

Not Lao-tzu's Magna Carta, lv - lxiii

by strannikov

lv

fully possessed of virtue, he's an infant:
bothersome bugs don't bother to bite,
snakes and serpents will not coil near him,
scavenging birds and predator beasts
will never draw near enough to harm.

his bones haven't firmed, his muscles are supple:
the ins and outs of copulation unknown,
he gets aroused, his rod gets stiffened—
he bears the fruit of his potency,
can holler all day without gasping for breath,
his harmony has reached its fullness.

knowing harmony is finding constancy,
knowing constancy is being wise—
striving for intensity is no good thing,
letting the mind dictate breath is forcing things.

to've grown old in one's prime it to've lost the Way:
lost to the Way, little left but early end.

lvi

those who comprehend don't speak of it,
those who speak of it don't comprehend.

plug up all the holes and shut the doors,
soften harsh glare, immerse in the dust,
blunt the sharp edges, unknot tangles:
this is called “shadowed identity”.

So:

never can you enjoy close intimacy,
never can you enjoy aloofness,
never can you enjoy benefits,
never can you receive enmity,
never can you be crowned with nobility,
never can you be debased with shame.

thus do you become treasured by all.

lvii

bring the state to order with plain speech,
reserve craftiness for the waging of war,
conquer the world by not being a meddler.

how do I know this is so? by this:

when “rules against” and prohibitions flourish,
folks are destitute, find themselves ill-nourished—
the sharper the sticks the people have,
the more benighted the state:
as knowledge and technique propagate,
the more do novelties multiply—
the greater the reliance on courts and laws,
the greater the number of robbers and thieves.

this is the verdict of the sages:

“we accomplish things without doing
and folks find themselves transformed,

we cultivate quiet and stillness
and folks find order within themselves,
we do nothing or next to nothing
and folks find themselves enriched:
our ambition is not to desire,
and folks recover their uncarved strength.”

lviii

when officials busily chase their own tails,
folks are simple and thriving—
once officials become fault-finding schoolmarms,
folks get tripped up with details.

upon misfortune good fortune leans:
good fortune hides misfortune ready to pounce—
never does this change or end!

facts of matters are not as they seem,
hour by hour crafty comments creep in,
another hour and “the good” is a horror:
our human blindness is older than our sight.

therefore do the sages say:
“be square-edged without being pointed,
be sharp without being a cause of stabbing,
expand your range without encroaching,
shine brightly without blinding.”

lix

governing folks in the service of Heaven,
there is nothing like restraint:

only in restraint can the Way be followed—
to follow the Way with the very first step
is called “amassing abundance of virtue”.

abundant virtue amassed, all can be done:
once all can be done, then limits are not known—
once limits are not known, the realm's yours to rule,
with the Mother of the realm under your care,
your rule can then long endure.

this is called “sinking roots down to the bedrock”:
the Way thus grants enduring vision and life.

lx

ruling a vast realm is like cooking small fish.

the realm ruled in accord with the Way,
the spirits will be energy-depleted—
but this isn't quite the case:
the spirits will be powerless to harm folks.
not only will spirits lack power to harm,
but sages won't spook the folks, either.

because spirits and sages do folks no harm,
their virtues collaborate in good for all.

lxi

large states are like the lower reaches
of large rivers—where all the mouths congregate
(not unlike a chorus of women).

in the social intercourse of all,
women always best men by keeping their cool:
assuming the low place, women model poise.

thus does a large state conquer a smaller state
 from underneath, by practicing poise.
if a small state can squeeze underneath,
 its affairs can be managed by the large state.
—so the one, assuming the low place,
 takes over the other one,
and the other, taking the low place,
 is overtaken by the other.

the large state only wants to care for the small,
the small state is keen only to serve the large.
if both are content with their wants and desires,
the large state does well to assume the low place.

lxii

truth be told, the Way is something of a swamp:
 as a refuge for the ten thousand,
 a treasure preserve for the good folks,
 a choice hide-out for the unruly.

eloquence has commercial utility,
men are ranked as nobility is assessed:
but is it good to dismiss the unruly,
 the coarse, or the vulgar as worthless?

So:
 at an emperor's coronation
 and installation of his three ministers,
 well would it be to offer the Way

instead of wheels of jade drawn by teams of horse:
why was the Way so revered of old?
those who said, “by this Way you obtain,
by this Way are you forgiven when you wrong”
did not err: under Heaven the Way is prized.

lxiii

accomplish without doing,
mind your own business—not anyone else's—
cultivate a taste for the bland when you can:

find the enormity in the commonplace,
discover complexity in the simple,
respond to all enmity with character.

greet difficult tasks with the first easy step:
accomplish large feats by mastering small tasks.

when the sage does anything worthy,
his result is no consequence of striving.

who promises rashly rarely keeps his word:
seeing “how easy!” blinds to “how difficult!”

thus the sage sees nothing as not difficult,
thus does he overcome all difficulties.

