

道德經

Chapter 1

This opening line plays with multiple meanings of 道 (way/speak) to create a profound paradox about the ineffable nature of the Dao

道可道非常道。
way can speak not constant way

Mirrors the structure of the first line, now applying the same paradox to 'naming'

名可名非常名。
name can name not constant name

Introduces the concept of 無 (nothing/absence) as the origin of existence

無名天地之始。
without name heaven earth of beginning

有名萬物之母。
have name ten-thousand things of mother

Note how 以 connects desire (or lack thereof) with perception

故常無欲以觀其妙。
therefore constant without desire by-means-of observe its mystery

常 有 欲 以 觀 其 徼

constant have desire by-means-of observe its boundary

此 兩 者 同 出 而 異 名

these two ones same emerge but different name

玄 (dark/profound) is a key concept suggesting deep mystery beyond ordinary understanding

同 謂 之 玄

same called it dark

玄 之 又 玄

dark of also dark

This final line presents the gateway to all mysteries - suggesting that embracing paradox leads to understanding

眾 妙 之 門

many mystery of gateway

Chapter 2

This opening line sets up a fundamental Daoist paradox about the relativity of human value judgments

天 下 皆 知 美 之 為 美 斯 惡
heaven below all know beautiful possessive make beautiful then ugly
已 .
already

皆 知 善 之 為 善 斯 不 善 已 .
all know good possessive make good then not good already

故 有 無 相 生 .
therefore have nothing mutually generate

The next several lines demonstrate the interdependence of apparent opposites

難 易 相 成 .
difficult easy mutually complete

長 短 相 較 .
long short mutually compare

高 下 相 傾 .
high low mutually lean

音 聲 相 和 .
tone sound mutually harmonize

前 後 相 隨 .
before after mutually follow

是 以 聖 人
this by-means-of sage person

Here begins the description of the sage's method - note the emphasis on non-action and teaching without words

處 無 為 之 事
dwell non action possessive affairs

行 不 言 之 教
practice not speak possessive teaching

萬 物 作 — 而 不 (始) .
ten-thousand things arise and not (begin)

生 而 不 有

give-birth and not possess

為 而 不 恃 .

act and not rely-on

This describes the sage's non-attachment to achievements

功 成 而 弗 居 .

merit complete and not dwell

夫 唯 弗 居 .

indeed only not dwell

是 以 不 去 .

this by-means-of not depart

Chapter 3

不 尚 賢

not elevate worthy

使 民 不 爭

cause people not compete

不 貴 難 得 之 貨

not value difficult obtain possessive goods

使 民 不 為 盜

cause people not become thief

不 見 可 欲

not see can desire

使 民 心 不 亂 .

cause people heart not chaotic

This line introduces the sage's method of governance

是 以 聖 人 之 治 。

this by-means-of sage person possessive govern

Notice the beautiful parallel structure and opposing concepts: empty/full, heart/belly

虛 其 心 實 其 腹

empty their heart fill their belly

Another parallel structure with opposing concepts: weak/strong, resolve/bones

弱 其 志 強 其 骨

weaken their resolve strengthen their bones

常 使 民 無 知 無 欲 。

always cause people without knowledge without desire

使 夫 智 者 不 敢 為 ____ 。

cause those clever ones not dare act

This final line contains one of the most famous Daoist paradoxes: 為無為 (doing non-doing)

為 無 為 則 無 不 治 [矣] 。

do without doing then nothing not governed [indeed]

Chapter 4

This opening line uses the metaphor of an empty vessel (盅) to describe the Dao's limitless nature

道 (盅) 而 用 之 (有) 不 盈 .
way (empty-vessel) and use it (exist) not fill

Here the Dao is compared to a deep abyss that appears to be the ancestor/source of all things

淵 兮 似 萬 物 之 宗 .
abyss ah seem ten-thousand thing 's ancestor

挫 其 銳 .
blunt its sharpness

解 其 紛 .
untie its tangles

和 其 光
soften its light

同 其 塵
join its dust

湛 (deep/clear) is a key word suggesting both depth and clarity, like still water

湛 兮 似 或 存 .

deep-clear ah seem perhaps exist

A powerful line expressing both wonder and mystery at the Dao's origins

吾 不 知 誰 之 子 .

I not know who 's child

帝 refers to the legendary divine emperor/deity, suggesting the Dao predates even divinity

象 帝 之 先 .

appear divine-ruler 's before

Chapter 5

This opening line introduces a challenging concept - that Heaven and Earth operate without human-style benevolence/compassion (仁)

天 地 不 仁

heaven earth not benevolent

This metaphor of 'straw dogs' (芻狗) refers to ritual objects that were treated as precious during ceremonies but discarded after - suggesting the impersonal nature of natural processes

以 萬 物 為 芻 狗 .

by-means-of ten-thousand things make straw dog

聖 人 不 仁 .

sage person not benevolent

以 百 姓 為 芻 狗

by-means-of hundred surnames make straw dog

天 地 之 間

heaven earth of between

橐籥 (tuoyue) refers to a bellows or organ-like instrument - emptying and filling naturally

其 猶 橐 籥 乎
it like bellows pipe question

虛 而 不 屈
empty and not bend

動 而 愈 出 .
move and more produce

多 言 數 窮
much speech often exhaust

The final line emphasizes keeping to the center/middle way - a key Daoist concept

不 如 守 中
not like keep center

Chapter 6

This opening line introduces the concept of 'valley spirit' - an important Daoist metaphor for emptiness and potential

谷 神 不 死
valley spirit not die

是 謂 玄 牝
this called dark/mysterious female

玄 牝 之 門
dark/mysterious female of gateway

A profound metaphor linking natural phenomena to cosmic origins

是 謂 天 地 (之) 根 .
this called heaven earth of root

This line uses reduplication (绵绵) to create a sense of continuity and endlessness

綿 綿 若 存
continuous continuous as-if exist

A practical observation about the sustainable nature of this principle

用 之 不 勤
use it not laborious

Chapter 7

This opening line establishes a cosmic perspective - heaven's endurance and earth's permanence as natural phenomena

天 長 地 久
heaven long earth endure

This line questions why heaven and earth can persist eternally

天 地 所 以 能 長 且 久 者
heaven earth that-which by-means-of able long and endure one-who

A profound paradox - their endurance comes from not living for themselves

以 其 不 自 生 .
by-means-of their not self live

故 能 長 生 .
therefore able long live

Introduces how the sage embodies this cosmic principle

是 以 聖 人
this by-means-of sage person

A beautiful paradox: by putting oneself last, one comes first

後 其 身 而 身 先 .

behind their body yet body ahead

外 其 身 而 身 存

outside their body yet body exist

邪 here acts as an interrogative particle, questioning if this selflessness is the reason

非 以 其 無 私 邪 .

is-not by-means-of their without private (question)

故 能 成 其 私 .

therefore able accomplish their private

Chapter 8

This opening line is one of the most famous in the Dao De Jing - it compares the highest virtue to water, setting up an extended metaphor.

上 善 若 水
highest good like water

Note how water benefits all things without contending - a key concept in Daoism.

水 善 利 萬 物 而 不 爭
water good-at benefit ten-thousand things and-yet not contend

Water flows to low places that others avoid - showing how virtue often manifests in what others reject.

處 眾 人 之 所 惡
dwell many people 's place hate

故 幾 於 道 [矣] .
therefore nearly to Way [indeed]

The following lines show how water exemplifies virtue in different contexts.

居 善 地
dwelling good-at earth

心 善 淵 .
heart good-at depths

與 善 仁
giving good-at benevolence

言 善 信 .
words good-at trust

正 善 治 .
governing good-at order

事 善 能
affairs good-at capability

動 善 時 .
moving good-at timing

The chapter concludes by returning to the core principle - non-contention leads to absence of blame.

夫 唯 不 爭 .
indeed only not contend

故 無 尤 .
therefore without blame

Chapter 9

持 而 盈 之

hold and fill it

不 如 其 已

not like its stop

This line uses 揣 (measure/estimate) with 銳 (sharp/keen) to warn against excessive sharpening

揣 而 (銳) 之

measure and (sharp) it

不 可 長 保 .

not can long maintain

A vivid image of material excess using 金玉 (gold-jade) and 滿堂 (full-hall)

金 玉 滿 堂

gold jade full hall

莫 之 能 守 .

none it can guard

富 貴 而 驕
wealth noble and pride

自 遺 其 咎 .
self leave its blame

A powerful conclusion about knowing when to retreat after success

功 遂 身 退
merit achieve body withdraw

天 之 道 .
heaven of way

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Chapter 10

This opening line discusses nurturing both the physical and spiritual aspects of one's being through maintaining unity

載 營 魄 抱 一
carry manage soul embrace one

能 無 離 乎
can not separate question

This line speaks to cultivating softness through breath control - a fundamental Daoist practice

專 氣 致 柔
focus energy achieve soft

能 嬰 兒 乎 .
can infant child question

This line refers to clearing one's vision to see the mysterious

滌 除 玄 覽
cleans remove mysterious view

能 無 疵 乎
can not flaw question

A pivotal line about governance through non-interference

愛 民 治 國
love people govern country

能 無 為 乎
can not act question

Uses natural imagery of gates opening and closing

天 門 開 闔
heaven gate open close

能 為 雌 乎
can be feminine question

明 白 四 達
bright clear four reach

能 無 [以] 知 乎
can not by-means-of know question

These lines speak to nurturing without possessing - a key Daoist concept

生 之 畜 之

give-birth it nurture it

生 而 不 有

give-birth yet not possess

為 而 不 恃

act yet not rely-on

長 而 不 宰

grow yet not control

The closing line introduces 'mysterious virtue' (玄德) - a fundamental Daoist concept of hidden or subtle power

是 謂 玄 德

this called mysterious virtue

Chapter 11

This opening line presents a powerful concrete image of a wheel to illustrate abstract principles

三 十 輻 共 一 轂
three ten spoke join one hub

當 其 無 有 車 之 用 .
when its nothing exist cart of use

埴埴 refers specifically to molding clay - a metaphor for shaping emptiness into usefulness

埴 埴 以 為 器
knead clay by-means-of make vessel

當 其 無 有 器 之 用 .
when its nothing exist vessel of use

Windows and doors are themselves empty spaces that make a room useful

鑿 戶 牖 以 為 室
cut door window by-means-of make room

當 其 無 有 室 之 用 .
when its nothing exist room of use

故 有 之 以 為 利
therefore exist of by-means-of make benefit

The final line presents the central paradox - emptiness/nothingness (無) is what makes things useful

無 之 以 為 用 .
nothing of by-means-of make use

Chapter 12

This opening line uses the metaphor of the five colors to warn about sensory overload - a remarkably modern concept.

五 色 令 人 目 盲 .
five color cause person eye blind

五 音 令 人 耳 聾 .
five sound cause person ear deaf

五 味 令 人 口 爽
five flavor cause person mouth numb

Note how 心 (heart/mind) and 發狂 (go-mad) work together to describe mental overstimulation

馳 騁 畋 獵 令 人 心 發 狂
gallop race hunt chase cause person heart-mind emit madness

難 得 之 貨 令 人 行 妨
difficult obtain of goods cause person conduct hinder

是 以 聖 人 .
this by-means-of sage person

A powerful contrast between 腹 (belly/core) and 目 (eyes/surface appearances)

為 腹 不 為 目
act-for belly not act-for eye

故 去 彼 取 此
therefore remove that take this

Chapter 13

This opening line sets up a profound comparison between favor/honor and disgrace/shame, linking them to a startling emotional state

寵 辱 若 驚

favor disgrace like startle

貴 大 患 若 身 .

value great trouble like body-self

何 謂 寵 辱 若 驚

what call favor disgrace like startle

Note how 為 (wei) here means 'because' - showing how receiving honor can be as disturbing as receiving shame

寵 為 下 得 之 若 驚

favor because lower obtain it like startle

失 之 若 驚 .

lose it like startle

是 謂 寵 辱 若 驚

this call favor disgrace like startle

何 謂 貴 大 患 若 身
what call value great trouble like body-self

A pivotal line showing how attachment to self/body leads to suffering

吾 所以 有 大 患 者 為 吾 有
I therefore have great trouble one-who because I have
身 .
body-self

及 吾 無 身 吾 有 何 患
until I not-have body-self I have what trouble

故 貴 以 身 為 天下 .
therefore value by-means-of body-self for all-under-heaven

若 可 [以] 寄 天下 [矣] .
like can [by-means-of] entrust all-under-heaven [indeed]

愛 以 身 為 天下
love by-means-of body-self for all-under-heaven

若 可 [以] 託 天下 [矣] .
like can [by-means-of] trust all-under-heaven [indeed]

Chapter 14

This chapter opens with three parallel statements about the ineffable nature of the Dao

視 之 不 見 名 曰 夷

look-at it not see name call invisible

聽 之 不 聞 名 曰 希

listen-to it not hear name call inaudible

搏 之 不 得 名 曰 微 .

grasp it not obtain name call intangible

After establishing these three qualities, the text emphasizes their ultimate inscrutability

此 三 者 不 可 致 詰 .

these three ones not can reach investigate

故 混 而 為 一

therefore mix and become one

[一 者]

[one one]

其 上 不 皦 .
its above not bright

其 下 不 昧 .
its below not dark

繩繩 is a reduplication expressing continuity - like an endless rope or line

繩 繩 [兮] 不 可 名 .
rope rope [particle] not can name

復 歸 於 無 物 .
return revert to nothing thing

This section describes the paradoxical nature of the Dao - the form of the formless

是 謂 無 狀 之 狀
this called nothing form of form

無 物 之 象
nothing thing of image

是 謂 惚 恍
this called indistinct vague

迎 之 不 見 其 首
meet it not see its head

隨 之 不 見 其 後
follow it not see its behind

執 古 之 道
hold ancient of way

以 御 今 之 有 .
by-means-of govern present of existence

能 知 古 始
can know ancient beginning

The chapter concludes by suggesting that understanding these paradoxes leads to comprehending the essential principle of the Dao

是 謂 道 紀
this called way principle

Chapter 15

This opening line describes the ancient sage-scholars, setting up an important contrast between surface appearances and deeper truths

古 之 善 為 士 者 微 妙 玄
ancient of good act-as scholar one-who subtle mysterious dark
通
penetrating

A key line suggesting the ultimately unknowable nature of true wisdom

深 不 可 識 .
deep not able know

夫 唯 不 可 識
indeed only not able know

故 強 為 之 容 .
therefore force make it appearance

The text now shifts to vivid metaphorical descriptions using natural imagery

豫 兮 若 冬 涉 川 .
hesitant ah like winter crossing river

猶 兮 若 畏 四 鄰 .
cautious ah like fear four neighbors

儼 兮 其 若 (客) .
dignified ah it like (guest)

Notice the beautiful imagery of melting ice, suggesting transformation

渙 兮 若 冰 — 將 釋 .
dissolving ah like ice — about-to melt

敦 兮 其 若 樸 .
honest ah it like uncarved-wood

曠 兮 其 若 谷
vast ah it like valley

混 兮 其 若 濁 .
chaotic ah it like murky

A profound question about transformation through non-action

孰 能 濁 以 靜 之 徐 清 .
who can murky by-means-of stillness it gradually clear

孰 能 安 以 久 動 之 徐 生
who can peaceful by-means-of long-lasting movement it gradually live

保 此 道 者 不 欲 盈
preserve this way one-who not desire full

夫 唯 不 盈
indeed only not full

The chapter concludes with the paradox that incompleteness allows for completion

(是) [以] 能 蔽 [而] 不 — 成
(this) [therefore] can cover [and] not complete

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Chapter 16

This opening line speaks to achieving absolute emptiness - a key Daoist concept

致 虛 極 .

reach empty utmost

Emphasizes the importance of maintaining stillness with dedication

守 靜 篤 .

maintain stillness sincere

萬 物 並 作

ten-thousand things together arise

A beautiful image of observing the natural cycle of return

吾 以 觀 [其] 復 .

I by-means-of observe [their] return

Describes how all things in their multiplicity return to their source

夫 物 芸 芸 各 復 歸 其 根 .

indeed things numerous numerous each return go-back their root

歸 根 曰 靜
return root called stillness

[靜] 是 謂 復 命
[stillness] this called return destiny

A key concept: 常 (constant) appears throughout this chapter representing the eternal unchanging way

復 命 曰 常 .
return destiny called constant

知 常 曰 明 .
know constant called enlightened

Warns of the dangers of acting without understanding the constant way

不 知 常 妄 作 凶
not know constant reckless act misfortune

知 常 容
know constant contain

容 乃 公
contain then impartial

公 乃 王

impartial then king

王 乃 天

king then heaven

天 乃 道

heaven then way

道 乃 久

way then enduring

A powerful conclusion: following this path, one's whole life will be free from danger

沒 身 不 殆

end body not danger

Chapter 17

This opening line speaks of the highest/supreme ruler - a profound observation about leadership styles

太 上 下 知 有 之
supreme high below know exist this

其 次 親 而 譽 之
its next close and praise this

其 次 畏 之
its next fear this

其 次 侮 之
its next despise this

A fascinating line about the relationship between trust and distrust

信 不 足 焉 有 不 信 ____
trust not sufficient how exist not trust

(猶) 兮 其 貴 言 .
(hesitate) ah its value words

A powerful statement about effortless achievement

功 成 事 遂

achievement complete matter follow

The ideal outcome of wise leadership - when people believe things happened naturally

百 姓 皆 謂 我 自 然 。

hundred names all say I self so

Chapter 18

This opening line sets up a profound observation about the decline of natural ways

大 道 廢 .

great way abandon

Suggests that explicit virtue arises only when natural virtue is lost

有 仁 義

exist benevolence righteousness

Points to the emergence of calculated wisdom replacing natural intuition

慧 智 出 .

clever-wisdom emerge

A powerful observation that great deception accompanies sophisticated thinking

有 大 偽

exist great falseness

Speaks to breakdown of natural family harmony

六 親 不 和

six relations not harmony

有 孝 慈
exist filial-piety kindness

Describes political disorder at the state level

國 家 昏 亂 .
country family confused chaos

有 忠 臣
exist loyal minister

Chapter 19

This opening line suggests abandoning conventional wisdom and learned intelligence

絕 聖 棄 智
cut-off sage abandon wisdom

Suggests that when artificial standards are removed, people naturally benefit more

民 利 百 倍 .
people benefit hundred times

Continues the theme of abandoning artificial virtues

絕 仁 棄 義
cut-off benevolence abandon righteousness

Suggests that when artificial morality is removed, natural family values return

民 復 孝 慈 .
people return filial-piety kindness

絕 巧 棄 利
cut-off cleverness abandon profit

Implies that when people aren't focused on profit, theft becomes unnecessary

盜 賊 無 有 .
thief bandit not exist

此 三 者 以 為 文 不 足 .
these three things by-means-of make culture not sufficient

故 令 有 所 屬 .
therefore cause have place belong

A beautiful metaphor for seeing things in their natural, unadorned state

見 素
see plain

Embracing simplicity rather than complexity

抱 樸
embrace uncarved-wood

少 私
minimize private

The chapter concludes with core Daoist values of simplicity and restraint

寡 欲 .
few desires

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Chapter 20

This opening line sets up a fascinating paradox - that abandoning scholarly pursuit leads to freedom from worry

絕 學 無 憂

cut-off study without worry

唯 之 與 阿

only this and yes

A rhetorical question about the distance between apparent opposites

相 去 幾 何

mutually separate how-much what

(美) 之 與 惡

(beauty) this and evil

相 去 若 何

mutually separate like what

A profound statement about fear - note how the double negative creates emphasis

人 之 所 畏 不 可 不 畏 。

person possessive that-which fear not can not fear

荒 兮 其 未 央 哉

wild ah it not-yet end indeed

描绘众人欢乐的景象 - Depicting the joy of the masses

眾 人 熙 熙

crowd person prosperous prosperous

如 享 太 牢 。

like enjoy great sacrifice

如 春 登 臺

like spring climb tower

The speaker contrasts themselves with the crowd - note the solitary, calm nature

我 獨 泊 兮

I alone anchor ah

其 未 兆

it not-yet show-sign

A beautiful metaphor comparing the speaker's state to an infant's innocence

如 嬰 兒 之 未 孩
like infant child possessive not-yet smile

儻 儻 兮 若 無 所 歸
tired tired ah like without place return

眾 人 皆 有 餘
crowd person all have excess

—— 我 獨 若 遺
I alone like abandon

我 愚 人 之 心 也 哉
I foolish person possessive heart indeed indeed

沌 沌 兮
chaos chaos ah

Another contrast between the masses and the individual

俗 人 昭 昭
common person bright bright

我 獨 (若) 昏
I alone (like) dark

俗 人 察 察

common person examine examine

我 獨 悶 悶

I alone depressed depressed

Beautiful nautical metaphor for the speaker's state of mind

澹 兮 其 若 海

peaceful ah it like sea

(漂) 兮 若 無 [所] 止

(float) ah like without [place] stop

眾 人 皆 有 以

crowd person all have by-means-of

—— 我 獨 頑 似 鄙

I alone stubborn seem vulgar

我 獨 異 於 人

I alone different from person

A profound closing referencing the source of nourishment - 'mother' here likely refers to the Dao itself

而 貴 食 母
and value eat mother

Chapter 21

This opening line speaks to how supreme virtue/power (孔德) manifests through following the Dao

孔 德 之 容 (唯) 道 是 從
supreme virtue/power of appearance (only) way this follow

Here the text begins to describe the elusive nature of Dao as a 'thing/substance'

道 之 為 物 (唯) 恍 (唯) 惚
way of being thing (only) hazy (only) indistinct

惚 兮 恍 兮 其 中 有 象 .
indistinct oh hazy oh its within have image

恍 兮 惚 兮 其 中 有 物 .
hazy oh indistinct oh its within have thing

These three parallel lines build a poetic description of increasing depth and mystery

窈 兮 冥 兮 其 中 有 精 .
deep oh dark oh its within have essence

其 精 甚 真
its essence very real

其 中 有 信
its within have truth

自 (今) 及 (古)
from (now) reach (ancient)

其 名 不 去
its name not depart

以 閱 眾 甫 .
by-means-of examine many beginning

This rhetorical question uses 何 (what) to ask how we can know the nature of all beginnings

吾 何 以 知 眾 甫 之 (然) 哉
I what by-means-of know many beginning of (thus) indeed

以 此 .
by-means-of this

Chapter 22

曲 則 全 .
bend then complete

枉 則 直 .
crooked then straight

窪 則 盈
hollow then fill

敝 則 新 .
worn then new

少 則 得 .
little then gain

多 則 惑 .
much then confused

Notice how 是以 (therefore) introduces the sage's response to these natural principles

是 以 聖 人
this by-means-of sage person

抱 一 [以] 為 天 下 式
embrace one [by-means-of] make heaven below model

This begins a series of parallel phrases showing the sage's non-assertive nature

不 自 見 故 明
not self see therefore bright

不 自 是 故 彰
not self right therefore manifest

不 自 伐 故 有 功 .
not self boast therefore have merit

不 自 矜 故 長 .
not self pride therefore endure

夫 唯 不 爭
indeed only not contend

故 天 下 莫 能 與 之 爭
therefore heaven below none able with them contend

Here begins a conclusion that references back to the opening line

古 之 所 謂

ancient possessive that-which say

曲 則 全 者

bend then complete one-who

豈 虛 言 哉 .

how empty words indeed

誠 全 而 歸 之

truly complete and return to-it

Chapter 23

This opening line sets up a profound observation about nature's spontaneity

希 言 自 然

rare speak self thus

故 飄 風 不 終 朝

therefore whirling wind not end morning

驟 雨 不 終 日 .

sudden rain not end day

An elegant rhetorical question using '孰' (who/what) to prompt reflection

孰 為 此 者 天 地 .

who make this one-who heaven earth

天 地 尚 不 能 久

heaven earth even not able endure

而 況 於 人 乎

and moreover at person question-particle

Here begins an important sequence about alignment with the Dao

故 從 事 於 道 者

therefore follow affairs at way one-who

道 者 同 於 道

way one-who same at way

德 者 同 於 德

virtue one-who same at virtue

失 者 同 於 失 .

lose one-who same at lose

同 於 道 者

same at way one-who

道 亦 樂 得 之

way also joy obtain it

同 於 德 者

same at virtue one-who

德 亦 樂 得 之

virtue also joy obtain it

同 於 失 者
same at lose one-who

失 亦 樂 得 之
lose also joy obtain it

A profound closing statement about the relationship between trust and distrust

信 不 足 焉 有 不 信 —
trust not sufficient herein have not trust

Chapter 24

This opening line establishes a pattern of paradoxical statements about striving vs. achieving

企 者 不 立

stand-on-tiptoe one-who not stand

跨 者 不 行

stride one-who not walk

Note how 自 (self) begins four consecutive lines, emphasizing the theme of ego/self-importance

自 見 者 不 明

self see one-who not bright

自 是 者 不 彰 .

self right one-who not evident

伐 literally means 'to cut down trees' but here means 'to boast' - an interesting metaphor

自 伐 者 無 功

self cut-down one-who without merit

自 矜 者 不 長
self pride one-who not grow

其 在 道 也
their exist-in way indeed

This line uses food metaphors to describe excessive/wasteful behavior

曰 餘 食 贅 行 .
say excess food superfluous conduct

物 或 惡 之
things perhaps detest this

The chapter concludes by connecting back to the Dao - suggesting that true followers of the Way avoid such behavior

故 有 道 者 不 處 .
therefore have way one-who not dwell

Chapter 25

This opening line describes the primordial state - 混成 (hun-cheng) is a key concept meaning 'chaotic wholeness' before separation

有 物 混 成
exist thing mixed complete

A temporal reference to the origin before heaven and earth

先 天 地 生
before heaven earth born

Beautiful sound symbolism here with 兮 (xi) giving a drawn-out, echoing quality

寂 兮 寥 兮
silent ! vast-empty !

獨 立 不 改
alone stand not change

周 行 而 不 殆
complete move and not danger

A profound metaphor comparing the Dao to a mother figure

可 以 為 天 下 母
can by-means-of become heaven below mother

吾 不 知 其 名 .
I not know its name

This shows how 道 (Dao) is a later human attempt to name the unnamed

字 之 曰 道
label it say way

強 為 之 名 曰 大
force make it name say great

大 曰 逝
great say depart

逝 曰 遠
depart say far

遠 曰 反
far say return

—— 道 大
way great

Here begins the famous 'four greats' sequence

天 大
heaven great

地 大
earth great

王 亦 大
king also great

域 中 有 四 大
realm within exist four great

而 王 居 其 一 焉。
and king dwell its one thus

The following sequence shows the chain of modeling/emulation

人 法 地
human model earth

地 法 天
earth model heaven

天 法 道
heaven model way

The final line reveals that even the Dao models something - spontaneous naturalness
itself

道 法 自 然 .
way model self so

Chapter 26

This opening line establishes a key metaphor: heaviness/weightiness as the root of lightness

重 為 輕 根
heavy becomes light root

A parallel construction showing how stillness masters restlessness

靜 為 躁 君
still becomes restless ruler

是 以 (君 子) 終 日
this by-means-of noble-person throughout day

輜 refers to baggage/supplies - suggesting staying grounded and prepared

行 不 離 [其] 輜
travel not leave [his] baggage

This line paints a vivid image of maintaining composure even amid luxury

重 雖 有 榮 觀 燕
heavy although have glory view feast

處 超 然

dwell transcend thus

萬乘 literally means '10,000 chariots' - a metaphor for great power/authority

奈 何 萬 乘 之 主

how what ten-thousand chariots of lord

而 以 身 輕 天 下

yet by-means-of body light heaven below

本 (root/foundation) connects back to the opening metaphor

輕 則 失 本

light then lose root

躁 則 失 君

restless then lose ruler

Chapter 27

This line speaks to actions that leave no trace - the highest form of skillful action is one that appears effortless and natural

善 行 無 轍 迹
good walk not-have wheel-rut trace

Similarly, the best speech is flawless and leaves no room for criticism

善 言 無 瑕 謫
good speak not-have flaw blame

善 數 不 用 籌 策
good count not use tally-stick counting-rod

A metaphor for natural security - the best lock is one that doesn't need physical mechanisms

善 閉 無 關 鍵 而 不 可 開 .
good close not-have bolt bar yet not can open

善 結 無 繆 約 而 不 可 解 .
good tie not-have rope bind yet not can untie

是 以 聖 人
this by-means-of sage person

A key principle of the Dao - the sage helps all beings without discrimination

常 善 救 人
always good save person

故 無 棄 人
therefore not-have abandon person

常 善 救 物
always good save thing

故 無 棄 物 .
therefore not-have abandon thing

是 謂 襲 明
this called inherit brightness

A profound statement about teaching and learning - those who need help become opportunities for those who can help

故 善 人 者 不 善 人 之 師
therefore good person one-who not good person of teacher

不 善 人 者 善 人 之 資 .
not good person one-who good person of resource

不 貴 其 師
not value their teacher

不 愛 其 資
not love their resource

雖 智 大 迷
although wisdom great confused

The final line suggests that this paradoxical relationship between teacher and student, helper and helped, contains a profound mystery

是 謂 要 妙
this called essential subtle

Chapter 28

This opening line establishes a key theme of balancing opposing forces - masculine/feminine energies

知其雄守其雌
know its male guard its female

為天下谿
become heaven below stream

為天下谿
become heaven below stream

德 (virtue/power) that is 常 (constant) does not depart - a key concept in Daoism

常德不離
constant virtue not depart

The image of returning to an infant state represents returning to natural simplicity

復歸於嬰兒
return revert to infant child

知其白守其黑。

know its white guard its black

為天下式

become heaven below model

為天下式

become heaven below model

常德不忒

constant virtue not err

無極 represents the infinite/boundless - another return to the origin

復歸於無極

return revert to without limit

知其榮守其辱

know its glory guard its disgrace

為天下谷

become heaven below valley

為天下谷

become heaven below valley

常 德 乃 足

constant virtue then sufficient

樸 (uncarved block) is a key metaphor for natural simplicity in Daoism

復 歸 於 樸 .

return revert to simplicity

樸 散 則 為 器

simplicity scatter then become vessel

This line shows how the natural state gets transformed into societal roles

聖 人 用 之 則 為 官 長

sage person use it then become official chief

故 大 制 不 割

therefore great system not cut

Chapter 29

This opening line sets up a hypothetical scenario about attempting to control/seize the world

將 欲 取 天 下 而 為 之
about-to desire take heaven below and do it

The speaker observes the futility of such attempts

吾 見 其 不 得 已
I see its not obtain already

'Divine vessel' is a metaphor for the world/empire - suggesting it has its own sacred nature

[夫] 天 下 神 器 .
(indeed) heaven below divine vessel

不 可 為 也
not can do indeed

A powerful statement about how forcing control leads to loss

為 者 敗 之
do one-who ruin it

執 者 失 之
grasp one-who lose it

故 物
therefore things

These paired lines describe natural cycles and opposites in nature

或 行 或 隨
some go some follow

或 (歔) 或 吹
some (warm) some blow

或 強 或 羸
some strong some weak

或 挫 或 隳
some defeat some destroy

Introduces the sage's response to these observations

是 以 聖 人
this by-means-of sage person

The final three lines present a powerful triple repetition of 'removing extremes' - a key teaching of moderation

去 甚

remove excessive

去 奢

remove extravagant

去 泰

remove extreme

Chapter 30

This opening line sets up a contrast between ruling through dao versus military might

以 道 佐 人 主 者

by-means-of way assist person ruler one-who

不 以 兵 強 天 下

not by-means-of weapon force heaven below

A subtle observation about how violence tends to cycle back

其 事 好 還

its affair tend-to return

A powerful metaphor: where armies camp, thorns grow - suggesting how violence leaves lasting scars

師 之 所 處 荊 棘 生

army of place dwell thorn bramble grow

焉 大 軍 之 後 必 有 凶 年

thereupon great army of after surely have disaster year

The next several lines use repetition of 果 (resolve/result) to build a meditation on proper action

善 者 果 而 已 .

good one-who resolve and stop

不 敢 以 取 強 .

not dare by-means-of take force

果 而 勿 矜 .

resolve and not boast

果 而 勿 伐 .

resolve and not attack

果 而 勿 驕 .

resolve and not pride

果 而 不 得 已

resolve and not get stop

果 而 勿 強 .

resolve and not force

A profound observation about the natural cycle of things

物 壯 則 老

thing strong then old

是 謂 不 道
this called not way

不 道 早 已 .
not way early end

Chapter 31

This chapter discusses warfare and weapons with deep moral implications

夫 佳 兵 者 不 祥 之 器 。
now fine weapon one-who not auspicious possessive vessel

物 或 惡 之 。
thing perhaps detest it

故 有 道 者 不 處
therefore have way one-who not dwell

Notice the symbolic importance of left vs right in Chinese culture

君 子 居 則 貴 左
lord master reside then honor left

用 兵 則 貴 右 。
use weapon then honor right

兵 者 不 祥 之 器 。
weapon one-who not auspicious possessive vessel

非 君 子 之 器 .
not lord master possessive vessel

Note how 不得已 (unavoidable) is constructed from 'not-obtain-already'

不 得 已 而 用 之
not obtain already and use it

恬 淡 為 上
peaceful bland make superior

—— (勿) 美 [也]
(do-not) beautify [indeed]

而 美 之 者 是 樂 殺 人 .
and beautify it one-who this enjoy kill person

夫 樂 殺 人 者
now enjoy kill person one-who

—— 不 可 以 得 志 於 天 下 矣
not can by-means-of obtain ambition in heaven below indeed
.

[故] 吉 事 尚 左 .
[therefore] auspicious matter esteem left

凶 事 尚 右 .
inauspicious matter esteem right

This passage reflects ancient Chinese military formations

[是 以] 偏 將 軍 居 左
[this therefore] deputy general army stand left

上 將 軍 居 右
superior general army stand right

言 以 喪 禮 處 之 .
speak by-means-of mourning ritual handle it

殺 人 — 眾
kill person many

以 哀 悲 泣 之
by-means-of sorrow grief weep it

The chapter ends with a powerful statement about treating victory with solemnity

戰 勝 以 喪 禮 處 之 .
battle victory by-means-of mourning ritual handle it

Chapter 32

道 常 無 名 .

way constant without name

樸 雖 小

uncarved-block although small

天 下 莫 能 臣 ____ .

heaven below none can subject

Note how 若 (if) sets up a conditional statement - a common Classical Chinese construction

侯 王 若 能 守 之

marquis king if can keep it

萬 物 將 自 賓 .

ten-thousand things will self guest

天 地 相 合 .

heaven earth mutual join

甘露 (sweet dew) is a metaphor for natural harmony and blessing

以 降 甘 露 .

by-means-of descend sweet dew

民 莫 之 令

people none it order

而 自 均

yet self equal

[焉] 始 制 有 名

[thereupon] begin system have name

名 亦 既 有

name also already have

夫 亦 將 知 止

that also will know stop

A key Daoist concept - knowing when to stop prevents danger

知 止 (所) 以 不 殆

know stop (that-which) by-means-of not danger

譬 道 之 在 天 下 .

compare way of exist heaven below

The final metaphor compares the Dao to water flowing naturally to lower places

猶 川 谷 之 (與) 江 海 .

like stream valley of (and) river sea

Chapter 33

This line contrasts external vs internal knowledge. 知 (know) when paired with 人 (person/others) creates 智 (wisdom) - showing how understanding others is one path to wisdom.

知 人 者 智 .
know person one-who wise

A profound parallel to the first line - 明 (bright/clear) represents a deeper form of wisdom that comes from self-knowledge.

自 知 者 明 .
self know one-who bright

勝 人 者 有 力 .
overcome person one-who have strength

Notice how 自勝 (self-overcome) leads to 強 (strong) - suggesting true strength comes from mastering oneself rather than others.

自 勝 者 強 .
self overcome one-who strong

知足 (know-enough) is a common Chinese idiom meaning contentment - here it leads to true wealth.

知 足 者 富 .

know enough one-who wealthy

強 行 者 有 志 .

strong act one-who have will

This line speaks to staying true to one's nature/position - 不失其所 literally means 'not losing one's place'.

不 失 其 所 者 久 .

not lose one's place one-who endure

A profound paradox - physical death (死) need not mean the end of one's lasting influence (壽/longevity).

死 而 不 亡 者 壽 .

die yet not perish one-who long-lived

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Chapter 34

This opening line paints a picture of the Dao as vast and flowing like water

大 道 汜 兮

great way overflow ah

其 可 左 右 .

its can left right

Notice how 恃 (rely-on) connects all beings to the Dao

萬 物 恃 之 (以) 生

ten-thousand things rely-on it (by-means-of) live

而 不 辭 .

yet not decline

功 成 遂

merit complete therefore

[而] 不 名 有 .

[yet] not name possess

A beautiful metaphor showing how the Dao nurtures without dominating

衣 養 萬 物

clothe nourish ten-thousand things

而 不 為 主

yet not act-as master

[故] 常 無 欲 .

[therefore] constant without desire

可 名 於 小 .

can name at small

萬 物 歸 焉

ten-thousand things return thereto

而 不 為 主

yet not act-as master

可 名 (於) 大 .

can name (at) great

(是以聖人之能成大.)

(thus-sage's-ability-achieve-greatness)

[以其不為大.]

[because-not-act-great]

This final line emphasizes the paradox that true greatness comes from not trying to be great

故	能	成	——	大
therefore	able	complete	()	great

Chapter 35

This opening line establishes a powerful metaphor - 'holding/grasping the great image/symbol'

執 大 象

grasp great image

天 下 往

heaven below go

往 而 不 害

go and not harm

安 平 太 .

peaceful level great

An interesting metaphor comparing the Dao to music and food that attracts passing travelers

樂 與 餌 過 客 止

music and bait passing guest stop

道 之 出 (言) 淡 (呵)

way of emerge (speak) bland (ah)

其 無 味 .

its without flavor

The next three lines form a powerful parallel structure about the ineffable nature of Dao

視 之 不 足 見 .

look at-it not enough see

聽 之 不 足 聞 .

listen to-it not enough hear

用 之 不 足 既 .

use it not enough exhaust

Chapter 36

This chapter opens with a series of parallel constructions showing opposing forces

將 欲 歛 之
about-to desire contract it

必 固 張 之
must certainly expand it

將 欲 弱 之
about-to desire weaken it

必 固 強 之
must certainly strengthen it

將 欲 廢 之
about-to desire abandon it

必 固 興 之 .
must certainly rise it

將 欲 奪 之

about-to desire take-away it

必 固 與 之

must certainly give it

微明 (subtle-brightness) is a key concept suggesting paradoxical wisdom

是 謂 微 明 .

this called subtle brightness

A famous line expressing how the soft overcomes the hard - a central Daoist principle

柔 弱 勝 剛 強

soft weak overcome hard strong

An metaphorical image comparing state power to fish in deep waters

魚 不 可 脫 於 淵

fish not can escape from deep-waters

國 之 利 器

state of sharp instrument

A warning about showing state power openly

不 可 以 示 人 .

not can by-means-of show person

Chapter 37

This opening line establishes one of the most fundamental concepts in Daoism - the paradox of wuwei (non-action)

道 常 無 為 .
way constant not-have act

而 無 不 為 .
yet not-have not act

Here 'lords and kings' represents those in positions of power and leadership

侯 王 若 能 守 之
lord king if can maintain it

萬 物 將 自 化
ten-thousand things will self transform

化 而 欲 作
transform yet desire arise

樸 (pu) is a key concept meaning 'uncarved wood' - representing natural simplicity

吾 將 鎮 之 以 無 名 之 樸
I will steady it by-means-of not-have name of simplicity

無 名 之 樸
not-have name of simplicity

夫 亦 將 無 欲
that also will not-have desire

不 欲 以 靜
not desire by-means-of stillness

This final line suggests that when desire ceases, natural order emerges

天 下 將 自 定 .
heaven below will self settle

Chapter 38

This chapter explores the hierarchy of virtue, beginning with a paradoxical statement about highest virtue

上 德 不 德 是 以 有 德
highest virtue not virtue this by-means-of have virtue

下 德 不 失 德 是 以 無 德
lower virtue not lose virtue this by-means-of without virtue

Note how 無為 (non-action) is a key Daoist concept - acting without forcing or interfering

上 德 無 為 而 無 以 為 .
highest virtue without action and without by-means-of do

下 德 為 之 而 有 以 為
lower virtue do it and have by-means-of do

上 仁 為 之 而 無 以 為 .
highest benevolence do it and without by-means-of do

上 義 為 之 而 有 以 為 .
highest righteousness do it and have by-means-of do

上 禮 為 之 而 莫 之 以 應 .
highest ritual do it and none it by-means-of respond

A vivid image of forcing compliance through ritual

則 攘 臂 而 (仍) 之
then raise arms and (still) it

故 失 道 而 後 德
(therefore) lose way and after virtue

This section shows the degradation from Dao to mere ritual - a key criticism of Confucian emphasis on ritual

失 德 而 後 仁
lose virtue and after benevolence

失 仁 而 後 義 .
lose benevolence and after righteousness

失 義 而 後 禮
lose righteousness and after ritual

A powerful critique of empty ritual - 薄 meaning thin/superficial is key here

夫 禮 者 忠 信 之 薄 .
(now) ritual that-which loyalty trust of thin

而 亂 之 首 .

and chaos of beginning

前 識 者 道 之 華 .

forward knowledge that-which way of flower

而 愚 之 始 .

and foolishness of beginning

大丈夫 'great person' represents the ideal sage in Daoism

是 以 大 丈 夫

this by-means-of great measure person

處 其 厚 不 居 其 薄

dwell its thick not reside its thin

處 其 實 不 居 其 華

dwell its solid not reside its flower

故 去 彼 取 此 .

(therefore) reject that take this

Chapter 39

This opening line sets up a historical perspective about those who have attained unity/ oneness

昔 之 得 一 者
ancient of obtain one one-who

天 得 一 以 清
heaven obtain one by-means-of clear

地 得 一 以 寧
earth obtain one by-means-of peaceful

神 (spirit) here refers to divine or spiritual forces

神 得 一 以 靈
spirit obtain one by-means-of efficacious

谷 (valley) is often used metaphorically to represent emptiness or capacity

谷 得 一 以 盈
valley obtain one by-means-of fill

萬 物 得 一 以 生 。

ten-thousand things obtain one by-means-of live

侯 王 得 一 以 為 天 下 貞

marquis king obtain one by-means-of become heaven below correct

其 致 之 。

its arrive-at it

Here begins the negative consequences of losing unity

天 無 以 清

heaven without by-means-of clear

將 恐 裂

will fear split

A profound statement about the relationship between high and low positions

高 以 下 為 基

high by-means-of low become foundation

The final lines use interesting metaphors comparing jade (precious) to stone (common)

不 欲 琬 琬 如 玉

not desire jade-like jade-like like jade

珞 珞 如 石

stone-like

stone-like

like

stone

Chapter 40

This opening line introduces a fundamental concept about the Dao's movement being cyclical or contrarian to what we expect

反 者 道 之 動 .

return one-who way of movement

This line pairs with the first, showing how the Dao operates through what appears weak or yielding

弱 者 道 之 用 .

weak one-who way of use

Here we see the origin of manifested things, using 萬物 (10,000 things) to represent all of existence

天 下 萬 物 生 於 有

heaven below ten-thousand things born from being

This final line reveals the ultimate source - that being itself comes from non-being, a profound philosophical statement in just 5 characters

有 生 於 無 .

being born from nothing

Chapter 41

This opening describes how different levels of scholars/practitioners respond to the Dao

上 士 聞 道 勤 而 行 之
upper scholar hear way diligent and practice it

中 士 聞 道 若 存 若 亡
middle scholar hear way seem exist seem lost

Note how 大笑 (great-laugh) implies mockery or ridicule

下 士 聞 道 大 笑 之
lower scholar hear way great laugh it

不 笑 不 足 以 為 道 .
not laugh not enough by-means-of become way

故 建 言 有 之 (曰) .
therefore establish words have it (say)

This begins a series of paradoxical descriptions using 若 (seem/as-if) to show how the Dao appears contrary to expectations

明 道 若 昧
bright way seem dim

進 道 若 退
advance way seem retreat

夷 道 若 類
smooth way seem rough

上 德 若 谷 .
highest virtue seem valley

大 白 若 辱
great white seem shame

廣 德 若 不 足
broad virtue seem not enough

建 德 若 偷
establish virtue seem steal

質 真 若 渝
substance true seem change

These lines describe how the greatest manifestations of the Dao often appear formless or empty

大 方 無 隅
great square without corner

大 器 晚 成
great vessel late complete

大 音 希 聲
great sound rare voice

大 象 無 形
great image without form

道 隱 無 名 .
way hidden without name

The chapter concludes by affirming that only the Dao can perfect both beginnings and endings

夫 唯 道 善 (始) 且 (善) 成
indeed only way good (begin) and (good) complete

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Chapter 42

This opening line establishes the cosmological progression of creation from Dao

道 生 一
way gives-birth-to one

一 生 二
one gives-birth-to two

二 生 三
two gives-birth-to three

A pivotal line showing how the abstract numbers manifest into the physical world

三 生 萬 物
three gives-birth-to ten-thousand things

This describes the fundamental duality in all things

萬 物 負 陰 而 抱 陽
ten-thousand things carry yin and embrace yang

沖 氣 以 為 和
empty qi by-means-of become harmony

人 之 所 惡

person 's that-which hate

These terms referred to those without family/support - a powerful statement about society's values

唯 孤 寡 不 穀

only orphaned widowed not grain

而 王 公 以 (自) 稱 .

yet king duke by-means-of (self) call

故 物

(therefore) things

A profound observation about the cyclical nature of gain and loss

或 損 之 而 益

some decrease it and increase

或 益 之 而 損

some increase it and decrease

人 之 所 教 我 亦 教 之

person 's that-which teach I also teach it

強梁 (qiang liang) refers to those who use force and violence - a warning about their fate

強 梁 者 不 得 其 死
strong beam one not obtain their death

吾 將 以 為 教 父
I will by-means-of make teaching father

Chapter 43

This opening line establishes a profound contrast - the softest thing under heaven. In Classical Chinese, extremes often reveal deeper truths.

天 下 之 至 柔

heaven below of most soft

A powerful image of the softest thing riding over/conquering the hardest - a key Daoist paradox where softness overcomes hardness.

馳 騁 天 下 之 至 堅

gallop race heaven below of most hard

This line speaks to how the formless can penetrate where there seems to be no space - like water seeping into stone.

無 有 入 無 間

nothing exist enter nothing space

吾 是 以 知 無 為 之 有 益 。

I this by-means-of know nothing do of exist benefit

Note how 'teaching without words' parallels 'acting without action' - both paradoxical Daoist concepts.

不 言 之 教

not speak of teach

無 為 之 益
nothing do of benefit

The final line suggests how rare it is for people to grasp these profound paradoxes - few in the world attain this understanding.

天 下 希 及 之 .
heaven below rare reach it

Chapter 44

This opening line poses a profound question about priorities - what matters more: reputation or one's physical self?

名 與 身 孰 親

name and body which close

Here the comparison is between physical self and material wealth - a theme that resonates through time

身 與 貨 孰 多

body and goods which more

A philosophical inquiry about gain versus loss - which causes more suffering?

得 與 亡 孰 病

gain and lose which sick

Notice how 甚 (very) modifies 愛 (love) to warn about excessive attachment

甚 愛 必 大 費

very love must great cost

多 藏 必 厚 亡

much store must thick lose

A powerful statement about contentment being a shield against shame

知 足 不 辱
know enough not shame

知 止 不 殆
know stop not danger

The conclusion suggests that understanding limits leads to sustainability

可 以 長 久
can by-means-of long endure

Chapter 45

This opening line sets up a profound paradox - that true greatness appears incomplete or lacking

大 成 若 缺

great completion seems-like lacking

其 用 不 弊 .

its use not exhausted

The character 盅 (empty container) creates a powerful image of a vessel that appears empty but has endless utility

大 盈 若 (盅)

great fullness seems-like (empty-vessel)

其 用 不 窮 .

its use not limited

大 直 若 屈 .

great straight seems-like bent

大 巧 若 拙 .

great skill seems-like clumsy

大 辯 若 訥 .

great eloquence seems-like stuttering

These next two lines present a fascinating contrast between movement and stillness

躁 勝 寒 .

restless overcomes cold

靜 勝 熱

still overcomes heat

The final line presents clarity and stillness as the way to properly order the world - a powerful conclusion that ties the paradoxes together

清 靜 為 天 下 正 .

clear still becomes heaven below proper

Chapter 46

This opening line sets up a contrast between when the world follows the Way vs doesn't

天 下 有 道

heaven below have way

A powerful image: in times of peace, warhorses are retired to farming work

卻 走 馬 以 糞

withdraw run horse by-means-of manure

天 下 無 道

heaven below not-have way

Contrasting image: in chaotic times, war horses are bred at the borders

戎 馬 生 於 郊 。

military horse born at suburbs

(罪 莫 大 於 可 欲)

(crime none greater than can desire)

This line introduces a key theme about the dangers of endless wanting

禍 莫 大 於 不 知 足

disaster none greater than not know enough

咎 莫 大 於 欲 得

blame none greater than desire obtain

A famous concluding line about contentment. Note how 足 is used three times with slightly different meanings: 'enough', 'sufficiency', and 'satisfied'

故 知 足 之 足 常 足 矣 .

therefore know enough of sufficiency always satisfied already

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Chapter 47

This opening line sets up a profound paradox about gaining wisdom without leaving one's dwelling

不 出 戶
not exit door

Here we see how internal contemplation can lead to understanding the external world

[以] 知 天 下
[by-means-of] know heaven below

不 闚 牖
not peek window

[以] (知) 天 道
[by-means-of] (know) heaven way

A key turning point showing the paradox of seeking external knowledge

其 出 彌 遠
their exit more far

其 知 彌 少
their know more less

Here we meet the sage who embodies this wisdom

是 以 聖 人
this by-means-of sage person

不 行 而 知
not travel yet know

不 見 而 名
not see yet name

The chapter concludes with the paradoxical achievement of the sage

不 為 而 成
not do yet complete

Chapter 48

This line contrasts pursuing academic knowledge vs the Dao - knowledge accumulates while the Dao strips away

為 學 (者) 日 益
do study (one-who) day increase

為 道 (者) 日 損
do way (one-who) day decrease

This emphasizes the continuous process of reduction - 'decrease and decrease again'

損 之 又 損
decrease it again decrease

以 至 於 無 為 .
by-means-of arrive at nothing do

A famous paradox - 'doing nothing yet leaving nothing undone'

無 為 而 無 不 為 .
nothing do yet nothing not do

取 天 下 常 以 無 事
take heaven below always by-means-of nothing affair

及 其 有 事 .
reach its have affair

This final line completes the paradox - trying to actively control or 'take' the world will fail

不 足 以 取 天 下
not sufficient by-means-of take heaven below

Chapter 49

This opening line introduces a profound concept about the sage's adaptable mindset

聖 人 無 常 心
sage person without constant heart-mind

Shows how the sage aligns with the people's hearts

以 百 姓 心 為 心
by-means-of hundred surnames heart-mind make heart-mind

善 者 吾 善 之
good one-who I good them

不 善 者 吾 亦 善 之
not good one-who I also good them

A powerful statement about the nature of virtue

德 善 .
virtue good

信 者 吾 信 之
trust one-who I trust them

不 信 者 吾 亦 信 之
not trust one-who I also trust them

德 信 .
virtue trust

This beautiful metaphor describes the sage's careful attention to the world

聖 人 在 天 下 歛 歛
sage person at heaven below gather-in gather-in

[焉] 為 天 下 渾 其 心
[therein] make heaven below merge their heart-mind

百 姓 皆 注 其 耳 目
hundred surnames all focus their ears eyes

The final line reveals how the sage views all people as children - with acceptance and care

聖 人 皆 孩 之
sage person all child them

Chapter 50

This opening line establishes a profound contrast between life and death

出 生 入 死

exit life enter death

生 之 徒 十 有 三

life of followers ten have three

死 之 徒 十 有 三

death of followers ten have three

A key line suggesting how life's movements can lead to death-grounds

人 之 生 動 之 死 地

person of life movement of death ground

亦 十 有 三

also ten have three

夫 何 故 。

that what reason

以 其 生 生 之 厚 .

by-means-of their live life of thick

This begins a famous metaphorical passage about those who understand how to preserve life

蓋 聞 善 攝 生 者

indeed hear good manage life one-who

(陵) 行 不 遇 兕 虎

(travel) walk not meet rhinoceros tiger

入 軍 不 被 甲 兵

enter army not wear armor weapon

Note how the rhinoceros's horn is rendered useless - a powerful metaphor

兕 無 所 投 其 角

rhinoceros no place throw its horn

虎 無 所 措 其 爪

tiger no place put its claw

兵 無 所 容 其 刃

weapon no place contain its blade

夫 何 故 .

that what reason

The profound conclusion - suggesting that one who truly understands life has no vulnerable spots

以 其 無 死 地

by-means-of their no death ground

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Chapter 51

This opening line establishes the foundational relationship between Dao and creation

道 生 之

way give-birth it

德 畜 之

virtue nurture it

物 形 之

thing shape it

勢 成 之

momentum complete it

是 以 萬 物

this by-means-of ten-thousand thing

Note how the double negative 莫不 creates emphasis

莫 不 尊 道 而 貴 德

none not revere way and value virtue

道 之 尊 .
way of revere

德 之 貴 .
virtue of value

夫 莫 之 命 .
that none it command

自然 (spontaneous-so) is a key concept in Daoism, suggesting natural authenticity

而 常 自 然 .
yet constant self so

故 道 生 之 德 畜 之
therefore way give-birth it virtue nurture it

長 之 育 之
grow it raise it

亭 here suggests providing shelter/support

亭 之 毒 之
shelter it nourish it

養 之 覆 之
sustain it cover it

生 而 不 有 .
give-birth yet not possess

為 而 不 恃 .
act yet not rely-on

長 而 不 宰
grow yet not control

玄德 (dark virtue) represents a profound, mysterious virtue that operates without conscious effort

是 謂 玄 德
this called dark virtue

Chapter 52

This opening line establishes a cosmic origin principle

天 下 有 始

heaven below have beginning

A metaphorical reference to the Dao as mother of all things

以 為 天 下 母

by-means-of become heaven below mother

既 得 其 母

already obtain its mother

以 知 其 子

by-means-of know its child

既 知 其 子

already know its child

Important theme of returning to the source

復 守 其 母

return guard its mother

沒 身 不 殆 .
end body not danger

A metaphorical instruction about controlling sensory desires

塞 其 兌 閉 其 門
block its opening close its door

終 身 不 勤
end body not toil

開 其 兌 濟 其 事
open its opening cross its matter

終 身 不 救 .
end body not save

A powerful paradox about perception and wisdom

見 小 曰 明
see small say bright

守 柔 曰 強
guard soft say strong

用 其 光 復 歸 其 明
use its light return return its brightness

無 遺 身 殃
without leave body calamity

The final line suggests this is the natural way of cultivation

是 謂 習 常
this called practice constant

Chapter 53

This chapter begins with introspective reflection on wisdom and its relationship to following the Way

· 使 我 介 然 有 知 ·
cause I armor thus have know

行 於 大 道
walk in great way

唯 迤 是 畏
only winding this fear

A powerful contrast is being set up between the 'great way' and what follows

大 道 甚 夷 ·
great way very level

而 民 好 徑 ·
yet people prefer shortcut

The next several lines paint a picture of neglect and misplaced priorities

朝 甚 除 .
court very bare

田 甚 蕪 .
field very overgrown

倉 甚 虛
granary very empty

服 文 綵
wear ornate silk

帶 利 劍
wear sharp sword

厭 飲 食 .
gorge drink food

財 貨 有 餘
wealth goods have excess

This powerful conclusion draws attention to how excess and showing off are forms of robbery

是 謂 盜 夸
this called robber boast

非 道 也 哉
not way indeed indeed

Chapter 54

This opening couplet uses parallel structure to express durability through gentleness

善 建 者 不 拔

good build one-who not uproot

善 抱 者 不 脫

good embrace one-who not slip-away

Speaks to unbroken continuation of family traditions

子 孫 以 祭 祀 不 輟

child grandchild by-means-of sacrifice worship not cease

修 之 — 身 其 德 乃 (真)

cultivate it body/self its virtue then (true)

The next five lines show expanding circles of influence, from self to the world

修 之 — 家 其 德 乃 餘

cultivate it family its virtue then abundant

修 之 — 鄉 其 德 乃 長

cultivate it village its virtue then grow

修 之 — 國 其 德 乃 豐
cultivate it country its virtue then prosperous

修 之 — 天 下 其 德 乃 普
cultivate it heaven below its virtue then universal

故 以 身 觀 身
(therefore) by-means-of body/self observe body/self

These parallel lines show how understanding moves from micro to macro

以 家 觀 家
by-means-of family observe family

以 鄉 觀 鄉
by-means-of village observe village

以 國 觀 國
by-means-of country observe country

以 天 下 觀 天 下
by-means-of heaven below observe heaven below

A rhetorical question that ties the chapter together

吾 何 以 知 天 下 然 哉
I how by-means-of know heaven below thus indeed

以 此
by-means-of this

Chapter 55

This chapter opens with a powerful metaphor comparing those who embody deep virtue to infants - a recurring theme in Daoism

含 德 之 厚 [者]
contain virtue of thick [one-who]

比 於 赤 子 .
compare to new-born child

This sequence presents vivid imagery of dangerous creatures that do not harm the infant - suggesting a state of natural harmony

蜂 蠆 虺 蛇 不 螫
bee scorpion viper snake not sting

猛 獸 不 據
fierce beast not seize

攫 鳥 不 搏
swooping bird not grab

Notes the paradox of an infant's apparent weakness containing true strength

骨 弱 筋 柔 而 握 固 .

bone weak sinew soft yet grip firm

A complex line referring to the infant's vital essence being at its peak before awareness of duality

未 知 牝 牡 之 合 而 (腹) 作

not-yet know female male of joining yet (aroused) arise

精 之 至 也 .

essence of ultimate indeed

終 日 號 而 不 嗄

whole day cry yet not hoarse

和 之 至 也

harmony of ultimate indeed

These parallel structures define important concepts through their relationships

知 和 曰 常

know harmony call constant

知 常 曰 明

know constant call bright

益 生 曰 祥 .

increase life call auspicious

心 使 氣 曰 強

heart-mind employ vital-force call strong

A warning about the natural cycle - forcing strength leads to decay

物 壯 則 老

thing strong then old

謂 之 不 道 .

call it not way

不 道 早 已

not way early end

Chapter 56

This famous opening couplet emphasizes the paradoxical nature of true wisdom - those who truly know don't speak of it, while those who speak much may not truly know.

知 者 不 言 .

know one-who not speak

言 者 不 知 .

speak one-who not know

The next series of lines describe practices for achieving a state of profound awareness through various forms of restraint and moderation.

塞 其 兌 閉 其 門

block its openings close its gates

挫 其 銳

blunt its sharpness

解 其 紛

unravel its tangles

和 其 光

harmonize its light

同 其 塵
unite its dust

'Mysterious unity' (玄同) is a key concept in Daoism, representing the profound state of being one with the Dao.

是 謂 玄 同 .
this called mysterious unity

故 不 可 得 而 親 .
therefore not can obtain and close

These parallel lines describe how one who achieves this state transcends ordinary human distinctions.

不 可 得 而 疏 .
not can obtain and distant

不 可 得 而 利
not can obtain and benefit

不 可 得 而 害
not can obtain and harm

不 可 得 而 貴
not can obtain and noble

不 可 得 而 賤
not can obtain and humble

The final line reveals that by transcending these distinctions, one becomes truly valuable to all under heaven.

故 為 天 下 貴 .
therefore become heaven below precious

Chapter 57

以 正 治 國

by-means-of upright govern state

以 奇 用 兵

by-means-of strange use soldiers

以 無 事 取 天 下

by-means-of without affairs take heaven below

吾 何 以 知 其 然 哉

I how by-means-of know its so indeed

以 此

by-means-of this

Notice how 天下 (heaven-below) appears again - this compound means 'the world' or 'all under heaven'

天 下 多 忌 諱

heaven below many taboo avoid

而 民 彌 貧 .

and people increasingly poor

民 多 利 器

people many sharp tools

[而] 國 家 滋 昏

[and] state family more dark

Note how 知 (know) in brackets implies knowledge in a negative sense - clever or cunning

人 多 (知) 巧

person many (know) skill

[而] 奇 物 滋 起

[and] strange things more arise

法 (物) 滋 (章)

law (things) more (manifest)

盜 賊 多 有

thief bandit many exist

故 聖 人 云

therefore sage person say

This begins a powerful series of parallel statements showing the sage's approach

我	無	為	而	民	自	化
I	without	action	and	people	self	transform

我	好	靜	而	民	自	正
I	love	quiet	and	people	self	upright

我	無	事	而	民	自	富
I	without	affairs	and	people	self	rich

我	無	欲	而	民	自	樸 .
I	without	desire	and	people	self	simple

Chapter 58

This opening set of contrasts shows how different governing styles affect the people

其 政 悶 悶

its government dull dull

其 民 淳 淳

its people simple simple

其 政 察 察

its government examine examine

其 民 缺 缺

its people lacking lacking

Note the use of 兮 (xi) as a classical particle expressing emotion or emphasis

禍 兮 福 之 所 倚 .

misfortune ah fortune of place lean

福 兮 禍 之 所 伏

fortune ah misfortune of place hide

孰 is an interrogative meaning 'who' or 'what' - showing philosophical questioning

孰 知 其 極
who know its limit

其 無 正 .
its not-have correct

正 復 為 奇
correct return become strange

善 復 為 妖
good return become evil

人 之 迷 .
person of confused

其 日 固 久
its day indeed long

Here begins the description of the sage's balanced way

是 以 聖 人
this by-means-of sage person

方 而 不 割
square but not cut

廉 而 不 歲
corner but not pierce

直 而 不 肆
straight but not unrestrained

The final lines present beautiful metaphors of balanced action

光 而 不 耀
light but not glare

Chapter 59

This opening line establishes the theme of governing both human affairs and natural/heavenly matters

治 人 事 天
govern person affairs heaven

莫 若 嗇
none like frugal

夫 唯 嗇
indeed only frugal

'Early submission' here refers to addressing things before they become problems

是 謂 早 服
this called early submit

早 服 謂 之 重 積 德
early submit called it repeated accumulate virtue

重 積 德
repeated accumulate virtue

則 無 不 克 .

then none not overcome

無 不 克

none not overcome

則 莫 知 其 極

then none know its limit

莫 知 其 極

none know its limit

可 以 有 國

can by-means-of possess country

'Mother of the country' is a metaphor for the fundamental principles that sustain a nation

有 國 之 母

possess country of mother

可 以 長 久

can by-means-of long endure

是 謂 深 根 固 柢
this called deep root firm base

This final line connects the practical governance described above with the eternal Dao

長 生 久 視 之 道 . .
long live endure see of way

Chapter 60

This opening line uses a cooking metaphor - comparing governing a large state to cooking small fish, suggesting gentleness and restraint

治 大 國 若 烹 小 鮮
govern great state like cook small fish

A pivotal line establishing how to approach rulership - through the Way

以 道 莅 天 下
by-means-of way oversee heaven below

其 鬼 不 神
its ghost not spirit

非 其 鬼 不 神 .
not its ghost not spirit

其 神 不 傷 人 .
its spirit not harm person

非 其 神 不 傷 人 .
not its spirit not harm person

Notice how the sage is equated with spiritual forces - neither causing harm

聖 人 亦 不 傷 人 .
sage person also not harm person

A key principle of Daoism - mutual non-interference leads to harmony

夫 兩 不 相 傷
thus both not mutual harm

The final line shows the natural result - virtue/power (de) naturally returns

故 德 交 歸 焉
therefore virtue exchange return herein

Chapter 61

This chapter uses the metaphor of water flowing downward to discuss international relations and power dynamics

大 國 者 下 流 .

great state one-who lower flow

天 下 之 交 .

heaven below of intersection

Uses feminine/masculine imagery to discuss power dynamics

天 下 之 牝 .

heaven below of female

牝 常 以 靜 勝 牡

female always by-means-of stillness overcome male

以 靜 為 下 .

by-means-of stillness make lower

故 大 國 以 下 小 國

therefore great state by-means-of lower small state

則 取 小 國
then take small state

小 國 以 下 大 國
small state by-means-of lower great state

則 取 [於] 大 國
then take [from] great state

This line introduces a key paradox - gaining by lowering oneself

故 或 下 以 取 .
therefore some lower by-means-of take

或 下 而 取
some lower and take

Describes the motivations of great states

大 國 不 過 欲 兼 畜 人
great state not exceed desire combine nurture people

Contrasts with motivations of small states

小 國 不 過 欲 入 事 人 .
small state not exceed desire enter serve people

夫 兩 者 各 得 [其] 所 欲 .
thus both ones each obtain [their] place desire .

The chapter's key conclusion - the natural advantage of humility

大 者 宜 為 下
great one suitable make lower

Chapter 62

This opening line establishes the Dao as the profound source/mystery behind all things

道 者 萬 物 之 奧 .
way one-who ten-thousand thing of mystery

善 人 之 寶 .
good person of treasure

不 善 人 之 所 保 .
not good person of that-which protect

An important parallel structure showing how both words and actions have value in the marketplace of life

美 言 可 以 市 .
beautiful words can by-means-of market

尊 行 可 以 加 人
honor conduct can by-means-of add-to person

人 之 不 善 .
person of not good

A rhetorical question suggesting no one should be abandoned

何 棄 之 有 。

what abandon them have

故 立 天 子

therefore establish heaven son

置 三 公 。

install three duke

This line references ancient gift practices - jade discs and horses were supreme gifts

雖 有 拱 璧 以 先 駟 馬

although have ceremonial jade-disc by-means-of precede four-horse horse

不 如 坐 進 此 道 。

not like sit advance this way

古 之 所 以 貴 此 道 者 何 。

ancient of that-which by-means-of value this way one-who what

不 曰

not say

以 求 得

by-means-of seek obtain

有 罪 以 免 邪

have crime by-means-of avoid wrong

A powerful conclusion emphasizing the universal value of the Dao

故 為 天 下 貴

therefore be heaven under precious

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Chapter 63

This opening line introduces a key Daoist paradox - acting through non-action

． 為 無 為 ．
act not-have act

事 無 事 ．
affair not-have affair

A subtle reference to finding satisfaction in simplicity

味 無 味
taste not-have taste

大 小 多 少
big small many few

A profound statement about responding to negativity with virtue

報 怨 以 德 ．
repay resentment by-means-of virtue

圖 難 於 其 易
plan difficult at its easy

為 大 於 其 細 .
act big at its small

This line expresses how great tasks begin with small steps

天 下 難 事 必 作 於 易
heaven below difficult affair must make at easy

天 下 大 事 必 作 於 細 .
heaven below big affair must make at small

是 以 聖 人 終 不 為 大
this by-means-of sage person end not act big

A paradoxical truth: by not attempting greatness, true greatness is achieved

故 能 成 其 大
therefore can complete its big

夫 輕 諾 必 寡 信
indeed light promise must few trust

多 易 必 多 難 .
many easy must many difficult

是 以 聖 人 猶 難 之 .

this by-means-of sage person still difficult it

The chapter concludes with the wisdom that by treating things as difficult, one ultimately finds no difficulties

故 終 無 難 矣 .

therefore end not-have difficult already

Chapter 64

This opening line discusses how something stable or settled is easily maintained

其 安 易 持 .
its stable easy maintain

Before something manifests signs or symptoms, it's easier to plan for

其 未 兆 易 謀 .
its not-yet sign easy plan

其 脆 易 泮 .
its brittle easy dissolve

其 微 易 散 .
its tiny easy scatter

A key Daoist concept: act before problems arise

為 之 於 未 有 .
act it at not-yet exist

治 之 於 未 亂
govern it at not-yet chaos

This beautiful metaphor shows how great things begin small - a tree you can barely wrap your arms around begins as a tiny sprout

合 抱 之 木 生 於 毫 末
join embrace of tree grow from fine-hair tip

九 層 之 臺 起 於 累 土
nine story of terrace rise from pile earth

A famous line suggesting all great journeys begin with a single step

千 里 之 行 始 於 足 下 .
thousand mile of journey begin at foot below

為 者 敗 之
do one-who fail it

執 者 失 之
grasp one-who lose it

是 以 聖 人
this by-means-of sage person

The paradoxical concept of wu-wei (non-action) - by not forcing, one does not fail

無 為 故 無 敗 .
without doing therefore without failure

無 執 故 無 失 .
without grasping therefore without loss

This line observes how people often fail just as they're about to succeed

民 之 從 事 常 於 幾 成 而 敗
people of follow affair often at almost complete and fail
之 .
it

慎 終 如 始
careful end like beginning

則 無 敗 事 .
then without fail affair

是 以 聖 人
this by-means-of sage person

A paradoxical teaching - the sage desires non-desire, showing how true wisdom involves transcending normal attachments

欲 不 欲
desire not desire

不 貴 難 得 之 貨
not value difficult obtain of goods

學 不 學 .
learn not learn

This line suggests the sage returns to what others have passed by or overlooked - finding value in the ordinary

復 眾 人 之 所 過 .
return many person of place pass-by

以 輔 萬 物 之 自 然
by-means-of assist ten-thousand thing of self so

而 不 敢 為 .
and not dare act

Chapter 65

This opening line sets up a comparison with ancient sages - note how 善 (good/skilled) pairs with 為 (do/make) to indicate mastery

古 之 善 為 道 者
ancient of good do way one-who

非 以 明 民 .
not by-means-of enlighten people

將 以 愚 之 .
will by-means-of simple them

民 之 難 治 .
people of difficult govern

Note how 知 (knowledge) is placed in parentheses, suggesting it's being treated as a noun rather than verb

以 其 (知) 多 .
by-means-of their (knowledge) much

故 以 (知) 治 國
therefore by-means-of (knowledge) govern country

國 之 賊 。

country of thief

不 以 (知) 治 國

not by-means-of (knowledge) govern country

國 之 福 。

country of blessing

稽式 appears together meaning 'pattern/model' - an interesting compound suggesting fundamental principles

知 此 兩 者 亦 稽 式 。

know this two ones also examine pattern

常 知 稽 式

always know examine pattern

玄德 (dark virtue) is a key Daoist concept suggesting a profound, mysterious kind of virtue

是 謂 玄 德

this called dark virtue

玄 德 深 矣 遠 矣

dark virtue deep indeed far indeed

與 物 反 矣
with things reverse indeed

The final line suggests a return to natural harmony through reversing artificial complexity

—— — 乃 至 大 順
then arrive great accordance

Chapter 66

This opening line uses the rivers and seas as a metaphor for leadership - a recurring theme in Daoist thought about how the 'low' position can actually be most powerful

江 海 所 以 能 為 百 谷 王
river sea that-which by-means-of able become hundred valley king

者

one-who

以 其 善 下 之 .

by-means-of its good-at below it

故 能 為 百 谷 王

therefore able become hundred valley king

Note how 聖人 (sage) is set apart in brackets, emphasizing this key Daoist concept

是 以 [聖 人]

this by-means-of [sage person]

欲 上 民 .

desire above people

必 以 言 下 之
must by-means-of words below them

欲 先 民 .
desire before people

必 以 身 後 之
must by-means-of body behind them

是 以 聖 人
this by-means-of sage person

Notice the elegant parallel structure in these next few lines, showing cause and effect

處 上 而 民 不 重 .
dwell above and-yet people not burden

處 前 而 民 不 害 .
dwell front and-yet people not harm

是 以 天 下 樂 推 而 不 厭 .
this by-means-of heaven below joy promote and-yet not weary

以 其 不 爭 .
by-means-of their not compete

The chapter closes by returning to the theme of non-contention, showing how true power comes from not fighting for it

故	天	下	莫	能	與	之	爭
therefore	heaven	below	none	able	with	them	compete

Chapter 67

This opening line plays with the concept of paradox - the speaker is describing how others view them as 'great' while suggesting this perception may be mistaken

天 下 皆 謂 我 — 大
heaven below all call me great

似 不 肖
seem not resemble

This line reveals a key Daoist paradox - true greatness comes from not trying to be great

夫 唯 (不 肖) 故 [能] (大) .
indeed only (not resemble) therefore [can] (great)

若 肖 .
if resemble

久 矣 其 細 也
long already its small indeed

The 'three treasures' (三寶) introduced here are fundamental Daoist virtues

夫 我 有 三 寶

indeed I have three treasures

持 而 保 之 .

hold and protect them

一 曰 慈 .

one called compassion

二 曰 儉

two called frugality

The third treasure embodies the Daoist virtue of humility

三 曰 不 敢 為 天 下 先

three called not dare act-as heaven below first

慈 故 能 勇

compassion therefore can brave

儉 故 能 廣

frugality therefore can broad

不 敢 為 天 下 先

not dare act-as heaven below first

故 能 成 器 長 。

therefore can become vessel leader

These next lines warn against abandoning the three treasures

今 舍 慈 且 勇 。

now abandon compassion and brave

舍 儉 且 廣

abandon frugality and broad

舍 後 且 先

abandon behind and first

死 矣

die indeed

The chapter concludes by showing how compassion leads to victory - a paradoxical concept that true power comes through gentleness

夫 慈 以 戰 則 勝

indeed compassion by-means-of fight then victory

以 守 則 固

by-means-of defend then secure

天 將 救 之

heaven will save them

以 慈 衛 之

by-means-of compassion guard them

Chapter 68

This chapter explores the paradoxical nature of true mastery - how the best leaders achieve their aims through restraint rather than force.

善 為 士 者 不 武 .
good-at act-as scholar-official one-who not martial

Notice the parallel structure starting with 善 (good-at) in these opening lines, building a powerful rhythm.

善 戰 者 不 怒 .
good-at battle one-who not anger

善 勝 敵 者 不 與
good-at victory enemy one-who not engage

Note how 下 (below/beneath) here carries the profound meaning of humbling oneself to lead effectively.

善 用 人 者 為 之 下
good-at use person one-who act-as their below

The repeated structure 是謂 (this-called) introduces three powerful conclusions about non-contention.

是 謂 不 爭 之 德
this called not compete of virtue

是 謂 用 人 之 力
this called use person of strength

The final line elevates these principles to cosmic significance, linking them to Heaven itself.

是 謂 配 天 古 之 極 [也]
this called match heaven ancient of ultimate [indeed]

Chapter 69

· 用 兵 有 言
use weapon have word

This sets up a military metaphor that will be used to discuss non-aggressive strategy

吾 不 敢 為 主 而 為 客
I not dare act-as host and act-as guest

不 敢 進 寸 而 退 尺
not dare advance inch and retreat foot

A profound paradox: how does one 'march without marching'? This introduces a series of such paradoxical statements.

是 謂 行 無 行
this called march without marching

攘 無 臂 ·
wave without arms

扔 無 敵
wield without enemy

執 無 兵
grasp without weapons

Note how 禍 (disaster) is paired with 莫大 (none greater) - a powerful warning about underestimating others

禍 莫 大 於 輕 敵
disaster none greater than treat-lightly enemy

輕 敵 幾 喪 吾 寶 .
treat-lightly enemy almost lose my treasure

故 抗 兵 相 (若)
therefore resist armies mutually (alike)

The final line reveals that the truly victorious are those who maintain compassion even in conflict

[則] 哀 者 勝 矣
[then] sorrowful one prevail indeed

Chapter 70

The opening presents a paradox that runs throughout Daoist thought - what seems simple is often profound

吾 言 甚 易 知 .
I words very easy know

甚 易 行 .
very easy practice

[而] 天 下 莫 [之] 能 知 .
[yet] heaven below none [it] can know

莫 [之] 能 行 .
none [it] can practice

'Zong' (宗) means ancestral temple but here refers to deeper underlying principles

言 有 宗 .
words have source

事 有 君 .
affairs have ruler

'Wu zhi' (無知) literally means 'without knowledge' but suggests a state of openness rather than ignorance

夫 唯 無 知 .

indeed only without knowledge

是 以 不 我 知 .

this by-means-of not I know

知 我 者 希

know I one-who rare

則 我 者 貴 [矣]

then I one-who precious [indeed]

This begins the concluding metaphor of the chapter

是 以 聖 人

this by-means-of sage person

A powerful closing image: wearing rough cloth but carrying jade inside - appearance vs. essence

被 褐 [而] 懷 玉

wear coarse-cloth [yet] embrace jade

Chapter 71

This opening line plays with the contrast between knowing and not-knowing, suggesting that claiming to know what one doesn't know is problematic.

知 不 知 (尚) [矣]
know not know (superior) [indeed]

This line reverses the previous pattern, suggesting that not recognizing one's own knowledge is a form of sickness.

不 知 知 病 [矣]
not know know sickness [indeed]

The character 夫 here serves as an emphatic opener, while 唯 emphasizes the following statement about recognizing sickness.

夫 唯 病 病
indeed only sickness sickness

是 以 不 病
this by-means-of not sickness

聖 人 不 病 .
sage person not sickness

This line uses 其 to refer back to the sage's recognition of sickness.

以	其	病	病	.
by-means-of	their	sickness	sickness	

是	以	不	病
this	by-means-of	not	sickness

Chapter 72

This opening line sets up a key principle about the relationship between authority and fear

民 不 畏 威
people not fear power

則 大 威 至 [矣] .
then great power arrive [indeed]

An elegant parallel construction warning against taking things for granted

無 狎 其 所 居
do-not familiar its place dwell

無 厭 其 所 生
do-not tire-of its place live

Note how 夫 marks the start of an explanation section

夫 唯 不 厭
now only not tire-of

是 以 不 厭
this by-means-of not tire-of

Introduction of the sage (聖人) as exemplar

是 以 聖 人
this by-means-of sage person

Beautiful parallel construction showing paradox of self-knowledge

自 知 不 自 見 .
self know not self display

自 愛 不 自 貴 .
self love not self value

Classic Daoist conclusion preferring this (此) over that (彼)

故 去 彼 取 此
therefore reject that choose this

Chapter 73

This opening presents a paradox about bravery that challenges our usual thinking

• 勇 於 敢

• brave in dare

則 殺

then kill

勇 於 不 敢

brave in not dare

則 活

then live

此 兩 者 或 利 或 害

these two ones perhaps benefit perhaps harm

A profound rhetorical question about the mysteries of heaven's preferences

天 之 所 惡 孰 知 其 故

heaven 's that-which hate who know its reason

是 以 聖 人 猶 難 之
this by-means-of sage person still difficult it

天 之 道
heaven 's way

These next four lines describe the paradoxical power of non-action (wuwei)

不 爭 而 善 勝 •
not compete yet good-at victory •

不 言 而 善 應 •
not speak yet good-at respond •

不 召 而 自 來
not summon yet self come

綽 然 而 善 謀
slow thus yet good-at plan

A powerful metaphor comparing heaven's justice to a vast net

天 網 恢 恢
heaven net vast vast

疏 而 不 失
loose yet not lose

Chapter 74

This opening line sets up a profound observation about human nature and fear

民 不 畏 死

people not fear death

奈 何 以 死 懼 之 •

how what by-means-of death frighten them •

若 使 民 常 畏 死

if cause people always fear death

This line introduces the concept of authority and punishment

而 為 奇 者 吾 得 執 而 殺 之 •

and do strange one-who I can seize and kill them •

孰 敢 •

who dare •

常 有 司 殺 者 —

always exist officer kill one-who

This passage uses the metaphor of carpentry (斲) to discuss authority and responsibility

(●) 夫 代 司 殺 者 殺 ●
(*) that replace officer kill one-who kill *

是 謂 代 大 匠 斲 ●
this called replace great carpenter chop *

(●) 夫 代 大 匠 斲 者
(*) that replace great carpenter chop one-who

The final line delivers the key insight through a powerful metaphor

希 — 不 傷 其 手 矣 (●)
rare not harm their hand indeed (*)

Chapter 75

This chapter explores how the actions of rulers/those above affect the common people below

● 民 之 饑 ●
• people of hunger •

A powerful statement on how taxation leads to hunger - note the causative structure with 以

以 其 上 食 稅 之 多 ●
by-means-of their above eat tax of much •

是 以 饑
this by-means-of hunger

民 之 難 治 ●
people of difficult govern •

Note 為 (doing/action) is a key concept in Daoism, often contrasted with 無為 (non-action)

以 其 上 之 有 為 ●
by-means-of their above of have doing •

是 以 難 治 •
this by-means-of difficult govern •

民 之 輕 死 •
people of light death •

厚 (thick/rich) here refers to excessive or extravagant ways of living

以 其 求 生 之 厚 •
by-means-of their seek life of thick •

是 以 輕 死
this by-means-of light death

夫唯 often marks an important conclusion or truth. This line presents the ideal of simple living.

(•) 夫 唯 無 以 生 為 者
(•) indeed only not by-means-of life doing one-who

是 賢 於 貴 生 •
this worthy than value life •

Chapter 76

• 人 之 生 也 柔 弱
• person possessive life is soft weak

其 死 也 堅 強 •
their death is hard strong •

Notice how the text uses natural metaphors from plants to illustrate its philosophical points about strength and weakness

萬 物 草 木 之 生 也 柔 脆
ten-thousand things grass tree possessive life is soft tender

其 死 也 枯 槁 •
their death is withered dried •

(•) 故 堅 強 者 死 之 徒 •
therefore hard strong one-who death possessive follower •

柔 弱 者 生 之 徒 •
soft weak one-who life possessive follower •

This line uses military metaphor to illustrate the paradox that excessive strength leads to defeat

是 以 兵 強 則 不 勝
this by-means-of weapon strong then not victory

木 強 則 兵 ●
tree strong then weapon •

強 大 處 下 ●
strong great dwell below •

This final line completes the paradox - what seems weak actually has the superior position

柔 弱 處 上
soft weak dwell above

Chapter 77

This line uses a bow as metaphor for natural balance - a powerful image familiar to ancient readers

天 之 道 其 猶 張 弓 與 •
heaven 's way its like draw bow indeed •

高 者 抑 之 •
high one press-down it •

下 者 舉 之
low one lift-up it

有 餘 者 損 之 •
have excess one reduce it •

不 足 者 補 之 •
not enough one supplement it •

Notice how this phrase repeats from the opening, creating a structural frame

天 之 道
heaven 's way

損 有 餘 而 補 不 足

reduce have excess and supplement not enough

Here begins the contrast between heaven's way and human way

人 之 道 則 不 然

human 's way then not thus

損 不 足 以 奉 有 餘

reduce not enough by-means-of serve have excess

孰 能 有 餘 (而) 奉 [於] 天 下

who can have excess (and) serve [to] heaven below

唯 有 道 者 •

only have way one •

是 以 聖 人

this by-means-of sage person

This famous line speaks to acting without attachment to results

為 而 不 恃

do and not rely-on

功 成 而 不 處 •

achievement complete and not dwell •

其 不 欲 見 賢 •

his not desire appear worthy •

Chapter 78

This opening line presents water as a metaphor for softness and adaptability - a key Daoist concept

天 下 莫 柔 弱 於 水
heaven below none soft weak than water

Yet water can overcome the hardest things - introducing the paradox

而 攻 堅 強 者
yet attack firm strong one

莫 之 能 勝 •
none it can overcome •

以 其 無 以 易 之 •
by-means-of its nothing by-means-of change it •

A core principle of Daoism - the power of yielding

弱 之 勝 強 •
weak it overcome strong •

柔 之 勝 剛 • •
soft it overcome hard • •

天 下 莫 不 知 •
heaven below none not know •

莫 能 行 •
none can practice •

是 以 聖 人 云 •
this by-means-of sage person say •

The sage leader takes on the 'dirt' of the nation - showing humility

受 國 之 垢
receive country of dirt

是 謂 社 稷 [之] 主
this called soil grain [of] master

受 國 [之] 不 祥
receive country [of] not fortune

是 謂 天 下 [之] 王
this called heaven below [of] king

A famous line suggesting that truth often seems paradoxical

正 言 若 反 •
correct words seem opposite •

Chapter 79

This opening line introduces a profound observation about reconciling grievances

和 大 怨

reconcile great grievance

必 有 餘 怨 ●

must have remaining grievance •

This line questions the conventional wisdom about what constitutes 'good'

安 可 以 為 善

how can by-means-of make good

是 以 聖 人

this by-means-of sage person

The 'left' side of the contract typically represents the debtor's portion - an interesting metaphor

執 左 契

hold left contract

而 不 責 於 人
yet not demand from person

[(•)故] 有 德 司 契
[therefore] have virtue manage contract

無 德 司 徹
without virtue manage collection

This is one of the most quoted lines about the impartial nature of the Dao

天 道 無 親
heaven way without favoritism

常 與 善 人
always with good person

Chapter 80

• 小 國 寡 民
• small state few people

使 有 什 伯 之 器 而 不 用 •
cause have ten hundred of tool but not use •

使 民 重 死 而 不 遠 徙
cause people value death but not far move

Note how 雖有 (although-have) creates a hypothetical scenario that is then negated - a common Classical Chinese construction

雖 有 舟 輿 無 所 乘 之
although have boat carriage none place ride it

雖 有 甲 兵 無 所 陳 之
although have armor weapon none place display it

使 (民) 復 結 繩 而 用 之
cause (people) return tie rope and use it

The next four lines show contentment through parallel structure, each starting with an adjective followed by 其 (their)

甘 其 食
sweet their food

美 其 服
beautiful their clothes

安 其 居
peaceful their dwelling

樂 其 俗
happy their customs

鄰 國 相 望
neighbor state mutual gaze

This vivid image of hearing neighboring roosters and dogs suggests both proximity and separation

雞 犬 之 聲 相 聞
rooster dog of sound mutual hear

民 至 老 死
people until old die

不 相 往 來
not mutual go come

Chapter 81

This opening line establishes a key Daoist paradox about the relationship between truth and beauty in language

信 言 不 美

trustworthy words not beautiful

美 言 不 信

beautiful words not trustworthy

A profound statement about the relationship between goodness and argumentation

善 者 不 辯

good one-who not debate

辯 者 不 善

debate one-who not good

These lines contrast deep understanding with mere accumulation of knowledge

知 者 不 博

know one-who not extensive

博 者 不 知 •

extensive one-who not know •

This begins a section about the sage's relationship to accumulation and giving

聖 人 不 積

sage person not accumulate

A beautiful paradox about gaining by giving

既 以 為 人 己 愈 有

already by-means-of do others self more have

既 以 與 人 己 愈 多

already by-means-of give others self more abundant

This describes the beneficial but non-harmful nature of the Dao

天 之 道 利 而 不 害

heaven 's way benefit and not harm

The final line beautifully summarizes the sage's way of non-contention

聖 人 之 道 為 而 不 爭

sage person 's way act and not compete

