

All Things Being Equal

[CHAPTER 2]

NAN-KUO TZU-CH'I LEANED ON HIS ARMREST WHILE sitting in meditation. He looked out toward the heavens. His breath came softly, steadily. He appeared to have lost himself. His attendant, Yen-ch'eng Tzu-yu, standing beside him, asked, "What sort of concentration is this? Can you really turn your body into a withered tree? Your heart into cold ashes? The man who leans here is not the one who did before."

Tzu-ch'i replied, "Dear Yen, it is good of you to ask. Just now, I lost myself. Could you tell? You've heard the piping of people, but not yet of the piping of earth; when you know the piping of earth, you will not yet have heard the piping of the heavens."

"I dare ask their secrets," Tzu-yu stated.

Tzu-ch'i smiled. "Well. Hmm. When the Great Clod belches, a prompt response may squelch it. But once begun, ten thousand holes emit an angry wail. Are you the only one who hasn't heard the roaring? In the high mountain forests there are huge trees—a

hundred feet around—ringed with cavities, holes like noses, mouths, ears, like sockets or goblets, like mortars. Like babies, they begin with grunts and 'wah-wahs' and such. And then there are roars like the surf's, sounds like shouted orders, raging screams, growls and snarls. When a breeze comes up they call, 'Hooo,' and as the breezes pass they cry, 'Yooo.' Small cold breezes make small harmonies; whirlwinds make great harmonies. And when the great winds pass, all the cavities and holes are filled with emptiness again. Have you alone not heard it, not seen things wavering, quivering, only to return to rest again?"

Tzu-yu said, "So the piping of the earth comes from its many holes, just as the pipes and flutes we play come from varieties of bamboo. But may I be so bold as to inquire about the piping of the heavens?"

Tzu-ch'i said, "It blows upon the ten thousand things, yet blows upon no two the same. It permits each to become itself, each choosing to be itself. But from whom, such a breath?"



GREAT UNDERSTANDING CUTS ITSELF OFF AND FALLS IDLE; small understanding grows lazier still. Big words can burst into flames and begin conflagrations; small words are mere chatter. The souls of sleepers may wander off in search of mates, but when awakened they ally themselves with all that is outer, their hearts wrestling with indecision, deceit, and seductions. Small fears unsettle the heart; great fears twist the bowels with indecision.

Some souls fly off like arrows from the crossbow, turning every this and that into a "right" or a "wrong." Some remain stuck like squatters guarding whatever it is they think they've won. They die like autumn into winter, dwindling like daylight in the late season. They drown in their own maneuverings. No one can help them rise and begin anew. Their own choices determine their oppression. They grow old and their blood grows thin and death draws near, yet none can look deeply enough into the heart to find the sun's yang, and rise with it to begin again.

Anger and delight; happiness and grief; anxiety and regret; fickleness and stubbornness; modesty and willfulness; insolence and toadying—music out of emptiness. Fungus sprouts in mustiness. Day and night follow each other. Who knows which came first or what are the sources of the sun and moon?

Enough. Aren't they enough, sunrise and sunset? Are they not our progenitors? Without them, there is no I. Without "I," there is no thing to cling. Although this knowledge is clear to me, I do not know what's responsible for making it so. It's as if there were such a thing as a True Lord, but I find no evidence of such—I can go forward believing, and yet I can find no such form. Is there fact without form? The hundred joints, the nine openings, the six viscera come from the womb and I, a child, exist. Which of these parts shall I then treat as one of my family? Will you speak up for all of them? You *will* have a favorite. If they are all your servants and handmaids, consider: are servants and maids sufficient to rule as governors? Can they all take turns at governance? Is there a True Lord among them? If I should seek to ascertain the facts of this and cannot, the facts remain unaffected.

From the moment we first accomplish a form for ourselves, we cannot forget that we merely await its exhaustion. We raise our swords to fence with the things of this world or we waste them, as they waste us, like a horse raced into utter exhaustion. No one can stop us. Isn't it pathetic? Heartless? Winter comes, the string of our lives runs out, and we have slaved to accomplish an end we never see, hearts wasted in wearisome labors, never knowing a home we may return to. Isn't it pitiful? You may say, "At least I'm not dead," but what good is that? Your form will change, and your heart with it. Can't we call this truly pitiful? But this is human life. Can it be lost among small weeds? Is it only I, myself, who am lost? Are others not equally lost?

If you follow the dictates of an accomplished heart, you have found a teacher. And who can fail to find such a teacher? Must it be that only those who understand the cycles of succession choose the heart as their teacher? Fools, too, may do so. But to choose a right or wrong without an accomplished heart is like de-

parting now for Yueh, only to arrive there long ago. This is confusing what does not exist with what does, trying to make something from nothing. Even the great Sage Yu couldn't find a way to do that! How could I alone learn how this might be done?

But words, words are *not* mere puffs of breath. Words speak. But if definitions have not already been agreed upon, can they really say anything? What differentiates words from the chirps of fledgling birds, if anything? Is there a difference?

If the Tao remained obscured, how could we know the natural from the artificial? And if words are clouded, where is the "right" or the "wrong"? Tao! How could we go on without it? How can words exist and still be impossible? Tao is obscured by small "accomplishments" in the same way words are obscured by rhetorical flourishes.

Thus we arrive at the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mohists: one takes the other's right as wrong and its wrong for right. If you want to right wrongs and wrong rights, nothing serves like the bright light of this sort of wisdom. There is no thing that is not that; there is no thing that is not this. That doesn't see itself as that. Self-knowledge precedes knowing others. So it's said, "*That* arises out of *this*, but *this* is also caused by exactly *that*. This is the theory that *this* and *that* are born together." And although this is true enough, where there's birth, there's death; where there's death, birth. Where there's a possible, there is the impossible; with the impossible, the possible. Cause right and you cause wrong; cause wrong, cause right. Right? So be it.

The sage doesn't belabor the point but stands revealed in clear daylight. He knows all this: that this is that and that is this, and he knows also that the *that* and the *this* make One of right and wrong. Does he still *have* a this and a that, or does he not have a this or that?

When even This and That have lost all sense of themselves, we call it the Pivot of the Tao, and when the pivot is born into the middle of the great circle, it serves without end. What is so is eternally so; what is not is not forever. And they say, "There is nothing like the light of wisdom."

To use a finger to make the point that a finger is not a finger is not as good as using a nonfinger to make the same point. To use a horse to prove that a horse is not a horse is not as good as to use a nonhorse to prove that a horse is not a horse. Heaven-and-earth is one finger. All ten thousand things are one horse. Okay? Not okay. Okay? Okay.

Walk in the Tao. Accomplish it all. Say words, and they're *so*. How so? Is so? How not so? Not so *so!* There is no thing that is not acceptable. Sprouts rise up, and mighty pillars, lepers and lovely women, strange and extraordinary things—in Tao they are one. To divide One is to "accomplish," and whatever is accomplished is destruction; whatever is unaccomplished cannot be destroyed: it is eternally beginning again at the beginning, One. Only those who have arrived know this coming-again-into-One. They do not make use of their knowledge but dwell in the diurnal, and every day is what is used. Who uses it, understands it. Who understands gets all that's needed—and time—and *this is all*. When one relies on this alone and doesn't know it's so, that is Tao.

To exhaust the spirit and the mind by laboring to make things One, never realizing that they are all the same—I call this "Three in the morning." Why "Three in the morning"? There was a monkey keeper who fed his monkeys nuts. When he said, "I'll feed you three in the morning and four in the afternoon," the monkeys were furious. So he suggested, "Four in the morning and three in the afternoon," much to the monkeys' delight. The words say the same thing, and yet one phrasing produced anger, another delight. The keeper simply made use of this knowledge. The sage brings what *is* into harmony with right-and-wrong and rests under the tree of the balance of nature. This is called going two ways at once.

The ancients' knowledge was complete. How complete? There were some who refused to acknowledge that there were *things*. That complete. Nothing could be added to that. Then came some who acknowledged the existence of things but refused to discriminate among them; then some who discriminated but refused to label one "right" and another "wrong"; then right and

wrong became matters of adjudication and Tao became deficient; and because Tao became deficient, those who loved the Tao came to attempt to "accomplish" things. But are there really such things as "accomplishment" and "deficiency," or are there not?

There are. As when Chao Wen played the lute. And there are not. As when Chao Wen did not play the lute. Chao Wen's lute, music master Kuang and his baton, Hui Tzu leaning on the Wu tree: how much these three learned! All so mastered their respective arts that we still remember them today. What they cared for they differentiated, they made a "that" of it. What they cared for they desired to illuminate, but that was not the illumination of enlightenment. So we are left with Hui Tzu's obscure arguments about "hardness" and "whiteness" and Wen's disciples who ran out his string—and their own as well—and accomplished nothing. Or perhaps they did accomplish something. If so, so have I. And if this is not "accomplishment," then neither "things" nor I have ever accomplished anything.

For this reason, blazing chaos is the light that guides the sage. Rather than merely using things, the sage dwells in the ordinary. This may be called illumination.



NOW I WANT TO SAY A FEW WORDS. WHETHER THEY ARE THE right or wrong kind of words, they are at least some kind of words, and are no different than the words of others, so they're just okay. But please permit me to say them. There is a beginning. And there is a not-yet-beginning-to-be-a-beginning. There is a not-yet-beginning-to-be-a-not-yet-beginning-to-be-a-beginning. There is being. There is not beginning to be being. There is not yet beginning to be not yet beginning to be being. Oh, suddenly there's being and not being. Now I just had my say. But I don't know whether my saying has said anything or nothing. In All-under-heaven, there's nothing bigger than the tip of a dust mote floating in clear autumn air, and yet a mountain is a tiny thing. No one is older than the stillborn child, and twelve-hundred-

year-old P'eng Tzu died young. Heaven and earth were born with me. The ten thousand things and I make one.

Now there's the One, and that's it, so how can I have said all that? But if I had said only, "Now there's the One, and that's it," would I not be saying something? The One and my saying make two; two and the One make three. Going on like this, even the most clever calculationist would never be done with it! Much less the rest of us. So: if by going from nothing to something we arrive at three, how much more might we get by going from something to something?

Don't be going from anywhere to anywhere. *Here is where it is!*

Before Tao was subjected to discriminations, words had not yet come to have precise definitions. But once "right" was distinguished, boundaries became defined. Let me say this about boundaries: there is a left and a right; there is sorting and assessment; there is division and discrimination; there is competition and conflict—the philosophers called these the Eight Virtues! Beyond the Six Realms, the sage embodies childlike clarity: he doesn't try to sort things out. Within the Six Realms, he sorts, but does not assess. On the true motives of former emperors as they are presented in the *Annals* and *Classics*, he assesses, but does not discriminate. There are things the dividers cannot divide, things discriminators cannot discriminate.

"What things?"—the sage embraces things, though throngs of men discriminate among them and make a great show of their discrimination. Therefore I say, "Those who discriminate cannot see."

The Great Tao has no title. Great discrimination has no words. Great compassion is not compassionate. Great modesty is reserved. Great courage is not aggressive. The Tao that shines forth is not Tao. Discriminating words never reach their mark. Compassion may be constant and yet accomplish nothing. Purity may be met with disbelief. Aggressive courage gets nothing done. These five fall within the circle, but tend to wander off . . .

Therefore: he who knows enough to stop at what he does not know is *there*. That's all. Who knows the wordless explanation

and Tao that is not Tao? Know this and become the Storehouse of Heaven: where things may be put but never fill; where things may be taken yet never depleted. Yet he himself does not know why or how. He will be called the Pao-kuang Star, tip of the Dipper's handle, forever cycling slowly around the center, predicting coming seasons.



MR. CHIPPED TOOTH QUESTIONED WANG NI, "YOU KNOW what all things consider right, right?"

Wang Ni replied, "How should I know?"

"Well, you know what you *don't* know, don't you?"

Wang Ni replied, "How should I know?"

"So nothing knows anything?"

"How should I know? Although that's how it is, I'll try nevertheless to explain. If I say I understand, how can I know whether I don't know what I say I understand? If I say I don't understand, by what measure may I know that what I say I don't know I actually know? Let me ask: When people sleep wet, they catch pneumonia and die. Is that equally so of fish? If one were to try to live in a tree, one would be constantly fearful, but is that true of a monkey? Of the three, who knows the right place to live? People eat meat from animals who feed of hay and grain. Deer eat grass. Centipedes think snake tastes sweet. Owls and crows eat rats. Of the four, who knows which is the right flavor? Monkeys mate with monkeys, bucks with doe, fish with fish. All men consider Mao Chiang and Lady Li to be eternal beauties, but when fish see them, they dive quickly to the bottom; when birds see them, they fly off; and when deer see them, they bolt and run. Of the four, who knows right beauty here beneath the sky? As I see it, the lines of compassion and rectitude, the paths of right and wrong, are so knotted and gnarled that I can find no way to discriminate among them."

Chipped Tooth asked, "If you can't tell profit from loss, can the one who has 'gotten there' tell?"

Wang Ni replied, "The one who's 'gotten there' is a spirit being. If the Great Swamp dried up and burned, he wouldn't feel the heat; if the great river froze, he wouldn't feel the chill; if fierce explosions sundered the mountains and storms disrupted the seas, he wouldn't even be startled. It's his nature to rise on clouds in the air and straddle sun and moon, to wander beyond the four enclosing seas. Neither life nor death can change him, so how could puny things like profit and loss affect him?"

Chu the Magpie said to Mr. Tall Wu Tree, "The great master says he does not take charge of worldly affairs; he neither pursues profit nor avoids loss. He doesn't enjoy seeking. He isn't married to the Tao. He makes pronouncements without speaking; speaking, he says nothing. He rambles beyond the dirt and dust of this world. Master Kung, Confucius himself, took these to be bold, outrageous words. But I think that's how it is when you travel the mysterious Tao. What do you think?"

Mr. Tall Wu Tree said, "Even the Yellow Emperor would have gotten heated up hearing those words. How could Master Kung understand them? And you! You're getting way ahead of yourself, looking at eggs and expecting them to crow at sunrise, looking at a crossbow bolt and seeing roast dove on a spit. I'll talk a little crazy to you. See whether you can't listen a little crazy too. Leaning on sun and moon, the whole universe of space and time tucked neatly under one arm, he makes his marriage with whirling chaos. He honors the lowest of the low as his equal. While the struggling masses slave away at worldly tasks, the sage remains a simple rustic, ten thousand harvests his only accomplishment. Simple, pure, he sees the ten thousand things become simply *so*, and they form one whole."



HOW AM I TO KNOW THAT THIS LIFE IS NOT MERELY A DELUSION? How am I to know that to despise death is not merely to be like one exiled in his youth and who now can find no way home? Beautiful Lady Li was the daughter of a petty knight of Ai. When

Chin first got her, she drenched the whole front of her gown with tears. But once she arrived at the palace and shared the emperor's bed and feasted on his fatted calves, she regretted her tears. How do I know that the dead do not regret clinging so ignominiously to life? Who dreams of drinking the wine of luxury may wake weeping in the sunrise. Who dreams of weeping may at dawn take up the hunt. As they dreamed, they didn't know that they were dreaming. Or in the midst of dreams they may have tried to find an omen in their dream. Awakened, they knew they'd been dreaming. Now, maybe there's a Great Big Awakening, after which we know that this has all been a Great Big Dream. Fools think they're awake now, having ferreted out the knowledge for themselves, on the sly, that this is so. One a lord; one a shepherd . . . Oh, sure!

Your Master Kung and you are both dreaming. And my saying you're both dreaming is also a dream. The name for all this is the Pitiful Deception. Ten thousand years from now, you may meet with a great sage who will know how to unravel this mystery for you. Or maybe you will this morning. Or this evening.

Suppose you and I have engaged in some dispute. If you won and I didn't, does that make you right and me wrong? If I won instead, does that make me right and you wrong? Is one of us right, the other wrong? Are both of us right or wrong? We can't agree. And no one else has even heard the argument yet. Who can straighten us out? If we pick someone who thinks like you, he'll agree with you; if we pick someone who thinks like me, he'll agree with me. If we pick someone who disagrees with both of us, his solution will certainly be disagreeable to both of us. He can't straighten things out. And someone who agrees with both of us won't help either. If neither you nor I nor anyone else can come to agreement, shall we wait around for yet another opinion?

Or perhaps we should find the harmony in the origin of all things? It's said, "Is and is not; so and not so. If *is* fits things and *isn't* doesn't, then *is* and *isn't* differ, and there is no dispute. If *so* is true of things, then there's no disputing it's different from *not so*." The alternating noises of dispute await their turns, but you

need not attend them. Harmonize them with the beginning of all things and move on the endless flow until you exhaust your years. Forget years! Forget judgments! Flap your wings and fly to the palace without boundaries and live there!

The shade asked the shadow, "A while ago you were moving. Now you've stopped. A while ago you were sitting and now you rise. How is it that you have no particular place to be, nothing particular to do?"

The shadow asked in reply, "Am I supposed to wait for something before I do what I do? Is the something I'm supposed to wait for waiting for something also? Shall I wait for snake skin or cicada wings? And how would I know if that's so? How could I know if it wasn't?"



LONG AGO, CHUANG CHOU DREAMED HE WAS A BUTTERFLY fluttering among trees, doing as he pleased, completely unaware of a Chuang Chou. A sudden awakening, and there, looking a little out of sorts, was Chuang Chou. Now, I don't know whether it is Chou who dreamed he was a butterfly, or whether a butterfly dreams he's Chuang Chou. But between Chuang Chou and the butterfly, we ought to be able to find some sort of distinction. This is what's known as Things Changing.