

Tao Te Ching (Ch. 50-52) Translated by James Legge

50.

1. Men come forth and live; they enter (again) and die.
2. Of every ten three are ministers of life (to themselves); and three are ministers of death.
3. There are also three in every ten whose aim is to live, but whose movements tend to the land (or place) of death. And for what reason? Because of their excessive endeavours to perpetuate life.
4. But I have heard that he who is skilful in managing the life entrusted to him for a time travels on the land without having to shun rhinoceros or tiger, and enters a host without having to avoid buff coat or sharp weapon. The rhinoceros finds no place in him into which to thrust its horn, nor the tiger a place in which to fix its claws, nor the weapon a place to admit its point. And for what reason? Because there is in him no place of death.

貴生, 'The Value set on Life.' The chapter sets forth the Tâo as an antidote against decay and death.

In par. 1 life is presented to us as intermediate between two non-existences. The words will suggest to many readers those in Job i. 21.

In pars. 2 and 3 I translate the characters **十有三** by 'three in ten,' instead of by 'thirteen,' as Julien and other translators have done. The characters are susceptible of either translation according to the tone in which we read the **有**. They were construed as I have done by Wang Pî; and many of the best commentators have followed in his wake. 'The ministers of life to themselves' would be those who eschewed all things, both internal and external, tending to injure health; 'the ministers of death,' those who pursued courses likely to cause disease and shorten life; the third three would be those who thought that by mysterious and abnormal courses they could prolong life, but only injured it. Those three classes being thus disposed of, there remains only one in ten rightly using the Tâo, and he is spoken of in the next paragraph.

This par. 4 is easy of translation, and the various readings in it are unimportant, differing in this respect from those in par. 3. But the aim of the author in it is not clear. In ascribing such effects to the possession of the Tâo, is he 'trifling,' as Dr. Chalmers thinks? or indulging the play of his poetical fancy? or simply saying that the Tâoist will keep himself out of danger?

51.

1. All things are produced by the Tâo, and nourished by its outflowing operation. They receive their forms according to the nature of each, and are completed according to the circumstances of their condition. Therefore all things without exception honour the Tâo, and exalt its outflowing operation.
2. This honouring of the Tâo and exalting of its operation is not the result of any ordination, but always a spontaneous tribute.
3. Thus it is that the Tâo produces (all things), nourishes them, brings them to their full growth, nurses them, completes them, matures them, maintains them, and overspreads them.
4. It produces them and makes no claim to the possession of them; it carries them through their processes and does not vaunt its ability in doing so; it brings them to maturity and exercises no control over them;-this is called its mysterious operation.

養德, 'The Operation (of the Tâo) in Nourishing Things.' The subject of the chapter is the quiet

passionless operation of the Tâo in nature, in the production and nourishing of things throughout the seasons of the year; a theme dwelt on by Lâu-dze, in II, 4, X, 3, and other places.

The Tâo is the subject of all the predicates in par. 1, and what seem the subjects in all but the first member should be construed adverbially.

On par. 2 Wû Khăng says that the honour of the Son of Heaven is derived from his appointment by God, and that then the nobility of the feudal princes is derived from him; but in the honour given to the Tâo and the nobility ascribed to its operation, we are not to think of any external ordination.

There is a strange reading of two of the members of par. 3 in Wang Pî, viz. 亭之毒之 for 成之熟之. This is quoted and predicated of 'Heaven,' in the Nestorian Monument of Hsî-an in the eighth century.

52.

1. (The Tâo) which originated all under the sky is to be considered as the mother of them all.
2. When the mother is found, we know what her children should be. When one knows that he is his mother's child, and proceeds to guard (the qualities of) the mother that belong to him, to the end of his life he will be free from all peril.
3. Let him keep his mouth closed, and shut up the portals (of his nostrils), and all his life he will be exempt from laborious exertion. Let him keep his mouth open, and (spend his breath) in the promotion of his affairs, and all his life there will be no safety for him.
4. The perception of what is small is (the secret of) clear-sightedness; the guarding of what is soft and tender is (the secret of) strength.
5. Who uses well his light,
Reverting to its (source so) bright,
Will from his body ward all blight,
And hides the unchanging from men's sight.

歸元, 'Returning to the Source.' The meaning of the chapter is obscure, and the commentators give little help in determining it. As in the preceding chapter, Lâu-dze treats of the operation of the Tâo on material things, he seems in this to go on to the operation of it in man, or how he, with his higher nature, should ever be maintaining it in himself.

For the understanding of paragraph 1 we must refer to the first chapter of the treatise, where the Tâo, 'having no name,' appears as 'the Beginning' or 'First Cause' of the world, and then, 'having a name,' as its 'Mother.' It is the same thing or concept in both of its phases, the ideal or absolute, and the manifestation of it in its passionless doings. The old Jesuit translators render this par. by 'Mundus principium et causam suam habet in Divino 有, seu actione Divinae sapientiae quae dici potest ejus mater.' So far I may assume that they agreed with me in understanding that the subject of the par. was the Tâo.

Par. 2 lays down the law of life for man thus derived from the Tâo. The last clause of it is given by the same translators as equivalent to 'Unde fit ut post mortem nihil ei timendum sit,'--a meaning which the characters will not bear. But from that clause, and the next par., I am obliged to conclude that even in Lâu-dze's mind there was the germ of the sublimation of the material frame which issued in the asceticism and life-preserving arts of the later Tâoism.

Par. 3 seems to indicate the method of 'guarding the mother in man,' by watching over the breath, the proto-plastic 'one' of ch. 42, the ethereal matter out of which all material things were formed. The organs of this breath in man are the mouth and nostrils (nothing else should be understood here by 兌 and 門;--see the explanations of the former in the last par. of the fifth of the appendixes to

the Yî in vol. xvi, p. 432); and the management of the breath is the mystery of the esoteric Buddhism and Tâoism.

In par. 4 'The guarding what is soft' is derived from the use of 'the soft lips' in hiding and preserving the hard and strong teeth.

Par. 5 gives the gist of the chapter:--Man's always keeping before him the ideal of the Tâo, and, without purpose, simply doing whatever he finds to do; Tâo-like and powerful in all his sphere of action.

I have followed the reading of the last character but one, which is given by Ziâo Hung instead of that found in Ho-shang Kung and Wang Pî.

50

1. We come out into life and go back into death.
2. The companions of life are thirteen;
3. The companions of death are thirteen;
4. And yet people, because they regard life as LIFE, in all of their actions move towards the thirteen that belong to the realm of death.
5. Now, why is this so?
6. It's because they regard life as LIFE.
7. You've no doubt heard of those who are good at holding on to life:
8. When walking through hills, they don't avoid rhinos and tigers;
9. When they go into battle, they don't put on armor or shields;
10. The rhino has no place to probe with its horn;
11. The tiger finds no place to put its claws.
12. And weapons find no place to hold their blades.
13. Now, why is this so?
14. Because there is no place for death in them.

51

1. The Way gives birth to them and Virtue nourishes them;
2. Substance gives them form and their unique capacities complete them.
3. Therefore the ten thousand things venerate the Way and honor Virtue.
4. As for their veneration of the Way and their honoring of Virtue—
5. No one rewards them for it; it's constantly so on its own.
6. The Way gives birth to them, nourishes them, matures them, completes them, rests them, rears them, supports them, and protects them.
7. It gives birth to them but doesn't try to own them;
8. It acts on their behalf but doesn't make them dependent;
9. It matures them but doesn't rule them.
10. This we call Profound Virtue.

52

1. The world had a beginning,
2. Which can be considered the mother of the world.
3. Having attained the mother, in order to understand her children.
4. If you return and hold on to the mother, till the end of your life you'll suffer no harm.
5. Block up the holes;
6. Close the doors;
7. And till the end of your life you'll not labor.
8. Open the holes;
9. Meddle in affairs;
10. And till the end of your life you'll not be saved.
11. To receive the small is called "discernment."
12. To hold on to the pliant is called "strength."
13. If you use the rays to return to the bright light,
14. You'll not abandon your life to peril.
15. This is called Following the Constant.