

Not Lao-tzu's Yellow Brick Road, xxviii - xxxvii

by strannikov

xxviii

know the male without neglecting the female:
then will you be a river gorge to the realm—
river gorge to the realm, you remain potent,
remaining potent, return to infancy.

know the white without neglecting the tarnished:
then will you be a lush valley to the realm—
lush valley to the realm, you remain potent,
remaining potent, return to uncarved strength.

know the white without neglecting what is black:
then will you be a sound model for the realm—
sound model for the realm, you remain potent,
remaining potent, the infinite returns.

an uncarved block is carved up to fashion tools,
the sage put to work advises officials.

master carvers do not reduce with carving.

xxix

bringing order to the realm is never done,
the realm, a sacred vessel, never complete:
not one kingdom of Earth can be perfected,
who strives to perfect kingdom and rule is lost.

in this world of the ten thousand things:

some things go ahead, some fall behind,
some exhale hot breath, others blow cold,
some wear their strength, others wear weakness,
some rise above, others fall beneath.

the sage disclaims excess, surfeit, luxury.

xxx

the sage serving as counselor of the Way
does not advise the king in the way of arms:
such aim would only imperil the kingdom.

where soldiers encamp, thorns and briars grow wild.
where great armies have marched, long deep dust follows.
a good commander secures his objective—
his aim secured, he embarks on no conquest:
he secures his aim not haughtily,
he secures his aim without boasting,
he secures his aim without bragging,
he secures his aim only when pressed.

this is called “securing aims without forcing”.

any creature prematurely aged
departed from the Way long ago:
the Way abandoned, it meets its early end.

xxxi

weapons themselves are quite fearful things:
rightly are they despised by all who wield them.

“the sage at home relies on his left,
once battle is joined, he relies on his right”.

the sage never takes up arms gladly:
weapons themselves are such fearful things—
weapons are wielded once no recourse remains:
peace and quiet are ever preferred.

weapons are crafted to possess no glory.
to glory in arms is to glory in death.
delighting in death is no rule for the realm.

in our celebrations we honor the left,
in our mourning we honor the right.
thus do lieutenants stand on the left,
supreme commanders stand on the right:
thus do they stand as if at a funeral.
when men are slaughtered, nothing is meet but grief:
even victories call for mourning.

xxxii

the unnamed Way remains forever nameless.
a small uncarved block of no earthly value,
no one dares to appraise it as more than scrap.
were kings and princes inclined to obtain it,
ten thousand would make obeisance unprovoked.
Heaven and Earth would unite in raining dew,
unruly folks would consent to harmony.

only when shares are divided up
are names needed for apportioning:
once names are needed, the matter can soon end—
know when to stop and danger is averted.

all under Heaven conforming to the Way
are as streams and rivers connected to seas.

xxxiii

who knows other people is clever—
who knows himself is master of resources.
to vanquish another shows power—
to conquer oneself is inner strength.
when one has just enough, he is rich.
when one perseveres, he proceeds with purpose:
knowing his place will he long endure,
remembrance after death extends a long life.

xxxiv

the Way is wide enough, extends left and right:
securing its aim, completing tasks, it owns naught.

the ten thousand yield obedience,
but the Way bestows without command:
not vaunting itself it gives place to the dregs—
the ten thousand yield obedience,
but the Way bestows without command:
not vaunting itself it raises up all things.

thus do sages attain to greatness:
modesty and humility raise them up.

xxxv

hold to the Great Image, the realm's in your hands.
the realm in your hands, it is preserved from harm:
music and food abound, wanderers loiter.
the Way is not injured by our speech:
 “the Way is bland, it has no flavor!”
 “the Way is transparent, barely seen!”

“the Way is quiet, inaudible!”
—yet here is the Way, inexhaustible fount.

xxxvi

what you want to shrink, you first must stretch.
what you would weaken, you first strengthen.
what you would reject, you must first join.
what you would subtract, you must first have supplied.
—so is this called “subtle discernment”.

soft and weak conquer the unyielding and strong.
fish must know the depths at which they thrive.
powers exercised by states are best concealed.

xxxvii

doing nothing, the Way leaves nothing undone.
were kings and princes inclined to obtain it,
ten thousand would be transformed without asking.
transformed, should they then become restless,
with a nameless uncarved block I would quell them.
restraining them with a nameless uncarved block,
they would discover the limits of desire.
limiting desire and finding peace,
Heaven and Earth find their native poise.

