

One

1.1

As for the Way:

It covers Heaven and upholds Earth.

It extends the four directions
and divides the eight end points.

So high, it cannot be reached.

So deep, it cannot be fathomed.

It embraces and enfolds Heaven and Earth

It endows and bestows the Formless.

Flowing along like a wellspring, bubbling up like a font,
it is empty but gradually becomes full.

Roiling and boiling,
it is murky but gradually becomes clear.

Therefore,

pile it up vertically: it fills all within Heaven and Earth.

Stretch it out horizontally: it encompasses all within the Four
Seas.

Unwind it limitlessly: it is without distinction between dawn
and dusk.

Roll it out: it expands to the six coordinates.¹

Roll it up: it does not make a handful.

It is constrained but able to extend.

It is dark but able to brighten.

It is supple but able to strengthen.

It is pliant but able to become firm.

It stretches out the four binding cords² and restrains yin and
yang.

It suspends the cosmic rafters and displays the Three
Luminaries.

Intensely saturating and soaking,
Intensely subtle and minute.
Mountains are high because of it.
Abysses are deep because of it.
Beasts can run because of it.
Birds can fly because of it.
The sun and moon are bright because of it.
The stars and timekeepers move because of it.
Qilins wander freely because of it. Phoenixes soar because of
it. [1/1/3–8]

1.2

The two August Lords of high antiquity³
grasped the handles of the Way
and so were established in the center.
Their spirits mysteriously roamed together with all
transformations
and thereby pacified the four directions.
Hence, they could revolve like the heavens and stand still like
the earth,
cycle round and round without stopping,
flowing unceasingly like water,
they ended and began together with all things.
As winds arose and clouds formed,
there was no event to which they did not respond.
As thunder rumbled and rain descended,
to all they responded without end.
Ghosts departed and spirits entered.
Dragons arose and phoenixes alighted.
Like the potter's wheel turning, like the wheel hub spinning,
they circled round and round.
Both carved and polished,
they returned to the Unhewn.⁴
They acted non-actively and were united with the Way.⁵
They spoke non-actively and were suffused by its Potency.⁶
They were peaceful and without cares and attained harmony.

Although there were a myriad of different things in the world, they accorded with their various natures. Their spirits could concentrate [on something as small as] the tip of an autumn hair⁷ and something as vast as the totality of space and time.⁸

Their Potency:

accorded with Heaven and the Earth and harmonized yin and yang;

delimited the four seasons and attuned the Five Phases.⁹

[Because] it affectionately supported and nurtured them, the myriad things nourished their vitality.

It could seep into grasses and trees and soak into metal and rock.¹⁰

Among the multitude of kinds of wild beasts the hairs of their coats were sleek and moist.

Their feathers and wings fluttered;

their horns and antlers grew.

The embryos of beasts were not stillborn.

The eggs of birds were not infertile.

Fathers were spared the grief of mourning their sons.

Elder brothers were spared the sadness of mourning their younger brothers.

Children did not become orphans.

Wives did not become widows.

Double rainbows did not appear.

Baleful stars did not occur.¹¹

This is all the result of the Potency with which they were imbued. [1/1/10–17]

1.3

The most exalted Way

generates the myriad things but does not possess them, completes the transforming images¹² but does not dominate them.

Creatures that walk on hooves and breathe through beaks, that fly through the air and wriggle on the ground,

depend on it for life, yet none understands its Potency;

depend on it for death, yet none is able to resent it.
Those who attain it and profit are unable to praise it;
those who use it and lose are unable to blame it.
It gathers and collects yet is not any richer for it.
It bestows and confers yet it not diminished by it.
It cycles endlessly yet cannot be fathomed.
It is delicate and minute yet cannot be exhausted.
Pile it up, but it will not get higher;
Collapse it, but it will not get lower.
Add to it, but it will not increase.
Take away from it, but it will not decrease.
Split it, but it will not get thinner.
Kill it, but it will not be destroyed.
Bore into it, but it will not deepen.
Fill it in, but it will not get shallower.
Hazy! Nebulous! You cannot imagine it.
Nebulous! Hazy! Your use will not exhaust it.
Dark! Obscure! It responds formlessly.
Deep! Penetrating! It does not act in vain.
It rolls and unrolls with the firm and the pliant.
It bends and straightens with the yin and the yang. [1/1/19–
24]

1.4

In ancient times when Feng Yi and Da Bing rode chariots, they rose up in thunder carts and entered the cloudy rainbow. They roamed in the ethereal mists and galloped in the hazy and nebulous. Going farther and farther and higher and higher, they reached the pinnacle. They traversed the frost and snow but left no tracks. Illuminated by the light of the sun, they cast no shadows. Spiraling around, they ascended the whirlwind. Traversing mountains and rivers, they strode over Mount Kunlun. Pushing through the Chang He [gate] they surged through the gateway of Heaven.¹³

If we compare this with the charioteering in recent times, although there are lightweight carts and good horses, strong whips and sharp prods, they cannot compete with or overtake them.¹⁴

Therefore, the Great Man
calmly has no worries
and placidly has no anxieties

He takes
Heaven as his canopy;
Earth as his carriage;
the four seasons as his steeds,
and yin and yang as his charioteers.

He rides the clouds and soars through the sky to become a companion of the power that fashions and transforms us. Letting his imagination soar and relaxing his grip, he gallops through the vast vault [of the heavens].

When appropriate, he canters [his steeds].

When appropriate, he gallops them.

He orders the master of rain to moisten the byways

And directs the master of wind to sweep away the dust.

He takes lightning as his lash
and thunder as his chariot wheels.

Above, he roams freely in the misty and murky realms.

Below, he emerges from the gateway of the boundless.

Having observed all around and illuminated everything

He returns to guarding [the One] in order to remain whole.

He superintends the four corners [of Earth]

Yet always turns back to the central axis.

Thus,

with Heaven as your canopy, nothing will be uncovered.

With Earth as your carriage, nothing will be unsupported

With the four seasons as your steeds, nothing will be unemployed.

With yin and yang as your charioteers, nothing will be incomplete.

Therefore, why is it that

he hastens forth but does not wobble;

goes far but does not weary;

his four limbs do not weaken;

his perceptual acuity does not diminish;

and he comprehends the shapes and outlines of the eight outlying regions and the nine fields of the heavens? It is because he grasps the handles of the Way and roams in the land of the inexhaustible. [1/1/26–1/2/11]

1.5

Therefore,

the affairs of the world cannot be deliberately controlled.

You must draw them out by following their natural direction.

The alterations of the myriad things cannot be fathomed.

You must grasp their essential tendencies and guide them to their homes.

When a water mirror comes in contact with shapes, it is not because of wisdom and precedent that it is able to flawlessly reflect the square, round, crooked, and straight.¹⁵ Therefore, the echo does not respond at random, and the shadow does not independently arise. They mimic sounds and forms and tacitly grasp them.

That which is tranquil from our birth is our heavenly nature. Stirring only after being stimulated, our nature is harmed. When things arise and the spirit responds, this is the activity of perception. When perception comes into contact with things, preferences arise. When preferences take shape and perception is enticed by external things, our nature cannot return to the self, and the heavenly patterns are destroyed.¹⁶

Thus those who break through to the Way do not use the human to change the heavenly. Externally they transform together with things, but internally they do not lose their genuine responses.

They attain Nothing, but their needs are provided for.

They are always on the move but find a place to lodge for the night.

Small and great, tall or short, each has its proper role. The myriads spring forth and leap and prance in profusion, yet they do not lose track of their norms.¹⁷

So when they rest above, the people do not find them heavy.

When they are located in front, the multitudes do not injure them.

All the world returns to them
The wicked and perverse fear them.
It is because they do not compete with the myriad things that none is
able to compete with them. [1/2/11–19]

1.6

Now if someone spends an entire day pole-fishing along a riverbank he will not be able to fill up even a hand basket. Even though he may have hooked barbs and sharp spears, fine line and fragrant bait, and, in addition, the skills of Zhan He or Juan Xuan,¹⁸ he would still be unable to compete with the catch hauled in by a trawling net. Or suppose a Bowman were to stretch out the famous Wuhao bow and fit it with the fine arrows from Qi and add to this the craft of Yi or Feng Mengzi.¹⁹ If he wanted to hunt birds in flight, he would still be unable to match the amount caught by a gauze net. Why is this? It is because what he is holding is small [by comparison].

If you stretch out the world and make it your basket
and follow the courses of rivers and oceans and make them
your trawling net,

How could you lose any fish or miss any birds?

Thus the arrow cannot match the spear; the spear cannot match the trawling net; but the trawling net cannot match the Formless Image.²⁰ [1/2/21–25] Now if you let go of the great Way and rely on inferior methods,²¹ this is no different from using a crab to catch a rat or a frog to catch a flea: it is insufficient to prevent wickedness and block depravity. It will only cause disorder to increase.

In ancient times, Gun²² of Xia made a city wall twenty-four feet high,²³ but the Lords of the Land turned against him and those who dwelled beyond the seas had deceitful hearts. [His son] Yu²⁴ understood that the world had become rebellious and thereupon knocked down the wall, filled in the moat surrounding the city, gave away their resources, burned their armor and weapons, and treated everyone with beneficence. And so the lands beyond the Four Seas respectfully submitted, and the four Yi tribes brought tribute. When he assembled the Lords of the Land on Mount Du, there were people from myriad principalities who brought in gifts of jade and silk. Thus