

The Taoist Approach to Administration

LXII

The way is the refuge for the myriad creatures.
It is that by which the good man protects,
And that by which the bad is protected.
Beautiful words when offered will win high rank in return;
Beautiful deeds can raise a man above others.
Even if man is not good, why should he be abandoned?
Hence when the emperor is set up and the three ducal ministers are appointed, he who makes of the way without stirring from his seat is preferable to one who offers presents of jade discs followed by a team of four horses. Why was this valued of old?
Was it not said that by means of it one got what one wanted and escape the consequences when one transgressed?
Therefore it is valued by the empire.

LXIII

Do that which consists in taking no action; pursue that which is not meddlesome; savour that which has no flavour.
Make the big small and the few many; do good to him who has done you an injury.
Lay plans for the accomplishment of the difficult before it becomes difficult; make something big by starting with it when small.
Difficult things in the world must needs have their beginnings in the easy; big things must needs have their beginnings in the small.
Therefore it is because the sage never attempts to be great that he succeeds in becoming great.
One who makes promises rashly rarely keeps good faith; one who is in the habit of considering things easy meets with frequent difficulties.
Therefore even the sage treats some things as difficult. That is why in the end no difficulties can get the better of him.

LXIV

It is easy to maintain a situation while it is still secure;
It is easy to deal with a situation before symptoms develop;
It is easy to break a thing when it yet brittle;
It is easy to dissolve a thing when it yet minute.
Deal with a thing while it is still nothing;
Keep a thing in order before disorder sets in;
A tree that can fill a span of a man's arms
Grows from a downy tip;
A terrace nine storeys high
Rises from hodfuls of earth;
A journey of a thousand miles

Starts from beneath one's feet.
Whoever does anything to it will ruin it; whoever lays hold of it will lose it.
Therefore the sage, because he does nothing, never ruins anything; and, because he does not lay hold of anything, loses nothing.
In their enterprises the people
Always ruin them when on the verge of success.
Be as careful at the end as at the beginning
And there will be no ruined enterprises.
Therefore the sage desires not to desire
And does not value goods which are hard to come by;
Learns to be without learning
And makes good the mistakes of the multitude
In order to help the myriad creatures to be natural and refrain from daring to act.

LXV

Of old those excelled in the pursuit of the way did not use it to enlighten the people but to hoodwink them. The reason why the people are difficult to govern is that they are too clever.
Hence to rule a state by the cleverness
Will be to the detriment of the state;
Not to rule a state by cleverness
Will be a boon to the state.
These two are models.
Always to know the models
Is known as mysterious virtue.
Mysterious virtue is profound and far-reaching,
But when things turn back it turns back with them.
Only then is complete conformity realized.

*Source: Lao Tzu, **Tao Te Ching**, trans. D.C. Lau. Copyright 1963 by Penguin Books, Reprinted by permission.*