

18.5.6 So dim, so dark,

That it has no image!

No image exists for this unselfconscious force.⁵

18.5.7 And the myriad things in their variety and number

All procreate compliant to that unselfconscious force.

All just procreate themselves.

18.5.8 Thus I say, “Because Heaven and Earth act unselfconsciously, nothing fails to be done.

If they acted selfconsciously, there would be failure.

18.5.9 But who among men can attain unselfconsciousness?

If unselfconsciousness were attained, there would be no trying to be happy and perfect joy would be had.

18.6 When the wife of Master Zhuang died, Master Hui went to visit the bereaved, to find Master Zhuang then sitting on the floor with his legs stretched out, drumming on a tile basin and singing.

18.7 Master Hui said, “She lived with you, raised your children, and was your old wife, so it is bad enough that you don’t lament her passing, yet you go on to drum on a tile basin and sing—is that not really going too far!”

18.8 Master Zhuang replied, “It is not so. When she first died, how could I not feel grief! But when I considered her beginning, originally she had no life; not only had she no life, she had no body; not only had she no body, she had no pneuma. Then, there mixed in the dim and dark a change occurred and her pneuma existed; her pneuma underwent change and her body existed; her body underwent change and she had life, and now with another change it led to her death. This is just like the way spring, summer, autumn, and winter progress through the four seasons. Now she rests in peace in the grand chamber of her tomb, so if, sobbing and blubbering, I had gone on lamenting her death, I should have thought that I had no understanding of fate; therefore, I stopped.”

As long as he had not understood this, he felt grief, but once he realized the truth of it, he stopped. This was how he instructed those subject to emotions—that by this teaching they should reach the ultimate truth [*zhili*] involved and thereby unburden themselves of such entanglements.

18.9 While Disjointed Decrepit [*Zhili Shu*]⁶ was accompanying Slippery Decrepit [*Gujie Shu*]⁷ to take in the sights at the Mound of the Arcane Lord [*Mingbo zhi qiu*] and the Wastes of Kunlun [*Kunlun zhi xu*], where the Yellow Thearch took his ease,⁸ suddenly a willow sprouted from his left elbow, which seems to have startled and annoyed him.⁹

18.10 Disjointed Decrepit asked, “Do you find it annoying?”

18.11 Slippery Decrepit replied, “Not at all—why should it annoy me! Life is something borrowed. That which is borrowed so it may produce life is but dust and dirt, and death follows life as does night the day. Now while you and I have been observing how transformation works, it so happened that

transformation caught up with me, so why should I go on being annoyed at that?"

Such a one might always initially appear subject to emotion, but then he grasps perfect principle and thus casts it aside. As it has been said, the self in its original nature is free from emotion, thus it feels no anxiety, but if subject to emotion, it consequently alienates itself from the realm of detachment and emancipation and instead gets lost and comes to grief in the land of sorrow or happiness.

18.12 On his way to Chu, Master Zhuang happened to see a hollow skull, dried up but still intact. Tapping it with his horse whip, he then asked, "Was it that greed for life made so you act against the principles of things that you came to this? Or did it happen that with the loss of your state you were put to death by an executioner's axe and so came to this? Or did you engage in evil ways and were so ashamed of the disgrace you brought upon your parents, wife and children that you came to this? Or did you suffer so much cold and hunger that you came to this? Or did your springs and autumns so mount up that they brought you to this?"

18.13 When he had finished speaking, he took the skull, made it his pillow, and lay down. In the middle of the night, the skull appeared in a dream and said, "The way you go on is like a sophist's discourse, and as for what you say, it all concerns entanglements suffered by the living—once dead there is none of this. Would you like to hear what the dead have to say?"

18.14 Master Zhuang replied, "Of course!"

18.15 The skull then said, "Once dead there are no rulers above, no subjects below, as well as no duties demanded by the four seasons, so one's springs and autumns last as do those of Heaven and Earth—even the pleasure enjoyed by a south-facing monarch can be no better than this."

18.16 Master Zhuang, incredulous, replied, "If I had the Director of Destinies [Siming] bring your body back to life, provide you with flesh and bones, and return to you your parents, wife, children, and the neighbors whom you knew, you would want that, wouldn't you?"

18.17 The skull sternly glared at him, knitted its brows, and said, "How could I cast aside the pleasures of a south-facing monarch and instead have to deal again with the toils of the living!"

According to an old saying, Master Zhuang loved death and hated life, but this is absolutely wrong! If it were so, what could he have meant by saying they were equal? What he meant by "equal" was that when alive, one should be content with life, and when dead, he should be content with death. Once one's feelings about life and death are one and the same, he shall be free from worrying about death while in the midst of life—that's all there is to it! This is what Master Zhuang meant.

18.18 When Yan Yuan was going to travel east to Qi, Confucius looked worried about it, so Zigong left his mat and inquired, "May your humble disciple