

Not Lao-tzu's Yellow Brick Road, xvii - xxvii

by strannikov

xvii

the rule of accomplished rulers is not seen.
the less accomplished curry adoration.
the still less accomplished instill only fear.
the least accomplished get their decrees pissed on.

lack of credibility breeds lack of trust:
even rulers live and die by their own words.

folks remark on how natural sound rule seems.

xviii

the Way ignored, “humanity” and “good” thrive.
the clever forsake the Way—what galling cant.
when social disruption ensues—mere pretense.
when the state is disordered—rank competence.

xix

“eschew the experts, toss out the technocrats—
a hundred blessings will come to the people!
reject ‘philanthropy’, dismiss ‘piety’—
the people will find native humanity!
send clever schemers packing, forget profit—
banditry and theft will be things of the past!”

these three rules cannot tell the whole story, though—
maybe what follows can make their counsel whole:

“settle for the simple, for unrefined strength,
abandon self-concern and desire's broad scope!”

xx

eschew pedantic nonsense: all will be well.

how much difference lives between “yes” and “no”?
how much distance from “beauty” to “ugliness”?

whom others fear has his own others to fear.

how not to be appalled by such confusion!

most are pleased to feast on pork, lamb, and beef,
most gladly gaze from an overlook in spring—
I alone sit still, no invitation sent,
an infant who from birth has never yet smiled,
unmoved, not curious enough to crawl off,
a surfeit of feasting for all while I starve.
the small mind I have belongs to a moron:
folks see things so clearly, I'm all befuddled,
folks don't miss a thing, what doesn't escape me?
—indistinct and foggy, my eyes lost at sea,
confined to a horizon not close to land.
folks are full of purpose and function,
I'm nothing but a provincial fool.

I'm compelled to be unlike the rest,
content to suck at my Mother's breast.

xxi

who can be extolled hews to the Way alone.
the Way is an obscure subject, never clear.
though never clear and always obscure,
images can make it visible.
though always obscure and never clear,
the substance within it can be seen.
the remote shades that dwell within it—
the bodies of living energy.
from these days and back to ancient days,
the Way has not ever lost its name.
our fathers conformed to this named Way:
how can we tell they conformed? by this.

xxii

those bent by any force spring up straight again.
whatever force casts down is cast off.
whatever empties is soon drained off.
whatever wears down is soon worn out.
beginning with little, much accrues.
keeping track of much soon bewilders.

the sage hewing to the One then shepherds all:
conspicuous for being unknown,
reflecting glory like the sun's moon,
not boastful and so deemed accomplished,
celebrated for self-effacement:
content not to contend, none with him contend.

whom the ancient ones praised for springing up straight

hewed close to the Way—they knew whereof they spoke!

with this saying are we equipped to endure.

xxiii

what can be more natural than concise speech?

tornadoes can't linger all morning,
cascades rarely pour down all day long:
Heaven and Earth set measures to these—
how much more could any man persist?

So:

one who hews to the Way pursues with the Way.
one allied with virtue conforms to virtue.
one identifying with loss becomes lost.

nothing promotes ill will like lacking good will.

xxiv

bloated with air to blow his own horn,
standing on tip-toe, ready to tip over,
the self-promoter earns no commendation.
who markets himself has little else to show.
who brags of his worth boasts not to his credit:
his boasting perishes before his last gasp.
the Way names these “surfeit” and “superfluous”—
puffing up oneself in order to explode:
no one hewing to the Way endures in these.

xxv

from before the birth of confusion,
born before Heaven, born before Earth,
silent with surprising emptiness,
standing in solitude and changeless:
its name could be “Mother of Heaven and Earth”—
without knowing its name, I call it “the Way”:
had I to name it, I would call it “the Great”.

“the Great” means “set apart for no other use”,
“set apart” means “to be at a far distance”,
“to be far removed” means “one day to return”.

So:

the Way is the Great, and enlivened Heaven,
the Way is the Great, and enlivened the Earth,
the Way is the Great, with its greatness makes kings great.

in this realm are four greats, the king counts as one:
the man who is great models himself on Earth,
the Earth is great that styles itself on Heaven,
Heaven is great to style itself on the Way,
the Way is great, being true to all that is.

xxvi

the heavy is the root of the light,
poise is the master of disturbance.

so the sage in his day of travel
does not abandon his full-laden wagon:
only when his wagon rests within safe walls
does he deign to put himself to rest.

how then could a king whose strength is armed
with ten thousand chariots take things lightly,
when the life of his rule depends on his strength?

taking lightly, he squanders his strength:
disturbed, he and throne topple over.

xxvii

the able traveler leaves no trail.
the able speaker does not waste breath.
the able accountant needs no abacus.
the able vault-maker needs no bolt,
needs no lock, but what he shuts is not opened.
the able rope-handler needs no cords,
needs no knots, but his work cannot be untied.

thus the sage excels at counseling all men,
abandoning no one, he is thrifty with all.
this is called "the mastery of resources".

thus do able people teach resourcefulness
and thus are squanderers their pupils.
failing to honor one's own teacher,
failing to love the requirement of learning,
one might succeed a little, or lose a lot.

this lesson is essential, it is sublime.

