

## Vol. 1

# Propitious Omens from Heaven

Lieh Tzu lived in P'ut'ien, the Cheng State for forty-eight years, and yet nobody knew him. The monarch and the high-ranking ministers treated him as an ordinary person. That year, there broke out famine in the Cheng State and Lieh Tzu was leaving for the Wei State. His disciple said to him, "You are about to be away from home and I don't know when you can come back. I would take the liberty to ask you a question. What will you prepare to teach us? Haven't you ever heard something that Huch'iu Tzulin said?" Lieh Tzu smiled, "Did Huch'iu Tzulin say anything? Anyway, the old man once said something to Pohunmaojen and I heard what he said beside him. Here I will try to tell you about it. He said something to the effect that the thing that can give birth to living things is not born in itself and the thing that can prompt things to change does not change in itself. The thing that is not born in itself can give birth to living things and the thing that does not change in itself can prompt the things that can change to change. The living things cannot but be born and the things that can change cannot but change, so they are often born and can often change. The things that are often born and can often change are born at any moment and can change at any moment. It is true of yin and yang

and it is also true of the four seasons; the thing that is not born in itself can be compared to Tao and the thing that does not change in itself always operates in a circle. The thing that always operates in a circle has no ultimate boundary and the thing that can be compared to Tao has no ultimate law to follow.”

(Lieh Tzu added,) “*Yellow Emperor’s Book* says, ‘As an eternal existence, Tao is absolutely virtual, vast, empty and immeasurable, just like an empty valley with a broad mind that can allow of and contain all created things, because the valley can give birth to, nurture and accommodate all living beings and never refuses or favors any one species. Therefore, Tao is an eternal mother who gives birth to all created things. This magical mother, as the base and portal that gives birth to all of the things in the universe, gives birth to Heaven and Earth and all created things, so the body of Tao is the origin of Heaven and Earth and all created things. The body of Tao is so unfathomable that there is no place that it cannot reach. It looks like a special object that is existent because it negligently gives birth to Heaven and Earth and all created things. Therefore, the body of Tao gets itself applied in this respect seemingly in the same way that a person has been working endless wonders while he is just sitting about. Similarly, when the sage applies Tao, he will realize its effect and efficiency for once and for ever.’ Therefore, the thing that can give birth to things is not born in itself and the thing that can prompt things to change does not change in itself. Such a thing is born by itself, can prompt itself to

change, takes its shape by itself, presents its color by itself, produces its wisdom by itself, makes its power by itself, becomes prosperous by itself and goes on the decline by itself. Therefore, it is wrong to say that other things give birth to it, prompt it to change, prompt it to take its shape, prompt it to present its color, prompt it to produce its wisdom, prompt it to make its power, prompt it to become prosperous and prompt it to go on the decline.”

Lieh Tzu said, “Once upon a time, the sage governed the world based on yin and yang. The visible things were born by the invisible thing. Then where were Heaven and Earth and all created things born? Therefore, the process of Heaven and Earth and all created things coming into being can be divided into the T’ai’i Period, the T’aich’u Period, the T’aishih Period and the T’aisu Period. In the T’ai’i Period, there had yet to appear vitality; in the T’aich’u Period, there began to appear vitality; in the T’aishih Period, there began to appear shape; and in the T’aisu Period, there began to appear mass. Vitality, shape and mass were all well-prepared, but everything had yet to be separated, which was called Chaos. The Chaos means that all created things remained a whole body and had yet to be separated from one another. If you want to see them, you will fail to see them; if you want to hear them, you will fail to hear them; if you want to touch them, you will fail to touch them, so this is called I (易, *i.e.* Tao). I took no shape. I changed and became one, one changed and became seven, and seven changed and became nine. Nine changed to an ex-

treme and again changed and became one. One was the beginning of the change of shape. As the clear *qi* was light, so it ascended and became Heaven; as the turbid *qi* was heavy, so it descended and became Earth; and the neutralized *qi* (vitality) became a human being. Therefore, as Heaven and Earth contained vital essence, all created things can procreate their children.”

Lieh Tzu said, “Heaven and Earth have no complete function, the sage has no complete aptitude, and all created things have no complete role. Therefore, Heaven’s duty is to protect all created things, Earth’s duty is to carry all created things, the sage’s duty is to moralize all created things and all created things’ duty is to stay where they should stay. Such being the case, Heaven has its own weak points while Earth has its own strong points, and the sage has his own places in which not to go smoothly while all created things have their own places in which to go smoothly. Why is it so? Heaven protects all created things but cannot carry all created things, Earth carries all created things but cannot moralize all created things, the sage moralizes all created things but cannot violate the principle that all created things stay where they should stay, and the principle that all created things stay where they should stay is well-defined and they cannot go beyond the positions in which they should stay. Therefore, the Way of Heaven and the Way of Earth are either subject to yin or subject to yang, and the Way of the sage is either benevolence or justice; all created things stay where they should stay and they are either weak or

strong, which is the principle that all created things must stay where they should stay and cannot go beyond the positions in which they should stay. Therefore, there exist the living things that are born in the world and there exists the thing that can give birth to the living things in the world; there exist the things that are endowed with shapes in the world and there exists the thing that can endow the things of shapes with shapes in the world; there exist the things that can utter their sounds in the world and there exists the thing that can prompt the things that can utter their sounds to utter their sounds in the world; there exist the things that can present their colors in the world and there exist the thing that can prompt the things that can present their colors to present their colors in the world; there exist the things that can send out their tastes in the world and there exists the thing that can prompt the things that can send out their tastes to send out their tastes in the world.

There will always be a day for the living things that are born to die of old age while there will never be a time for the thing that can give birth to living things to die of old age; the things that are endowed with their shapes and can take their shapes are all conspicuous things while the thing that can prompt the things that can take their shapes to take their shapes is never a conspicuous thing; the things that are endowed with their sounds and can utter their sounds are all the things that can be heard while the thing that can prompt the things that can utter their sounds to utter their sounds is never a thing that

can utter any sound; the things that are endowed with their colors and present their colors are all conspicuous things while the thing that can prompt the things that can present their colors to present their colors is never a conspicuous thing; the things that are endowed with their tastes and can send out their tastes are all the things that can be tasted while the thing that can prompt the things that can send out their tastes to send out their tastes is never a thing that can present its taste. All those are the Great Tao's duties to take non-action. Heaven and Earth and all created things can either be subject to yin or be subject to yang, can either be weak or be strong, can either be short or be long, can either take their round forms or take their square forms, can either live or die, can either stay in hot summer or stay in cold winter, can either emerge or sink, can either make a *kung* tone (宮音) or make a *shang* tone (商音), can either appear or disappear, can either present a black color or present a yellow color, can either send out a sweet taste or send out a bitter taste, can either send out a gamy smell or send out a sweet smell. I (or Tao) looks ignorant and incapable, but actually it is omniscient and all powerful.”

Lieh Tzu went to the Wei State. When he had a meal on the road side, he met with a skull that had been dead for a long time. He pulled out a fleabane and pointed to the skull and looked back at Paifeng, his disciple and said, “It is only he and I who know that you have not died nor lived. Do you really feel sad? Do I really feel happy? All species are formed from the natural mechan-

ism (or the natural law). Just as the frog becomes a quail, as long as there is water available, there will outgrow spirogyra; in the corner with water and soil available, there will outgrow the green moss, and when it grows on the earth-piled hill, it becomes the plantain; with dung and dirt available, the plantain becomes the crowtoe (also nicknamed black bean, birdfoot or pentalobe); the crowtoe's root becomes the grub (also called walnut worm) and crowtoe's leaf becomes the butterfly; the butterfly soon evolves into an insect, which grows under the firewood stove and looks as if it was casting off its skin; it is named *diestrammena japonica* (also called kitchen diestrammena or ovenbird). The *diestrammena japonica* becomes a bird after it has grown for one thousand days and it is named *kanyüku* (the name of a bird in the legend). The *kanyüku*'s saliva becomes a *ssumi* insect, and the *ssumi* insect becomes a midge *i'lu* (an insect living in the large wine jar). The midge *i'lu* grows out of the midge *huangk'uang*, the midge *huangk'uang* grows out of the *chiuyu* insect, the *chiuyu* insect grows out of the midge and the midge grows out of a firefly. The lamb liver becomes sludge, the horse blood becomes will-o'-the-wisp and the human blood also becomes will-o'-the-wisp. The sparrow hawk becomes a sparrow hawk-like eagle, the sparrow hawk-like eagle becomes a cuckoo and the cuckoo again becomes a sparrow hawk when it has lived for long. The swallow becomes a clam, the vole becomes a quail, the rotten melon becomes fish, the old fragrant-flowered garlic becomes an amaranth, the old ewe becomes an ape, the fish egg becomes a worm. There

lives a mammal in Tanyüan Mountain who is both male and female in itself and can give birth to its children and it is called Lei (类); there lives a bird on Hotse Lake where the two birds of the kind look at each other and give birth to their children, and it is called an egret-like aquatic bird. The purely female one is called the wide-waisted, that is something like a turtle; the purely male one is called chalcid fly, that is the slender-waisted. The man who misses the female does not bother to marry but can respond with his vital essence instead while the woman who misses the male does not bother to get married but can give birth to her child instead. Houchi was born when his mother stepped on the footprint of the sage while I'yin was born when his mother stayed in K'ungsang (a place full of mulberries). The redworm grows in dampness and the midge grows in sour gas. The puccinia corticioides (a fungus living on the bamboo root, also named bamboo meat or bamboo mushroom) lives close to the shoot-free old bamboo, the old bamboo gives birth to a bamboo root insect, the bamboo root insect gives birth to an akamushi, the akamushi gives birth to a horse, the horse gives birth to a man and the man will in turn get back into the natural mechanism. All created things are born from the natural mechanism and will in turn get back into the natural mechanism.” (Some names of species mentioned here are supposedly fabricated.)

*Yellow Emperor's Book* says, “The motion of the body will form a shadow rather than a body, the motion of the sound will form an echo rather than a



sound, and the motion of nothing will form something rather than nothing.” The visible things are bound to have a day to come to an end. Will Heaven and Earth have a day to come to an end? Heaven and Earth and I will come to an end together. Will Heaven and Earth have a day to come to an end? I don’t know. Tao will come to an end when it originally has yet to begin and will come to an end when there is originally nothing in existence. The living things will again go back to their lifeless state and the visible things will again go back to their bodiless state. The thing that is not born is not originally a thing that is not born and the invisible thing is not originally an invisible thing. The things that are born are accordingly bound to have a day to come to an end. The things that will come to an end cannot but come to an end just as the things that are born cannot but be born. If you want it to live forever and prevent it from coming to an end, which means that you cannot understand the law. The spirit is a share belonging to Heaven while the body is a share belonging to Earth. The clear *qi* belonging to Heaven will disperse while the turbid *qi* belonging to Earth will gather. The spirits leave their bodies and return to their residences separately, so we call them ghosts. The ghosts mean their returning, returning to their real residences. Yellow Emperor said, “The spirit enters the gate of Heaven while the body returns to the root of Earth. What else can I retain?”

From birth to death, one experiences the four important periods of change

as follows: babyhood, vigorous youth and the prime of life, senility and death. In his babyhood, he concentrates his mind without any distracting thoughts and his gentle breath has gathered to an extreme so that others will not do harm to him in that he has never been so perfect in moral integrity. In his vigorous youth and in the prime of his life, he is full of life and energy with his desires emerging like a gush of water so that others will do harm to him in that he begins to decline in moral integrity. In his senility, he becomes soft and gentle in the matter of desires, but his body is about to come to an end so that others will not compete with him. At that time, he is not so perfect as he was in his babyhood in moral integrity, but he is much better than he was in his vigorous youth and in the prime of his life. In the period of his death, he will soon come to an end and return to an extreme.

While going sightseeing in Mount T'ai, Confucius saw Jung Ch'ich'i roaming about the suburbs of Ch'eng City, dressed in a crude leather jacket, with his waist fastened with a rope, playing a stringed instrument and singing a song. Confucius asked him, "Sir, you look so happy. Why?" He answered, "I have many kinds of happiness as follows: Nature gives birth to all created things and it is only the human being who is the noblest; now that I can live as a human being, this is the first kind of happiness. There is some difference between the man and the woman and the man has a high social status while the woman has a low social status, so the man is noble; now that I live as a

man, this is the second kind of happiness. In terms of life, some die before they can see the sun and the moon and others die while they are still in their swaddling clothes; now that I am already ninety years old, this is the third kind of happiness. Poverty is the constant state of the intellectual and death is the end of one's life; now that I am in the constant state and wait for the end of my life, is there anything else worth worrying about?" Confucius said, "You are right! You are a man who can comfort yourself."

Lin Lei would be nearly one hundred years old. When spring came, he still wore a crude leather jacket, picking the ears of wheat scattered around the field, singing and walking ahead. Confucius was on the way to the Wei State, looking at Lin Lei who was walking ahead in the field, and turned around to his disciple, "That old man is a man worth talking with. You can go to ask him for a try!" Tzu Kung requested to go there. Tzu Kung went there along the ridge face to face with him and sighed, "Sir, haven't you ever regretted? You are singing and picking the ears of wheat?" Lin Lei kept walking ahead and kept singing. It was after Tzu Kung continued to ask him that he began to look up and said, "Do I have anything to regret for?" Tzu Kung said, "Sir, you did not work hard when you were young, you did not meet a good opportunity when you grew up, you do not have your wife and children when you are old and you are about to die. Do you have any happiness to speak of so that you are picking the ears of wheat and singing?"

Lin Lei smiled, “I have happiness, and in fact everybody has happiness, but they take it as worry. I did not work hard when I was young, I did not meet a good opportunity when I grew up, so I have a long life. I do not have my wife and children and I am about to die, so I feel happy like that.” Tzu Kung said, “A long life is what everybody wants while death is what everybody hates. You take death as happiness. Why?” Lin Lei said, “Death is to go and life is to come. Therefore, now that I die here, how can I know that I will not be born there? Therefore, how can I know that they are not similar to each other? How can I know that keeping working hard to earn a living is not a kind of self-confusing? Also, how can I know that my today’s death cannot surpass my past life?” Tzu Kung heard all this, but he could not understand what all this meant, so he came back and told Confucius about it. Confucius said, “I know that he is a man worth talking with and it is indeed the case; however, he said all this, but he had yet to finish his talk.”

Tzu Kung was weary of studies, so he said to Confucius, “I hope to rest for a period of time.” Confucius said, “As long as one lives, he has no time to rest.” Tzu Kung said, “Such being the case, does Tz’u (the same as ‘do I’, with Tz’u being the name of Tzu Kung) have no time to rest, too?” Confucius said, “You do. Just look at that cemetery, which is a piece of highland, a large grave, a tomb, which looks like a big cauldron put upside down, the upper part being small and the lower part being big. You can see that it is the place where that

man is at rest.” Tzu Kung said, “How great death is! The Chüntzu is at rest there while the mean man is lying down there.” Confucius said, “Tz’u! Do you understand? Everybody understands the happiness of life rather than the pains of life; everybody understands the exhaustion of senility rather than the ease of senility; everybody understands that death is tiresome rather than that death means being at rest. Yen Tzu said, ‘How great it is that there was death in ancient times! Those with a benevolent heart could be at rest while those without a benevolent heart could but be lying down.’ After death, everybody goes to the place where he should go. The ancients called the dead person the returned person, so the living person is a passerby. If the passerby does not return home, he gives up his home. If a person gives up his home, then the world people will blame him; if the world people give up their homes, then nobody knows who is to blame. Someone leaves his home village, departs from his six relations (including father and son, elder brother and younger brother, and husband and wife), abandons his family business, wanders around and does not return home. What is he? The world people are bound to call him an uninhibited person. Someone else cherishes peaceful days, brags about his own brightness and capability, embellishes his own fame and reputation, indulges himself in exaggeration and sticks to his old way of doing things. What is he? The world people are bound to regard him as a strategist with wisdom. Both of them give up their homes and the world people approve of one and disapprove of the other. It is only the sage who knows whom he is

to approach and whom he is to leave.”

Someone asked Lieh Tzu, “Why do you take nothingness as precious?” Lieh Tzu said, “Nothingness is not precious.” Lieh Tzu again said, “Nothingness does not lie in its name. We may as well mention quietness and we may as well mention nothingness. If you persist both in quietness and in nothingness, you have got your true nature; if you want to get much and still want to be praised, you have lost your true nature. Things have been ruined and then there appear the people playing with benevolence and justice, which is unlikely to restore things to their original state.”

Chou Hsiung said, “All created things operate and move without stop and Heaven and Earth move secretly. Who can feel about it? Therefore, if things decrease themselves there, they will increase themselves here; if they grow up here, they will make losses there. Both decrease and increase or both growth and loss change with life and change with death. In coming and going, the beginning and the end follow each other. The gap between the two is unnoticeable. Who can feel about it? Usually, a vitality will not grow up suddenly and a body will not make losses suddenly. You cannot feel about their growth and you cannot feel about their making losses. This is just like a person living from his birth to senility whose looks, wisdom and posture keep changing everyday and whose skin, fingernail and hair grow at any time and drop at any time. Literally speaking, it is not the case that they stop growing and will not

change in his babyhood. As the gap in between is unnoticeable, you cannot understand it until later on.”

There was a man in the Ch’i State who was afraid that Heaven and Earth would collapse and drop. As his body would have no place to depend on so that he could not go to sleep and could not eat meals. There was another man who was concerned about the man who was afraid that Heaven and Earth would collapse. Thus, he went to advise him, “Heaven is the gathering air and there is no place with no air. As you can bend over and straighten up your back, as you can exhale and inhale, as you can move about in Heaven all day long, how can you be afraid that Heaven and Earth will collapse and drop?” The man said, “Even if Heaven is really the gathering air, then should the sun and the moon not drop?” The adviser said, “The sun, the moon and stars are the shining objects in the gathering air. Even if they drop, they will not do harm to anything else.” The man said, “Then what if Earth is broken?” The adviser said, “Earth is the gathering land, which fills up the sky around, and there is no place with no land. As you can stand up and walk about, as you can move about on Earth all day long, how can you be afraid that Earth will be broken?” The man cleared up his doubt and became very happy and likewise, the adviser cleared up his doubt and became very happy.

Ch’anglu Tzu heard of that and smiled, “The rainbow, the misty cloud, the wind and rain and the four seasons are all the gathering air that has brought

Heaven into being. The lofty mountain, the river and sea, the metal and stone, and the fire and wood are all the gathering land that has brought Earth into being. We know the gathering air and we know the gathering land. Why do we say that they will not be broken? Both Heaven and Earth are small things in the universe, but they are the biggest things among all created things. They are hard to exhaust and they are hard to explore, which has originally been the case; they are hard to estimate and they are hard to identify, which has originally been the case. If you are afraid that they will be broken, you are indeed far away from the truth; if you claim that they will not be broken, you are just as wrong. If Heaven and Earth cannot but be broken, then they will be broken after all. Therefore, when you find them broken, how can you not be afraid?"

Lieh Tzu heard of this and smiled, "You will be wrong if you claim that Heaven and Earth will be broken and you will be just as wrong if you claim that Heaven and Earth will not be broken. Whether they will be broken or not is something that I don't know. Such being the case, that is a possibility and this is also a possibility. Therefore, I don't know when I will die while I'm alive and I don't know when I will be born again while I'm dead; I don't know that I will go when I come and I don't know that I will come when I go. How can I be concerned about whether Heaven and Earth will be broken?"

Emperor Shun asked Ch'eng, "Can Tao be obtained and possessed?" Ch'eng



said, “Your body is not something you can possess. How can you obtain and possess Tao?” Emperor Shun said, “Now that my body is not something I can possess, who possesses it?” Ch’eng said, “It’s Heaven and Earth that entrust you with your body; your birth is not something you can possess, but it’s Heaven and Earth that entrust you with your vitality; your life is not something you can possess, but it’s Heaven and Earth that entrust you with your harmonious body of clear *qi* and turbid *qi* (*i.e.* the male’s sperm and the female’s egg); your children and grandchildren are not something you can possess, but it’s Heaven and Earth that entrust you with those bodies. Therefore, we don’t know where to go when we walk, we don’t know what to keep when we live and we don’t know what taste to distinguish when we eat. A moving gush of yang-*qi* between Heaven and Earth makes it possible for you to walk, live and eat, but all that is not something that you can possess. How can you mention that you can obtain and possess Tao?”

There was a rich man named Kuo in the Ch’i State while there was a poor man named Hsiang in the Sung State; Hsiang went to the Ch’i State from the Sung State and asked him for advice about how to become rich. Kuo said to him, “I am good at stealing. At the beginning, when I worked as a thief, I could become self-sufficient for the first year, I could become rich for the second year and I could reap a bumper harvest for the third year. From then on, I gave my properties to the *chou* (州, almost the same as the county) and

the *lū* (閩), almost the same as the village consisting of twenty-five families.” Hsiang was very happy. He could understand the words about how to work as a thief while he could not understand the method about how to work as a thief. Thus, he climbed over a wall, chiseled a hole in the wall and got across the wall and pried about any place that he could touch with his hands and any place that he could see with his eyes. As he failed to leave there in time, he was found guilty for his spoils and the local authorities confiscated the properties that he had accumulated before. Thinking that Kuo had cheated him, Hsiang went to blame Kuo.

Kuo said, “Why did you work as a thief?” Hsiang told him what had happened. Kuo said, “Alas! You should have violated the method of working as a thief to such an extent. Here I will tell you about it in detail. I hear that Heaven has its time and Earth has its terrain. I stole the time and the terrain, the irrigation of cloud and rain and the raising of the mountain and lake with which to grow my seedlings and plant my crops and build my walls and construct my houses. On land, I stole birds and beasts and in water, I stole fish and turtles. There was nothing that I could not steal. The seedlings and crops, the soil and wood, the birds and beasts and the fish and turtles are all the things that nature bore and raised. Were they the things that I possessed? Nevertheless, I stole the things given by nature and would not suffer disaster. The gold and jade, the grain and silk, and the money and properties were all

the things that others had accumulated. Were they the things that nature gave you? You stole those things and was found guilty. Who was to blame for it?”

Hsiang was greatly confused, thinking that Kuo cheated him on purpose, so he went to Mr. Tungkuo for advice. Mr. Tungkuo said, “Isn’t all of your body something that you stole? You stole the harmonious *yin-qi* and *yang-qi* (*i.e.* vitality) to bring your life into being and carry your body; moreover, aren’t the external things beyond your body something that you stole? Indeed, Heaven and Earth and all created things are not separated from one another. If you think that they are something that you possess, it means that you are much confused. Kuo stole out of reasonableness, so he had not suffered disaster while you stole out of selfishness, so you had been found guilty. It is subject to stealing if you make difference between the public and the private while it is also subject to stealing if you do not make difference between the public and the private. It is the virtue of Heaven and Earth to take the public as the public and take the private as the private. So far as someone who knows the virtue of Heaven and Earth can see, who is the thief and who is not the thief?”