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昔之得一者	From the beginning One is attained	
天得一以清	Heaven attains One to be clear	
地得一以寧	Earth attains One to be tranquil	
神得一以靈	Spirits attain One to thrive	
谷得一以盈	Valleys attain One to be full	
萬物得一以生	All beings attain One to exist	
候王得一以為天下正	Rulers attain One to set the world right	
其致之	It can be said	
天無以清 將恐裂	When heaven cannot be clear	Shall fear its collapsing
地無以寧 將恐發	When earth cannot be tranquil	Shall fear its crumbling
神無以靈 將恐歇	When spirits cannot thrive	Shall fear their vanishing
谷無以盈 將恐竭	When valleys cannot fill	Shall fear their emptying
萬物無以生 將恐滅	When things cannot live	Shall fear their disappearing
候王無以高貴 將恐蹶	When rulers cannot keep their loftiness	Shall fear their falling
故物或損之而益	Therefore things may gain from loss	
或益之而損	Or lose from gain	
故 貴以賤為本	Therefore the nobles originate from the abject	
高以下為基	The high is based on the low	
人之所惡 惟孤寡不穀	People abhor being orphaned widowed or unworthy	
而王公以為稱	Yet rulers humbly call themselves by such terms	
是以候王自謂 孤寡不穀	The reason they call themselves orphaned widowed and unworthy	
此非以賤為本耶 非乎	Is it not based on their abject origin Is it not so	
故致數譽無譽	Therefore those who seek accolades end up with none	
不欲瑋瑋如玉	Desire not to shine like a piece of carved jade	
珞珞如石	But rather be sturdy like a rock	

Prosody

This is one of the longest verses. It is also one of the more musical with characters lining up neatly to provide rhyme and meter. Most phrases repeat from line to line within the first and second stanzas and the set of characters that change from line to line in the first stanza repeat in the second, so that four of the five sounds rhyme in the first stanza and six of the eight sounds do in the second stanza, including the foot-rhyme. The sounds *tsheŋ* 清, *nŋeŋ* 寧, *rŋeŋ* 靈, and *leŋ* 盈, *rŋeŋ* 生, and *teŋ-s* 正 provide foot-rhyme both the first stanza, as well as the first half of the lines of second stanza. The second half of the lines in the second stanza end with these rhyming sounds in ancient Chinese: *rat* 裂, *pat* 發, *qhat* 歇, *N-krat* 竭, *met* 滅 and *kot* 蹶. This pattern creates a nicely interlocking structure.

Parallelism continues into the third and fourth stanzas with internal rhymes reverberating through the couplets, but it breaks down in the fifth stanza except for the repetition of the phrase *ŋa C.kwŋra? pə kōk* 孤寡不穀 at the end of the first and third lines. A rhyming last stanza brings a crescendo to the verse with half of the sounds belonging to the *-a*魚, *-ak* 鐸, and *-ok*屋 rhyme groups. The first two lines features triple-rhymes – *m-qa ma m-qa* 譽無譽 the and *gok rŋok rŋok* 欲瑤瑤, before closing out the verse with a reduplication, *rak rak* 珞珞, in the last line.

Annotation

This verse continues where Verse 42 leaves off by expounding the virtues of “one.” One harmonizes the opposites and dualities at the center of the multitude. It brings equilibrium to sustain wellness for organisms. Without it upheaval ensues. As the atmosphere retains heat when greenhouse gases become excessive; the ground rumbles when too much stress has built between tectonic plates.

In human affairs, “one” represents our center, the indescribable core of who we are. “One” is the neutral point between beautiful and ugly, smart and dumb, and all the rest of the countless polarities. “One” is equanimity. To maintain equanimity one must stay within one’s psychic center of gravity, so no one can push or pull one to the ground. To be humble helps us avoid not only grandiosity, but also humiliation. The Old Master uses paradoxes to highlight the importance of maintaining our center. He uses humbling terms with which emperors addressed themselves throughout imperial China to illustrate it is far better to emulate a worthless rock than a piece of intricately carved jade. Just as living beings thrive in balanced systems, those in power must keep their people in harmony. This is how his idea of “inaction” comes into play – to stop imposing our will on others and the environment, to follow the course of nature.