lao-tzu's view. So if you don't read "esteem" as such, Lao-tzu's view doesn't make sense. He says that when sagacity is not esteemed, people don't show off sagacity to play at being intelligent, so they don't compete. When you read it this way, the line makes sense.

"Not to value hard-to-get goods causes the people not to steal." This line is very good. As goods are really precious, it is to be expected they should be valued. So when easily gotten goods are valued, there should be no harm. When hard-to-get goods are valued, the underprivileged cannot refrain from stealing.

"Not seeing anything to desire makes the mind undisturbed." This line is even finer. It means that it's

better not to display things that people are likely to crave. Then people will be calm. For example, for those who think rough cotton, colored with a little pattern, serves as the finest dress clothing there is, that will do. Once they go to the city and see all sorts of gorgeous things, they'll inevitably come to want them. This disturbs people's minds.

"The government of sages empties the mind" means making it so that there is no craving; to "fill the belly" means to let the people eat their fill.

"Weakening" means being humble, without conceit. Because of emptying the mind, one's attitude is humble, not presumptuous.

"Strengthening" is because of filling the belly.

"Innocent" should be viewed in reference to the aforementioned emptying of the mind and weakening of ambition. By emptying the mind and weakening ambition, you make it so there's nothing to know. "Desireless" should be viewed in reference to filling the belly and strengthening the bones. Because of provision for the filling of bellies and strengthening of bones, there is nothing to want.

"Making the sophisticated not dare to contrive" means that even if they try to know something about all sorts of things, even if there are those who do know, they are prevented from acting on it presumptuously.

"Act without contrivance" means that everything would be in order if all were done without artificiality. That notion is as expressed above. Some say this chapter illustrates taking care of life.

Of course, insofar as Lao-tzu's book expounds the Way, because the Way is inseparable from any concern, it can apply to taking care of life as well as anything else. This is the point of the line in chapter 35, "Verbal expressions of the Way are so bland they're flavorless, but their application is inexhaustible." Even so, since the present passage speaks of the government of sages, going on to

conclude, "Act without contrivance, and all will be orderly," the government of nations is to be viewed as the basic meaning of the path of governance.

[4]

THE WAY IS EMPTY

The Way is empty, so using it may not be complete.
It is so deep it seems to be the source of everything.
It blunts the edges, dissolves the complications,
 harmonizes the light and assimilates to the world.
Brimming full, it seems as if it is there.
I don't know whose offspring this is, like before the
 emperors.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

The Way is not something difficult, not something so fancy. It's nothing like the way the world appears, so it is called "empty."

"Using it may not be complete" means that since it's empty, it may be better not to use it completely. "Using it without completeness" means not exerting it fully, not applying it 100 percent. This does not refer only to the present concern; it is so of everything and anything; even, for example, such things as implements and possessions. Even the government of a nation is this way—trying to sweep absolutely everything clean won't work, and isn't done.

"May" is an expression of indefiniteness; if completeness is possible, you complete; if not, you leave it incomplete. This is Lao-tzu's way.

"Seems," like the preceding "may" and the following "seems," is Lao-tzu's way. It is not something with form and

appearances, like myriad things and myriad beings, so it “seems.” The sense is that it seems like the source or origin of all things and all beings. While it is the source of all things, to say it *is* the source would mean it has form and appearance; so he says it “seems.”

“It blunts the edges, dissolves the complications” means that being empty and not complete, seeming to be the source, it is detached from things. To “blunt” means to grind down; the edges refer to the sharpness of the mind’s spearheads. “Dissolving” means removing; “complications” refers to having a lot of things on your mind.

Blunting edges and dissolving complications alone is not enough. You also harmonize your light and assimilate to the world. The “light” means ostentation of intellectual brilliance. The “world” means ordinary society. “Assimilate” may also be read as “integrate.”

“Full” means like a brimming pool. “Seems as if it is there” means the Way seems to be there. It says “seems” because to say simply that it exists, as an affirmation, would be wrong; so it says “seems.” Even “seems” is wrong because it suggests a trace of form, so it makes the point that it’s better to say “seems as if”—“It seems as if it is there.” To read “it may appear to be there” is the same idea.

“I don’t know whose offspring this is, like before the emperors.” “Whose offspring” is a person like this, like someone before the Five Emperors?¹

Anyway, this chapter has only one meaning from the beginning. To read “the emperors” as the Five Emperors is my own idea.

Blunting edges, dissolving complications, harmonizing light, and assimilating to the world are clarified in detail in the fifty-sixth chapter.

[5]

SKY AND EARTH ARE NOT BENEVOLENT

Sky and earth are not benevolent; they treat myriad beings as straw dogs.

Rulers are not benevolent; they treat peasants as straw dogs.

Between sky and earth is like a bellows, empty yet inexhaustible,
producing more and more with movement.

If you say a lot, you'll repeatedly be stumped;
that's not as good as staying within.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"Not benevolent" means that since it is not anything whatsoever, application of the Way has no contrivance and no concern, but once you've said "benevolent," benevolence can be expressed in words, so from the perspective of the Way it's a level lower. So sky and earth are only the Way, not something benevolent. Therefore it is said that "Sky and earth are not benevolent."

"Straw dogs" are said in commentaries to be used for sacrifices, but in my ignorant opinion it doesn't matter whether or not they are used for sacrifices. It's enough to say they are dogs made of straw. If they were live dogs, there would be a feeling of affection, but because they're made of straw there's no affection, no feeling toward them. This means being mindless and imageless. Thus rulers too, like that, are mindless and imageless toward the people.

Therefore they govern without contrivance and without concern. It is due to half-baked pretenses of benevolence butting in and doing all sorts of things that there is unrest. So it is said that “Rulers are not benevolent.”

To substantiate the statement that “Sky and earth are not benevolent,” it says that within sky and earth is nothing at all, “like a bellows.” Inside a bellows is nothing; it is empty. Because there is nothing, no matter how much comes out, it is never emptied out. If there were something inside, it would eventually be emptied out, no matter how long it took. So it is saying that sky and earth produce life by being like a bellows, not by benevolence.

“Producing more and more with movement” means the more the movement, the more the production.

“If you say a lot, you’ll repeatedly be stumped.” When you say this and that, the more you talk, the more your reasoning runs out. Since the Way is not susceptible to verbal expression, if you say a lot you repeatedly get stuck. “That’s not as good as staying within” means not speaking. In other words, it’s preferable to stay within and not speak. This is emptiness. It is what the Buddha called “not saying a word.” Buddha said, “In forty-nine years of teaching, I have not said a single word.”¹

[6]

NURTURE THE SPIRIT, AND IT WON'T DIE

Nurture the spirit, and it won't die;
this is called the mystic female.
The house of the mystic female
is called the root of heaven and earth.
Continuous, as if there,
using it is effortless.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

In ancient times, the Chinese character for "valley" was used interchangeably with one meaning "food" and "nourish," so commentaries since olden times all read "nourish," it seems. Mr. Hayashi reads it as "valley spirit," saying it is the soul of emptiness. Even so, when you read it that way as "valley" and rationalize that it means the soul of emptiness because a valley is hollow, you can say what you will, but that won't be the original meaning. The so-called valley spirit is particularly unsatisfying. The obvious reading of "nurture" will do just fine.

The sense of this section is not just using purity without contrivance to govern oneself and to govern the state or the world; but also to use purity without contrivance to nurture the spirit. When you nurture it, it doesn't die; this means prolonging life is possible.

"Not dying" means like the saying we still use popularly today, "Do such and such, and you won't die."¹ So it's a mistake to see it like the immortalists do, to mean living as

long as sky and earth, never dying. That's not what it means. "Nurture the spirit, and it won't die" means that when you use purity without contrivance to nurture your spirit, this also has the effect of lengthening life.

"Mystic" implies profound calm, and also inconceivable subtlety. "Female" refers to the path of keeping profoundly calm and flexible; this is the way to nurture the spirit. This means that the way to nourish the spirit so that it doesn't die is called "the mystic female."

"The house of the mystic female" means the location. When books speak of the houses of the creative and the receptive, or the houses of the seasons, this refers to their associations. The location of the mystic female is where even sky and earth begin. This is "the root," it says. The sense is that all movement returns to stillness, existence ultimately returns to nothingness. Returning to stillness and nonbeing is the beginning of sky and earth because they are originally empty and silent.

Now then, when it comes to things that last long, nothing endures as long as sky and earth. That is because they are empty and calm, not acting contentiously or adamantly. So it means keeping profoundly calm and flexible, as active contention and adamant exertion are bad for the health.

"Continuous" means continuing consistently, without interruption. "As if there" means that while the spirit is certainly present, because it prefers not to be adamant and forceful in its behavior, and so is profoundly calm and flexible, it seems as if the spirit were barely there. That is to say, it seems as if you could scarcely tell whether it is there or not. This is how to nurture the spirit.

"Using it" means once it is employed; "effortless" means there is no forced effort. It's a matter of not straining to compete with people or strive forcefully. In any case, to take care of the vital spirit and use it sparingly so as not to let it outside—this is Lao-tzu's meaning.

So however you understand this section, it must include extension of life. For example, when people say things were such and such rather than so-and-so, you just say "I see" and let it go at that. This is Lao-tzu's method.

[7]

THE SKY IS LASTING, THE EARTH IS ENDURING

The sky is lasting, the earth is enduring.

The reason they can last and endure is because they don't produce themselves; that is why they can last, enduring.

Therefore leaders put themselves last, so they themselves are first;

They detach from themselves, so they themselves survive.

Is it not because of having no self that they can establish themselves?

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"They don't produce themselves" means, in short, to be mindless. Sky and earth are mindless things, so they don't produce themselves or foster themselves. "That is why they can last, enduring" is in some texts written "that is why they can live forever," but "enduring" is better because it should follow on "last and endure" above.

"Therefore leaders put themselves last . . ." Because sky and earth are thus, so are rulers. To "put themselves last" means that leaders set their personal concerns aside and don't think about them or get caught up in them, instead giving precedence to the concerns of the people. Because the people appreciate that, the leader becomes foremost.

To "detach" means to relinquish and not be concerned. "They themselves survive" means being personally

established. This has the same meaning as the preceding line.

“Is it not because of having no self that they can establish themselves?” Isn’t it because of having no selfishness, being compassionate above all? That is why, in the final analysis, the leader accomplishes his own purposes first.

[8]

HIGHER GOOD IS LIKE WATER

Higher good is like water:
the good in water benefits myriad beings and does not
contend;
it abides where most people detest, so it is near to the
Way.
In a dwelling, goodness is the place.
In the mind, goodness is depth.
In giving, goodness is benevolence.
In speech, goodness is truthfulness.
In government, goodness is order.
In work, goodness is ability.
In action, goodness is timing.
But only by not contending is there no blame.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Higher good” means the best goodness. “The good in water benefits myriad beings . . .” means that nothing will grow without water. That being so, whereas one’s main intention may be to prevail, water does no such thing, not contending for supremacy at all. So the text says that it “does not contend.” Moreover, it conforms to square or round, and becomes as people do with it, east, west, north, south, not contesting. What is “detested” is low, unclean places.

“In a dwelling, goodness is the place” on down refers to people of higher goodness. “Goodness is the place” means

that when people of higher good are placed in noble positions, they are at ease in their nobility. It means that the rich and the noble and the poor and the humble are all at ease in their places. In any case, it's a matter of being able to be at peace wherever you may be.

“Goodness is depth” means being profoundly calm and receptive without prejudice.

“In giving, goodness is benevolence” means giving generously whether or not you like someone.

“Goodness is truthfulness” means telling it like it is, without being clever.

“Goodness is order” means that as long as there is no artificial contrivance in the administration of government, the people will cause no disturbance.

“Goodness is ability” means that when you do things with no mind, there is no obstruction or blockage.

“Goodness is timing” means that advance and withdrawal, going out and staying in, are in accord with what is appropriate at the time. Whatever you do, when you can accord with what is appropriate, then you have no mind in either advance or withdrawal, being basically mindless. Cases of going ahead when it is wrong to do so just because of a desire in the mind to go ahead; or of withdrawing, or of going out or staying in, are all examples of this. Without that mind, you naturally accord with what's fitting.

Since “not contending” means being mindless and not contending with people, harmonizing with them instead, there should be no blame from others.

[9]

TO HOLD AND FILL SOMETHING

To hold and fill something is not as good as stopping.
If you hone and sharpen something, it can't be kept
forever.

If gold and jade fills the halls, no one can safeguard
them.

If you are rich, with high status, and are arrogant, you
leave your own indictment.

When your work is done and your reputation
established, personal retirement is the Way of
Nature.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"To hold" means to hold on, not letting go. To "fill" means to try to reach fulfillment. Be it riches and nobility, or be it official position, those who tenaciously keep trying to advance more and more will eventually stumble and fall.

"Stopping" means knowing when to stop. This applies not only to riches, nobility, and official position, but also to knowledge, virtue, art, and ability. If you keep trying to enlarge and expand these yourself, you will inevitably be subjected to the hatred of others. So riches, nobility, knowledge, virtue, art, and ability are each best forgotten.

"Honing" means something like polishing. To make an effort to grind and polish in order to be able to cut through anything is referred to as "sharpening." "It can't be kept forever" means that when something is honed and

sharpened like that, eventually the edge will break, the point will readily snap. This means that people are in any case better off dull.

“Gold and jade” offers evidence to prove the foregoing two passages. “No one can safeguard them” means they cannot be kept forever; that is why there is trouble between the first generation and the second generation.

“You leave” means you forward your own problems. Those problems are not brought on by anyone else; you send them yourself.

“When your work is done and your reputation established . . .” For example, in spring the generous production of myriad things is the work of spring. When that work is done, fulfilling the definition of spring, then spring gives way to summer. The same goes for the flourishing of summer, harvesting in autumn, and storing in winter. This is called the Way of Nature.

So while people may do well up to the point where their work is done and their reputation established, they’re not good at retiring. In Japan, Yoshitsune was successful and famous, but he didn’t know enough to retire, and ultimately got killed.¹ Fan Li of Yue,² and Zhang Liang of Han,³ in contrast, knew that to withdraw oneself is the Way of Nature, so they were not harmed.

[10]

BEARING BODY AND SOUL

Bearing body and soul, embracing unity, can you keep them from parting?

Concentrating energy, making it supple, can you be like a baby?

Cleaning mystic perception, can you make it flawless?

Loving the people, governing the nation, can you exclude artifice?

As the gate of heaven opens and closes, can you be unattached?

Clearly comprehending in all directions, can you have no knowledge?

Producing this, nurturing this,
producing without possessing,
creating without being proud,
mastering without domineering—
this is called mysterious virtue.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

Mr. Hayashi's idea is evident in the fact that he reads, "Work to carry the soul." The grammar cannot be construed that way, no matter what. All you have to do is read the original text as it is.

This refers to bearing the circulation of oxygen and blood, and the heavenly and earthly souls. What that means is the reason people are troubled by desires for sound, form, scent, flavor, honor, and gain, is because they have

ears and eyes, mouth and nose. Lao-tzu's idea is this—why be compelled by circulation of oxygen and blood, and the heavenly and earthly souls? They are but items loaded on this body; when you just embrace unity, you will not be compelled by the desires of eyes and ears, nose and tongue, mind and imagination.

“Embracing unity” refers to the Way of emptiness. “Can you keep them from parting?” refers to not losing unity. “Can you keep from” really means “Don't!” Putting it as an interrogative is Lao-tzu's usual way of not ramming things down people's throats. Both mean the same—“Don't part,” meaning “Don't lose unity.”

“Concentrating energy”—concentration means unified focus. It means making the mood calm. It means refining the state of mind.

To “make” means to bring about fully. “Supple” means adaptable. To “make supple as a baby” does not merely mean not seeing or hearing; it means there is nothing the matter at all. “Like a baby” means become like a baby.

To “clean” means to clean out thoughts of fame and gain. Now one whose thoughts of fame and gain are cleared out may be too pure, disliking this and liking that, affirming this and denying that, becoming narrow-minded. But being like that is not attainment of the Way. As it says in the first chapter, even with desire you see the subtle, so the point is to use consciousness cleared of thoughts of fame and gain to perceive mystically, without any bad flaws. “Mystic perception” is like subtle observation. “Can you make it flawless?” alludes to discriminatory judgments, likes and dislikes, as flaws.

“Loving the people, governing the nation, can you exclude artifice?” There is always a trade-off. Seeing to it that this doesn't happen is called “excluding artifice.”

The “gate of heaven” refers to women's private parts; “opening and closing” is sexual intercourse between man and woman. “Can you be unattached?” means having no

fixation on sexual attraction. This means being mindless and not obsessed even though there is man and woman, with the appropriate organs, consequently having intercourse. It seems that the bedroom arts of hygienists were derived from this passage.

“Clearly comprehending in all directions” means that though your intellect is clear and penetrates the four quarters, you should have no objects of knowledge.

“Producing this . . .” and so on means that being as such is mystic virtue. Producing and nurturing myriad beings, though producing there is no possessiveness; though creating all things, there is no pride in the achievement.

“Without being proud” means not being conceited. “Mastering without domineering” means even while mastering myriad beings and things, not to keep domineering or asserting control. This too is just a matter of being mindless. This means being in a situation without minding, forgetting. This refers to one who has actually entered the state of emptiness. “Mysterious virtue” means recondite virtue.

[11]

THIRTY SPOKES

Thirty spokes join at one hub; precisely where there is nothing is the function of the carriage.

Working clay to make vessels, precisely where there is nothing is the function of the vessels.

Opening doors and windows for a room, precisely where there is nothing is the function of the room.

Therefore the benefit of the existent is the use of nonexistence.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Spokes” are the wheel spokes of a carriage; they number thirty. They join at one hub. The wheel hubs hold the axle of the carriage. That is where thirty spokes converge, so it is said they join.

“Precisely where there is nothing” refers to the fact that there is a hole in the hub to admit the axle, enabling the carriage to roll. This is a metaphor for the usefulness in nothingness.

In molding clay, “where there is nothing” refers to the space inside the teacup or teapot, into which something can be put.

“Opening doors and windows . . .” If a room is sealed on all sides, it cannot be used. Open a door, and people can go in and out; open windows, and light can come in.

“The existent” refers to implements or utensils; the “nothing” of “nonexistence” refers to where there is

nothing. The idea is that the emptiness of nothingness produces the benefits.

The sense of this chapter is that the Way too is thus. When virtuous people let go of their own virtue, then they can accept what people bring from outside. In terms of wisdom too, if you consider your own knowledge to be wisdom, then you cannot admit even good ideas from others. So if you consider your own wisdom nothing, then you'll be informed of all sorts of good things from outside. This is why Lao-tzu regards empty nothingness as the Way.

[12]

THE FIVE COLORS

The five colors blind people's eyes,
The five notes deafen people's ears,
The five flavors change people's palates,
The chase and the hunt craze people's minds.
Hard-to-get goods make people's behavior offensive.
This is why sages act for the gut and not for the eyes,
so they abandon that and adopt this.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"Blind people's eyes" means that looking at all sorts of colors dazzles the eyes. What follows is the same idea. "Change" is derived from the basic meaning "differ." When the "palate is changed" means that people who always eat rich food get jaded in their taste. "The chase and the hunt" refers to hunting on horseback. "Going crazy" is racing around. As for "hard-to-get goods," while there is no harm in easily obtained goods, oppression of the peasantry and all sorts of evils come about because of seeking hard-to-get goods. This is called offensive behavior.

As for "acting for the gut," the "gut" means the inside. "Acting for the gut" means cultivating the inside. In "not acting for the eyes," the "eyes" refer to the outside, so this means not seeking things outside.

"That" refers to the property of kings above. "Adopting this" refers to the Way of empty nothingness.

[13]

FAVOR AND DISGRACE

In favor and disgrace, you're upset.
Valuing big trouble is your body.
What are favor and disgrace?
Disgrace is considered lowly.
Getting them, you're upset;
losing them, you're upset.
What does it mean to say "Valuing big trouble is your
body?"
The reason we have big trouble is because we have
bodies;
had we no bodies, what trouble would there be?
Therefore if you respect using your body for the benefit
of the world,
then you can be trusted with the world.
If you carefully use your body for the benefit of the
world,
then you can entrust it with the world.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"Favor and disgrace." The line below that says "What are favor and disgrace?" asks about the preceding "In favor and disgrace, you're upset." It is an abbreviation of "What does it mean to say that favor and disgrace startle you?" Here you'll miss the point if you don't see it that way. There are a lot of abbreviations throughout this book. This isn't the only one. Evidence of that is in the subsequent, "What

does it mean to say ‘Valuing big trouble is your body?’” which is also a rephrase of a preceding line. By this it can be seen that “Disgrace is considered lowly” is also an abbreviation. It means that favor is made out to be superiority, while disgrace is made out to be inferiority. Considering favor superior, people value it and delight in it; considering disgrace inferior, people hate it and despise it. So the fact that people are upset when they get them and when they lose them too is because everyone’s attention is arrested by favor and disgrace.

“Valuing big trouble is your body” means that since you have big trouble because of the existence of this body, to insist on deliberately prizing the body is to value big trouble. “Because of having a body” means that to experience this body alone subjects you to compulsions of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and you toil in all sorts of ways. “What trouble would there be?”—that being so, realize that there is nothing so useless and malignant as this body. When you are able to actually understand this, you won’t prize this body, and you won’t seek anything else, either.

Even so, this does not mean to tell us to neglect the body—it tells us to develop detached perception and consciousness. This is only said to forestall seeking. It’s like when Buddhists speak of this body as suffering.

“Therefore if you respect . . .” The sense of the word “respect” here differs from the sense of “value.” Here it implies awe and deference. The sense of this line is that to govern the world with this body is something to be feared, foregone, disliked. It means refraining in awe from the repulsive task of governing the world. Such people have no thought of gaining fame and fortune by ruling the world. Therefore the world should be entrusted to such people, it says. That’s because people who use government for fame and profit develop all sorts of conceits, but these faults don’t come out in this other type of person.

“Carefully” means sparingly. It means using the body for the world sparingly, precisely because using the body to govern the world is a pathetic business. Because such people don’t govern for their own livelihood, they can be trusted with the world.

QUESTION: In the beginning of this section it makes the body out to be something useless and malignant, but in the end it seems to say to take care of the body. What about that?

ANSWER: Though they seem to be two that way, the reality is one. Why? To want to rule the world is to want to pamper this body. When you don’t prize this body, you don’t want to rule the world.

[14]

WHEN YOU LOOK AT IT, YOU DON'T SEE

When you look at it, you don't see; this is called unvaried.

When you listen to it, you don't hear; this is called rarefied.

When you grasp it, you don't get it; this is called subtle. These three cannot be pinned down, so they merge into one.

Above it is not clear, below it is not obscure.

Too multifarious to be named, it reverts back to nothing.

This is called a description of the indescribable, an image of the imageless.

This is called indistinct: facing it, you don't see its beginning; following it, you don't see its end.

Hold to the ancient Way to manage present existence, and you can know the ancient beginning.

This is called the order of the Way.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"When you look at it, you don't see" means there is no trace of form indicating what kind of thing it is. "Unvaried" means unchanging; while things that change can be described, there is no way to see what is unvaried.

"Unvaried" can also be read "flat," meaning the same thing. For instance, you can see examples of height in

mountains and fluidity in rivers, but you can't see empty flatness.

"When you listen to it . . ." Because it has no voice, there's no way to hear it. To be "rarefied" is to be uncommon. This means "the great sound is rarely voiced."

"You don't get it" means it cannot be taken in hand. "Subtle" means minute, and it means indistinct or vague.

The idea up to here is that the "Way" is something so invisible, inaudible, and ungraspable as to be unvaried, rarefied, and subtle. But these three are not threefold; this set of three is said to define the foregoing invisible, inaudible, ungraspable, rarefied, invariable, and subtle. As such, they cannot be ultimately defined. To "pin down" means to question, in the sense of finding out. "So they merge into one" means they therefore merge into one. This is the Way of nothingness. Reference to the Way as "one" here and there in Lao-tzu's book means this.

"Above . . ." means that the Way of empty nothingness is, therefore, not something that can be known clearly by deliberately looking high and low, searching and seeking. Yet if you think it's obscure because it can't be clearly known, nevertheless it's not obscure either. It cannot be clearly known, yet cannot be deliberately concealed either. The point is that it is something you have to experience yourself and realize yourself.

"Multifarious" means manifold. "Too multifarious to be named" means that the countless phenomena and events in the world, the totality of all things and beings, is too multifarious to name one by one. Even though there are so many existents, that is to say, they all wind up nothing. To say they "revert" means that those indescribably multifarious things all originally emerged from nothing. Those things that came from nothing return to original nothingness in the end.

"This is called a description of the indescribable . . ." A description is a form or likeness. The sense of this line is

that all things originally emerge from nothing and ultimately return to nothing, so they are descriptions of the indescribable, images of the imageless, something indistinct. “Indistinct” means vague, as if there, yet as if not.

“Facing” means looking at something head-on; “following” means looking from behind. “Facing it, you don’t see its beginning; following it, you don’t see its end” means the Way is ultimately beginningless and endless, beginning and end both invisible.

“Hold to the ancient Way . . .” The “ancient Way” doesn’t mean the virtues of the past. Since all things are originally nothing, the “ancient Way” means original nothingness. You do not see beginning or end—this is the ancient Way.

To “manage” means to handle. Dealing with present existence realizing the ancient Way, knowing that all things in the human world are nothing at first, means that you are not confused by presently existing forms.

The “ancient beginning” is the aforementioned past origin. “Knowing the ancient beginning” means knowing nothingness, that is, the Way of empty nothingness. The “order of the Way” means the rule or the law of the Way.

[15]

THOSE SKILLED AS SCHOLARS IN ANCIENT TIMES

Those skilled as scholars in ancient times,
with subtle mystic comprehension,
were so deep that they could not be known.
Just because they could not be known,
a description is forced on them:
Hesitant, as if crossing a river in winter,
cautious, as if wary of all around;
composed, like a guest;
relaxed, like ice about to melt;
plain, like raw timber;
broad, like a valley;
opaque, like clouded water.
Who, when clouded, can gradually clear by stilling it?
Who at rest can gradually come alive by persisting in
it?
Those who preserve the Way do not want fullness; only
by not filling is it possible to wear out and not make
anew.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Those skilled as scholars in ancient times” means good people of old. The idea expressed here is that good people of old were just subtle mystics, not sharp operators; deep, not superficial; so they cannot be figured out, and therefore there is no way to describe them. “A description is forced on them” means that if one were forced to describe them, it

would be as “hesitant” and so on. People who have been able to cultivate and attain the Way of “subtle mystic comprehension” that is so deep it cannot be known are actually indescribable.

“Hesitant” means holding back. Enthusiastic do-gooders are mundane people. The good people of old, even when going good, seemed unable to go ahead, and did not do so with adventurous enthusiasm.

“Crossing a river in winter” means crossing gradually, little by little. This is the sense of Chuang-tzu’s saying, “When doing good, don’t get near fame.” This means not doing so much good that it will get you fame. Chuang-tzu doesn’t mean not to do it for fame—that is the teaching of Confucius.

“Cautious” also means hesitant. This means not doing evil is like refraining because of fear of those around. This is the sense of Chuang-tzu’s statement, “If you do wrong, don’t get near punishment.” What Chuang-tzu means is that even if you do something wrong, don’t do anything so bad that you get your head chopped off.

These two lines mean that even when seeing the bad, you don’t despise and reject it too much; and even when seeing the good, you don’t proceed too enthusiastically. The idea is that even seeing good, you don’t go right ahead, and even seeing bad, you don’t reject it.

“Composed” means dignified. Guesthood is a composed state of inner calm. It does not mean strict manners. It does not refer to the outward form, but to the inner mind. Ultimately it refers to the tranquillity of people who have attained the Way.

“Melting” means something viscous or thick. “Plain” implies sincerity. “Raw timber” is wood that hasn’t been planed, like a tree cut down and just left there. This means having no embellishments.

“Broad” refers to breadth of mind. “Like a valley” means like the heart of a valley.

“Opaque” means undifferentiated, not distinguished.

“Who, when clouded, can . . .” means who is able, while seeming clouded, to be inwardly calm so as to clear gradually somehow. This refers to good people of ancient times cultivating and attaining the Way, people without artificiality, without issues.

“At rest” means tranquil, at peace. To “come alive” is like saying to go into action, to become active.

“Not wanting fullness” means not wanting to fill. It is as if there were not enough of anything. This is not uniformity, it is total diversity.

“Only by not filling” means just because of not wanting fullness. To “wear out” means like old clothing, not new clothes. This is all metaphorical. It is worn-out here and there, not something new and neat.

[16]

REACHING EXTREME EMPTINESS

Reaching extreme emptiness, maintaining calm
steadily,
as myriad beings all act, I thus watch their return.
Beings are multitudinous; each reverts to its origin.
Reverting to the origin is called calm;
calm is called return from a mission.
Return from a mission is called normalcy;
knowing normalcy is called clarity.
If you don't know normalcy, you randomly make
trouble.
If you know normalcy, you accept.
Acceptance is impartial; impartiality is regal;
the regal is celestial, the celestial is the Way;
the Way is everlasting—you are not endangered to the
end of your life.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Reaching extreme emptiness” means reaching empty nothingness as far as possible. When you reach the extreme of empty nothingness, you keep calm steadily. “Keeping calm” means maintaining tranquil silence, not conceiving a single thought. So people like this, even if myriad phenomena and myriad beings loom large as mountains before their eyes, watch for their return back to nothingness. Because they know all will eventually return to nothing, they don't keep anything on their minds, and

don't seek anything. This is "as myriad beings all act, I thus watch their return." Their "return," like their "reversion," is like saying their end. "Reverting to the origin" means going back to their original nothingness.

"Calm is called return from a mission" refers to the aforementioned "watching their return." The "mission" is the life, or destiny, of the basic organism. All the commentators take it to mean returning to the noumenon of the fundamental substance, but this is an interpretation that started in the Sung dynasty. If you consider this point carefully, since "return from a mission" means reporting back, so it is here too. "Reporting back" means returning from a mission as an emissary and reporting on the outcome. It's also used when someone other than an emissary comes to the ruler and reports an occurrence. So, since having entered into that tranquil calm is to have returned to the original state, this is "reporting back."

"Normalcy" means that reversion to tranquil calm is what the first chapter calls "the eternal Way." Since reversion to tranquil calm is becoming free from artificiality, this is the way of normalcy, the eternal Way.

"Knowing normalcy" means knowing the eternal Way. To "randomly make trouble" can also be read "acting at random is harmful." The sense is the same. When you don't know the normal way of tranquillity without artificiality, you randomly do things that are harmful.

To "accept" means to acknowledge everything. People who have become free of artifice know the world is something neutral, indifferent, something basically as is; so they don't like, dislike, or hate, but accept everything. It is only because of not knowing this that you have likes and dislikes and cannot accept.

"Impartial" means no subjectivity or selfishness. The "regal" refers to being unselfish; this is called kingship or the regal way. This is none other than the celestial Way. So

this Way never changes, and never ends, so it is called “everlasting.”

“You are not endangered to the end of your life” implies that without this perceptive knowledge, everyone in the world is in danger!

[17]

IN HIGH ANTIQUITY

In high antiquity, those below knew these existed.
Next, they liked them and praised them.
Next, they feared them.
Next, they despised them.
So when their reliability was inadequate,
there was distrust in them.
Yet they still valued talk.
When work is done and things are accomplished,
the people all think they did it of their own accord.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“High antiquity” means ancient times. “Those below knew these existed” means those below were only aware of the fact that there were rulers over them, and had no thought of liking them or lauding them; so of course they had no thought of reviling them or fearing them either. Why? Because they governed without contrivance, and didn't make anything of it, so those below were mindless of them.

One version says “didn't know these existed,” but the ultimate meaning is the same. “These existed” means rulers existed.

“They liked them and praised them” means that later on, freedom from artifice waned, and rulers governed in an innocent manner called “benevolence,” so people liked them and praised them.

“They feared them” means that later still, government even by benevolence didn’t work, so rulers governed strictly by duty, and so people feared them.

“Despised” means after that, once even benevolence and duty had disappeared, nothing worked anymore, so the people despised the rulers.

What happened was that gradually, in this manner, the reliability of the leadership became inadequate, so those below did not trust them. Nevertheless, instead of considering that this is because of insufficient reliability, they still glare around and talk this way and that, saying things like, “If such is the case, then do thus and so.” This is what is meant by “Yet they still valued talk.”

“When work is done and things are accomplished” means that in an era like high antiquity, being governed without artificial contrivance, naturally, even though the work gets done and things get accomplished, the people below don’t think of it as due to the leadership, but simply think they themselves are naturally the way they are.

[18]

WHEN THE GREAT WAY IS ABANDONED

When the Great Way is abandoned,
there are benevolence and duty.
When ingenuity emerges,
there is much fabrication.
When relatives are not in harmony,
there are respect and kindness.
When a nation is benighted and chaotic,
there are loyal ministers.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“When the Great Way . . .” means governing by the Great Way without artificiality is not a matter of practicing benevolence and doing duty. It is because of not attaining that freedom from artificial contrivance that matters of benevolence and duty come up. This is still not objectionable.

For example, speaking in terms of a husband and wife with a good relationship, they pass the days and the years without any particular fuss, not doing anything special—this is best. Occasionally saying something nice or saying something endearing is “benevolence.” This is already secondary. Next after that, guiding with duty, such as “Take care of it properly!” or “Watch your manners!” is lowest. The couple on the best of terms gets along without any of that sort of thing. This is the idea.

“When ingenuity emerges . . .” Getting up when the sun rises, going to bed when the sun goes down, drinking when thirsty, eating when hungry, dressing heavily when it’s cold, dressing lightly when it’s hot, dealing with the world as it is this way, just going along with Nature, doesn’t need any cleverness. It is because of all kinds of exercise of cleverness that a lot of lies are told.

“When relatives . . .” From here on are metaphors. When the Great Way is discarded, there are benevolence and duty; when ingenuity emerges, there is much fabrication, as, for example, in the following cases.

Children look after their parents with affection, ministers expect to be directed by rulers, and expect to serve the public; there’s no reason for them to label this filial kindness or loyal service. It is when the world degenerates and relatives don’t get along that there are “respect” and “kindness.” The point is that it is only after a state is benighted and chaotic that someone would be called a good public servant or said to have been loyal in some way.

[19]

ELIMINATE SAGES, ABANDON INTELLECTUALS

Eliminate sages, abandon intellectuals,
and the people will benefit a hundredfold.
Eliminate benevolence, abandon duty,
and the people will return to filial piety and kindness.
Eliminate cleverness, abandon profiteering,
and thievery will not exist.
These three are considered lack of culture,
providing something to follow.
See the basic, embrace the plain;
lessen selfishness, diminish desire.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

This chapter is especially hard to understand. "Eliminate sages, abandon intellectuals" speaks in terms of people. "Eliminate benevolence, abandon duty" speaks in terms of policy. "Eliminate cleverness, abandon profiteering" speaks in terms of practices. Seen in this way, Lao-tzu's intent comes across fine.

"Sages" are wise people, "intellectuals" are smart people. This passage refers to the remote past when there were no such things as "sages" and "intellectuals." The following "Eliminate benevolence, abandon duty" and "Eliminate cleverness, abandon profiteering" are the same idea. At that time, people went along with the course of events naturally, with no such thing as law or ritual; so, because the people got by as they were by nature, people were free.

However, in later ages, so-called sages and intellectuals emerged, invented laws and designed rites, and so as there came to be claims of illegality and impropriety, the people's liberties became restricted. So it says that when sages and intellectuals are eliminated, as in ancient times, that would be more beneficial for the people.

"Eliminate benevolence, abandon duty" means that in the remote past when there were no such things as "benevolence" and "duty," people naturally cared for their children and their parents, so parents and children were conscientious and kind.

But in later ages, when doctrines of benevolence and duty came about, people started saying things like, "That's not the way to treat parents," "An heir doesn't talk that way," "A child by a first wife is to be treated thus, a child by a concubine is to be treated so," and from there the customs of the world degenerated.

So if we do as in high antiquity when there were no terms for benevolence and duty, the people will all return to original conscientiousness and kindness.

Here Lao-tzu's idea is that what the world calls benevolence and duty are not true conscientiousness and kindness, because they are thought of as bribes.

"Eliminate cleverness, abandon profiteering." Cleverness means intellectual skill, profiteering means utilitarianism. In remote antiquity people all did things in roundabout ways, making do with inconvenience. In later times they contrived all sorts of intellectual skills and strove for advantageous utility, so they would even steal.

"These three" refers to "Eliminate sages, abandon intellectuals," "Eliminate benevolence, abandon duty," and "Eliminate cleverness, abandon profiteering." That they are "considered lack of culture" means these three tend to simplicity, with little embellishment. Therefore the people "have something to follow." "Something to follow" is like saying there is something to go along with.

“Seeing” is knowing; “the basic” is the path of elemental simplicity. “Embracing” is preserving; “the plain” is the virtue of innocence. “Something to follow” means the people’s hearts readily rally around. It means unity is easily achieved; it is easy to go along.

[20]

STOP ACADEMICS AND THERE'S NO DISTRESS

Stop academics and there's no distress;
How far apart are "Yes" and "Yeah"?
How far apart are "good" and "bad"?
What people fear cannot but be feared.
Wild, they never stop!
Everyone is cheerful, as if they are having a feast,
like climbing a terrace in springtime;
I alone am indifferent, showing no sign,
like an infant before it can smile,
squirming, as if having nowhere to rest.
Everyone has excess; I alone seem lacking.
I have the mind of an ignoramus, blank!
Worldly people are bright; I alone seem dim.
Worldly people are inquisitive; I alone am at a loss,
light as an ocean breeze, seeming to stop nowhere.
Everyone has purpose; I alone am dull, and lowly too.
I alone am different from others;
I value seeking to feed from the mother.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

What Lao-tzu's book refers to as "academics," on examination, turns out to mean formalities. Indeed, in Confucian books too, "academics" amounts to formalities. What "academics" means is to study things like, for example, who said what or did what in ancient times, the

sages determined this and that, and so on. Therefore it is, after all, a ritual.

Of course, the original meaning that sages gave to scholarship wasn't studying those things, but rather studying the Way and virtue. Yet scholars of that standard are one in ten thousand, if that.

So the sense of "Stop academics and there's no distress" is that what is called "scholarship" in the world consists of saying various things, making up various things to increase people's confusion. So when you eliminate that, there is no distress or confusion. Distress implies anxiety and uncertainty.

"'Yes' and 'Yeah'" refer to rules of propriety in responding to people when called. "Yes" is respectful and polite, while "Yeah" is a casual response. "How far apart are 'Yes' and 'Yeah'?" means how different are they—to whom would it be problematic to speak in this way or that?

"'Good' and 'bad'" means you say a certain way is good and praise it, and say a certain way is bad and despise it; but even so, how different are they? Lao-tzu's meaning is that originally "good" means uncontrived disinterest, so this is not something verbally said to be good. Thus the so-called good of running around in the world is not too different from bad.

"What people fear" follows on the above, saying that even so, what ordinary people fear should of course be feared. What ordinary people fear are the sky, the earth, spirits, laws, and punishment.

The preceding "How far apart are 'Yes' and 'Yeah'? How far apart are 'good' and 'bad'?" is a way of proceeding that is characteristic of Lao-tzu, who doesn't utilize wit.

"Wild" means people's craving and seeking for honor and gain are wild and disorderly no end. So the masses cheerfully crave and seek honor and gain with pleasure and delight, as pleased with this as if they were enjoying a feast.

“Like climbing a terrace in springtime” means that they feel there is no better entertainment than honor and gain; they feel as gratified as if they were enjoying the view from a high place on a spring day.

“Indifferent” means not heavily attached or involved. “Showing no sign” means not manifesting a single thought of honor or gain.

“Squirming, as if having nowhere to rest” means not having any motive or intention.

“Everyone has excess” means everyone wants a superabundance of honor and advantage.

To “seem lacking” means seeming to have forgotten about honor and advantage. “I have the mind of an ignoramus” because of having forgotten name and gain. “Blank” means nothing’s there. This is the undifferentiated mind.

“Bright” means clarifying, “inquisitive” means examining things in detail. “At a loss” means ignorant, “light” means unattached, “as an ocean breeze” means like wind blowing over the sea without going anywhere. The idea here is that worldly people have something in mind they aim for, so they labor for that. Without that, one is like this passage says.

Also, the use of “like” and “as if” all along here is likewise Lao-tzu’s procedure.

To “have purposes” means that the reason people are thus is they do things for some purpose, so after all it is done for their sake.

“Dull” means ignorant; he is dull because of not knowing any desire. “Lowly” means not seeking honor, not thinking about repute. Those who seek honor and think of repute easily get excited thinking about what won’t work or what they can’t do, but once you no longer see honor you’re down-to-earth. “Dull” and “lowly” refer to the aforementioned “mind of an ignoramus.”

“I value seeking to feed from the mother” corresponds to the foregoing “like an infant before it can smile.” “Seeking to feed from the mother” refers to an infant nursing at the breast. Lao-tzu’s meaning is that an infant’s nursing, without greed, is valuable in the sense that this state of mind is good.

[21]

THE APPEARANCE OF GREAT VIRTUE

The appearance of great virtue only follows the Way.
The Way as an entity is but vague, indistinct.
Indistinct and vague, therein are forms;
vague and indistinct, therein are things.
Mysterious and inscrutable, therein is spirit.
That spirit is very pure; therein is truth.
From of old up to the present,
the name has not disappeared;
thereby are examined all beginnings.
How do I know all beginnings are so?
By this.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

To say that "great virtue" has an appearance does not mean talent, or the appearance of bravery, but entering into emptiness that is nothing when you look. When you reach that state, you naturally have the appearance of mature virtue.

Having the appearance of mature virtue is due to following the Way as it is, so it says that only the Way is followed. That Way is then described.

"Indistinct and vague" both mean indefinite, indescribable, inexpressible. This refers to the substance. The appearance of great virtue is indescribable and indefinite, but that doesn't mean there's nothing at all. There seem somehow to be forms therein; there seem

somehow to be things. It's not nothing as children or fools suppose, so it says there are forms and there are things.

"Mysterious and inscrutable" means deep and dark. Within that profound darkness there is an indescribable spirit. "Pure" means unadulterated essence. "Truth" means clear, unsurpassed, perfect truth.

This chapter, from "The Way as an entity" to "therein is truth" is hard to express. Because it is the inexplicable subtle Way, it repeats the same thing over and over, changing the rhyme, praising in various ways as something without artificiality, pure, and subtle. Those who succeeded in entering to the uncontrived Way in those days must have been rare.

"Has not disappeared" means it does not change; "the name" means the term "The Way."

"Thereby are examined" means in terms of this uncontrived Way. "Examine" means to observe each particular. Because it means looking through, to read it "go through," "supervise," or "examine" means the same thing. "All beginnings" means all good deeds. What this means is that all good deeds, if not uncontrived, cannot be called basic good. Therefore it "supervises all beginnings."

How do I know this is so? "By this"; meaning that to know that too is by means of the uncreated wellspring of the Way.

[22]

THE FLEXIBLE REMAIN WHOLE

The flexible remain whole.
The twisted straightens.
The hollow is filled.
The worn-out is renewed.
The lacking gain,
plenty confuses.
Therefore sages embrace the one,
and act as a model for the world.
They do not see themselves, so they are aware.
They do not affirm themselves, so they are
distinguished.
They do not take pride in themselves, so they are
successful.
They are not conceited, so they last.
Only because they do not contend,
no one in the world can contend with them.
Is the old saying that the flexible remain whole empty
talk?
When truthfulness is complete, it resorts to this.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

Flexibility is seen in swords and trees. A sword made only of highly tempered steel snaps easily. If it is raw steel, it flexes freely, and so it doesn't snap. The same goes for trees. Strong trees don't bend, so they break. Weak trees

like willows bend in the wind, so they don't break. This is what is meant by "the flexible remain whole."

As for "The twisted straightens," a carpenter's string can be stretched anywhere to straighten things because it can be twisted around in any way.

These two lines are similes for how the hard and strong readily speak out, but the flexible and yielding do not perish.

Also, in office, someone who is absolutely direct and cannot be flexible cannot criticize the ruler's wrongs discreetly, and so instead brings destruction on himself. One who can be flexible in following the ruler naturally criticizes discreetly. This is the sense of these two lines.

"The hollow is filled." Water is an example of this. Water doesn't accumulate on high ground, nor does it sink in. So it is with people. If you lower yourself and consider yourself inadequate, people will bring good, and good things will gather.

"The worn-out is renewed." The leaves of plants and trees are examples of this. Dry leaves fall, so new leaves come out. If the dry leaves didn't fall, the fresh foliage couldn't come out. This is the worn-out being renewed. For people too, whether in poverty, lowliness, or misfortune, or in bad company, if you can tolerate the bad, not thinking it bad, and soften the badness, then both intellect and character improve.

After all, if you haven't been poor you won't get rich, and if you haven't been lowly you won't become noble.

"The lacking gain." Though this means wealth, it applies to everything. When you're poor and have little, you work hard and eventually acquire a lot.

"Plenty confuses." When you have a lot, you start doing all sorts of things, and get confused by that. For example, even in something like poetics, when you study poetics too much you get confused by a multiplicity of issues and become a lousy poet. Even without studying poetics, poets

devote themselves diligently and know what poetry is all about, so they are skillful.

“Embrace the one.” “Embrace” means to hold and keep. “One” is the smallest number. That “one” refers to the Way of emptiness without artifice. Sages simply relinquish everything and keep to the Way of emptiness, and become models for the whole world.

“They do not see themselves” speaks in terms of intelligence. Sages, as mentioned above, just keep the One and have no idea of having seen for themselves, so as people tell them all sorts of things they turn out to be very aware.

“They do not affirm themselves” speaks in terms of honor. “Pride” is boasting of accomplishments, “conceit” is boasting of abilities. It means boasting of your own capability. “Not being conceited” here means not boasting of your virtue. To “last” means to survive a long time.

“They do not contend” means they have no interest in contention with others. “No one can contend with them” means there’s no contention with sages.

“The old saying” refers to the ancient maxim that “The flexible remain whole.” “When truthfulness is complete, it resorts to this” means that flexible people can’t get beaten; they get back to where they were with body and life intact.

[23]

SPEAKING LITTLE IS NATURAL

Speaking little is natural.
Thus a whirlwind doesn't last all morning,
a rain shower doesn't last all day.
Who does this? Sky and earth.
If even sky and earth cannot go on forever,
how indeed can humans?
As for those who follow the Way in practice,
with the Way, they are equanimous toward the Way;
with virtue, they are equanimous toward virtue;
in failure, they are equanimous toward failure.
Those who are equanimous toward the Way
are just as happy to attain the Way.
Those who are equanimous toward virtue
are just as happy to have virtue.
Those who are equanimous toward failure
are just as happy when they experience failure.
When faith is insufficient, there is distrust.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"Speaking little is natural" means there is no need for a lot of talk. When you say what the Way is like, the Way cannot be said to be anything to speak of. There's nothing particular to say; there's no need for a lot of talk, no more than to simply say "nature."

"A whirlwind doesn't last all morning." Morning is but a while; it doesn't blow all morning long. "A rain shower

doesn't last all day." It doesn't shower all day long. "Who does this?"—"this" refers to showers and whirlwinds; "Sky and earth" means these are the doings of sky and earth.

"Cannot go on forever" means not lasting all morning or all day. "How indeed can humans?" means that the gains and losses and successes and failures of the human world are of course uncertain—it's all natural.

"Those who follow the Way in practice" means those who cultivate practice of the Way. "With the Way, they are equanimous toward the Way" and so on means whatever is the Way, they leave it at that; whatever is virtue or failure, they let it be virtue or failure.

"Failure" is the opposite of virtue. It comprises not following the Way, not being virtuous, and not attaining success. Whatever is bad is called "failure."

"They are just as happy to attain the Way" means when they attain the Way they also enjoy the Way. The same applies to virtue. "Just as happy when they experience failure" means that if they find no guidance or virtue, they're content with that too. Why? When they lose, they let the loss be. The ultimate sense is whether it be the Way or not the Way, virtue or not virtue, good or bad, benefit or harm, gain or loss, not to take it to heart, not to keep your mind on any of it—this is called becoming free of artificiality, or entering into emptiness, in accord with Nature.

However, to be like this it is necessary to really believe in the Way. If that faith is insufficient, it is impossible to comprehend. So it says, "When faith is insufficient, there is distrust."

[24]

ONE ON TIPTOE CAN'T KEEP STANDING

One on tiptoe can't keep standing,
one with legs spread cannot walk.
Those who see themselves are not aware;
those who affirm themselves are not distinguished.
Those who take pride in themselves have no merit;
those who are self-conceited don't last.
On the Way, these are called leftovers and abnormal
growths.
People may dislike them, so those who have the Way do
not stay.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

The first two lines are metaphors. "Standing on tiptoe" is stretching upward. "Can't keep standing" means can't stand long. This is a metaphor meaning that when people extend themselves unreasonably, they don't grow, even if they want to. In the end they tumble.

"One with legs spread cannot walk" is a metaphor for those who want to expand unreasonably. Someone with his legs spread wide can't walk; after all it doesn't work.

Similarly, in regard to intelligence as well, those who presume they've seen for themselves are not aware. As for those who don't see themselves, people bring all sorts of good things, so they become aware.

"Those who affirm themselves" refers to arts and abilities. Those who think themselves great do not become

famous; it is those who think themselves inadequate and incomplete who become distinguished.

“Taking pride in yourself” means taking pride in virtue. When you take pride in virtue yourself, others detract from it, so it doesn’t last long.

“On the Way” means that people who see themselves and affirm themselves, who take pride in themselves and are self-conceited, are called leftovers and abnormal growths on the Way. “Leftovers” means uneaten food; “abnormal growths” refer to things like wens, lumps, and so on. The point is that on the Way those things are referred to contemptuously in this manner. When you see yourself and consider yourself right with pride, then knowledge and virtue become useless superfluities, which people will find ugly.

Here, “people” are referred to in relation to the leftovers and abnormal growths. To “dislike them” means to find them repulsive. “Do not stay” means not being here. So people who have the Way are claiming no knowledge or virtue or talent for themselves.

[25]

THERE IS SOMETHING, AN UNDIFFERENTIATED WHOLE

There is something,
an undifferentiated whole,
born before sky and earth,
silent and solitary,
unique and unchanging,
going everywhere without danger,
thereby being a mother for the world.
I do not know its name, but label it the Way.
Imposing a name on it, I call it great.
“Great” implies travel,
travel implies distance,
distance implies return.
Therefore the Way is great,
the sky is great,
earth is great,
and leadership is great too.
Within the realm are four greats,
and leadership is one among them.
Humans derive laws from earth,
earth derives laws from the sky,
the sky derives laws from the Way,
the Way derives laws from Nature.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“There is something, an undifferentiated whole” means that there is something, but when you say what sort of thing it is, it cannot be named, cannot be described, cannot be indicated in any way; it is completely undifferentiated, indistinct.

“Born before sky and earth.” This thing has existed since before the separation of sky and earth. “Silent and solitary” means that thing has no color, shape, or smell. It is just silent and solitary.

“Unique and unchanging.” There is nothing that can be compared to this, so it is said to be unique. “Unchanging” means it does not alter.

“Going everywhere” means circulating. “Without danger” means there is nothing perilous. When people go to unsuitable places, that’s dangerous. For example, if a Confucian goes where Buddhism is popular, that’s a type of danger. However, the Way is not like that; though it goes everywhere and anywhere, it’s not dangerous.

“A mother for the world” means a parent to all things and beings in the world. There is also some nuance in saying “mother” instead of “parent.” Lao-tzu’s Way is based on the Way of the Receptive and makes flexible harmonization its path, so he says “mother.”¹ This is like when Buddhist writings say that “Faith is the foundation of the path, the mother of virtues.”

“I label it the Way.” When we say “Way,” it seems like it has some form. But if we don’t give it a name, we have no means of referring to it. This must be a substitute for the name, as a label takes the place of a name.

“I call it great” means it can only be called great, that is, vast. “Travel” means that in its immensity it can circulate everywhere; circulating everywhere, it is remote, distant. And, while remote, it returns to the origin, so it implies return. When people become free from artificiality, the unshakable stability of this basis is called successful “return.”

“Therefore the Way is great” means that though people think leadership is great, sky and earth are greater, and the Way is even greater. “Leadership is great too” is Lao-tzu’s way of going about things. Even having realized the greatness of freedom from artificiality and entered into it, this way of proceeding does not abandon the world or destroy it, so the book says leadership is great too. “Within the realm” means in the world.

“Humans derive laws from earth.” Leaders are also human. So here, wherever people live, they must depend on the earth for their clothing, food, and drink. This is regarding earth as law.

“Earth derives laws from the sky.” Even the earth doesn’t produce anything where it is not touched by the sky’s rain, dew, frost, snow, and sun, so earth has to take the sky as law.

The sky and earth take the Way for law. As for the Way, in the sense that it is not something that adds anything artificial at all, he says the Way takes its laws from Nature.

[26]

WEIGHTINESS IS THE ROOT OF LIGHTNESS

Weightiness is the root of lightness, calm is the ruler of activity.

Thus princes travel all day without leaving their supply wagons.

Though they have beautiful views, they abide at peace, transcendent.

How can the master of ten thousand chariots slight the world for personal reasons?

Slights result in loss of subjects, agitation results in loss of rulership.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Weightiness is the root of lightness” means the inner mind is serious and calm. In everything, the serious can command the frivolous, the calm can command the agitated, so these are called the “root” and the “ruler.” In any case, this is said because you can't accomplish anything without being calm and serious. Weighty calm is none other than freedom from artifice.

“Supply wagons” have cargo space and are drawn by oxen, so they are called heavyweight. “Without leaving” refers to saddlebag provisions. Even a light cavalry pursuing an enemy will inevitably get beaten if it gets separated from its supplies. In the same way, no matter how busy work may be, unless you are serious and calm it won't get done. When you remain serious and calm, work

turns out well. “Thus princes travel all day without leaving their supply wagons.”

“Beautiful views” means elegant vistas. To “abide at peace” is to live in contentment. “Transcendent” means going beyond. No matter what beautiful vistas they have, they don’t gape at them excitedly. Transcending beautiful vistas, they think nothing of beautiful views and so do not lose their gravity and calm. As princes are this way, how can a ruler govern the world while flighty and excitable?

“Loss of subjects” means inability to command the loyalty of the world. “Loss of rulership” means losing the role of ruler.

Reference to “slighting the world for personal reasons” means it is imperative to be more serious than the world. “How can the master of ten thousand chariots slight the world for personal reasons?” implies disregarding oneself to lead the world.¹

[27]

GOOD TRAVEL HAS NO RUTS OR TRACKS

Good travel has no ruts or tracks,
good speech has no flaws or faults,
good planning doesn't use calculation;
what is well closed has no key but cannot be opened,
what is well bound has no bonds but cannot be
released.

Thus sages are always good at saving people,
so no one is abandoned.

They are always good at saving things,
so nothing is abandoned.

This is called concealing understanding.

Therefore good people are teachers of people who are
not good;

people who are not good are assistants of good people.

Without respecting the teachers,
without cherishing the assistants,
even knowledge is great confusion;
this is called blocking subtlety.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"Good travel" means being able to go anywhere. "No tracks" implies no trail is needed. This means cart and horse are not needed. It is only for physical travel that cart and horse are needed. Those who travel by the uncontrived Way can reach anywhere without traveling bodily, so cart and horse are not needed.

“Flaws” are flaws in gems, “faults” are reprehensible things. These flaws and faults are due to flapping your lips. Those who speak well can explain without using mouth and tongue; because they don’t explain vocally, they don’t misspeak, and so they say nothing blameworthy.

“Closing” means shutting, concealing. For example, when you hide money and jewels, no matter how securely you lock them up, they can be broken into and taken. Those who hide them skillfully don’t let anyone know where they put them, so there’s no need for lock and key, as there’s no way to break in and take them.

“Bound” means tied up tightly. This refers to things like contracts with others, or promises. “Bonds” are ties.

The foregoing are all metaphors. Lao-tzu’s meaning here is that those who have become free from artifice do not depend on anything among the traces of form, like not needing tracks, flaws, calculations, keys, or bonds.

“Thus . . .” having become free from contrivance this way, one does not grasp that or reject this, so there is no abandoning people either.

“Concealing understanding” means that distinguishing good and bad is so-called understanding. Being as if not knowing good and bad, not distinguishing good and bad, is therefore called “concealing understanding.”

“People who are not good are assistants of good people” means that when interacting with people who are not good, they become like them. Because they enable us to understand that bad people are bad and hard to deal with, they are called “assistants.”

“Without respecting the teachers, without cherishing the assistants” means you should respect teachers and care about assistants. To do otherwise is great confusion.

As for “blocking subtlety,” “blocking” means obstructing, obscuring, choking off. This world being what it is, it is to be expected that there is good and there is bad too. Not to abandon them but to make use of them is called subtle

function. To discriminate, despise, and reject is called blocking or choking off subtle function.

[28]

KNOWING THE MALE

Knowing the male, keep the female,
to be a valley stream for the world.
Being a valley stream to the world,
constant virtue inseparable,
you return to the state of the infant.
Knowing the white, keep the black,
to be a model for the world.
Being a model for the world,
constant virtue unchanging,
you return to infinity.
Knowing the glorious, keep the ignominious,
as a valley for the world,
and constant virtue is sufficient,
and you return to the state of unworked wood.
When unworked wood is split up, it is made into
utensils;
when sages use it, they become chiefs of office.
So a big chop doesn't splinter.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Knowing the male, keep the female” means you don't show your strength just because you're strong. Even though strong, you keep flexible and yielding.

A “valley stream” is a watercourse through the mountains. It is where the water of two mountains comes down. This means being a resort for the world.

“Constant virtue inseparable” means not losing the virtue of normalcy.

“You return to the state of the infant” means going back to the essence of infancy, being like an infant. It is going along with others, but like an infant not being useful. Even while going along with others like an infant, you don’t lose the Way or virtue. That is why it says, “constant virtue inseparable.”

“Knowing the white, keep the black” means because of clear recognition you stay in the dark. It means remaining ignorant. But being in the dark is not itself enough to be a “model for the world”; being intelligent and aware and yet remaining ignorant is like the example of the ancient sage-king Shun being fond of asking questions.

“Infinity” means ultimate nothingness.

“Knowing the glorious, keep the ignominious” means though wealthy and noble, remaining poor and humble. It means not showing off to others, not being proud of yourself, having no arrogance or conceit at all.

A “valley” represents where everyone in the world returns. “Sufficient” refers to those who have returned to the state of unworked wood. “Unworked wood” means simplicity, plainness.

“When unworked wood is split up, it is made into utensils.” Because utensils are things made by cutting up raw wood, their basic element is wood. So too of humans: when they go back to the basic like that and act from there, everything works out fine.

“Use it” means using the basic “unworked wood,” being humble and not affected.

“Chiefs of office” stand above other people. The idea is that while sages stand above others, they do not put on lofty airs.

“A big chop doesn’t splinter” means that magnanimous judgment does not make petty distinctions of good and bad, but just judges by the basics.

[29]

THOSE WHO WOULD WANT TO TAKE THE WORLD

Those who would want to take the world and contrive
to do it,
I see that they simply cannot.
For the sacred vessel of the world, artifice will not do.
Those who contrive spoil it, those who grasp lose it.
Of all beings, some go, some follow; some puff, some
blow;
some are strong, some weak; some are supported,
some collapse.
Therefore sages avoid extremes, avoid extravagance,
avoid arrogance.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

As Lao-tzu's time was one of chaos and civil war contending for the land, this chapter too appears to have been spoken in reference to that.

To "contrive to do it" means doing all sorts of things trying to take the world, having all sorts of preoccupations. This is very much at odds with Lao-tzu's freedom from contrivance.

"I see that they simply cannot." "Simply" means that we don't see anyone who ever succeeded in taking the world by contriving to get it; we only see those who didn't get it.

"The sacred vessel of the world" means that the world is not a human implement, it is an implement of the spirits. "Sacred vessel" is like saying everything in the world.

“Artifice will not do” refers to making all sorts of adjustments.

“Those who contrive . . .” means those who contrive to take invariably fail, those who grasp invariably lose. The idea here is that the world is won naturally without taking, and works naturally without contrivance.

In China, the First Emperor of Ch’in and Emperor Wen of Sui are examples of failing by contrivance, losing by grabbing.¹ In Japan too, characters like Nobunaga and Shingen were all cases of this.²

“Some go . . .” While there are those who go away and leave, there are those who obey and follow. From here on the sense is that the beings in the world are manifold and various. “Go” means to turn away and leave; “follow” means to conform and come along, to follow admiringly.

“Puffing” is breathing out gently, “blowing” is expelling breath forcefully. “Some puff, some blow” means that there are those who brag and those who boast. There are those who are strong, as well as those who are tired and weak. Some things succeed, and some fail.

“Extremes” refers to extremes in anything; anything odd or weird. Sages defer to nature without contrivance, so they have no such quirks. So it says they “avoid” them.

“Extravagance” is pride in material wealth; “avoiding extravagance” means being frugal in all things. “Avoiding arrogance” means being deferential. “Arrogance” means insolence, haughtiness, imperiousness.

[30]

THOSE WHO ASSIST HUMAN RULERS BY MEANS OF THE WAY

Those who assist human rulers by means of the Way
do not coerce the world with weapons.
In that business, it is good to go back home.
Where an army camps, brambles grow;
after a major war, there are always bad years.
Therefore the good are efficient, that's all;
they don't presume to use it to grab power.
Be efficient without conceit, efficient without pride,
efficient without indulgence, efficient when
necessary, efficient without forcing.
When beings reach maturity, they age.
This they say is not the Way.
What is not the Way is to be stopped early.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

The preceding chapter spoke about rulers; this chapter talks about ministers, officials, strategists, and so on. "Do not coerce the world with weapons" means they don't fortify military strength to challenge the world.

"That business" means that manner of action. To "go back home" means to set off to return home. For example, when you kill a lot of people, you may have gained a victory, but your heirs won't last long. When you take a lot of territory from others, your own clan eventually perishes. Therefore people with the Way, knowing this, are able to go

back home, and so do not destroy others' nations and do not kill lots of people.

An example of this is Tokugawa Ieyasu. Whereas half the land was against him at the battle of Sekigahara, after unification when everyone surrendered he granted amnesty, and executed no more than four or five men.

"Where an army camps" offers evidence of how bad it is to overpower the world with arms. "Where an army camps" means where a military encampment has been for a long time, it ruins the cultivated fields, so they become overgrown with brushes and brambles, and turn into wasteland. This is because when an encampment is there for a long time, there is no planting or plowing.

"After a major war" means after mass human death; "bad years" means famines, epidemics, and the like. These all come about through accumulation of human enmity.

"The good are efficient" means that good people resolve things early. King Wu of Chou warred with King Chou just once.¹ For this reason, he naturally killed few people, and didn't destroy the fields. So the good resolve things early; efficiency means resolving things soon.

"They don't presume to use it to grab power" means they don't grab and exploit military power. King Wu's acquisition of the realm, for example, was from the beginning never greed for land. He took it when the other [King Chou] had destroyed himself by extreme malfeasance, and therefore he didn't need power and didn't waste time.

Even a gourd is hard to pick when it's unripe. When it ripens fully, it pops off the vine without requiring any trouble or time.

"Be efficient without conceit" means don't get conceited from confidence in your own military strength. "Pride" is conceit over one's achievement. It is embellishing upon achievements.

"Indulgence" is being willful and whimsical.

“When necessary” means it’s better to act only on the basis of imperative necessity.

“Without conceit” onward repeats the same thing in different words, as a warning.

“Age” implies decline. “What is not the Way is to be stopped early” means that ways of doing things that are not the Way should be stopped earlier rather than later. Stop them immediately, this very day, right now!

[31]

THOSE WHO WANT WAR

Those who want war are instruments of ill omen;
people hate them, so those who have the Way do not
deal with them.

Thus princes normally value the left, and when at war
value the right.

Weapons are instruments of ill omen, not tools of true
leaders,
who use them only when unavoidable.

To be disinterested is best, winning without praising it.
For praising it means enjoying killing people.

Those who enjoy killing people cannot get their will in
the world.

So for felicitous things the left is preferred,
for unlucky things the right is preferred.

For this reason the assistant commander is on the left,
while the top commander is on the right.

This means when in a position of superior power,
occupy it mourning.

The people killed are multitudes; weep for them sadly.
When you win a war, mourn for it.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

This chapter is also about people in the role of military command. "Those who want war" refers to people who avidly employ or direct armed forces. "Ill omen" is misfortune. They are misfortunes for nations. "People hate

them” because they always use disgustingly brutal methods; both their enemies and the majority of people hate them. Not only that, because they like to go to war, even their allies hate them.

“Do not deal with them” means not occupying that position. Taoist dislike for three generations in a family becoming generals is the same idea.

“Normally” means in everyday life, ordinarily. To “value the left” means to make the left the first seat. From “value the right” to “for praising” is one continuum. Since it speaks of “weapons,” it repeats the beginning. The idea is that it is not only those who like to make war, that is, those who act in the role of commander, who are of ill omen; even the instruments called weapons become implements of misfortune. They are not the tools of true leaders.

“Disinterested” means having no greed, being unaffected. Having no greed, one becomes disinterested.

“Cannot get their will” means they won’t attain their ambition and establish great success.

From “So” on reiterates the foregoing. “Felicitous things” are things like celebrations. “The left is preferred” means the left is made the first place, as before.

An “assistant commander” is a supporting role, such as a forward commander. To be “on the left” means to be on the left in the advance.

The “top commander” is the supreme commander. He is “on the right”; the right is behind. In the army, the left is forward, the right to the rear. The point is that this is so in contrast to ordinary manners, where the top commander would be on the left and the assistant commander would be on the right.

“This means when in a position of superior power . . .” In terms of being in a superior position, the right is preferred as in rites of mourning. It is in mourning that the right becomes valued. The point is to call attention to the fact that war is not an auspicious thing, it is a very bad thing!

“People killed . . . sadly.” When many of your allies have died, of course you grieve; but it seems that there also used to be rites of mourning even for enemies after the slaughter of a massive victory.

“When you win a war . . .” This should be read as if it said “this war.” Because of killing so many people, you weep sadly. The point is that when you’ve seen this, even when there’s victory in war you mourn for it.

[32]

THE CONSTANT OF THE WAY IS NAMELESS

The constant of the Way is nameless.
Though unworked wood is small,
the whole world does not presume to subordinate it.
If lords and kings could keep it, everyone would resort
to them.
Sky and earth, joining, shower sweet dew;
no man commands it, it is naturally equal.
Beginning definition, there are names;
once names exist, you must know where to stop.
By knowing where to stop, you're not endangered.
The presence of the Way in the world
is like streams to the rivers and seas.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"The constant of the Way." The Way is the reason of the world. If it's the basic constant Way, it can't have any specific name as such and such a path or way. The point is that the "Confucian way," the "Buddhist way," or any such particular "way" is not the fundamental Way. Of course, what Lao-tzu said was not Confucianism or Buddhism. Buddhism, particularly, had not even come to China then. But speaking in terms of principle, this is the idea.

"Though unworked wood is small . . ." Then what is the fundamental Way? "Unworked wood" is the basic Way. Unworked wood is wood that hasn't been planed, that is the pure unfabricated Way, the natural Way. So this

unworked wood, having no embellishment, is nothing special, and so it doesn't seem great, but insignificant. It is what has been embellished that seems great.

"Keep" means to preserve the unworked wood. "Resort" means everyone in the world comes following.

"Sky and earth . . ." The whole world coming to join is like sky and earth combining to "shower sweet dew." "Sweet dew" just means rain, dew, frost, snow, and the like. It is not limited to the sweet dew that falls as an auspicious omen. Behold that sweet dew—without any contrivance it moistens evenly everywhere, reaching all things. The Way of unworked wood is like that. This is expressed as "no man commands it, it is naturally equal."

"Beginning definition, there are names" means that the unfabricated, unworked wood gives way to all sorts of craft, and then names come to be. "Once names exist" means that once names such as Confucianism and Buddhism have already come about, then names cannot be dispensed with entirely, so this is not saying to abandon or reject them all. "You must know where to stop" means that if names cannot be dispensed with, just know where to stop. If you know where to stop, even if there are names, you do not forget the nameless unworked wood, so you don't get trapped in names, because you're not in peril. If you don't know where to stop, then you fall into danger and are imperiled.

All things in the world are like the water of streams to rivers and seas. All streams lead to rivers and seas; all things, all names, wind up on the Way. So as long as you know where to stop, even with names there's no difference from unworked wood.

[33]

THOSE WHO KNOW OTHERS ARE INTELLIGENT

Those who know others are intelligent,
those who know themselves are lucid.
Those who conquer others have power,
those who conquer themselves are strong.
Those who are content are wealthy,
those who act strongly have will.
Those who do not lose their places last.
To die without perishing is longevity.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Those who know others are intelligent.” Knowing the good and bad in others is called intelligence. Knowing yourself, that is, knowing your limitations, is called “lucidity.” People who know others often don’t know themselves. People well aware of their own limitations don’t talk about others.

“Those who conquer others . . .” Those who like to prevail over others do not know how to overcome themselves. “Conquering yourself” means overcoming selfishness, eliminating haughty and arrogant thoughts. Someone like that doesn’t think of conquering others.

“Those who are content are wealthy.” Even if you have a huge hoard of gold, as long as you’re not content you still have a craving heart, so you’re poor. But even if you haven’t got a single piece of gold, if you yourself are satisfied, then you are rich.

“Those who act strongly have will.” No matter how much determination you may have, if you regress, that is not “will,” so acting strongly without regressing is called “will.”

“Those who do not lose their places” means finding peace in your place. It means not losing yourself. To “last” means to continue unchanging. Those who cannot be at peace in their place eventually change.

“Die without perishing” means there is something that does not pass away. As such, don’t seek it outside but only seek it in the inner mind.

The line “To die without perishing is longevity,” as it says even in the annotations, is not something that can be interpreted in words. It is reasonable to say it is subjectively experienced and subjectively realized. But this phenomenon is not just one thing—it applies to everything. Hygienists say this refers to spiritual immortals not dying, but in view of the preceding sayings of this chapter, it doesn’t look like it refers to the art of not dying and not aging. The emphasis of these sayings is simply on reason.

[34]

THE GREAT WAY IS UNIVERSAL

The Great Way is universal; it can be left or right.
All beings are born depending on it, and it does not
refuse.

Accomplishment complete without dwelling on it,
it covers name and existence,
accepts and nurtures myriad beings without acting as
master.

Therefore, always being without desire, it can be called
small;

all beings resort to it, yet it does not act as master, so it
can be called great.

This is how sages are able to attain that greatness,
by not aggrandizing themselves;
therefore they can attain that greatness.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Universal” does not merely mean extensive; what is
“universal” is not something limited, like Lao-tzu says, not
something crooked or winding. This is to be found to the
“left” and to the “right.”

“Depending on it” means being born due to the Great
Way. “It does not refuse” means the Great Way does not
refuse to produce life because it’s hard work.

“Without dwelling” means not abiding in the realm of
reputation claiming credit for its own accomplishments.
“Covers” means that the blessings of the Great Way cover

all beings. "Without acting as master" means there is no domineering, no possessiveness. Therefore it is called desireless.

"It can be called small" means that being desireless and unassuming as stated above, it appears small, and could be called small. "It does not act as master" means that there is no sense of being the boss, so "it can be called great."

"This is how . . ." This idea has been expressed any number of times. Not aggrandizing yourself means not considering yourself great or making yourself out to be great.

[35]

HOLDING ON TO UNIVERSAL LAW

Holding on to universal law,
going everywhere in the world,
going without harm,
it is safe, peaceful, easy.
Music and food go to guests, then stop.
Verbal expressions of the Way are so bland they're
flavorless.
When you look at it, it isn't visible.
When you listen for it, it isn't audible.
When you use it, it's inexhaustible.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Universal law” refers to the Way of Nature, the Way of emptiness.

No thing is bigger than sky and earth, but even they have form, so they have limits. But this Way has no limits, so it goes everywhere in the world.

In the affairs of the world, sometimes you encounter things that are right, and sometimes you encounter things that aren't right. Only this Way of naturalness and emptiness goes everywhere without any disharmony, so there is no getting hurt. So it is safe, peaceful, easy.

“Music and food go to guests, then stop.” Nothing is more pleasing to the ear than music, but when you listen for a long time it comes to seem noisy. Nothing is more palatable than food, but afterward you don't even want to

eat. So both music and food are provided just once, and stopped when the guests have gone.

“Verbal expressions of the Way” means when you try to express the Way in words. “Bland” means nondescript, nothing particular. When you look, it’s not something visible, not a sight to see, nothing splendid. It’s not something fun to listen to, like music. Nevertheless “it’s inexhaustible”—even though flavorless, invisible, and inaudible, it performs extremely profound and subtle functions, without exhaustion.

The sense of this chapter is hard to express in words.

[36]

IN ORDER TO GATHER

In order to gather, you must extend.
In order to weaken, you must strengthen.
In order to eliminate, you must promote.
In order to take, you must give.
This is called concealing understanding.
The flexible overcome the adamant,
the yielding overcome the forceful.
Fish cannot leave the water.
A nation's weaponry shouldn't be shown to people.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

The word for "gather" has the same sense as "attract," "to draw to oneself," meaning to gather. To begin with, if you want to gather people, if all you do from the outset is try to recruit them, then people won't join. Therefore, if you want to gather people, first you have to network widely; otherwise no one will join.

The next lines up to "you must give" all express this same idea. They each refer to all matters, not just one thing.

So everything up to "you must give" is allegorical. Since the world is all this way, the point is to realize that if you are not flexible you can't overcome the adamant, and if you are not yielding you can't overcome the forceful. The allegories are for the purpose of expressing these two lines.

"Concealing understanding" is hiding enlightenment. The foregoing descriptions are of hiding enlightenment.

Anyway, the flexibility and yielding of which Lao-tzu speaks are different from the softness and weakness ordinarily spoken of. What Lao-tzu has in mind is this empty, natural Way with no artificiality.

“Fish cannot leave the water.” Just as fish cannot live outside of water, people should not depart from the Way for any reason. This implies that we should be thus flexible and yielding, without artificiality.

“Weaponry” pertains to military matters. “Show” means show off. This being so in any case, the idea is not to contend militarily.

[37]

THE WAY IS ALWAYS FREE FROM CONTRIVANCE

The Way is always free from contrivance,
but there's nothing it doesn't do.
If lords and kings could keep to it,
all people would be naturally won over.
Having been won over, if they wanted to act,
I would stabilize them with nameless plainness.
Nameless plainness does not even desire.
Calmed by not desiring, the world will correct itself.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

The constant Way is the fundamental Way. The Way is as is, so it is not something thought up. In any case, when being as such with nothing to do, in spite of doing nothing there's nothing that cannot be done. Because a path that involves deliberately doing something is dealt with in one way, there's always some other way it doesn't work, something that can't be done.

"Keep to" means to manage to keep to the constant Way. To be "won over" means to be influenced to submit and follow. "Having been won over, if they wanted to act" means that if it is done badly, after being won over they will try to rise up. Then they blunder. Therefore, at such a time, plainness without artificiality, simplicity without striving, is used to stabilize them.

This is an interesting phenomenon, which is in all things. As mentioned before, all of Lao-tzu's writing is general, not

about one specific thing, so, like a phantom or a shadow, it cannot be easily grasped. But if we apply it to something ourselves, it works.

For example, when people are won over, if we take advantage of that, we may get fixated on that too and ultimately forget the Way.

Suppose there is someone who almost knows the Way, and people are won over and follow along; already a school is formed. This is acting on being won over.

If it is someone who really does have the Way, when people come to know that, they will eventually be won over. Being “won over” doesn’t mean giving in; it just means not getting otherwise involved. That is called “stabilizing with nameless plainness.”

For example, in Song dynasty China, the partisans of Master Chu Hsi were called the Lo Faction, while the partisans of Su Tung-p’o were called the Shu Faction.¹ Better people would see to it that factions would not develop this way. Once a trend is established and a faction forms, bad things naturally come from it.

Also, even governing a nation or empire, good people who have the Way will prevent the establishment of a regime of rites and music. If established, these multiply. Not only that, if it looks like any sort of bureaucratic business is going to develop, they use inaction to see to it that it doesn’t come about.

Master Chu was from Lo, Su Tung-p’o was from Shu, so their followers were named the Lo Faction and the Shu Faction. “Nameless plainness” means there is no artificial contrivance. “Does not even desire” means that nameless plainness is desireless. When you do not desire, you have no prejudices, no thought at all, so you are spontaneously calm; thus the world too straightens out.

[38]

HIGHER VIRTUE ISN'T VIRTUOUS

Higher virtue isn't virtuous; thereby it has virtue.
Lower virtue does not fail to be virtuous; so it has no
virtue.

Higher virtue is uncontrived, and has no reason to
contrive.

Lower virtue does something, and has a reason to do it.
Higher benevolence does something, but with no
motive for acting.

Higher duty does something, and has a reason to do it.
Higher courtesy does something, but if no one
responds,
still makes the effort to go on.

So after losing the Way there's virtue;
after losing virtue there's benevolence;
after losing benevolence there's duty;
after losing duty there's courtesy.

Manners are thinness of trust
and the beginning of disorder.

Knowledge of precedent is a flower of the Way,
yet is the beginning of ignorance.

Therefore great people stay with the thick and don't
take the thin,

stay with the fruit and not the flower.

Thus they eliminate that and take this.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

If you read it according to the annotations, “Higher virtue isn’t virtuous” should be read “Higher virtue doesn’t consider it virtuous.” That means with higher virtue you don’t think yourself virtuous. But that is the import of Confucian books, and does not accord with Lao-tzu’s meaning. To read it “Higher virtue isn’t virtuous” is Lao-tzu’s intent. The idea is that the very highest virtue is nothing special at all, so it has nothing called “virtue.”

For example, a person should just be called a person. There’s no reason there should be a label of “virtue” in addition to that. Therefore the highest, original virtue has no so-called virtue. So this is called a virtuous person.

“Lower virtue does not fail to be virtuous.” Lower virtue does not refer to unexceptional ordinary people; it means there is certainly some so-called virtue there. This is not failing to be virtuous. So, because there is something superimposed on the nothing-special of higher virtue, this has no virtue.

“Uncontrived, and has no reason to contrive” means because higher virtue is something that is not fabricated, there’s nothing to contrive with it. “No reason to contrive” means there’s no such thing as doing thus and so for such and such a reason. To have a motive to act is to have intent. To have no motive to act is like hearing due to sound entering because you have ears, like smelling due to scents entering because you’ve got a nose. It means it is not done intentionally.

“Lower virtue does something.” To “do something” means there’s something to do. “Has a reason to do it” means doing thus and so because such and such occurred, doing something for a certain reason.

“Higher benevolence does something . . .” Benevolence is lower than virtue. Virtue cannot be defined, be it as compassionate or as dutiful. Benevolence is already defined as compassionate, so it is lower than virtue. “Does something” means that when you act compassionately, this

is created. However, as long as it is higher benevolence, there is no such thing as doing it for a particular motive. Therefore it has “no motive for acting.”¹

“Higher duty does something, and has a reason to do it.” Duty is somehow uneasy, so it is lower than benevolence. Therefore it has reasons for what it does.

“Higher courtesy does something, but if no one responds, still makes the effort to go on.” Ritualized manners are completely artificial, totally made up. Therefore something is done, and something done in return. If there is no accord, then you roll up your sleeves, withdraw, and go. Because manners involve definite ways in which one has to do things, when others don’t respond accordingly, it is necessary to induce them to do so.

Anyway, here it speaks of higher and lower virtue, but only the higher when it comes to benevolence, duty, and courtesy. Lao-tzu’s meaning is that even higher benevolence, duty, and courtesy are thus, so lower benevolence, lower duty, and lower courtesy are completely fabricated and not worth talking about. So he doesn’t mention them earlier either.

“So after losing the Way . . .” If we try to express the unsurpassed Way, the natural state is itself the Way. It is reason. Since what has something to be preserved is called virtue, that is already lower than the naturalness of the Way. Even so, just speaking of preserving it does not yet define virtue. When it comes to benevolence, it has a definite form, called compassion, so it is lower than virtue. Benevolence is compassion, so it is better than duty; duty has definite indications, and so it is lower. Hence the text runs them down step-by-step, saying that after losing the Way there’s virtue, after losing duty there is courtesy.

“Thinness of trust” means trust has diminished; this is the beginning of chaos. As for the sense of this passage, there are all sorts of manners, but to speak in terms of one instance, between father and son they are summed up in

familiarity. Rustics are like this, but leaving them aside, we can see the so-called courtesies between parents and children are all bribes.

Also, in the rites of mourning, when a parent dies, for three days you think of the winter wind and begin to weep. After that, you weep a certain number of times over a certain number of days. Past that, you weep morning and night. This is the sort of thing the text is talking about. These betoken slightness of trust, so they may be expected to turn into sources of trouble, beginnings of disturbance.

“Knowledge of precedent” means broad knowledge of events of yore, or what we now call scholarship. This means intellectual activity. True knowledge that is not fabricated is fine, but knowledge based on precedent is inconsistent. In the past, such and such happened, but so-and-so also happened; so is this right, is that wrong, which is better—in this way thoughts diverge, so it’s the beginning of ignorance.

As long as the fundamental is clear, then knowledge is clear even if you don’t look up a single word. Lao-tzu’s time was one of chaos, when they made all sorts of pretenses of ritualized manners and intellectual knowledge, so it is reasonable that he spoke in this way.

“The thick” means cultivating the Way and virtue. In “don’t take the thin,” following on the foregoing, “thin” means manners.

The “fruit” is the Way and virtue; the “flower” is knowledge of precedent. The idea of these two lines is that great people practice the Way and virtue, while those with knowledge of precedent and thinness of trust do not.

“Thus they eliminate that and take this.” Here, “that” means ritualism and intellectualism; “this” means the Way and virtue. “The Way” and “virtue” refer to the natural Way with no fabrication.

[39]

THOSE WHO GOT THE ONE BEFORE

Those who got the One before:

The sky attained the One, and thereby became clear.

The earth attained the One, and thereby became steady.

Spirits attained the One, and thereby became miraculous.

Valleys attained the One, and thereby became filled.

All beings attain the One; thereby they are alive.

Kings and lords attain the One, thereby being standards for the world.

What brings this about is one.

If the sky had no means of clearing, it would split.

If the earth had no means of stability, it would erupt.

If spirits had no way to make miracles, they would stop.

If valleys had no way to fill, they would dry up.

If myriad beings had no way to live, they would become extinct.

If kings and lords had no way to be standards, but prized high status, they would stumble.

So nobility is based on humility, loftiness is based on lowliness.

This is why lords and kings refer to themselves as alone and unsuccessful.

This is their practice of humility as being basic, is it not?

So when you've analyzed a carriage, there's no carriage.

You don't want jingling like jades or rattling like stones.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Those who got the One before” is going to say what has the One since antiquity. This gives the outline, presenting the individual elements that got the One, as follows. The One is the Way.

“The sky attained the One . . .” The sky is clear because of the Way of the sky. Earth is steady because of the Way of the earth. Spirits have the power of miracles because of the Way of spirits. The “power of miracles” means punishing or helping the living.

“Valleys” imply space. With the Way, mountains receive all sources of water and become filled.

Emperors, kings, and lords become “standards for the world” by means of this Way. “Standards for the world” means exemplars for the world.

“What brings this about is one” refers to accomplishment. “One” means having attained one or another particular way.

“If the sky had no means of clearing . . .” The “means” is the instrumentality. If the sky didn't clear, it wouldn't be ever clear and transparent as it is, but would be split. What follows is all that idea. “Erupt” means to quake and crumble. “Stop” means the power of miracles would stop, would be withdrawn.

To “prize high status” means merely being high in status, to no useful purpose. To “stumble” is to fall down.

“So nobility is based on humility.” Even kings and lords need the way of humility; if they are only elevated in status, they will fall, so they make humility basic. “Loftiness is based on lowliness” is an analogy to the foregoing “nobility is based on humility.” Basing nobility on humility is like high being founded on low. Even towers and mountains can't be “high” without a “low” base.

“Referring to oneself” means how you introduce yourself, or what you call yourself. “Alone” implies having few virtues, “unsuccessful” is read as “no good.”

“When you’ve analyzed a carriage, there’s no carriage.” If you remove each part one by one to take inventory, “These are wheels,” you say, taking off the wheels; “These are hubs,” you say, taking off the hubs; “These are axles,” “This is a shaft,” “This is a yoke”—when you’ve taken off each and every part, there’s no more carriage. It is as a whole that it is called a carriage.

“Jingling” and “rattling” both represent collections of stones. Jingling is smaller, rattling larger in expression. “Jades and stones,” even when shattered, are still called jade and stone; they cannot become “empty.” The carriage, analyzed into parts, ceases to exist as a “carriage” and becomes “empty.”

It is from within that emptiness that the function of the carriage emerges. Therefore the carriage can be construed to exist, and can be construed not to exist. Jades and stones, however, remain stuck in solid existence; such things cannot become “empty.”

So the point is that it is desirable to be like the carriage, not like jade and stone.

[40]

RETURN IS THE ACTION OF THE WAY

Return is the action of the Way.
Yielding is the function of the Way.
All beings in the world are born in existence;
existence is born in nonexistence.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Return” is the same as “withdrawal.” “The action of the Way” and “the function of the Way” are the same thing, just expressed in different terms. Lao-tzu’s Way is based on deference and softness, so its function is to return to flexibility.

Why does it make deference and softness its functions? Because all beings in the world originate in existence, while existence originates in nonexistence. Since being originates in nonbeing, nonbeing must be considered the essence of the Way. That being so, there is nothing to be proud of or conceited about, nothing to be adamant and forceful over. It is because of thinking something exists that people get proud, conceited, and overbearing.

[41]

WHEN THE BEST STUDENTS HEAR THE WAY

When the best students hear the Way,
they diligently put it into practice.
When mediocre students hear the Way,
it seems to be there, seems to disappear.
When the worst students hear the Way,
they laugh at it a lot.
If they didn't laugh,
it wouldn't be worth considering the Way.
Therefore, among established maxims are these:
The Way of enlightenment seems obscure.
The Way of equality seems ordinary.
The Way of progress seems backward.
Higher virtue is like a valley.
Great purity seems ignominious.
Extensive virtue seems insufficient.
Constructive virtue seems furtive.
Genuineness seems changeable.
Great rectitude has no stiffness.
Great vessels are completed late.
Big news is rarely voiced.
The greatest phenomenon has no form.
The Way is hidden, nameless;
but only the Way ably gives and perfects.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Students” means people who study the Way. The best students act on it earnestly because they think it quite reasonable.

“The Way” is the Way of emptiness and naturalness. It “seems to be there, seems to disappear” in the sense that while you’re hearing about it you think and feel the Way is reasonable, so it “seems to be there,” but after a while you forget it, so it “seems to disappear.”

The “worst students” are not worthy of being called students, but this follows the examples of referring to the “best students” and “mediocre students.” “They laugh at it” means that worldly people show their feelings and approve only of advancement. What they’ve gotten by greed they consider knowledge, so when people who know the Way tell them to be deferential and relinquish desires, then of course they laugh.

Here Lao-tzu does not only mean being laughed at by lesser students. If it is not laughed at by all people of the world, particularly Confucians, it is not worth considering the Way.

“Established maxims” are sayings left by people of ancient times. These refer to “The Way of enlightenment” on down.

“The Way of enlightenment seems obscure.” What is most clear seems somehow obscure, not clearly visible.

“The Way of equality” means the Way of the ordinary; the most ordinary way is in the same class as normal people, with nothing unusual apparent. “Ordinary” means being of the same kind. For example, in Lieh-tzu’s time there was a man named Master of Pot Hill who knew the Way well. When Lieh-tzu went to visit him, all along the route, in the teahouses and the inns, when people saw Lieh-tzu they deferred their seats to him in respect. But after he had heard the Way from the Master of Pot Hill, when he went back no one deferred their seats to him, but instead they fought him for a seat. This is someone on a high level who

is after all of the same species as an ordinary person, with nothing unusual, and so is not recognized by others.

“The Way of progress seems backward.” The way to make good progress doesn’t seem to be going forward, but seems to retreat. That seeming retreat is what gets ahead. In a desire to progress, to contend and challenge to get ahead ultimately doesn’t work. This is logical.

“Like a valley” means empty and receptive. People of lesser virtue reject with protestations of dislike and condemnation, but a valley never fails to admit whatever flows in, all murky, muddy waters.

“Great purity seems ignominious.” When you are very pure, that turns out to be ostentatious and seems somehow repulsive. Extensive virtue seems somehow lacking. So in these matters, people who have well-established virtues keep them private and do not show them. This is called being “furtive.” The most genuine and honest people do not have any motto like “A man never changes his word,” but rather seem changeable. This is called being furtive. In any case, the supreme Way has no ostentation.

Up to here is Lao-tzu’s basic meaning; from “great rectitude” down to “no form” are examples, but the examples become the basic meaning. They are explained in a dreamlike, shadowy way, so pay attention.

“Great rectitude” means to be very correct. When being very correct there are no edges, no stiffness. Half-baked rectitude is edgy, stiff.

“Great vessels are completed late.” Small vessels are soon completed, but great vessels are not made so readily. The same goes for people. People of great capacity are not as crafty as weaklings. Also, great achievements, in their own way, are naturally best accomplished slowly. Haste, in any case, is slovenly.

“Big news is rarely voiced.” “Rarely” means seldom or never. For example, what is announced all over has limits;

“big news” is what echoes everywhere without being announced.

As for “the greatest phenomenon,” Mount Tai in China and Mount Fuji in Japan are examples of immensity, but they still have form. What is greatest in size has no form.

“The Way is hidden, nameless.” “Hidden” means inscrutably subtle. The Way is something to which no specific name can be affixed. That is to say, as it states above, it seems obscure, it seems ordinary, it seems backward, it seems ignominious, it seems insufficient, it seems furtive, it has no edges, it is rarely voiced, and has no form; so it is inscrutably subtle and cannot be named.

“But only the Way ably gives and perfects.” While it cannot be named or put into words, to sum it up, the Way is very giving. “Giving” means not contending or challenging, but getting along with others. So it says the Way gives. “And perfects” means that giving alone is a partial order, with no prospect of complete fulfillment; and yet the Way does fulfill.

As mentioned earlier, here the text speaks in a dreamlike, shadowy way, so you have to look carefully into Lao-tzu’s meaning outside the surface of the words, or else you can’t get the sense.

[42]

THE WAY PRODUCES ONE

The Way produces one, one produces two;
two produce three, three produce myriad beings.
Myriad beings bear yin and hold yang;
neutral energy makes a blend.
What people dislike is to be alone, lacking, and
unsuccessful;
and yet that is what kings and nobles call themselves.
People may benefit by reduction, or lose by increase.
What people teach, it is also my duty to teach this:
Strongmen are not known for their death.
I consider this the father of teachings.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“One” is the absolute; “two” is the sun and moon; “three” is sky, earth, and humankind. Sky, earth, and humankind produce myriad beings. Look at this—originally they were all nonexistent.

To say that “myriad beings bear yin” means that they are born from yin and yang, so they are much like yin and yang, carrying yin on their backs while holding yang in front, with a neutral, empty energy blending yin and yang inseparably.

“Neutral” means empty. This is the one elemental energy. Therefore humans and all beings are here due to the Way of neutral emptiness.

“What people dislike” are disagreeable things. “That is what kings and nobles call themselves.” What he is saying is to see how it is because of the nobility of original empty nothingness that myriad beings can be what they are.

“Reduction” is lessening. This is the reason why the principles of increase and reduction are both in the symbol for Reduction in the *I Ching*. Taking from above to increase below is increase, enhancement, benefit; taking from below to add to above is reduction, loss, harm. To reduce yourself to give to the people is increase, enhancement, benefit. Try to add, and you reduce somewhere or other.

Not only this. Deferential people are respected by others, while arrogant people are despised by others. Here too, in this spirit, kings and nobles diminish themselves by calling themselves alone, lacking, and unsuccessful.

“What people teach . . .” What people teach, I also intend to teach as duty, he says, but where did “strongmen” ever die a decent death? This is because Lao-tzu’s Way does not value duty. Strength amounts to a misunderstanding of the teaching of duty.

The saying of Master Kao in Mencius that “Benevolence is inside while duty is outside” was not first articulated by Master Kao. It seems to me that it comes from this idea of Lao-tzu.

“I consider this the father of teachings.” He says he thinks this must be the highest of teachings. “The father of teachings” means the chief instruction.

[43]

THE GREATEST FLEXIBILITY IN THE WORLD

The greatest flexibility in the world rushes into the greatest firmness; nonbeing penetrates where there is no space.

This is how we know noncontrivance is beneficial. Unspoken instruction, uncontrived benefit—few in the world attain them.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Rushes into” is like saying “ably enters.” For example, water flows east, west, south, or north, depending on where people are; and conforms to whatever container it's put into, whether round or square, curved or straight. While it's such an extremely flexible thing, the slightest gap and it leaks right out. This means it will get through anything. Yet water also washes away large boulders.

An example of this phenomenon is the extremely fierce warrior who is so furious he never surrenders, but will surrender to a beautiful woman. Another example is when a warrior sent on a dangerous mission will get killed, while nothing will happen to a monk sent on the same mission.¹

“Nonbeing penetrates where there is no space” means that where there is no space, no opening or gap, something that has form cannot enter, but what has no form can enter. For example, if you put something solid like gold, silver, or iron on a freshly planed board, it doesn't permeate or penetrate at all. But when you put something fragrant or

foul smelling on the board, the fragrance or odor remains even after you take the object off, because fragrance and odor are formless.

“We know noncontrivance is beneficial.” Contrivance is of no benefit, and if badly done is harmful. For example, if a child comes up behind someone and does some mischief, that person won’t get angry. The little child may be mischievous, but it is not conniving. If the culprit were an adult, the victim would be very annoyed, because it would have been done intentionally, contrived for a purpose.

“Unspoken instruction.” People don’t want the instruction of busybodies telling them how to do things all the time.

“Uncontrived benefit.” Things that are deliberately contrived this way and that are of no benefit at all.

The sense of this chapter is that in any case if you lead a life without artificial contrivance, no one will get in your way. If you contrive, people will not be able to restrain themselves from getting in your way.

“The greatest flexibility” is also being uncontrived. Anyway, Lao-tzu’s whole book is about leading a life without artificial contrivance.

[44]

YOUR NAME OR YOUR BODY

Which is closer, your name or your body?
Which is better, your body or your goods?
Which is worse, gain or loss?
So intense liking surely means great expenditure;
much hoarding surely means great loss.
If you know what's enough, you won't be disgraced;
if you know when to stop, you won't be endangered.
Thereby you can last long.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Name” means reputation. “Which is closer” means the mind is remote from reputation. The point is this—isn't the body closer? Therefore, not winning a reputation is no big deal, but to torment your body to gain a reputation is fruitless. Even so, ordinary people torture themselves to gain a reputation.

“Goods” means money and valuables. This line has the same sense as the previous one; by greedily trying to get goods, you lose your valuable body.

These two lines are plausible. The line “Which is worse, gain or loss?” expresses in words what can hardly be said. “Which is worse” means which is hopeless. Loss is the more hopeless. For example, be it an official post or be it a newborn son, when you get it you're happy, but that's not much in comparison to your dismay when you lose it.

The loss is because there was a gain. What you've never gotten, you have no worry of losing. In that sense it's better never to have gotten it. Whatever is obtained is lost. That being so, nothing is better than gain.

"Intense liking" refers to love of honor. "Expenditure" means compulsively spending effort. "Much hoarding" refers to valuables. "Great loss" means losing hoarded wealth.

"If you know what's enough, you won't be disgraced." It is because of not knowing when you have enough that you get disgraced. "Knowing when to stop" means being in control. In anything at all, this is how you can last long.

[45]

GREAT FULFILLMENT SEEMS LACKING

Great fulfillment seems lacking, but its function never fails.

Great plenitude seems empty, but its function is inexhaustible.

Great directness seems roundabout.

Great skill seems clumsy.

Great eloquence seems inarticulate.

Activity overcomes cold.

Stillness overcomes heat.

Clarity and calm are right for the world.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Fulfillment” means completion, achievement, success, attainment. Although it seems lacking and insufficient, no matter how much it is used it never wears out. That is why it is called “great fulfillment.”

“Empty” means seeming devoid and lacking. Even so, when used it is never exhausted, so it is called “great plenitude.”

Now this refers to both wisdom and virtue. It is said that the ancient sage-king Shun liked to ask questions, and used to investigate incidents himself. Because of that, he never failed and was never at a loss in any event. To avidly ask questions and look into local gossip surely seems lacking and vacuous, but it's never exhausted and never used up, so what is it but great plenitude and great fulfillment?

“Great directness seems roundabout.” Half-baked directness seems quite straightforward, while great directness seems to bend and yield. This is the sense of the earlier maxim, “The flexible remain whole. The twisted straightens.”

“Great skill seems clumsy.” The most knowledgeable and skillful seem inept. For example, people of quasi-intelligence may gloss over their own mistakes so others won’t think them mistaken, but that in itself is something others will surely think is dreadful. People with great sophistication and skill are simply straightforward without any affectation. Therefore, he says, they appear clumsy and inept.

“Great eloquence seems inarticulate.” Any verbal explanation is impossible. Great eloquence does not speak, but people are overcome by sincerity in silence, so it seems inarticulate.

Anyhow, in this chapter, from “Great fulfillment” up to here is all about valuing noncontrivance and deference.

“Activity overcomes cold.” When the weather is cold, if you engage in vigorous activity you forget the cold. This is overcoming cold. This is not particularly meaningful, except to introduce the following line “Stillness overcomes heat.”

“Stillness overcomes heat.” When the weather is hot, if you keep your mind quiet you forget the heat. As long as you stay clear like this, you can overcome even the heat of the natural order, so this clarity is the right quality for the world.¹

[46]

WHEN THE WORLD HAS THE WAY

When the world has the Way, chargers are sent back to be farm horses.

When the world lacks the Way, war horses are bred in the country.

No wrong is greater than the desirable,
no calamity is greater than discontent,
no blame is greater than on desire to gain.

Therefore the sufficiency of contentment is always enough.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“When the world has the Way,” there’s no contention, so chargers are sent back. “Chargers” are galloping horses. “Farm horses” are work horses. “War horses” are horses for battle. To be “bred in the country” means to come from rural areas. This means taking work horses from the countryside and making them into war horses.

From this perspective, there’s nothing worse than human desires. So it says there’s no greater wrong than desire. “The desirable” means desirable things. One would think it is people’s desires that are wrong, that it’s not the fault of things, but it is because there are desirable things that people desire, so it says that desirable things are worse than people’s desires. “Blame” comes from people.

“The sufficiency of contentment is always enough.” No matter how much you may wish for, when content you’re

sufficed; how much the more so when you do have enough.

[47]

WITHOUT GOING OUT THE DOOR

Know the world without going out the door,
see the course of the heavens without looking out the
window.

The further out it goes, the less the knowledge is.
Therefore sages know without going,
are honored without show, accomplished without
contriving.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

Love of learning without knowing to cultivate yourself and seek knowledge within is seeking knowledge outside. This chapter criticizes that.

“Know the world without going out the door.” Human nature is the same everywhere, so even without leaving home you know the concerns of the whole world.

“See the course of the heavens without looking out the window.” Knowing the course of the heavens even without looking out the window is because Nature and humanity are part of the same pattern.

“The further out it goes, the less the knowledge is.” Although this doesn't necessarily mean going outside, people who love learning and seek knowledge beyond what they've seen and heard are said to “go out.” So people like that don't know how to return within and find understanding in themselves, so it becomes even less.

“Knowing without going” refers back to “without going out the door.” “Without show” means without showing off. “Accomplished without contriving” means they are this way because they return within and cultivate themselves.

[48]

THE PRACTICE OF LEARNING ADDS DAILY

The practice of learning adds daily;
the practice of the Way reduces daily,
reducing and reducing, until reaching where there is no
doing.

There is no doing, but nothing is not done.

Therefore those who take the world always do it by
disinterest.

When they have an interest in it, they cannot take the
world.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

This "learning" is that study referred to before in "Stop academics and there's no distress" (chapter 20). The "practice of learning" means seeking learning externally, studying one thing today and another thing tomorrow. This way, issues progressively multiply, and things to study gradually increase.

"The practice of the Way" refers to people who cultivate the Way. People who cultivate the Way get rid of useless things every day, so it says they "reduce daily." Gradually reducing, eventually they reach the point where there is no doing. When you reach the realm of no doing where there's nothing whatsoever, then nothing fails to work out. Hence "nothing is not done."

"By disinterest" means taking without contention or ambition. "When they have an interest in it, they cannot

take the world” because if you have an intention to take the world, you have a contentious attitude. Therefore you are unable to take the world.

This does not apply only to the world, but to all things. There is a tendency to give to the undemanding, and not to give to the greedy.

[49]

SAGES HAVE NO CONSTANT MIND

Sages have no constant mind; they make the minds of the people their mind.

The good, I also consider good; those who are not good, I also consider good, and so obtain goodness.

The trustworthy, I trust; those who are not trustworthy, I also trust, and so gain trust.

Sages' presence in the world is apprehensive; they unify their minds for the world.

The people all focus their ears and eyes, while sages regard them like children.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

To "have no constant mind" means being mindless, with no special likes and no special animosities. It is making the mind of ordinary people one's mind. Therefore, though sages have knowledge, they become unsophisticated for the sake of the common people; and though they have virtue, they become undistinguished for the sake of the common people. As long as you can understand that, you can understand here too, and on top of that understand reason and do as you will in the world.

"Having no constant mind" ultimately means having no fixed prejudices.

"The good, I also consider good." "I" refers to the sage. Sages accept good people as good. What is not good, they also accept as good. Therefore they eventually get what is

good, hence “obtain goodness.” What follows is this idea too. “I trust” means believing in what people say. To “gain trust” means to be believed and not deceive.

Those with half-baked knowledge, those who put on a show of virtue, accept the good as good, but consider those who are not good to be bad, and cannot accept them, so in the end they go on not being good. The same goes for the trustworthy and the untrustworthy.

As for sages, their tolerance is so great they can accept anything. As long as it is accepted in one’s own realm, nothing will not be good; but if there is no acceptance, the immoral and the untrustworthy are left as they are.

Ultimately the idea here is that sages accept everyone without making an issue of whether they are good or not, or trustworthy or not, so that somewhere along the line they all manage to become trustworthy and good.

In olden times, Emperor Che-tsung of Sung dynasty China assumed the throne while still a minor, so his mother the empress acted as his guardian. Now when Che-tsung reached the age of thirteen, he became obsessed with sex and got a reputation for promiscuity. So a high official of the time named Fan Tsung told the emperor’s mother that such and such was going on, and everyone was talking about it. Fan said, “If he goes on like this, he won’t have a good reputation, and since this is bad for his health at this young age, you won’t be of any use as a guardian if you don’t remonstrate with him.”

The emperor’s mother said, “That’s not true. It’s just gossip.”

Fan Tsung didn’t argue, but just said, “Very well, then. I only told you because it would not be a good thing if it were true. I hope to see to it that no such thing does happen.” Then he withdrew.

Most people, hearing the emperor’s mother’s excuse, would be inclined to tell her such and such things happened, and so-and-so said so, citing evidence, going on

verbosely. But even without bringing out evidence to shame someone, one who will stop will stop, and one who won't stop won't stop no matter what.

On the whole, this is characteristic of the wise. For example, fugitives are left on the run, without any attempt to catch up with them and prevent them from escaping. This was Fan Tsung's way of going about things, and it accords with this passage in this text.

"Apprehensive" means not being complacent. It means not being conceited, not being self-satisfied. To "unify the mind" means to make the mind so that it is not compartmentalized. "Unified" means there are no edges and no ruts; not being on edge and not getting into a rut.

"The people all focus their ears and eyes." What sages do, the people watch attentively. What sages say, the people listen to attentively. Because the people are watching and listening, sages don't show or tell them anything unusual, but look upon them in everything as like children. The way parents are with children, if their children are clever, the parents are delighted at the thought that their children are bright; and if their children are good, the parents love them for their innocence. If the children are nice, their parents joyfully praise them for being nice; and if the children are mischievous, their parents are happy if they don't get hurt. Sages treat the people this way, looking upon them as they would children. Because they are like parents in regard to their own children, they accept them all, leaving no one out, trustworthy or not, good or not. This state has a supremely sublime function.

[50]

GOING OUT IS LIFE, ENTERING IN IS DEATH

Going out is life, entering in is death.

The followers of life are three in ten; the followers of death are three in ten; the lives of people who tend to go to grounds of death are also three in ten.

Why? Because of the richness of their living life.

It is said that one who is good at taking care of health may travel on land without encountering tigers and rhinos,

and go into the army without donning armor or wielding weapons.

Rhinos have nowhere to gore,

tigers have nowhere to maul,

weapons have nowhere to wound.

Why is that? Because they have no death spot.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Going out” means leaving the confusion of name and gain, sound and form, the six senses, and the objects of the six senses, going outside of all things. It is the same as Buddhist teachers’ explanation of the principle of liberation. When you get out of this sort of confusion, then you acquire mental freedom and independence, so this is called “life.”

“Entering in” means becoming submerged in name and gain, sound and form, senses and objects, thus becoming

stuck. This is the same as being dead, so it is called "death."

"Followers of life are three in ten." The word "followers" here and below is crucial. "Followers of life" are those who, while not really having gotten free and attained life, don't want too much to begin with and have few illusions, so they're on the way to life. "Followers of death" are those who, while not completely sunk and dead, are headed that way.

"Three in ten" means that three out of ten people are like that.

"The lives of people who tend to go to grounds of death" refers to those in between. If they seem dead, still they're half alive; though they seem alive, they're half dead.

So far, nine out of ten people have been accounted for. The one left is the "one who is good at taking care of health." Of course, there is hardly even one such person in ten, or even in a hundred, but when we look at the world we'd have to say that on the whole three in ten are good, three in ten are bad, three in ten are in between, and one in ten is exceptionally good. That's why it is put this way.

"The richness of their living life" means eagerness to give life to living. This means craving for things is deep, so it tends to go to a ground of death.

The "one who is good at taking care of health" is one in ten, one who has real life. This individual has shed all thoughts, minds nothing, and contrives nothing. Having entered into this state is called "taking care of health."

"Travel on land" means wherever one goes. "Without encountering" means not getting hurt by "rhinos" and "tigers." These are wild animals. "Nowhere to wound"—why is this? Because one has "no death spot" within. Not minding or contriving anything, there's no one to oppose them, nothing to hate, nothing to beat, nothing at all.

As for things like "going into the army without armor or weapons," there are many such examples among good

people since ancient times. Once a merchant was traveling in the countryside by night when two firelike objects came flying at him from across the road. Hiding by the wayside, he saw a wolf with eyes like blazing fire, quickly running away. Then a blind man came along slowly, staff in hand, from the direction in which the wolf had gone. The merchant asked the blind man if he was aware there had been a wolf there. The blind man said he wasn't. It turns out that the wolf, thinking no creature more ferocious than itself, came across the blind man who had nothing on his mind, thinking nothing of it, so the wolf got scared and ran away.

Even in such cases these things happen. So it is that much more reasonable to expect it of someone who has no artificiality and who minds nothing, who is not confused by name and gain or sound and form, and has transcended the senses and objects.

[51]

THE WAY GIVES BIRTH TO THEM

The Way gives birth to them, virtue nurtures them;
things form them, momentum completes them:
Therefore myriad beings all honor the Way and value
virtue.

Honoring of the Way and valuing of virtue are always
spontaneous;
no one commands them.

Therefore the Way gives birth to them, nurtures them,
raises them, develops them, completes them, matures
them, supports them, and covers them;
gives birth without possessing, acts without
presumption, develops without dictating.
This is called invisible virtue.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

All beings are produced by the Way of Nature, produced naturally. All are born from nothingness. "The Way" is the Way of Nature. The Way of Nature is what is so of itself. What is so of itself is nothing. "Virtue" is the same, but in respect to its flow it is called the Way, while in respect to its blessings it is called virtue. The Way is Nature, while virtue is the name it is given in humans. They are the same thing.

"The Way gives birth to them" refers to the Way of Nature. "Virtue" means the qualities of Nature.

"Things form them" means forms called "things" appear. "Momentum" means coming to completion by the

momentum of this flow.

“No one commands them.” Usually nobility only comes about by order of emperors or lords, but this Way and virtue are noble without being given a rank by anyone.

From “the Way gives birth to them” on repeats the doings of the Way in various different terms, to say that what gives birth to all beings is the Way, what nurtures them is the Way, what raises them is the Way, what develops them is the Way, what completes them, matures them, supports them, and covers them is in every case the Way.

From “gives birth” to “without dictating” are phenomena that have occurred earlier any number of times. “Invisible virtue” is virtue that is profoundly subtle. This makes it clear that were it not like this, as depicted here, it could not be called invisible virtue.

[52]

THE WORLD HAS A BEGINNING

The world has a beginning,
considered the mother of the world.
Once you've found the mother,
thereby you know the child.
Once you know the child
and resume protecting the mother,
you won't be endangered all your life.
Close your mouth, shut the door,
and you won't labor all your life.
Open your mouth, dispose of affairs,
and you won't be saved all your life.
Seeing the small is called clarity;
keeping flexible is called strength.
Having used your light, return to that clarity,
and you won't leave trouble for yourself.
This is called internalizing eternity.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Has a beginning” refers to nothingness. To have “found the mother” also refers to nothingness. The things and beings in the world are unlimited in number; if you try to know each and every one, not only are you unable, the more you know the more confused you get. It cannot all be known, surely. Then, since the innumerable things and beings in the world originated from nothing, as long as you

really comprehend that nothingness, you spontaneously know everything in the world, all existence.

“The child” refers to the existence of all things and beings in the world, because it is born from nothingness. “Protecting the mother” means not letting the mind become fixated on that existence, but keeping the nonexistence of the mother. “You won’t be endangered” because one gets bound up by all sorts of things and endangers oneself due to fixation on all existences. If you focus on their nonexistence and realize nothingness, then there’s no peril.

“Close your mouth.” The word meaning an “opening” used here in the original may be interpreted as the mouth. This phrase means closing your mouth and not letting anything out. “Shut the door” means not letting anything in. Not letting anything out or in is having entered completely into the unconditioned. “Labor” means toil. This line is metaphorical. Because of speaking there is misspeaking, and because of going outside there is blundering. The point is that as long as you don’t let a word out of your mouth and don’t go outside, you shouldn’t have any toil.

To “dispose of affairs” is because of increasing all sorts of concerns. “Won’t be saved” means it is fraught with danger and ultimately frustrating.

“Seeing the small is called clarity.” The “small” also means nothingness. Lao-tzu’s sayings are free and independent, so he uses various expressions like this. To “see” means to witness: what is most small if not nothingness?

“Clarity” is clear knowledge. “Flexibility” is strength of tolerance. Whoever puts adamant force first will surely break down. Worldly convention considers seeing the great to be clarity, and considers being adamant to be strength, but Lao-tzu’s idea is that this is not so.

“Having used your light, return to that clarity,” refers to the aforementioned clarity of seeing the small. Even though you use your light, you should return to clarity, not forgetting nothingness.

“Internalizing eternity” means keeping unchanging truth to yourself. “Using your light” has the sense of private perception. This means using the light of clarity without expressing the clear knowledge that sees the small.

[53]

IF WE MAKE OURSELVES GET INVOLVED

If we make ourselves get involved in acquiring
knowledge
to proceed on the Great Way, its only application will be
anxiety.

The Great Way is quite even, but people like to
sidetrack.

When the courts are quite useless, the fields are very
weedy,

and the storehouses very empty,

to wear fancy clothes, sharp sword at the belt, eating
and drinking to satiety, goods and money in excess—
this is called the boasting of thieves.

It is not the Way!

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Get involved” has the sense of making distinctions. Lao-tzu's tendency is to dislike using the intellect to draw distinctions like good and bad, pure and impure. This too is a case of that.

“Acquiring knowledge” implies having intelligence; “application” is putting it into practice. “Anxiety” means worry, concern, uneasiness. The idea is that for those who try to practice the Great Way making intellectual distinctions of good and bad, pure and impure, its application is very worrisome. Why? Because the Great Way is in principle very much like even ground, so like when

people travel a main thoroughfare, it is level and easy and needs no discrimination or directions.

“People like to sidetrack” means they don’t like the level, easy Great Way, but are inclined to go in unpredictable directions. So he says this is how it is with people who prefer sidetracks rather than going by the Great Way.

“Courts” means royal courts. “When the courts are quite useless” means the government administration is incompetent. The “storehouses” refers to both the people’s storehouses and the ruler’s storehouses. “When the courts are quite useless” onward may be read as referring to government officials who are bad people. The “fields” are the people’s fields and gardens. The people’s storehouses have nothing in them.

“Fancy clothes” are the colorful clothes of rulers. Even though the people are worn-out, this is how the rulers are. “In excess” means that once they get this way they don’t even think it’s wrong. To brag to people that your grasping, greedy ways are smart is like a thief who, while stealing things from people, brags to others about how much money he earns.

[54]

WHAT IS WELL ESTABLISHED IS NOT DONE AWAY
WITH

What is well established is not done away with.
What is held carefully does not slip away.
Posterity carries on memorial rites unending.
Practice them individually, and those virtues are real;
practice them in the home, and those virtues are
abundant;
practice them in the locality, and those virtues are
eminent;
practice them in the nation, and those virtues are
plentiful;
practice them in the world, and those virtues are
universal.
So observe the individual in terms of the individual;
observe the family in terms of the family;
observe the locality in terms of the locality;
observe the nation in terms of the nation;
observe the world in terms of the world.
How do I know the world is so? By this.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

What is carefully set up is not abolished. What is carried carefully isn't dropped. So a well-established person establishes virtue, and therefore cannot be done away with; and one who carries carefully holds nameless simplicity, so there is no way to fall. Thus, because of this, your posterity

continues on and on; this is expressed as descendants carrying on memorial rites unending. “Carry on” means to practice. It means carrying out that establishment of virtue and embrace of plainness in practice.

The word “virtues” in “those virtues” in the following lines are not the qualities of the Way, but good works. “Abundant” means superabundant blessings. Homes where goodness is accumulated have their rewards. “Eminent” means one will be honored as eminent among the people of the area. “Plentiful” means making that whole nation rich. “Universal” means everywhere in the world.

“So observe the individual in terms of the individual.” So as we view others’ personalities, others’ families, others’ localities, and others’ nations by our own personalities, our own families, our own localities, and our own nations, there is no difference between their likes and dislikes and our likes and dislikes.¹

From “in terms of the individual” and “in terms of the family” to “the world” is better read to mean just as it says, without seeing it as one’s own person and family, seeing individuals as individuals and families as families. It seems to mean that if you see a family or even the whole world in individual terms, that’s mistaken.

So when you see through the eye of the Way with no artificiality, with no personal subjectivity, since you are then seeing impersonally, there’s nothing in the world you can’t see. When you look in terms of artificial views, you can’t even see your own condition. Why? Because of personal subjectivity.

Anyway, here “observe the world in terms of the world” just continues this line of reasoning. In the world as a whole there’s no such thing as “others” or “ours.”

“How do I know?” If anyone knows the nature of the likes and dislikes of everyone in the world, that too is known by means of this Way.

[55]

RICHNESS OF INNER VIRTUE

Richness of inner virtue is compared to an infant:
poisonous insects do not sting,
ferocious beasts do not approach,
birds of prey do not strike.
Its bones are weak and its tendons soft, but it grips
firmly;
it does not yet know the union of female and male,
yet its sexual organ gets aroused—this is the epitome of
vitality.
It can cry all day long without getting hoarse—this is
the epitome of harmony.
Knowing harmony is called constancy;
knowing constancy is called clarity.
Augmenting life is called ominous;
mind using energy is called strength.
When beings mature, they age; this is called unguided.
What is unguided should quickly be stopped.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

The reason it says “inner virtue” instead of “richness of virtue” implies concealing virtue within, storing it and not showing it. This is conveyed particularly well by calling it “inner.”

“Poisonous insects do not sting . . . birds of prey do not strike” follows on richness of inner virtue, meaning that people rich in inner virtue are thus and so. Why is this so?

Because people rich in inner virtue have become free of contrivance and are mindless, so other species don't mind them either, and have no intention to harm them. If creatures like this came around and became familiar, they could do so, but they have no impulse to attack.

"Its bones are weak" continues the comparison with the infant. An infant's bones are weak and its tendons are soft, but its grip is firm. There's even a folk saying that "A baby can crush an adder's head in its grip."

"The epitome of vitality" means the peak of vitality. But this is different from an adult's peak. This is something innocent. "Its bones are weak and its tendons soft . . . yet its sexual organ gets aroused" represents the epitome of vitality, the preservation of an innocent mood.

In this connection, I recall a situation where a certain man suffered from impotence and couldn't get an erection. And yet his wife had gotten pregnant. When inquiries were made into the reason, it turned out that when he was with his wife he wasn't impotent. So it seems that when he was with other women, any anxiety or concern at all would get on his mind, and his penis would wilt. When he was with his wife, however, he had nothing on his mind, so he wouldn't wilt. This is enough to prove the sense of this chapter.

Also, children will pee even off a high second-story, or off a boat, whereas an adult could never manage to urinate from a place like that. This is the difference between minding and not minding.

"It can cry all day long" refers to the infant. That it doesn't "get hoarse" means that its throat doesn't get dry. "The epitome of harmony" is perfectly balanced energy. Adults cry because of anger, or sadness, or something; this is conscious, and compromises balance. So the voice becomes dry. A baby's crying has no anger or sorrow, and is not consciously done. "The epitome of vitality" and "the

epitome of harmony” both refer to preserving an innocent mood, without contrivance, without minding.

“Knowing harmony is called constancy.” Ever unchanging, knowing that constant Way is called clarity. The point is that augmenting life is called trouble, not clarity. “Augmenting life” means greedily seeking wealth, status, and longevity. The reason people cannot be mindless and uncontrived is because of this augmenting life. If you just have no mind to augment life, you can also attain uncontrived mindlessness.

“Mind using energy” does not merely mean bothering about something, it means bothering contentiously to get ahead. When you’re bothering about something, you cannot be uncontrived and mindless.

“When beings mature, they age,” age and decline. When beings reach their peak, then they deteriorate and age, so there’s no sense in bothering about augmenting life. “What is unguided should quickly be stopped” means you should be quick to give up whatever is not the Way.

[56]

THOSE WHO KNOW DO NOT SAY

Those who know do not say, those who say do not know.
Close your mouth, shut your door, blunt your edge,
resolve your confusion, soften your light, adapt to
your world. This is called mystic adaptation:
it cannot be made familiar, cannot be alienated, cannot
be profited,
cannot be harmed, cannot be ennobled, cannot be
debased.
Therefore it is most valuable to the world.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"Those who know do not say." This is a famous maxim known everywhere, past and present. Lao-tzu's idea is that since the Way is simply nothing special, it cannot even be said to be so. Thus there's no way to say what it is like. Therefore people who know do not speak of the Way, while those who say, "It is thus and so" say this because they do not know.

Now it occurs to me that it is not only the Way, but everything in the world, be it scholarship, or wisdom, or art—experts don't speak out and make a display of their knowledge.

"Close your mouth, shut your door" means you don't pretend to knowledge and do not need to speak.

To "blunt" means to grind down. Your "edge" means your psychological edge. "Resolve your confusion" means

detachment from all confusion of the six senses. "Light" is the light of knowledge, the light of virtue. People with knowledge and virtue are inclined to show that light outwardly. To "soften your light" means not showing it ostentatiously, but concealing it within. "Soften your light" corresponds to the foregoing "blunt your edge." It means blunting your sharp psychological edge and not revealing the light of your knowledge and virtue. "Adapt to your world" means adapting to the objects of the six senses. This corresponds to the foregoing "resolve your confusion." Even as the mind criticizes the confusion of the six senses, it is still adapting to the objects of the six senses. This is Lao-tzu's procedure.

"Mystic adaptation" is attaining a state that is mysterious and subtle yet adapts to other people. "Cannot be made familiar" refers to one who has entered the realm of mystic adaptation. Here "familiar" implies contempt through familiarity. "Alienation" is estrangement. "Cannot be profited" means no amount of benefit provided is worth celebrating. "Cannot be harmed" means no obstruction or injury can be perpetrated. "Ennobled" means ennobled by official rank. "Debased" means debased by impoverishment and degradation. "Most valuable to the world" means most honorable and most noble in the world.

This chapter too has flavor beyond the words.

[57]

USE REGULARITY TO GOVERN NATIONS

Use regularity to govern nations,
use irregularity to deploy troops,
use disinterest to take the world.
How do I know that is so? By this.

The more the taboos in the world, the poorer the
people become.

The more conveniences people have, the more
benighted the nation.

The more the crafts of the people, the more oddities
arise.

The more legal codes are promulgated, the more
thieves there are.

Sages say, "If I contrive nothing, the people will govern
themselves.

If I like tranquillity, the people will correct themselves.

If I am disinterested, the people will prosper on their
own.

If I have no fancies, the people will naturally be
simple."

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

To govern a country, a regular administration is used to keep order. In military operations, shock troops are used. This differs from governing a country. Anyway, to take the world cannot be done by irregular means, nor even by regular administration. If not for naturalness without

contrivance, it cannot be taken. "By this" means knowing by means of this Way. This Way is naturally so, with nothing special, and the world is also naturally so, with nothing special. Thus the knowledge that this is so is realized by means of this Way. Anyhow, the point is that no matter how regular you make administration in the world, it cannot be taken over in that manner.

As evidence that the world is taken by disinterest, he notes that the more taboos there are in the world the poorer the people are. In my ignorant opinion, this appears to refer to ritual rules. Ritual rules have a lot of taboos—"You can't do that! This isn't done! This is lucky, this is unlucky." In this way problems multiply and the people become poorer and poorer. For example, if you say feet can't be wiped with a hand towel, then you have to have a foot towel too.

"Conveniences" means useful tools, so it refers to intelligence. What is a useful tool for humankind if not intelligence? When people remain in a crude condition they use immature intelligence to do all sorts of things when there is no actual issue, so consequently the nation becomes benighted. This has happened throughout history in both Japan and China.

"Crafts" means technical skills, all sorts of skills. "Oddities" are strange or unusual things.

"Promulgated" means defined. If there are no laws, there's no such thing as violation; but since there are laws that you may not even know exist, if someone infringes, is arrested, and tried, he has to tell all sorts of lies to talk his way out of it. This is represented as the proliferation of thieves.

"I contrive nothing." According to ancient sages, their procedure was not to do anything, so the people governed themselves; because the minds of the sages have no artificiality and no agenda, order is spontaneous. To "like

tranquillity” means to be fond of peace and quiet, and not be impulsive. “Correct” means not doing what is not good.

“If I am disinterested” onward is particularly meaningful. When the people on top undertake all sorts of projects, they use the people a lot, so shortages eventually occur, and they have to oppress the people to take from them. If the rulers had no interests, no agenda, and didn’t do anything, then the people would naturally prosper.

“No fancies” means having no whims. If those above have some fancy, the people below them will do all sorts of things to pander to it. If there is no fancy, there is nothing to pander to, so the people are plain, naturally plain.

Plainness is something like a tree left where it’s felled. It means being unaffected.

[58]

WHEN THE GOVERNMENT IS BUMBLING

When the government is bumbling, the people are
innocent;

when the government is exacting, the people are
failures.

Calamity is what fortune depends on, fortune is what
calamity overcomes.

Who knows the limit? Is nothing right?

Rectitude also becomes eccentricity, good also becomes
troublesome.

The confusion of the people is indeed long-standing.

Therefore sages are straight without cutting, sharp
without injury,

direct but not indulgent, bright but not flashy.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

For example, if you try to straighten out something that's bent five inches to the left by bending it back five inches to the right, it won't work. So you have to bend it back ten inches to the right for it to straighten five inches to its original condition. So this chapter is bending back ten inches against the exacting, intrusive, detailed legal procedures of the states of Lao-tzu's time. That is the reason for such expressions as "When the government is bumbling, the people are innocent." Those who read Lao-tzu without understanding that criticize him severely for negative things they attribute to him. For example, it is a

bad thing for people to be soft, yet it is said, "When remonstrating with the fearsome, be like cotton."

"Bumbling" means not drawing sharp distinctions. "Innocent" means happy. "Exacting" means distinctions are clearly drawn. "Failures" originally describes disappointment.

"Calamity is what fortune depends on" introduces proofs that "When the government is bumbling, the people are innocent" and "when the government is exacting, the people are failures." For example, when calamity comes upon people, they are thrown into alarm and turmoil, but it can happen that they become fortunate because of that calamity. And people may rejoice because of good fortune, but calamity can come from that fortune. So calamity and fortune support and subdue each other.

"Who knows the limit?" implies that no one knows the end of calamity and fortune. So there is no such thing as fixed or determinate calamity or fortune.

Thus in military strategy too, what seems to be a conventional force suddenly turns into shock troops, while shock troops suddenly change into regular army. Likewise, good things can also become troublesome, and trouble can turn into good. But though calamity and fortune are like this, the mentality of ordinary people is to hate calamity and like fortune. This confusion is already long-standing.

"Straight without cutting . . ." What is jagged is readily planed down, but sages are not jagged and so there's nowhere to smooth; what has edges easily breaks, but sages have no sharpness and so do not break down.

"Indulgent" means ever-increasing display of directness. "Bright" refers to the radiance of knowledge and virtue. "Bright but not flashy" means being illumined but not glorifying it.

Ultimately sages are this way because for them the wise and the ignorant, the pure and the polluted, are the same one being-as-is. These points may be summed up as the

communion of light. This has to be realized in yourself and attained in yourself.

[59]

GOVERNING PEOPLE AND SERVING HEAVEN

For governing people and serving heaven, nothing is like frugality.

That is because only frugality is the means of rapid recovery.

Rapid recovery is called repeatedly accumulating virtue.

With repeated accumulation of virtue, nothing is impossible.

When nothing is impossible, no one knows your limit.

When no one knows your limit, it is possible to hold a nation.

With the matrix of a nation, it is possible to last long.

This is called making the roots deep and the stem firm, the Way of lengthening life and prolonging watchfulness.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“People” should be read to mean “populace.” To “govern people with frugality” means for those who administer nations and states, nothing compares to frugality. With frugality, things get done with little expenditure, so little is taken from the people, and that is enough.

As for “serving heaven,” or serving the divine, in Lao-tzu’s time those who performed rites were particularly extravagant in their ceremonies, thinking this to be honoring heaven and revering the deities. Therefore Lao-

tzu says that in serving heaven as well, nothing compares to frugality.

In addition, among hygienists there is something called sparing blessings, which posits that people are born with specific limits, so that someone will consume so much rice in a lifetime, someone will use so much cloth for clothing in a lifetime, and thus the lot provided by heaven is limited and must be managed proportionately. For when those who consume recklessly use up their lifetime allotment of food and clothing, their lives must end. So this notion that in “serving heaven, nothing is like frugality” can be seen in such phenomena as well. It applies to both.

On the whole, in Taoism they not only manage clothing and food; they see to it that even water for hand washing is not wasted. Anyway, if this is properly understood, it is a good policy. Not wasting resources and not getting sick from overeating are of course good. When you go on to avoid wasting anything, even bathwater, there should be no end to the benefits.

“Rapid recovery” means knowing when to stop in all things and quickly returning. For example, everyone knows that when something reaches fullness it reverses, but when you get caught up in something you can’t stop. But when those who know when to stop want to fulfill 100 percent of what they know 100 percent, they quickly return to the original 50 percent. Those who don’t know when to stop get caught up in their enthusiasm until they finally tumble and fall.

To see what such people cannot see, and do what such people cannot accomplish, is called “repeatedly accumulating virtue.” From there on, there shouldn’t be anything you can’t achieve. If there’s nothing that can’t be accomplished, no limit to that can be known. That is how a nation or an empire is held indefinitely.

“The matrix of a nation,” in view of the context, refers to this frugality. Rapid recovery, repeated accumulation of

virtue, ability to accomplish anything, beyond limitation, and holding a nation, are all due to this frugality, so it is called "the matrix."

"Lengthening life and prolonging watchfulness." Frugality is the path to lengthen life and prolong watchfulness, he says; even the path to long life and perpetual watchfulness is nothing but this. For example, the reason people die prematurely is that their eyes look at things as much as they possibly can, their ears listen as hard as they can, their mouths talk as much as they can, their minds think as hard as they can, collectively letting vital spirit leak out completely; so eventually they die early. To be uncontrived and natural, returning awareness so as to be as if not seeing with the eyes, not letting vital spirit leak out, thus to preserve it, is frugality. This way it is naturally a matter of course to live long and prolong watchfulness. To "prolong watchfulness" means the eyes are strong and can watch unblinking for a long time. This is because of not letting vital energy leak out and not looking with the eyes.

Now what Lao-tzu calls frugality is what Confucians call thrift. Confucians consider stinginess bad but thrift good. Lao-tzu's idea is the Confucian sense of thrift. While Lao-tzu wouldn't consider stinginess good either, as in the fifty-eighth chapter he speaks of frugality in the sense of straightening out a five-inch bend by bending it back ten inches. However, in every way Lao-tzu's book tends to incline toward frugality. This should be taken to the extent that the Confucian version of the concept can be understood to be inclined toward thrift.

QUESTION: Regarding "prolonging watchfulness," since the eyes are the most important of the sense organs, does this expression just mean living in the world for a long time? What about the interpretation of watching for a long time without blinking?

ANSWER: There is indeed an interpretation as long life. But the interpretation of not blinking is in Chuang-tzu, so I say it because I can't discard this interpretation either.

[60]

GOVERNING A BIG COUNTRY

Governing a big country is like stewing little fish.
Use the Way to rule the world, and the ghosts don't
become spirits.
Not only do the ghosts not become spirits, the spirits
don't hurt people.
Not only do the spirits not hurt people, sages too are
not hurt.
Neither hurts the other, so their virtues are what both
return to.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

This chapter is hard to see. That is why the old commentaries are not clear either. Only Mr. Hayashi's way of reading it does not seem bad. This appears to refer simply to the mutual noninterference of yin and yang, humans and spirits. It seems to have the sense of the passage in *The Mean*, "With sky and earth in position, myriad beings develop." Here Mr. Hayashi's commentary also has that sense.

"Fish" refers to fresh fish. "Stewing little fish" means seasoning the broth appropriately and then not meddling with it until the fish is fully cooked. If you can't wait, and keep on picking it up with chopsticks or a ladle to take a look and stir it around, it will fall to pieces and be spoiled. When a great nation is governed liberally and goes on in an

orderly manner as it is, naturally, without contrivance, then it is peaceful.

“Using the Way” means the Way of uncontrived naturalness. “Rule” means to govern the world. “Ghosts” are yin, “spirits” are yang. “Ghosts don’t become spirits” means yin and yang don’t encroach upon each other. “Spirits don’t hurt people” means humans and spirits don’t intrude upon or overwhelm each other. When government is by uncontrived natural order, yin and yang don’t encroach upon one another, and the course of Nature is normal. When the course of Nature is normal, humans and spirits don’t encroach upon each other either, so people don’t have “bad luck.”

“Sages too are not hurt” means that sage-rulers too remain intact, leading the world, with order established.

“Neither” refers to yin and yang not encroaching on each other, and also to humans and spirits not encroaching on each other. “Both return” means that leaders fulfill the path of leadership, while subordinates, people in general, and even spirits, all individually return to their own virtues.

[61]

GREAT NATIONS, FLOW DOWNWARD!

Great nations, flow downward!
For the intercourse of the world, be the female of the world;
the female always overcomes the male by calm.
Because calm is lower, great nations, by lowering themselves to small nations, thus take small nations.
Small nations, by lowering themselves to great nations, thus take great nations.
So some take by lowering, and some take by being lower.
Great nations only want to include and support people;
small nations only want to admit and serve people.
Both get what they want, so the great should be lower.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

Here too these statements are made because in Lao-tzu's time the various states were preoccupied with conflict.

"Flow downward" means don't be oppressive, don't act pretentious like a great nation. The greater the nation, the more it should "flow downward," being humble and accommodating.

Why? Because "the intercourse of the world" is due to being female to the world. "The intercourse of the world" means people all over gladly come, interact, and marry. Why? Because of being everyone's female, meaning being

receptive to all. This is said metaphorically, likening the great nation to a courtesan.

“Calm” is yin, flexible. The “male” is the course of yang. The dominance of yin flexibility over the course of yang is because yin flexibility is accommodating and humble. So it says that calm is below.

To “take a small nation” means to win the allegiance of a small nation. To “take a great nation” means to win the favor of a great nation and not be harmed.

To “take by lowering” refers to great nations. By lowering themselves they take smaller nations. To “take by being lower” refers to small nations. Small nations, humble because they are small, gain the favor of great nations. This is not conscious, but natural and spontaneous.

To “include and support” means to take in all collectively. To “serve people” means to support your own family by working for others.

“Both” refers to both great and small nations. “Get what they want” means they get what they want as long as they are deferential and humble. “The great should be lower” means the greater the nation, the less pretentious it should be.

[62]

THE WAY IS THE SECRET OF ALL THINGS

The Way is the secret of all things,
the treasure of good people,
the refuge of people who are not good.
Fine speech can be used to sell,
noble conduct can be used to oppress people:
what is not good in people, why reject it?
Hence the establishment of emperors
and the setting up of the three lords,
even with huge jades and driving four-horse chariots,
is not as good as proceeding on this way at home.
What was it about this Way that ancients valued?
Was it not finding by seeking,
and when in the wrong to be absolved?
That is why it is valued by the whole world.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Secret” means that everything begins in nothing and ends in nothing. Therefore this Way is the secret, the ultimate meaning, of all things and beings. The Way is empty naturalness. Because the Way is empty and nothing, it values naturalness. That is why good people regard it as a treasure. Even people who are not good take refuge in it.

What this means is that fundamental to the Way of Nature is something natural, open, and not possessive, so even people who are not good can be there too in the mix, even with their confusion and bewilderment. If not for the

accommodation of emptiness and naturalness, people who are not good could not survive for a single day.

“Fine speech” means, for example, when a peddler tells everyone he’s dispensing medicine out of compassion for the world, not to make a living. These are fine words. Then even though no one thinks that’s true, there are buyers and the medicine sells well. This is how fine speech “can be used to sell.”

The real reason, ironically, why this kind of talk makes for good sales, is that it is an imitation of the Way. So one wouldn’t say selling medicine was only to make a living, not for compassion, because then no one would buy.

“Noble conduct can be used to oppress people.” In a local setting, if there is someone with a rather mild-mannered personality, rather than being subordinate to others, he soon rises above others. Even if he is not someone imbued with the Way, this happens to one who is merely mild-mannered. That way there is no such thing as meanly rejecting people’s imperfections. The point is recommending acceptance.

So to “establish emperors” and “set up lords,” to “drive four-horse chariots” with enormous “jades,” and invite savants and scholars, is to choose between the sagacious and the ignorant. Rather than invite savants and scholars to try to govern the country in that manner, it is better to advance on this Way as is, without dividing the wise from the unwise or the good from those who are not good.

“Huge jades” are jades so big they have to be held with both hands. They are tokens of good faith when inviting scholars. “Four-horse chariots” are reception vehicles for welcoming scholars.

“Finding by seeking” means if you will only seek it, you’ll find it in yourself.

“When in the wrong to be absolved” means that even though you have done wrong, you can be absolved by a single moment’s goodness.

“The establishment of emperors” and so on means that rather than doing all sorts of things like setting up emperors, establishing lords, and driving four-horse chariots with huge jades to invite savants and scholars, it is better to advance on the Way at home. That doesn’t mean emperors and lords should be abolished; this is Lao-tzu’s manner of speaking.

[63]

ACTING WITHOUT CONTRIVANCE

Acting without contrivance, working disinterestedly,
savor the plain, be small when great,
minimize abundance, respond to hostility with
kindness,
plan the difficult when it is easy, do the great while it is
small.

The difficult tasks in the world must be done while
they're easy;
the great tasks of the world must be done while they're
small.

This is how sages never do what is great,
and can therefore accomplish the great.
Casual agreements are rarely trustworthy;
with much ease, there will be many difficulties.
This is why even sages consider it hard,
and therefore ultimately have no difficulty.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Act without contrivance” and so on means that sages do not act upon artificial contrivance or possessive interest. They just work disinterestedly and savor the plain. The sayings of sages have no spice at all, because they do what has no contrivance and work on disinterest. What sages do, and what they say, has no particular sweet flavor. What are sweetened are the words and deeds of those who are conventionally called knowledgeable or dutiful.

Looking at it in this way, it literally seems to say simply that sages eat flavorless food. That too refers to purity without contrivance, just as the foregoing explanation refers to purity without contrivance. Lao-tzu's sayings, in any case, hit the mark however expressed, and can apply fittingly to anything. That too is because of the naturalness that explains the plainness of pure uncontrived disinterest.

"Be small when great, minimize abundance" means that when your rank is high and important, you make little of it; and when you have a lot of wealth, knowledge, virtue, or learning, you yourself minimize it. It means not making much of your own greatness. The culmination of realization and negation is ultimately to reach the obliteration of this. This is called reaching empty nothingness.

"Respond to hostility with kindness" means that you are benevolent even to people who have grudges. Now in the Confucian *Analects*, Confucius says, "Repay kindness with kindness, repay hostility with honesty," having posed the question, "If you respond to hostility with kindness, what can you respond to kindness with?" Therefore people who don't know the logic criticize Lao-tzu for differing with Confucius here, but that is because they don't know the mentality of masters.

In my ignorant opinion, Confucius was talking in terms of a norm. But even Confucius would be like Lao-tzu when it was better to repay hostility with kindness. That is what is called universal autonomy. This is not contradicting Confucius, but augmenting Confucius. Moreover, this line has something of goodwill in it.

"Plan the difficult when it is easy" means that most people only pay attention at the stage when something has become hard to accomplish. Then nobody can do anything. Therefore sages do it when it's still easy, so it takes no trouble.

"Do the great while it is small" means acting while there's not much to do. "Do while easy" means the

beginning is always easy, so sages plan things while they're easy. The idea is that they "never do what is great" in the sense that they don't wait until something has become a big issue before they act on it. They don't do big things, they just accomplish uneventfulness. Therefore no matter how great the task, it never fails to get done.

To give an example, when the typhoon season comes in the eighth lunar month, as the wind rises you get a lot of people up on the roof, and you go up yourself too, slipping around, rushing around, making a fuss, somehow managing to get the roof covered. An onlooker praises it as a job well-done, thinking it could happen to him too. This is amazing to the foolish, risible to the wise. The wise, knowing that the typhoon comes in the eighth month, will repair and reinforce his roof during the seventh month, so when the typhoon comes he won't make a fuss with bated breath, but stay inside watching the storm. This is the sense of this section. Thus even taking good care of a house exemplifies this; even someone in charge of a house doesn't get into a fix and then make a fuss.

"Agreement" means assent. Those who agree hastily will inevitably fail to fulfill their agreements, so they are "rarely trustworthy."

"Much ease" means that those who regard things too lightly will inevitably have difficulty somewhere instead of ease. Therefore even sages do not make light of things, but regard them as difficult. That is why, in the end, for sages there is nothing difficult to accomplish or hard to do.

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WHAT IS AT REST IS EASY TO HOLD

What is at rest is easy to hold.
What has yet to evince imminence is easy to plan for.
What is delicate is easily broken.
What is minute is easily dispersed.
Do it before it exists, control it before it goes wild:
Even a colossal tree grows from a tiny sprout,
even a nine-story terrace is raised on piled earth,
even a journey of a thousand miles begins at your feet.
Those who contrive spoil it, those who grasp lose it:
sages have no contrivance, hence no failure;
they have no clinging, hence no loss.
People's pursuit of projects usually spoils them on the
verge of completion; if you are as careful of the end
as of the beginning,
then there will be no spoiled works.
Therefore sages want not wanting,
and do not value hard-to-get goods;
they learn not to imitate,
and forgive people's errors.
Thereby they assist the naturalness of all people,
and do not presume to contrive.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"What is at rest is easy to hold." Most people try to secure their holdings when in peril, so it's hard to hold on. If you

secure your holdings in times of tranquillity, it's very easy and takes no trouble.

“What has yet to evince imminence is easy to plan for.” If you confer with people before any signs of a disaster appear, you can manage somehow.

“What is delicate is easily broken. What is minute is easily dispersed.” These two lines are metaphors for the preceding two: “easy to hold” and “easy to plan for” are like when something is delicate and soft it is easily broken, and when something is not prominent but slight it is easy to dispel. The point is that after something has become very prominent it is hard to dispel.

“Do it before it exists, control it before it goes wild.” Nothing compares to this, he avers; it means just what it says.

“A nine-story terrace” does not start out with nine stories, but with the gradual buildup of earth. “A journey of a thousand miles” means a long journey; “at your feet” means right where you are. So since everything is thus, no artificiality is needed; all is accomplished without contrivance, without a fuss. Therefore “Those who contrive spoil it.” Those who put forth wit, intelligence, and cleverness, enthusiastically trying to do this and that, inevitably fail. The same goes for those who grasp; they struggle for acquisition by intellect and ability.

“Sages have no contrivance, hence no failure.” Sages deal with things as they happen, without artificial contrivance. Since they haven't taken anything by conflict and usurpation, they suffer no losses. In any case, what you have gotten on your own is not lost.

“Pursuit of projects” means working, doing our job. See how you foul up “on the verge of completion”; this is because of being overeager and trying too hard, not being natural. So when “you are as careful of the end as of the beginning,” you will have no failures.

To “want not wanting” means not prizing “hard-to-get goods” that most people desire. Then there is no competing with others for them.

To “learn not to imitate” means learning what is nothing special.

Now the fact that there is nothing particular, nothing defined, in “wanting not wanting” and “learning not to imitate,” is extra interesting. Ultimately it refers to having no artificial contrivance and no special interests. It means overlooking the errors of the multitudes. To “forgive” means to deliberately make light of them.

These points you must pay attention to and discover what they are for yourself.

“Assist” is an interesting word. Letting all things go on naturally, there is no distorting interference on our part. It’s just a matter of helping out a bit. For example, a cart is basically something that rolls, so all you have to do is lend a hand. This means you don’t try to push it sideways.¹ This is the meaning of assisting the naturalness of all beings and not presuming to contrive.

[65]

EXPERTS IN EFFECTING THE WAY IN ANCIENT TIMES

Experts in effecting the Way in ancient times did not use it to enlighten the people, but to make them unsophisticated.

The reason people are hard to govern is that they know too much.

Using sophistication to govern a country is detrimental to the country;

not using sophistication to govern a country is beneficial for the country.

Knowing these two is also a standard.

To be able to recognize the standard is called invisible virtue.

Invisible virtue is deep, far-reaching, providing people a way back, thus reaching great accord.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Effecting the Way” means to accept the Way and put the Way into practice. To “enlighten the people” means to instruct them on various subjects such as ritual, music, law, ceremony, and precedent, establishing various interests to sophisticate the people. “Not to enlighten the people” means not doing this sort of thing; “making them unsophisticated” means just not contriving anything, so they’ll be simpleminded.

“The reason people are hard to govern” means once all sorts of instruction is given, people become hard to control. “They know too much” means the people are sophisticated; they get clever and use all sorts of methods to deceive the government and cheat others.

“Using sophistication to govern a country” here refers to the intelligence of the people on top. It refers to the sophistication to invent and establish all sorts of ideologies and interests. “Detrimental” means it harms the country.

“Not using sophistication” means to act without artifice, instead of using sophistication.

“Knowing these two” means knowing the difference between these two. “Is also a standard” means that the aforementioned establishment of various ideologies and interests are not the only standards; knowing the distinction between these two is also a standard. “A standard” means a rule.

“Invisible virtue” means uncontrived subtle qualities. “Providing people a way back” means it returns all beings to the basic without pursuing the trivial. “Reaching great accord” means that when bringing them back to the basic, there is no discord with the people; so it says, “thus reaching great accord.”

[66]

RIVERS AND SEAS ARE KINGS OF A HUNDRED VALLEYS

The reason that rivers and seas can be kings of a hundred valleys is that they can be lower; that is why they can be kings of a hundred valleys.

Therefore, when sages want to head the people, they will speak humbly to them; when they want to lead the people, they will place themselves after them.

This is why when sages are in charge, the people don't find them onerous, and when they take the lead the people don't attack them.

This is why everyone gladly promotes them and does not weary of them; because they do not contend, no one in the world can contend with them.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"Kings of a hundred valleys" means the heads or chiefs of the hundred valleys and myriad streams are the great rivers and oceans. "Can be lower" means they are lower than the hundred valleys, so the valleys drain into them. That is why it turns out that the rivers and seas are kings of the valleys.

To "want to head the people" means to act as their chief; "they will speak humbly" means they are modest in their speech. These two lines correspond to the preceding two,

so “when sages want to head the people, they will speak humbly to them” and “This is why when sages are in charge, the people don’t find them onerous” should be read as a continuum. To “head” means to be in a superior position; “onerous” means burdensome, bothersome. If you are high-handed and pushy in a desire to stand at the head of the people, the people will find that oppressive and onerous. But sages don’t do that, so the people don’t find them burdensome.

To “want to lead the people” is the same thing as to “want to head the people.” It means trying to stand at the head of the people. It is trying to establish yourself before the people. To “place themselves after them” means after the people. This is first seeing to it that the people are established. This should be read with the subsequent line “when they take the lead the people don’t attack them.” In this way, though sages are in front of the people, the people don’t do them any harm, and don’t become unhappy.

For example, when sightseeing, if the people in front don’t stand up tall, but keep a low profile, then the people behind won’t have their view blocked and won’t become unhappy.

To “promote” means to accept, promote, and honor. To “weary” means to get tired of, get sick of.

“Because they do not contend” means because sages have no thought of contending with others; since they have no thought of contending with others, no one contends with them.

[67]

EVERYONE SAYS

Everyone says I'm great but seem stupid.
It is just because of greatness that I seem stupid.
As for pretense, its pettiness is long established.
I have three treasures, which I keep as precious:
First is mercy, second is frugality,
third is not presuming to precede everyone.
Because of mercy, it is possible to be brave.
Because of frugality, it is possible to be generous.
Because of not presuming to precede everyone, it is
possible to be a leader.
Now if one were brave without mercy, generous
without frugality,
preceded and did not follow, one would die.
Mercy in war means victory, in defense means security.
Those whom Nature is going to save, it guards with
mercy.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"Everyone says" means everyone in the land says so. It's not that there were any number of people with views like Lao-tzu saying this, but that everyone would say he was this way. "I'm great but seem stupid" means that wisdom at its greatest seems witless. The greatest courage too is not aggressive, but after all seems diffident. When virtue is at its greatest as well, ultimately it seems decadent. Hence he says he seems stupid or trifling.

“It is just because of greatness that I seem stupid” means that it is precisely because of the greatest wisdom, character, and courage that one seems unworthy. “As for pretense” means if all you know how to do is claim that you don’t appear trifling and are not unworthy, then you’re a petty person, not a great person. “Long established” is like saying “originally” or “from the outset.” What he is saying is that this sort of thing has always been petty.

“Frugality” is thrift. “Not presuming to precede everyone” means being deferential, not going ahead of everyone else. In terms of the series, he should say, “third is deference,” but here he changes his manner of speech and says at length, “not presuming to precede everyone.” This is even more interesting.

“Because of mercy, it is possible to be brave” means that compassionate people do not exercise bravery on their own account alone, but exercise bravery with others, so they are brave and strong.

“Generosity” means giving extensively. A “leader” means someone at the head of others.

“Brave without mercy” means that what is done without mercy is not bravery with others but individual bravery, so it is dangerous.

“Generous without frugality” means that if you’re generous without spare, you go broke and cannot but perish.

“Precede and not follow” means rejecting the imperative to follow the world rather than take the lead. Also, “precedence” implies contest, challenge.

“One would die” means these all beckon death. This joins the preceding three lines into one. Excess bravery means death, excess generosity means death and ruin, excess initiative means death.

As for “mercy,” among the three treasures mentioned, none is greater than compassion.

“Those whom Nature is going to save” refers to specific people. Because Nature gives birth to beings, this is its heart. The heart of Nature is fundamentally compassionate. So, because mercy is Nature’s salvation, it says, “Those whom Nature is going to save, it guards with mercy.”

[68]

GOOD MAGISTRATES

Good magistrates are not severe.
Good warriors don't get furious.
Those who win well do not engage.
Those who employ people well act humbly toward
them.
These are called the virtues of noncompetition.
This is called utilizing people's strengths.
This is called matching Nature, the ancient ultimate.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"Magistrate" refers to a government office in charge of punishments and penalties. So one would think someone in this office ought to be severe and harsh, but since ancient times good magistrates were merciful and compassionate, not severe or harsh.

"Good warriors don't get furious" means that while one would think that it is in a fury that bravery peaks, since ancient times those who fight well do not get infuriated. If you get mad, you'll fall for your opponent's tricks and therefore cannot fight well. "Do not engage" means not becoming an adversary. If you go after adversaries to try to beat them wherever they appear, you cannot win. Those who go where there are no adversaries can go as far as they will.

The saying of swordsmen that "It's better not to contend" is an example of "not engaging."

As these three lines are both literal and figurative, they should be seen as metaphors within the primary meaning. They are articulated thus to express the statement that “Those who employ people well act humbly toward them.” Since care is subsequently taken to explain the line “Those who employ people well,” the first three lines, while meaning what they say, are used as figures of speech, while the line on employing people is the main idea of this chapter.

To “employ people well” means managing people skillfully. To “act humbly toward them” is what is called liking to ask questions. Someone who doesn’t like to ask questions can’t become a leader. So this is called “the virtue of noncompetition,” and also “utilizing people’s strengths.”

“Utilizing people’s strengths” means that if you like to ask questions, people will speak their minds, so you employ people’s strengths. And it also implies that you adapt and utilize others’ ideas without taxing yourself.

“Matching Nature” means conformity with the Way of Nature. Because the Way of Nature basically wants to support all beings, unless you utilize people’s strengths without contention, you cannot be considered in conformity with the heart of Nature.

“The ancient ultimate” means the ultimate Way of sages since ancient times. The principles in this chapter are completely wholesome.

[69]

THERE ARE MAXIMS FOR THE USE OF ARMS

There are maxims for the use of arms:

“We do not presume to be aggressors, but will be defenders.”

“We do not presume to advance an inch, but will withdraw a foot.”

This is called going on no expedition, baring no arm, drawing no enemy, wielding no weapon.

No calamity is greater than underestimating an opponent.

Underestimate opponents, and you may lose your own treasure.

Therefore, when opposing armies clash, the one with pity wins.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“There are maxims for the use of arms.” The military scientists of the time must have said things like this.

The “aggressor” is the one who attacks, the “defender” is the one who has no choice but to respond. “Not presuming to be the aggressor, but being the defender,” means you do not attack, but go into action only when attacked.

“We do not presume to advance an inch, but will withdraw a foot,” as indicated in commentaries, points out a principle of military science, the method of seizing victory by giving an appearance of weakness. Lao-tzu applies that

to the Way to say that unless you are not contentious you cannot prevail.

“Going on no expedition” means if you find nowhere to stop no matter how far you go, that’s the same as not going anywhere. Hence it says “going on no expedition.”

“Baring your arms” means rolling up your sleeves. If you roll up your sleeves but don’t fight, that’s the same as not baring your arms.

“Drawing no enemy” means even though drawing out opponents in a challenge, not opposing them but just drawing them out is the same as having no enemy. This is waiting out opponents by being flexible.

“Wielding no weapon” means even though you carry a sword, if you don’t fight it’s the same as not wielding a sword.

These four lines are like the Zen school’s “shooting an arrow that’s not released with a bow that’s not drawn.”

Your “own treasure” refers to the way to win without fighting.

“Opposing” is vying; “clash” is confrontation. “The one with pity” means the side that takes pity wins.

Emperor Guangwu of the Latter Han Dynasty said he felt his hair got grayer every time he raised an army.¹ So Guangwu avoided conflict and war as much as possible, and governed solely by benevolence and wisdom as much as he could. Great triumph does not come about otherwise.

[70]

MY SAYINGS ARE VERY EASY TO KNOW

My sayings are very easy to know, very easy to apply, but no one in the world can know or apply them.

Sayings have a source, actions have a leader, but no one knows.

This is why they don't know me.

Those who know me are rare; that's my value.

This is why sages wear wool but have jade.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"My sayings are very easy to know," that is, the principles of the words I say. Why are they easy? Because it is the Way without artificial contrivance, so it's nothing difficult, and nothing with a secret tradition. Because it's nothing problematic.

"Easy to apply" too, after all, is because there is no contrivance involved, and nothing unusual.

"No one in the world can know." People everywhere do and say all sorts of things, not knowing or practicing the Way of no contrivance.

"Have a source" and "have a leader" mean the same thing. It means that the sayings and practices are based on something. What they are based on is simply being uncontrived.

"No one knows." No one knows that Lao-tzu's maxims and practices have a basis.

“Those who know me are rare.” Even so, he says, the fact that few people know me is something to appreciate. His primary consideration is to be free from artificial contrivance, therefore those who know are rare. That is precisely why I’m valued, he says.

“Wool” is low-class clothing; this speaks of being as if wearing wool on the body while embracing a precious “jade” at heart. Even though having a valuable gem in the heart, on the external body one is wearing wool, so those who know are few.

This chapter too is particularly interesting.

[71]

KNOWING IGNORANCE IS SUPERIOR

Knowing ignorance is superior; ignorant knowledge is sick.

Only distress over sickness is the means of not getting sick.

Sages do not get sick because they're distressed by sickness;
therefore they don't get sick.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

The weird phrasing of this chapter is Lao-tzu's habitual touch.

"Knowing ignorance is superior" means that knowing nothing even while knowing the Way well is best in the Way. This is unknowing due to having become completely free of artificial contrivance by knowing the Way. As soon as there is any knowing going on, he says, you haven't become free of artificiality. Lao-tzu's meaning in speaking thus is to say that people of the world who make a show of knowing the Way do so because they don't know.

"Distress over sickness" means acknowledging that ignorant "knowledge" is an ailment. It means to be concerned about the sickness of "knowing" what you don't know.

"Because they're distressed by sickness." Why don't sages ail? Because without artificial contrivance, one will not get this way. So, wanting to become free of artificial

contrivance, by knowing the sickness of “knowledge” and being concerned about it, “therefore they don’t get sick.”

[72]

WHEN THE PEOPLE DO NOT FEAR AUTHORITY

When the people do not fear authority, great authority arrives.

When none find their abodes cramped, none weary of where they live.

It is because they don't weary that they are ready and willing.

Thus sages know themselves but do not see themselves;

they care for themselves but do not elevate themselves. So they abandon that and take this.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"Authority" implies power and penalty. After all, people should revert to ignorance. As proof of that, when they are shrewd and don't fear punishment by the authorities, somewhere along the line they will run into big trouble. This is "great authority arrives." Great authority implies a major penalty.

"When none find their abodes cramped." There is no abode as big, wide, and safe as freedom from artificial contrivance. Not staying there, but putting out all sorts of subjective cunning, is what causes cramping.

"None weary of where they live." If they stay in that safe place where there is no artificial contrivance, there won't be any trouble. When people don't stay there, they suffer

all sorts of calamities and injuries. Isn't this getting weary of where you live?

"It is because they don't weary that they are ready and willing" refers to not wearying of where you live. That they are therefore "ready and willing" is like saying "so they last long."

"Sages know themselves but do not see themselves." Though they know for themselves, they are as if they don't see. This too is returning to ignorance.

"Care" means to take care of the body. "Not to elevate oneself" means remaining lowly and deferential.

"They abandon that" means they abandon all sorts of cleverness by which ordinary people cramp themselves, weary themselves, and elevate themselves. "Take this" means to adopt carefree noncontrivance.

QUESTION: "When the people do not fear authority, great authority arrives," in my ignorant view, suggests that when the top people don't know how to rule the populace by virtue, and try to rule by threat, above and below are alienated and estranged, and ultimately authority is lost. But when rulers and ruled are on friendly terms and not estranged, the people don't seem aware that the rulers have the power, and don't fear them; then the dignity of the leaders is great and enduring. Isn't that what this means?

ANSWER: This is an even more interesting explanation. It fits grammatically and semantically, and also accords with Lao-tzu's thought and practice.

[73]

BRAVE IN DARING

When you're brave in daring, you get killed;
when you're brave in not daring, you live.
These two may benefit and may harm.
Who knows the reasons for what Nature dislikes?
Therefore even sages find it hard.
The Way of Nature prevails without contention,
responds without speaking,
comes without being called,
smoothly plans well.
The web of Nature is all-encompassing,
loose without letting slip.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

The word "daring" in itself means being bold and resolute, but here, when you look carefully, it refers to initiating challenge and conflict. "Not daring" means not challenging or contending.

"Benefit" refers to staying alive. "Harm" refers to being killed.

"What Nature dislikes." The Way of Nature is normal, nothing particular—there may be mountains or rivers, it may be cold or warm; some things are medicinal, and some are poisonous—and so on; there is all sorts of variety, but because the Way of Nature fundamentally is not contentious, it lets everything happen as it may, so everything coexists.

That being so, it is to be expected that the contentiousness of the daring is disagreeable to Nature.

“Who knows” means nobody knows the reason for that.

“Find it hard” means it is hard to let your natural self be just as you are.

“Responds without speaking” means that the Way of Nature hasn’t thundered, “Hey you! Get the message?” Yet it responds with good fortune to those who do good, and with bad to those who do bad.

“Comes without being called” means that all these are spontaneous expressions of the Way of Nature.

“Smoothly” means evenly, without a fuss, smooth and uneventful. To “plan well” means performance and planning. It means it’s wondrous how everyone has their own natural ways of application and management.

“Loose” means the mesh is coarse. “Without letting slip” means even the small-fry don’t get away. This likens Nature to a net.

[74]

WHEN THE PEOPLE AREN'T AFRAID OF DYING

When the people aren't afraid of dying,
how can they be intimidated by killing?
Supposing the people were ever afraid of dying
and those who act oddly we could arrest and execute,
who would dare?
Normally there is an executioner who executes:
to kill in place of the executioner is called planing in
the carpenter's stead;
those who plane instead of the carpenter rarely avoid
hurting their hands.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"When the people aren't afraid of dying." If the people aren't scared of death, why threaten them with killing? They ought to hate death; if they don't fear death, how can death be used to intimidate them?

In Confucian books it says humans like life and hate death, so they despise the cruel and take to the compassionate. Here, however, in this book, that is reversed, so people who read it are startled and declare that Lao-tzu says absurd things. But that is not so. The saying in the *Analects* of Confucius, "People all like life and hate death" refers to general human feeling, speaking of what is normal. Here, Lao-tzu is speaking in terms of the force of momentum. When people are riding on the force of momentum, they don't have any aversion to death. The

proof of that can be seen in the fact that they dislike dying alone, but in a mass life-or-death situation they think nothing of it, coalescing into a mass just like that.

Also, when the policies of the leader are reasonable, people adhere to them for fear of penalties. If they think policies are unethical and unreasonable, they're apt to violate them. This is called not fearing death.

The sense of this chapter is that even when the people aren't afraid of death, those who administer punishments and penalties, failing to recognize that, try to rule coercively by means of the death penalty.

"Supposing the people were ever afraid of dying." If the people were ever afraid to die, and each and every one of those who acted oddly were arrested and executed, who would dare do anything odd? If the people feared death, they wouldn't do anything bad because they'd get killed for it, but as long as they don't fear death they'll go ahead and do bad things, regardless of execution. So there's no point in arbitrarily strengthening the death penalty. If they are really truly bad people, there is an executioner to kill them.

That executioner is Nature. For example, heads of state who are compassionate people just banish even those who deserve to be executed. When they reform, they drift back to their country. If they don't mend the evil of their ways, somewhere along the line they get killed.

Since the Way of Nature always works out this way, to become impatient with it and carry out the death penalty in its stead is like losing patience with a carpenter planing wood, grabbing it and doing the planing yourself. Even if you feel you can't wait, you're surely not better than a master carpenter; so if you act that way you'll not fail to hurt your hands. In the same way, even if you think you have wisdom and can administer rewards and punishments properly, are you indeed better than the Way of Nature? So killing people as if in its stead is not likely to bode well.

[75]

THE STARVATION OF THE PEOPLE

The starvation of the people
is due to the quantity of taxes consumed by the rulers;
that is why they starve.

What makes the people hard to govern
is contrivance on the part of their rulers;
that is why they're hard to govern.

The reason people disregard death
is because of the eagerness of their quest for life;
that is why they disregard death.

It is those who do nothing artificial to live
who are expert at valuing life.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

In today's world, people go hungry because their rulers take too many exactions. This includes everything taken from the populace.

"Contrivance" means involvement in doing one thing and another, not acting without artificiality. So it is with the whims of rulers.

"Disregarding death" means dying for the sake of some desire, or dying due to craving to consume. These are examples of disregarding death. This is "eagerness of their quest for life."

To "do nothing artificial to live" means not making life a problem. It is a matter of becoming free from artificiality

and leaving it up to Nature how long you live and how you fare.

“Valuing life” means valuing life is seeking to live. This chapter is all about the value of having no artificiality, expressed through examples. The artificial actions mentioned above are bad things; the point is to express the importance of acting without artificiality.

[76]

WHEN PEOPLE ARE BORN

When people are born, they are supple,
but when they die they are stiff.
All beings, plants and trees, are soft when born,
brittle when they die.
Therefore stiffness is an associate of death,
flexibility is an associate of life.
This is why when an army is strong it doesn't win,
and when a tree is strong it is put to use.
Forcefulness is below, yielding is above.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

"When people are born, they are supple." This fits with the terms of the path of health maintenance, and also corresponds to strength or softness of personality.

It is disastrous to be weak. Those who are hard and forceful encounter calamity. In my ignorant opinion, this also fits the saying in the *Kōyō Gunkan* that bold adversaries are easy to beat, while yielding adversaries are hard to beat.¹

"Soft when born . . ." For example, seedlings are soft inside and will readily take root wherever they're transplanted. This is being born soft. When they dry out, they wither and die.

"When an army is strong . . ." means not only living things, but even the way of warfare is like this. For example, between the armies of Wu and Yueh, the army of

Wu was strong but got beaten.² The same is true of the armies of Han and Ch'u.³ There are countless cases of victory by way of benevolence and yielding. Even trees, if sturdy and strong, are cut down to be put to use.

To be "below" or "above" refers to inferiority and superiority.

[77]

THE WAY OF NATURE

The Way of Nature is like drawing a bow:
the high is lowered, the low is raised,
the extra is reduced, the incomplete is augmented.
The Way of Nature reduces excess and compensates for
the insufficient,
but the way of humans is not so—they reduce the
insufficient to present to those with excess.
Who can have a surplus to present to the world?
Only those who have the Way.
Therefore sages act without presumption;
when their work is done, they don't dwell on it;
they don't want to be seen as sagacious.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“Like drawing a bow” means that it snaps back. In other words, it reverses. When you draw a bow, what had been inside becomes outside, what had been outside becomes inside; where it had been high is lowered, where it had been low is raised. So the Way of Nature too reverses marvelously. Those on high are put down by Nature, while the lowly are raised up by Nature. This is what I've called snapping back.

“The high is lowered.” This speaks in terms of social rank. For example, the ancient kings Jie and Zhou were extremely extravagant and arrogant, so they were put down; King Tang and King Wu were humble, and so they

were raised up. The extravagant with abundance are curbed, the humble are elevated and ennobled.

To “have a surplus” refers to wealth. When well-to-do people are extravagant, they fritter their money away, while poor people work and get wealthy. But while the Way of Nature is always like this, somehow the way of humans is not, reducing the inadequate to present to those with more than enough.

To “reduce the insufficient” means to take away what is already not enough. This means squeezing the people mercilessly for your own luxury, cutting down on the left to give a bribe to the right.

But who can have a surplus for the whole world? No one but those who have the Way, he says. To “present to the world” means to reduce yourself to serve the world. It means reducing some luxury to help out the populace.

“Without presumption” means you don’t presume on it as your own personal virtue. “Don’t dwell on it” means you don’t dwell on accomplishments as your own personal merit.

“They don’t want to be seen as sagacious” because they are well aware that the Way of Nature reverses, like drawing a bow.

[78]

SOFTTEST AND MOST YIELDING IN THE WORLD

Nothing in the world is softer and more yielding than
water,
yet nothing can surpass it in attacking the firm and
strong;
nothing does it more easily.
The fact that yielding beats force,
and gentility beats hardness,
is known to everyone in the world,
but no one can apply it in practice.
Therefore sages say,
Accepting the disgrace of the nation
is called ownership of the land and its produce;
accepting the misfortune of the nation
is called world leadership.
True words seem contradictory.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

Nothing is as soft and yielding as water. Its shape conforms to the vessel it's in, be it round or square; whatever people do with it, that's how it becomes.

"Attacking the firm and strong" refers to water. What can put out even a huge fire is water. What can burst even an enormous levee is water. What can attack even the strongest citadel is water. "Nothing does it more easily" means that in order to prevail over the firm and strong, there is no easier way to win than by means of "water."

“Known to everyone in the world” means such an evident fact is obvious, but is not put into practice.

“Accepting the disgrace of the nation” means putting up with the shame. “The land and its produce” is another way of saying “the country.” “Misfortune” is like saying “bad luck.” This means events like King Wu’s confinement.¹

“True words” mean genuinely accurate discourse. Lao-tzu says himself, “What I say is true but sounds like the opposite.”

An example of this is the case of a certain Chao Chien-tzu of ancient China. He had many sons, but he bypassed the bright and talented ones to make Chao Hsiang-tzu his heir. When people asked him why, Chien-tzu said, “Because he has the sense to endure humiliation. If people cannot bear humiliation, they cannot handle great responsibilities.” And so he made him his heir.

Subsequently, when Chih Po went out of control and destabilized the state, Chao Hsiang-tzu was able to put up with it for the time being, and waited until he saw his momentum petering out, whereupon he destroyed Chih Po.

[79]

WHEN YOU PACIFY GREAT HOSTILITY

When you pacify great hostility
yet there must be remaining spite,
how can that be considered good?
Therefore sages do not press people.
The virtuous keep pledges,
those without virtue keep precedents.
The Way of Nature is impartial;
it is always with good people.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

“When you pacify great hostility yet there must be remaining spite . . .” In your relations with people, when there is bad blood between you and others, even if you reconcile and make peace, if some hostility is sure to remain, that cannot be considered good. The idea is that anything deliberate is greatly inferior to being mindless. The point is to realize mindlessness with no artificiality.

During the reign of Emperor Te-tsung of T'ang dynasty China, the Prime Minister Chang Yen-shang and the major general Li Sheng were on bad terms with each other. Li Sheng thought, “For this man and I to be at odds is by no means good for the government.” With this consideration in mind, Li Sheng took the initiative to speak of his concern and effect a reconciliation, hoping even to become friends. Subsequently he suggested that Yen-shang's daughter marry his own son; but Yen-shang didn't agree. Then

General Li Sheng knitted his brow and said, "A military man, once having reconciled in this way, forgets everything and never again entertains a past resentment. It seems to me that this is what is meant by the saying that 'The mind of a literary man is complicated'!"

"The virtuous keep pledges." A pledge means a promissory note. Though they hold promissory notes, they don't press people to redeem them. When you hold a pledge, you can repossess the object; to refrain from pressing for its return even though it belongs to you, it is necessary not to mind. This is just a metaphor for the thorough mindlessness of sages.

"The virtuous keep pledges." To "keep" means hold. Virtuous people just say they are keeping promissory notes; this means they don't press others.

To "keep precedents" uses "precedent" in the sense of clarification. While virtuous people hold pledges, people without virtue are eager to clarify those matters. Now this is a simile to say that people without virtue are judgmental.

"Impartial" means having no favoritism. "With good people" means to side with good people and penalize those who aren't good. The idea is that since the Way of Nature is already like this, why be eager to clarify things in Creation's stead? It's the same idea as the earlier one that those who try to take over for the carpenter will hurt their hands.

Though the "pledge" in this chapter is a metaphor, such things can actually exist for people with no artificiality. An example is Su Yun-ch'ing of Hsiang-yang, during the Sung dynasty of China. The Sung, having two-thirds of its empire taken by the Altaic Chin dynasty, selected Chang Wei-kung of Hsiang-yang to be the supreme commander of an attempt to beat the Chin and recover occupied territory.

Earlier, when Chang Wei-kung was still an ordinary man, he had a friend back in Hsiang-yang, named Su Yun-ch'ing. After he had gotten this big responsibility as supreme

commander, he thought he wouldn't be able to succeed alone, so he decided to send for his old friend Su Yun-ch'ing so that they could collaborate on strategic planning.

When inquiries were made looking for Su, it turned out that he had known beforehand this would happen, and at some point had moved away. So Chang privately had pictures of Su made and sent out searches for him all over, until he heard that Su was in a place called Yu-chang. Then he sent two messengers to find him, deliver a letter from Chang, and present him with travel expenses.

When the messengers arrived in Yu-chang and made inquiries, they were told that there was no one there named Yun-ch'ing, but there was someone they called Old Man Su, who might be he.

The messengers asked what that man looked like. They were told he was very tall, with a face as black as lacquer, and the light of his eyes like lightning; and that he was an extremely kind and lovable man, respected by all thereabouts, both religious and laypeople, both old and young, and disliked by no one. He always worked in the fields, so he grew produce successfully throughout the four seasons; his produce was better than others, and sold readily, so he made a comfortable living. However, when people down on their luck borrowed money from him, he'd lend whatever he had to anyone; and those who couldn't pay, he gave back their notes, while those who could, repaid. This is the kind of person he was, people said.

The two messengers went to his house with no introduction. He was there working in the fields. They saw there wasn't a speck of dust around, and his house only had an earth stove, beside it a desk with the *Book of Han* on it. Realizing he was no ordinary man, they announced themselves as travelers. He stopped his work in the fields to brew some tea to entertain them. As he was boiling the water, the messengers asked him where he came from, gradually broaching the matter of Chang Wei-kung.

Su said, "He's an old friend of mine; I know him well." Then the messengers asked, "Will he succeed in this great task?" Su said, "It will be hard. Wei-kung can employ cultivated people all right, but he can't handle lesser people. He has talent, but his intelligence is not up to the job."

The messengers said, "That's exactly why he sent us here to call you." When they brought out the letter and the money, Su snorted softly and said, "If that's the way it is, I'll go with you, but I can't right now. First inform the local authorities of the trip, and I'll come tomorrow."

So the two messengers went to the provincial governor. The next day they waited, but Su never showed up. So the messengers and the governor went to Su's house. There they found the letter unopened, the money there just as it was, and Su gone, no one knew where.

The two messengers could do nothing but go back and tell Chang Wei-kung what had happened. He became dispirited, considering his mission impossible. As it eventually turned out, he didn't succeed. Slanderers emerged in his ranks, and Chang Weikung was sent into exile.

Chang Wei-kung's son was a great Confucian named Chang Nan-hsuan. Once when there was going to be a major battle the next day, Nan-hsuan couldn't sleep all night. He went to look in on his father, and found him fast asleep, snoring loudly. While he had been given various admonitions in the past, Nan-hsuan said that this is how he realized the difference in their caliber.

[80]

A SMALL COUNTRY WITH FEW PEOPLE

A small country with few people
may have weapons for groups of tens and hundreds,
but doesn't use them.
It makes the people take death seriously
and not go on distant expeditions.
Though they have boats and wagons,
they don't ride them anywhere;
though they have armor and weapons,
they don't take them out.
It has the people return to the use of knotted ropes,
relish their food, admire their clothing,
be comfortable in their homes, and enjoy their customs.
Neighboring states can see each other,
can hear each others' chickens and dogs,
but the people never travel between them all their
lives.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

Lao-tzu's meaning is that if he were to govern a country, even if it were a small country with few inhabitants it would still be organized into groups of tens and hundreds. The rule for governing the people is generally to organize them into groups of five, ten, fifty, and a hundred, for mutual consultation and mutual assistance. Lao-tzu means that since cleverness and genius are not needed, even if there are talented people he wouldn't hire them.

“Take death seriously” means that when people leave their families to go to unfamiliar foreign countries, it is because they are not at peace where they are, and are seeking something else; well, to die in a foreign country is not taking death seriously. If where you are is comfortable, you have no inclination to move away, go somewhere else, and die in a foreign land.

“Though they have boats and wagons . . .” Although they have the usual boats and vehicles, and conventional armor and weapons, they don’t ride the vehicles anywhere and don’t take out the armor and weapons to attack and plunder anywhere. Lao-tzu’s intention here is to represent how he’d start this way, with no artificiality and no issues. And this way of governing is to govern by means of the three treasures mentioned earlier—frugality, mercy, and deference.

“Return to the use of knotted ropes.” Lao-tzu’s meaning is that he does not like to sophisticate the people with pointless learning of letters, rites, and music; he would have them return to ancient government, knotting ropes. However, this does not mean destroying writing and getting rid of books because Lao-tzu says so. This statement in Lao-tzu’s book is also writing, and moreover to destroy the writings circulating all over the world would itself be a contrived action, not without artificiality.

“Relish their food . . .” When the people don’t know anything else, they consider their normal food and clothing to be just fine, and don’t seek anything rare.

“Can see each other” means so close they can see each other. “Hearing each other” also means they are close. The sounds of one state’s chickens and dogs can be heard in another state, and vice versa, but no one travels between them because there is no need to go anywhere else.

Lao-tzu says this is how he’d do it. He can’t be saying it’s actually like this; rather, what he’s saying is that in any case, even in governing a country, he’d see to it that there

would be order by minimizing matters. Yet it's not entirely hypothetical.

[81]

TRUE WORDS ARE NOT BEAUTIFUL

True words are not beautiful, beautiful words are not true.

Experts do not argue; the argumentative are not expert.

The knowledgeable are not generalists; generalists are not knowledgeable.

Sages do not hoard;
since they act for others,
they themselves have more and more.

Since they give to others,
they have increasing abundance.

The Way of Nature helps and does not harm;
the Way of sages is to act without contention.

TAKUAN'S COMMENTARY

Truthful speech has no polish; this is stated in order to say that embellishment is bad.

“Experts do not argue” means that whether in legal proceedings or in discussion, the right party or the right thing doesn't depend on argument, so one does not clarify by argument. It is the one in the wrong who wants to exercise eloquence in argument.

“The knowledgeable” are those who know the Way. “Generalists” are those who study widely. Here too it is ordinarily like this—as it turns out, the learned are ignorant of reason. That's because they're confused by quantity.

Those who know what is reasonable are not the erudite scholars.

“Do not hoard.” They don’t store up wealth for themselves, but use it for others. While they place the importance on giving to others, they have more and more, greater and greater abundance.

King Wen of Chou was an example of this. He enabled the people to save, and didn’t hoard himself. Then when he announced that he wanted to build a tower, the people were happy to hear it, and the tower was soon completed.

And it is not only sages who are thus. The Way of Nature also does this, helping and not harming. For example, autumn and winter seem to make the plants and trees wither, but it is not so; the leaves fall because the spring growth sprouts from beneath. This is not killing, but producing without contending. Whatever it does, there is no contention with anyone.

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NOTES

[2] WHEN EVERYONE IN THE WORLD KNOWS

1. A Zen maxim says, "All sounds are the voice of Buddha."
2. That is to say, elements of an order or a succession are defined relative to one another. Just as the same individual may be at once ahead of someone and behind someone else in a given order, the same individual may be ahead of someone in one order but behind the same person in another order.

[3] NOT TO ESTEEM SAGACITY

1. Hayashi Razan (1583–1657) was a famous neo-Confucian scholar. He was a tutor of the first three shoguns of the Tokugawa regime, and the head of the government Confucian academy.
2. Yao and Shun were ancient leaders immortalized as sages in Chinese traditions.

[4] THE WAY IS EMPTY

1. The Five Emperors of antiquity represent the development of civilization and culture. In this sense, "before the emperors" refers to the idea of recovering pristine human nature prior to artificial social or cultural constructs, or, in Zen terms, perceiving inherent Buddha-nature.

[5] SKY AND EARTH ARE NOT BENEVOLENT

1. This is not meant literally, but refers to the conception that Buddha taught people as he found them and did not declare a fixed dogma.

[6] NURTURE THE SPIRIT, AND IT WON'T DIE

1. That is to say, it is not meant literally but hyperbolically, used as a form of recommendation.

[9] TO HOLD AND FILL SOMETHING

1. Minamoto Yoshitsune (1159–1189) was a younger brother of Minamoto Yoritomo, the first shogun of the Kamakura military government. Yoshitsune helped Yoritomo defeat the rival Taira clan for supremacy, then afterward joined forces with the emperor against Yoritomo. He was subsequently brought down and forced to commit suicide.

2. Fan Li was a grandee of the state of Yue, an adviser to the king. After the king annexed the neighboring state of Wu, Fan Li retired, changed his name, and became a medicine peddler. A biographical note on Fan Li appears in *Alchemists, Mediums, and Magicians*.

3. Zhang Liang tried unsuccessfully to assassinate the First Emperor of China. While in hiding afterward, he studied with a wizard, and eventually became adviser to the imperial house of the newly established Han dynasty. After assisting in the stabilization of the Han regime, he retired to practice Taoism.

[25] THERE IS SOMETHING, AN UNDIFFERENTIATED WHOLE

1. This refers to the second symbol of the Chinese classic I Ching, which represents pure yin, commonly symbolized by the female gender, normally used to stand for the quality of flexibility.

[26] WEIGHTINESS IS THE ROOT OF LIGHTNESS

1. Takuan prefaces his commentary, “This chapter is easy to interpret in itself, but the commentaries are extremely distorted, so that it turns out the concluding lines are hard to see.” The record of his own reading is confused at the end mainly because of a grammatical problem in the transformation of Chinese to Japanese syntax, something that is not uncommon in Japanese readings of Chinese texts. The notion of leadership being “more serious than the world” can be reconciled with the notion of “disregarding oneself to lead the world,” if being more serious than the world is taken to mean being more serious about the world than personal interest in the world.

[29] THOSE WHO WOULD WANT TO TAKE THE WORLD

1. The First Emperor of China originally united Ch'in and expanded it into an empire in the third century B.C.E. Emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty reunited China in the late sixth century C.E. after it had been divided by conquest for hundreds of years. In both cases the wealth amassed by centralization was squandered by successors on further military ambition, resulting in the early demise of both dynasties.

2. Nobunaga was a warlord who tried to unite Japan in the late sixteenth century C.E. He was particularly fierce in his attempt to destroy Buddhism as a social and political influence, burning down monasteries and killing monks. In the end he was defeated and forced to commit suicide. Shingen was another warlord of the sixteenth century, very famous for having been undefeated in combat throughout his career. Controversy surrounds his death, the exact circumstances of which are uncertain, but Takuan may be referring to a story that Shingen was assassinated by a member or members of his own camp, who feared he was losing his warrior's edge after he took to a luxurious lifestyle in the manner of the aristocrats of old.

[30] THOSE WHO ASSIST HUMAN RULERS BY MEANS OF THE WAY

1. King Wu of Chou was one of the founders of the ancient Chinese Chou (Zhou) dynasty, which supplanted the preceding Shang dynasty in the late second millennium B.C.E. King Chou (Zhou) was the last king of the Shang dynasty, who is portrayed as having been impossibly corrupt, precipitating a revolt of an alliance of subordinate states and tribes led by King Wu of Chou.

[37] THE WAY IS ALWAYS FREE FROM CONTRIVANCE

1. Chu Hsi (Zhu Xi) (1130-1200) and Su Tung-p'o (Su Dongpo) (1037-1101) were neo-Confucian scholars.

[38] HIGHER VIRTUE ISN'T VIRTUOUS

1. That is, no ulterior motive, no personal ambition. In Buddhism this is called objectless compassion.

[43] THE GREATEST FLEXIBILITY IN THE WORLD

1. The reference is to the tradition that a monk, having no family and owning no property, has no personal worldly interests, and as such is not regarded as a party to a dispute, even when acting as an intermediary. Not being threatening to anyone, the monk is not threatened by anyone.

[45] GREAT FULFILLMENT SEEMS LACKING

1. That is to say, as stillness can overcome even the heat of the natural order, so calm can overcome the heat, the anger and irritation, of the human realm.

[54] WHAT IS WELL ESTABLISHED IS NOT DONE AWAY WITH

1. This refers to fundamental natural feelings such as liking life and disliking death, liking health and disliking hunger, injury, and disease. This identification of fundamental interests is part of the Buddhist practice of universal compassion.

[64] WHAT IS AT REST IS EASY TO HOLD

1. To “push a cart sideways” is a standard expression for trying to do something in an unnatural, arbitrary, or unreasonable manner.

[69] THERE ARE MAXIMS FOR THE USE OF ARMS

1. Guangwu reigned over the Chinese empire for more than thirty years, from 25 to 58 C.E. He reestablished the Han dynasty, which had begun in 206 B.C.E and had continued uninterrupted for almost two hundred years until the throne was usurped by a bureaucrat in 9 C.E. After Guangwu restored the Han in 25 C.E., it continued for nearly two more centuries, until 220 C.E.

[76] WHEN PEOPLE ARE BORN

1. This is a collection of writings centered around the career of the famous Japanese warlord Takeda Shingen (1521-1573). See *Essentials of Military Matters* by Yamaga Takatsune, translated in *Samurai Wisdom*.

2. Wu and Yueh were neighboring states in ancient times. After seesawing conflict, Yueh annexed Wu in the fifth century B.C.E.

3. This war between Han and Ch'u took place between 206 and 202 B.C.E. The Ch'u military was considered the most powerful of the time, but the Han prevailed to establish the monumental dynasty of that name. The chief strategist of the Han is greatly honored in Taoist histories. See chapter 3 of *Alchemists, Mediums, & Magicians*, "Western Han Dynasty."

[78] SOFTEST AND MOST YIELDING IN THE WORLD

1. King Wu is a hero of Chinese history, one of the founders of the Chou dynasty in the late second millennium B.C.E. Before he rose up to overthrow his corrupt overlord, king of the preceding Shang dynasty, Wu was condemned to confinement by that king, who feared his increasing influence. The point made here is that Wu's ability to endure this kind of setback was an element of his greatness as king.

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