

THE  
HARMONIOUS  
UNITY

Liu Zhi

Liu Zhi's Sino-Islamic  
Interpretation of the  
Five-Fold Path

Foreword by

Wang Genming

Introduction and Translation by

Naoki Yamamoto

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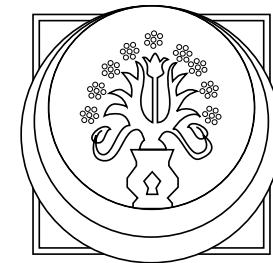
# The Harmonious Unity

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FONS VITAE

Published in 2026 by  
Fons Vitae  
49 Mockingbird Valley Drive  
Louisville, KY 40207  
<http://www.fonsvitae.com>

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2026932039

ISBN 979-889640-0141

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This book was typeset by Neville Blakemore, Jr.

Printed in the United States of America

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# Foreword

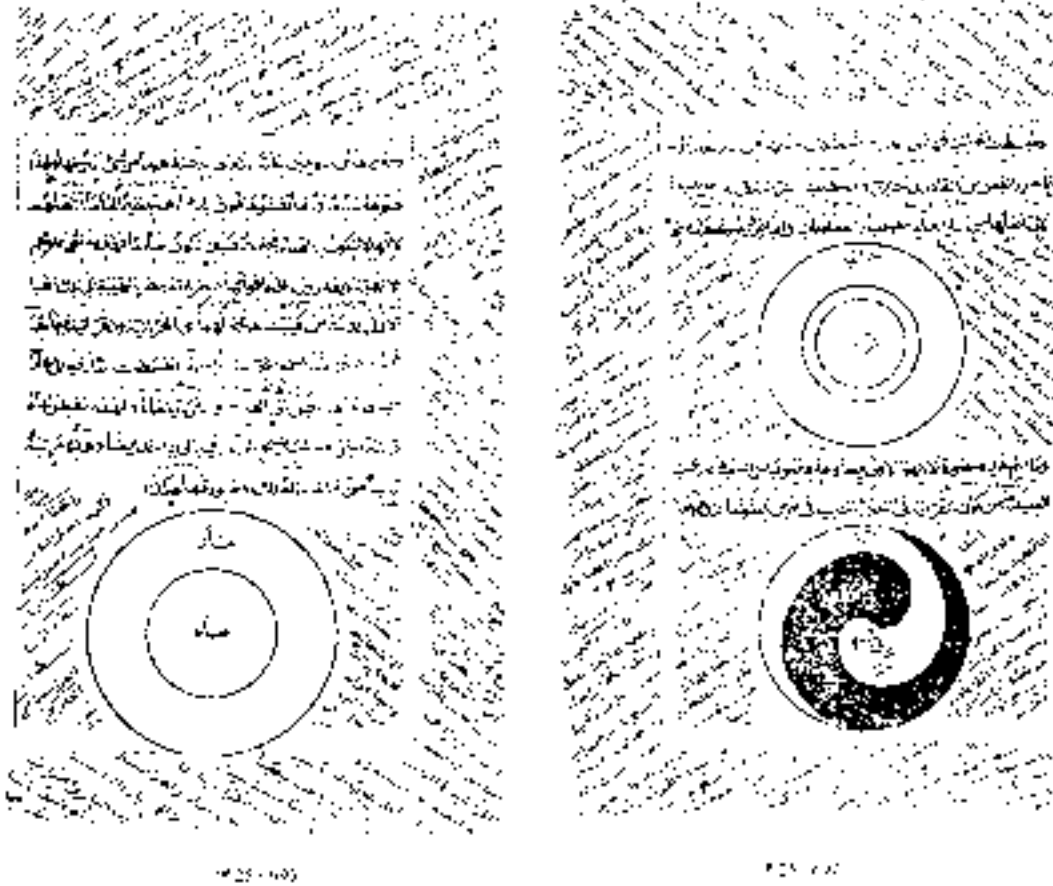
## I. THE AUTHOR OF *THE EXPOSITION OF THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM* AND ITS PRESENCE IN CHINESE CLASSIC LITERATURE

Liu Zhi's *The Exposition of the Five Pillars of Islam* ([五功释义]), first published over three centuries ago, remains one of the most influential Chinese-language Islamic works among the Hui Muslim community in China. Numerous editions have been produced over the years. More than four decades ago, I personally encountered a handwritten manuscript copy in a rural mosque, and during my childhood, I read and memorized parts of the text. Over twenty years ago, I began collecting various editions and eventually published a collated and annotated version (see *Annotated Teachings on the Nature and Principle of the Heaven* [天方性理校注], pp. 378–397, Religious Culture Press 宗教文化出版社, October 2020).

Below is a record of the editions of Exposition of the Five Pillars ([五功释义]) known to me, along with related biographical notes on the author.

An entry found on page 1788 of *Cihai* ([辞海], Compact Edition 缩印本, 1989), published by the Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House (上海辞书出版社) in January 1990, reads as follows:

Liu Zhi (ca. 1660–1730), an Islamic scholar of the early Qing period. Style name: Jielian (字介廉); in his later years, self-designated as Yizhai (一斋). A native of Shangyuan, Jiangsu (江苏上元, present-day Nanjing 南京), and a member of the Hui ethnic group. He first studied the Confucian classics, historical texts, as well as Buddhist and Daoist scriptures. Later, he delved deeply into Arabic and Persian, focusing on Islamic theology. His numerous writings and translations include such widely transmitted works as *Tianfang Xingli* ([天方性理], *Nature and Principle of the Heaven*), *Tianfang Dianli* ([天方典礼], *Rituals of the Heaven*), *Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu* ([天方至圣实录], *Authentic Record of the Most Noble Sage of the Heaven*), and *Exposition of the Five Pillars* ([五功释义]).



The Yin–Yang Diagram from the Arabic translation of Liu Zhi’s *Tianfang Xingli*, together with its commentary, *Sharḥ al-Laṭā’if* by Ma Lian-yuan.

This entry marked Liu Zhi's and his *Exposition of the Five Pillars's* ([五功释义]) formal entry into the field of Chinese academic scholarship. Later, *The Great Cihai: Volume on Religion* ([大辞海·宗教卷], December 2015, Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House 上海辞书出版社) included even more detailed entries related to Liu Zhi and his works: "Liu Zhi" ([刘智], p. 600), "Tianfang Dianli" ([天方典礼], p. 668), "Tianfang Xingli" ([天方性理], p. 670), and "Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu" ([天方至圣实录], p. 671).

Between 1992 and 2000, several important Chinese reference works included detailed entries on Liu Zhi (刘智) and his translated or authored texts.

*The Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Chinese Hui Muslims* ([中国回族大词典], Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House 江苏古籍出版社, December 1992 edition) contains entries such as:

- "Liu Zhi" ([刘智], p. 941)
- "The Tomb Inscription of Mr. Liu Jielian" ([刘介廉先生墓碑], pp. 665–666)
- *Tianfang Xingli* ([天方性理], p. 895, *Nature and Principle of the Heaven*)
- *Tianfang Dianli* ([天方典礼], *Rituals of the Heaven*), *Tianfang Sanzi Jing* ([天方三字经], *Three-Character Classic of the Heaven*), *Wugeng Yue* ([五更月], *The Five Phases of the Moon*) and *Zhenjing Zhaowei* ([真境昭微], *Subtle Illuminations of the True Realm*) p. 896.
- *Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu* ([天方至圣实录], p. 904, *Authentic Record of the Most Noble Sage of the Heaven*)

*The Comprehensive Dictionary of the Chinese Hui Muslims* ([中国回族大辞典], Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House 上海辞书出版社, January 1993 edition) includes:

- "Liu Zhi" ([刘智], p. 436)
- "The Tomb Inscription of Mr. Liu Jielian" ([刘介廉先生墓碑], p. 456)
- *Tianfang Dianli* ([天方典礼]) and *Tianfang Xingli* ([天方性理], p. 221)
- *Tianfang Zhisheng Lu* ([天方至圣录]) and *Tianfang Sanzi Jing* ([天方三字经], p. 223)
- *Tianfang Zimu Jieyi* ([天方字母解义], p. 224, *Explanation of the Letters of the Heaven*)

- *Exposition of the Five Pillars* ([五功释义], p. 235)
- *Wugeng Yuege* ([五更月歌], p. 236, *Song of the Five Phases of the Moon*)
- *Zhenjing Zhaowei* ([真境昭微], p. 816)

*The Concise Dictionary of Islam* ([伊斯兰教简明辞典], Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House 江苏古籍出版社, June 1993 edition) includes entries for:

- "Liu Zhi" ([刘智], p. 169)
- *Tianfang Dianli* ([天方典礼], p. 282)
- *Tianfang Xingli* ([天方性理])
- *Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu* ([天方至圣实录], p. 283)

*The Annotated Bibliography of Chinese Islamic Texts and Translations* ([中国伊斯兰文献著译提要], Ningxia People's Publishing House 宁夏人民出版社, June 1993 edition) contains extensive entries on:

- "Liu Zhi" ([刘智], pp. 605–606)
- *Tianfang Dianli* ([天方典礼], pp. 143–144)
- *Tianfang Xingli* ([天方性理], pp. 73–74)
- *Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu* ([天方至圣实录], pp. 39–41)
- *Zhenjing Zhaowei* ([真境昭微], pp. 83–86)
- *Exposition of the Five Pillars* ([五功释义], pp. 141–143)
- *Tianfang Zimu Jieyi* ([天方字母解义], pp. 293–294)
- *Wugeng Yue* ([五更月], pp. 339–343)
- *Annotated Explanation of the Three-Character Classic of the Heaven* ([天方三字经注解], pp. 342–344)

*The Encyclopedia of Chinese Islam* ([中国伊斯兰百科全书], Sichuan Lexicographical Publishing House 四川辞书出版社, March 1994 edition) includes entries for:

- "Liu Zhi" ([刘智]) and "Liu Zhi's Tomb" ([刘智墓], pp. 318–319)
- *Tianfang Dianli* ([天方典礼], p. 555, *Rituals of the Heaven*)
- *Tianfang Xingli* ([天方性理]), *Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu* ([天方至圣实录]), and *Tianfang Zimu Jieyi* ([天方字母解义], p. 556, *Explanation of the Letters of the Heaven*)
- *Wugeng Yue* ([五更月], p. 592, *The Five Phase of the Moon*)
- *Exposition of the Five Pillars* ([五功释义], p. 593)

*The Dictionary of Islam* ([伊斯兰教辞典], Shanghai Lexicographical

Publishing House 上海辞书出版社, October 1997 edition) features entries such as:

- “Liu Zhi” ([刘智], p. 483)
- *Tianfang Xingli* ([天方性理], p. 126)
- *Tianfang Dianli* ([天方典礼]) and *Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu* ([天方至圣实录], p. 127)
- *Exposition of the Five Pillars* ([五功释义]), *Wugeng Yue* ([五更月]), and *Tianfang Zimu Jieyi* ([天方字母解义], p. 128)
- *Tianfang Sanzi Jing* ([天方三字经], p. 129, *Three-Character Classic of the Heaven*)

*The Comprehensive Dictionary of Religion* ([宗教大辞典], Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House 上海辞书出版社, August 1998 edition) contains entries for:

- “Liu Zhi” ([刘智], p. 469)
- *Tianfang Dianli* ([天方典礼]), *Tianfang Xingli* ([天方性理]), and *Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu* ([天方至圣实录], p. 802)
- *Exposition of the Five Pillars* ([五功释义]) and *Wugeng Yue* ([五更月], p. 869)

Among the aforementioned reference works, the *Encyclopedia of Chinese Islam* ([中国伊斯兰百科全书]) offers a relatively thorough and detailed exposition of Liu Zhi’s life and scholarly contributions. Meanwhile, *The Annotated Bibliography of Chinese Islamic Texts and Translations* ([中国伊斯兰文献著译提要]) provides a more comprehensive and systematic explanation of his translated and authored works.

## II. SUMMARY OF *THE EXPOSITION OF THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM*

*Exposition of the Five Pillars*, in a single volume, is a foundational Hui Islamic text on religious rituals and institutional prescriptions. It is also referred to as *The Book of Rituals: Exposition of the Five Pillars* ([礼书五功释义]) or *Yizhai’s Exposition of the Five Pillars* ([一斋五功释义]). The work was authored by Liu Zhi (刘智), a renowned Hui Muslim scholar of the Qing dynasty, whose sobriquet was Yizhai (一斋).

In this text, Liu Zhi employs the principles and terminology of Confucian moral metaphysics (性理学, *xingli xue*) to interpret and argue for the significance of the Five Pillars of Islam (五功) and their proper observance. The writing is concise yet rich in

meaning, methodical in structure, and expansive in scope. As such, it has long been regarded by Chinese Muslims as a fundamental textbook for learning and comprehending the divinely ordained duties of Islam. Consequently, the book has been printed in many editions and widely circulated across generations.

The original date of publication is unknown, though it is generally believed to have been printed during the Kangxi reign (1662–1722) of the Qing dynasty. In the opening chapter, the author plainly declares his purpose:

The Five Pillars of the Sacred Teaching—Declaration, Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving, and Pilgrimage—are prescribed to guide humanity in cultivating the Way and returning to its original root. The Declaration is to know one’s return; Prayer is to tread the path of return; Fasting severs attachment to worldly things; Almsgiving eradicates selfishness; and Pilgrimage fulfills the divine command and returns to the Real. By observing these, the Way of Heaven is fulfilled in its entirety.

The full text comprises approximately 30,000 characters.

The book is divided into sixty-three chapters, symbolically reflecting the number of years the Prophet Muhammad (穆罕默德) lived in this world. Each chapter is composed of a concise essay of several hundred characters, bearing an individual title. The chapters can be grouped into three major thematic sections.

The first section consists of the opening seven chapters, which outline the origin and significance of the Five Pillars. These are summarized as follows:

- Chapter 1: The Origin – Asserts that the observance of the Five Pillars constitutes the fulfillment of the Heavenly Way.
- Chapter 2: The Principle – Describes how human beings are stained by five forms of sensual desire: sound, color, scent, taste, and touch. The Five Pillars serve to counteract these attachments and resolve the resultant afflictions.
- Chapter 3: Love and Aversion – Argues that the Pillars cultivate in a person the ability to love what is good and abhor what is evil, thereby enabling the establishment of public virtue and the suppression of selfish desire.
- Chapter 4: The Outer Senses – Discusses the external sense

## Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Neng Dong, Mariam Tam, Heng Wang, Dr. Ibrar Bhatt and Dr. Wang Genming for their help with proofreading the translation.

While proofreading the translation, we referred to Mr. Ma's modern Chinese translation and commentary.

The translation is based on 劉智「五功積義『回族典藏全書』第26冊、pp. 4-35.

Naoki Yamamoto

## Introduction: Liu Zhi's Way of Islam

HIS LIFE

Liu Zhi, styled Jielian (介廉) and known by the sobriquet Yizhai (一齋), was born around 1670 C.E. into a family of Islamic scholars (Akhung) in Nanjing. His father, Liu Sanjie, was a pre-eminent scholar who played a central role in Nanjing's Muslim community. Such was his reputation that even Ma Zhu, another prominent figure in Chinese Islamic history, sought him out to review his writings. Liu Sanjie's erudition in Islamic studies was widely acknowledged and respected.

During his early years, Liu Zhi received his education in the madrasas of Nanjing, where he was also deeply influenced by his father's scholarly pursuits. At the age of fifteen, Liu resolved to dedicate himself fully to the path of learning. For the next eight years, he immersed himself in the study of Chinese classical traditions, followed by six years devoted to Islamic classics, three years to Buddhist texts, and a year to Daoist studies. He further read an impressive collection of 137 Western classical works, achieving a mastery that positioned him as a true inheritor of both Eastern and Western traditions.

However, Liu Zhi's voracious reading was not driven merely by the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Rather, it was aimed at delving into the profound depths of "Tianfang" (Islamic) learning. His ultimate goal was to elevate Islamic scholarship to the status of a "universal discipline," a treasure shared by all under heaven. Through this synthesis of diverse traditions, Liu Zhi became a scholar of unparalleled breadth and vision, seeking not only to enrich his own understanding but to establish a broader intellectual and spiritual foundation for Islamic thought within China.

After the death of his father, Liu Zhi's dedication to scholarship only deepened. He distanced himself from all human relationships, devoted nearly all his resources to his studies, and retreated to a humble hermitage in the mountains, where he immersed himself in intellectual pursuits. By the time he reached his mid-forties,

twenty-eight years had passed since he first resolved to pursue a life of learning at the age of fifteen.

However, Liu came to realize that merely reading classical texts and indulging in solitary contemplation would not suffice to uncover the essence of Islamic scholarship as a “universal learning.” Determined to expand his understanding, he left his hometown of Nanjing, carrying his provisions on his back, and wandered across the vast landscapes of China. According to Liu, he visited more than half of China’s renowned cities, traveling through Shandong, Beijing, Hunan, Hubei, Shaanxi, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and beyond. During these journeys, he sought out Muslim scholars in each region, learning from them, identifying the shortcomings in his own writings, and refining his ideas through rigorous intellectual exchanges.

Upon returning to Nanjing, Liu Zhi eventually established a distinctive style of Islamic scholarship deeply rooted in the soil of Chinese intellectual traditions. He pursued what he called the “Three Axes of Knowledge,” a study of the True Lord (Allah), the cosmos (macrocosm), and humanity (microcosm), emphasizing their interconnectedness.

Yet, despite his unparalleled vision and unique scholarship, Liu Zhi struggled to gain the recognition he deserved, not only within China’s intellectual circles but even among his fellow Muslims. In the preface to his biography of the Prophet Muhammad, *The True Record of the Most Sage of Islam (Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu)*, Liu Zhi confessed the profound loneliness that haunted him:

“I have no companions in life, nor any colleagues in work. Even my family and close friends consider my lack of engagement in productive labor to be an ill omen.”

“I write my manuscripts myself, transcribe them myself, edit them myself, and refine them myself, yet I dare not affirm them myself.”

“I have searched every bookstore for books on Heaven, Earth, and Humanity, only to find words that are stale and devoid of substance.”

“I know no moment of peace. My brothers and relatives regard me as foolish and eccentric, avoiding me and distancing themselves from me. At one point, I had to move several times within a single year.”

The renowned Hui Muslim writer Zhang Chengzhi reflects on Liu Zhi’s isolation, suggesting that his solitude was emblematic not just of his personal struggles but of the broader plight of Islam—and religion in general—in China:

“This [anguish of loneliness] might be recognized as the solitude of Islam in China, and indeed of religion itself in the Chinese context. Confronted with the harsh realities of life, the overwhelming power of the state, and the vast ocean of Chinese culture, any religion that seeks to remain faithful to its principles will find itself confined to loneliness, with its very survival at risk. In the blood-soaked history of Hui Muslims during the Qing Dynasty, Liu Jielian’s writings become all the more astonishing with each reading.” (Zhang Chengzhi, *China as Seen through Islam: Ethnicity, Religion, and the State*, Chuko Shinso, 1993, 58 p)

The classical Islamic works from China that we hold in our hands today are the fruits of relentless dedication, forged by Chinese Muslims who, undeterred by isolation, sought to reveal the truths of Islam as a “universal discipline.” Their uncompromising spirit endures as a testament to their pursuit of the divine.

THE “DAO” OF THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM:  
LIU ZHI’S VERNACULAR ARTICULATION OF ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY

“The Five Pillars serve as the pathways of cultivation, guiding humanity toward harmony with Heaven (the divine truth). The first is the practice of Dhikr (Remembrance of the True Lord), the second is the act of Salah (Rendering reverence to the True Lord), the third is the discipline of Sawm (Fasting as an act of purification), the fourth is the virtue of Zakat (Charity through giving), and the fifth is the journey of Hajj (Pilgrimage to the sacred sanctuary). These Five Pillars are not merely commands of the True Lord but are practices exemplified by the Prophet as a model for all humankind, providing a clear and universal path to spiritual harmony.” Liu Zhi, *Tianfang Dianli*

In the realm of Chinese Islamic thought, the use of East Asian vocabulary to articulate Islamic philosophy is not a mere instance of superficial cultural syncretism. Rather, it represents the outcome

of profound philosophical and theological ingenuity. Chinese Muslim thinkers employed traditional East Asian concepts and linguistic frameworks not only to convey the fundamental doctrines of Islam but also to reinterpret these teachings within the intellectual paradigms of East Asia.

The notable characteristic of this synthesis is the redefinition of core East Asian philosophical concepts—such as *li* (理), *qi* (气), and *xing* (性)—within the framework of Islamic thought. For instance, *li*, a concept central to Confucian and Daoist traditions, is reconceptualized in Islamic terms as a manifestation of divine will and universal truth. It comes to signify the order and law that the Creator has embedded within all of creation. Similarly, *qi*, traditionally understood as the dynamic energy or life force animating the cosmos, is reimagined in Islamic terms as the sustaining principle through which God governs and maintains existence.

A second defining feature of this intellectual endeavor is the sophisticated deployment of East Asian vocabulary to elucidate the ethical and ritual practices that form the core of Islamic teachings. Foundational practices such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are reinterpreted through the frameworks of harmony between *tian* (天: Heaven), *di* (地: Earth), and *ren* (人: Humanity), as well as the cosmological principles of yin-yang and the five elements. For example, prayer is presented as an act of standing before Heaven, prostrating upon Earth, and embodying the cosmic balance of the universe. Through this redefinition, Islamic practices resonate deeply with East Asian perceptions of nature and humanity, rendering them more accessible and relatable to the cultural sensibilities of the Chinese audience.

#### LIU ZHI'S STUDY OF THE THREE AXES

Drawing upon the vernacular lexicon of East Asia, Liu Zhi sought to present the Islamic tradition as “the universal learning” accessible to both Muslims and non-Muslims within the Chinese intellectual and cultural milieu. To achieve this ambition, Liu Zhi redefined the Five Pillars of Islam as a profound wisdom that completes the harmony among the “Three Axes” of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity.

In Liu Zhi's philosophical framework, the “Three Axes”—Heaven, Earth, and Humanity—represent the three fundamental realms of existence: the cosmic, the natural, and the human. These realms are not viewed as separate or isolated but are deeply interconnect-

ed through the practical observances of the Five Pillars. Liu Zhi's vision weaves together these axes to form an integrated path for understanding human life and its ultimate purpose.

The harmony of Heaven and Earth is realized through the practice of the Five Pillars, which embody the universal principles of divine order and manifest them within the material world. These observances align the spiritual and physical realms, thereby fostering a balance that transcends the dichotomy of the temporal and the eternal.

Humanity is situated as the unifying axis that bridges Heaven and Earth. Through the Five Pillars, individuals cultivate themselves, drawing closer to the divine essence of Heaven while simultaneously contributing to the moral and social order of Earth. Humanity becomes the living testament of this unity, embodying divine will and earthly responsibility in harmonious concert.

When the balance of the Three Axes is achieved, the entirety of existence functions as a seamless cycle of interconnectedness. Heaven, Earth, and Humanity operate as one unified whole, enabling individuals to actively participate in the cosmic order. Such harmony, Liu Zhi asserts, is not merely an abstract ideal but a lived reality that can be realized through the disciplined application of the Five Pillars.

This study of the Three Axes in Liu Zhi's thought reveals a vision of humanity's place within the cosmos, wherein the divine, the natural, and the human converge. His work thus offers a profound synthesis of Islamic spirituality and East Asian intellectual traditions, portraying the Five Pillars as the means by which this tripartite unity is brought to fulfillment.

#### THE WISDOM OF HEAVEN

In Liu Zhi's philosophical framework, the “Wisdom of Heaven” refers to the exploration of the fundamental principles governing the cosmos and the universal laws that underpin them, with a focus on how these truths can be embodied in human life and action. This study is constructed around the principles of order, harmony, and creation symbolized by Heaven, encompassing a worldview that manifests as the will of God (Allah).

In the realm of Heaven's wisdom, the universe is understood not as a mere collection of material phenomena but as a domain imbued with the creative intent of God and the laws deriving from

# The Exposition of the Five Pillars of Islam

by  
Liu Zhi

# The Exposition of the Five Pillars of Islam

## Introduction

In the beginning, there was the Supreme Ultimate. And from this, the two primal forces of Yin and Yang were born. When the two principles came into existence, the Four Symbols (the four stages) were established. With the establishment of the Four Symbols, the Five Elements then arose. These Five Elements generate one another and overcome one another in eternal harmony. Likewise, in the sacred laws of Islam, there are five essential duties: Shahada, Salat, Sawm, Zakat, and Hajj.

These Five Pillars mirror the order of the cosmos, for just as the Five Elements govern the workings of the world, so do these five duties govern and sustain the soul's journey.

These duties, like the Five Elements, are indispensable, and the principles of generation and overcoming are woven into their very essence. To generate means that from them the true nature of being is born, and to overcome means that by them the desires of the self, which arise later, are driven away. All depends upon the intention of the individual. If one's intention is grounded in truth, then by performing these five acts, that truth will naturally be revealed. But if one's intention is fixed upon mere form, then only the outward form will be seen.

As it is often said, the virtuous behold virtue, the wise behold wisdom; the deep-hearted perceive depth, and the shallow discern only shallowness.

Now, Master Liu Zhi has sought to investigate the meaning of the Five Duties one by one, delving deeply into their very source. Furthermore, he has extended these principles to encompass related matters, so that scholars of future generations, through diligent study and the

## Chapter 1: The Origin

unification of body and mind, might not only grasp what has already been spoken, but also, through analogy, understand what has yet to be said. Thus, the Five Duties are not merely confined to five acts alone.

The numbers of Heaven are five<sup>1</sup>, and likewise, the numbers of Earth are five<sup>2</sup>. The five positions are in harmony with one another, each bound by its own connection. The total of fifty-five<sup>3</sup>, the numbers of both Heaven and Earth, is derived entirely from the principle of the Five, upon which all is founded and proceeds.

Thus, by embodying these five acts, observing them with precision, and diligently carrying them out, one may ascend from the foundational learning to higher understanding, through the long-accumulated truths. By rigorously disciplining oneself, one will at last arrive at the realm of silence, where words are no longer needed. This is the very vision that Master Liu ardently hoped for in the world, and it is his wish that the people never forget his intent, but faithfully carry it forward.

In the 49th year of the reign of Emperor Kangxi, in the third month of the year Gengyin, this was written beneath the light of a lamp. Composed by the disciple of the faith, Yu Kai.

### THE RITES OF THE PURE FAITH

Faith has long been divided, yet the truth of Islam runs deep. Heaven, Earth, and Man—the Three Powers—are governed by the workings of creation, and the Five Offices preside over all things. What does the Limitless (Wu Ji) truly encompass? There is a God, though He is beyond all definition. In stillness, seek the profound and mysterious truth, and with sincerity, follow the guidance of the Lord.

### THE PURPOSE OF THE PURE FAITH

To remain unsullied and keep to purity is to safeguard the truth at its very source. With unwavering sincerity, one illuminates even the most subtle matters. In loyalty and filial piety, there is no other design, nor does one tire of advancing these principles time and again. Though there is nothing to gain, one holds it close to the heart, desiring only to share the rare and precious treasures of wisdom with others.

1. Numbers of Heaven refer to odd numbers, namely 1,3,5,7,9.

2. Numbers of Earth refer to even numbers, namely 2,4,6,8,10.

3. The sum of the numbers of Heaven (1+3+5+7+9) and the sum of the numbers of Earth (2+4+6+8+10) make 55.

## Chapter 1: The Origin

When form and energy manifest, the Heavenly Way (the cosmic order) becomes veiled. As energy arises daily, the truth is obscured. What is clear becomes concealed, what is pure is mingled, and the paths of understanding are blocked. Mankind, unaware of the source of their divine mandate, knows not whence they came, nor how to return. Yet the Five Duties of Islam—the Pillars of Faith—offer a way: Shahada, Salat, Sawm, Zakat, and Hajj. These guide humanity in the way of cultivation, restoring them to their original purity.

Shahada is the knowledge of where one's devotion belongs. Salat is the practice of that devotion upon the path. Sawm severs the ties of worldly desire, and almsgiving teaches the soul to forget itself. Hajj is the fulfillment of the divine mandate and the return to truth. Through the mastery of these duties, the path of Islam is fulfilled, and the soul returns to its rightful place in the order of all things.

## Chapter 2: The Principle

The Way of Heaven and the heart of man, though subtle, are intertwined. Allah, in His Wisdom, has granted a single principle to all things, yet the manner in which people receive it differs. Thus, there arises the distinction between the sage and the ordinary man. The Sage (the Prophet), through the Law, guides all creation, and the truth of the Way (Dao) is clear to him. But the ordinary man, seeking to grasp the Way through material things, finds that the truth is obscured.

For this reason, they cannot recover the truth and return to their original state of purity. Therefore, Allah has commanded the Five Pillars, revealing to humanity the path to cultivation. The Five Pillars open the barriers, clear the obstructions, show the way forward, and lead man back to his original state.

What are these Five Pillars? The heart and nature of man are bound together, much like a key and its lock. Man's ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and body are immersed in the five sensations of sound, color, scent, taste, and touch. From these arise the five desires of love and hatred. The spring of these desires becomes entangled with the key, tightly wound, and impossible to release. But if one uses the correct key, perfectly suited to the lock, the spring and key will be released naturally.

The human body is bound by the chains of these five sensations, and thus it is that the five laws (the Five Pillars) must be used to address them. In doing so, the bonds are gradually loosened, the heart is clarified, and one's true nature is revealed. In this way, the truth of the Law becomes clear. This is why the Five Pillars are of utmost importance in the cultivation of the Way.

### Chapter 3: Love and Aversion

The ear is attuned to sound, the eye to color, the nose to scent, the mouth to taste, and the body to touch, each in its proper accord. Yet love inclines towards what is beautiful, and aversion recoils from what is foul—thus, in this regard, they are the same. But to be without love or aversion, without the perception of beauty or ugliness, and to follow purely the law of Heaven (the cosmic order)—this is the virtue of justice.

To accept only what one desires without discerning whether it is truly worthy of love, or to hate what one despises without examining the cause—this is a virtue tainted by selfishness. But to know the flaws within what one loves, and to recognize the beauty within what one despises—this is the virtue of clarity.

The governance of man by the Five Pillars—faith, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage—is to conquer selfish desire, restore the virtue of clarity, and ultimately return to the state of perfect justice, where all is impartial and without bias.

### Chapter 4: The Outer Senses

The five senses, each endowed with its own function, possess within them their own virtues. Yet man, as he is, fails to fully realize the goodness inherent in them. The mouth is endowed with the virtue of speech, the ear with the virtue of hearing, the eye with the virtue of sight, the nose with the virtue of smell, and the body with the virtues of grasping, moving, and resting. In these virtues, there is no inherent evil, but if they are used improperly, their virtues are lost.

The Five Pillars of Islam are ordained to restore the virtues that have been lost, and to preserve them from further loss, ensuring that the faculties of man remain in their rightful purpose and harmony.

## Chapter 5: The Inner Virtues

Within man there are five inner virtues: nature, heart, wisdom, inclination, and subtlety. Nature is the essence of life, heart is the faculty of perceiving, and wisdom is the means by which one applies these. Inclination is the movement of the heart, and subtlety is the hidden state of the heart. That which is revealed when the heart begins to move is called “sign,” and that which remains concealed is called “subtlety.”

These five virtues are originally pure and perfect gifts bestowed by the Creator (Allah). Yet selfish desire clouds one's nature, disputes bewilder the heart, temperament obscures wisdom, schemes unsettle the stirrings of the heart, and joy, anger, gain, and loss disturb its hidden depths. Thus, what is inherently good flows toward what is not good.

The principle of the Five Pillars of Islam is to cleanse the self of desire, straighten the vital force, level the understanding of right and wrong, settle the heart's movements, and temper one's emotions and responses in the face of joy, anger, gain, and loss.

## Chapter 6: The Virtues of Heart and Nature

Within the nature of man, there are five virtues: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith. These virtues guide one in acting justly within the world. Within the workings of the heart, there are five virtues as well: joy, anger, love, hatred, and desire. These reside within the self. And within the domain of knowledge, there are yet five more virtues: memory, retention, understanding, planning, and application. These virtues are employed in the world through action.

In each of these three realms, one must strive to maintain balance, for to lean too far in any one direction is to stray from the path. The Five Pillars of Islam serve to correct such imbalance and guide one back to the Way of moderation.

## Chapter 7: The Balanced State and Distorted Change

Man is born from four elements and perfected by five. In the beginning of one's nature, semen is as water, blood is as earth, warmth as fire, and that which stirs all change is the Qi. When form is made complete, the breath of air and fire join to bring forth wood, while earth and water unite to give rise to metal. Wood nurtures growth and vitality, while metal bestows firmness and clarity. Within man, the water of the semen, the fire of warmth, and the earth that shapes the bones form five aspects of being, with Qi at their center, known as the Innate Wisdom of the Soul.

These five elements possess their own nature and virtue. The nature of fire is to ascend, and its virtue is loftiness and brilliance. The nature of water is to descend, and its virtue is humility. The nature of wood is to grow, and its virtue is simplicity and sincerity. The nature of metal is to be firm, and its virtue is steadfastness. The nature of earth is to enfold and nurture, and its virtue is stillness and obedience. Yet these virtues must be nourished by the Qi, for only then can each keep to its proper course and preserve the balance of moderation.

Should the breath fail to nourish them, what is balanced becomes unbalanced, and what is right is turned to wrong. Thus, loftiness and brilliance may become violence, and desire shall swell. Humility may turn to flattery, and impure thoughts arise. Steadfastness may harden into stubbornness, and rigidity shall grow. Simplicity may be clouded by ignorance, turning one dull and foolish. Stillness may transform into sluggishness, rendering one dull and slothful. Once the five natures are altered, selfish desires emerge, and from these, all evil things unfold. All this arises from the Qi being unfed, causing the path of balance to be forsaken.

The Five Pillars of Islam offer the means to nourish the Qi, restoring the five natures to their balanced course. These first seven chapters summarize the origins of the Five Pillars; the following twenty-five chapters will expound upon their principles, and the final thirty-one chapters will elucidate their deeper significance. Together, they form a sacred record, encompassing sixty-three chapters, inscribed as a testament to the age of the blessed Prophet



## Chapter 8: The Rite of Remembrance

Remembrance is the turning of the heart toward the Lord (Allah). It is to reflect often within one's breast, to continually speak words of remembrance, to carve them deep into the heart, maintaining sincerity and reverence as one praises the Lord's majesty. In all words and deeds, one must preserve the harmony of the Way, guarding even the smallest action from straying from the path of righteousness. Never forget the remembrance of the heart, and let not the utterance of remembrance cease from your lips.

The scripture says: "In your rising and resting, in your slumber and in your meals, remember always."<sup>4</sup> And it is also said: "To those who remember the Lord, the Lord also remembers them."<sup>5</sup> By remembrance of the Lord, transgressions are wiped away, and by the Lord's remembrance, all anxieties are stilled. Be mindful of your actions, and the Lord shall be your guardian.

## Chapter 9: The Law of Remembrance

The heart is like unto a mirror. When it turns toward one thing, it must of necessity turn away from another. That which it faces is either the law of Heaven (the natural order) or the desires of man. The heart's direction is ever shifting—when it turns toward the law of Heaven, the desires of man find no place within, but when it turns toward human desire, the law of Heaven vanishes from its sight. All judgments of good and evil, all discernment of

4. Based on Quran 3:191.

5. Quran 2:152.

right and wrong, arise from the heart's orientation.

This matter is both perilous and subtle, requiring reverence and the utmost care. A single righteous thought may bring a lifetime of blessing, but a single unrighteous thought may lead to a lifetime of sorrow. To revere and to act without restraining the heart is like holding back a torrent or taming a wild steed. This must always be kept in mind, and one must often reflect upon oneself.

As the holy prophet has said, "When the heart is clouded, it is as a mirror sullied with dirt. But by remembrance, it may be polished until it shines once more."

## Chapter 10: The Meaning of Remembrance

Remembrance signifies that which is never forgotten, the unceasing memory of one's true source. It is the remembrance of the origin from which the body was born, the root of one's very nature, which lies in the essence of creation. This essence is the highest good, and in remembering it, evil is dispelled. It is supremely pure, and in remembering it, all impurity is cleansed. It is utterly true, and in remembering it, falsehood is banished.

When remembrance reaches its fullness, evil fades away, impurity is no more, and falsehood vanishes. In that moment, one returns to the original source. As the holy prophet has said: "Through remembrance, one transcends. By transcending the material and the self, one returns to a state of primal purity. This is the meaning of returning to the origin, of finding the end in the beginning."

## Chapter 11: The Principle of Remembrance

Between man and the Lord (Allah) there lies no true separation. Yet it is commanded that one turn their remembrance toward the Lord, to reveal the very absence of such division. Man perceives his own self as an essential object, unaware that all things have

been created by Allah. He sees the world as an illusion, not knowing that the truth behind the illusion is the Lord Himself. If one remembers only people or things, then one perceives only people and things, losing sight of the Lord.

But if one's heart is wholly turned to remembrance of the Lord, then all things and the self alike fade away, leaving only the essence (dhat) of Allah, deep and clear as a tranquil sea. As the scripture says: "The Lord is present with man, nearer than his own heart and life."<sup>6</sup> And further, it is said: "In remembrance, there must be no divided heart; in reverence, no divided heart; in service, no divided heart. A 'divided heart' is to place another alongside the Lord, and this is the gravest betrayal."

## Chapter 12: The Proof of Remembrance

To remember with conscious intent is to remember the Lord from a man's perspective. To remember unconsciously, without thought, is to remember the Lord as He desires. When man remembers the Lord, it requires effort, bound by time and place. But when the Lord remembers Himself, there are no bounds of time or place; it is no longer an act of human remembrance. There is neither motion nor thought, and it surpasses any notion of remembrance.

If even a single thought or action does not align with the Way, then it remains constrained by time and place. Yet, "when one remembers the Lord as He desires", action and stillness alike transcend self; there is no separation, thought, or memory. In this state, one responds freely and fully to all things, and this is what it means for the Lord to remember Himself. Thus, it is said, "Remembrance holds no fixed form." One is called to remember even in stillness, and to forget not in action. In all encounters, be upright; in dealings with others, be true—this is remembrance.

As the scripture records: "Whether governing or laboring in the fields, or counting (and practicing medicine), in all things hold to the Way—this, too, is remembrance." And the holy prophet has said, "Without remembrance, all endeavors shall falter. Yet to remember without action—can this truly be called remembrance?"

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6. Quran 50:16.



## Chapter 13: The Rite of Worship

Worship is the turning of the body toward the Lord (Allah). Five times each day, at appointed hours, worship is performed: at dawn (Fajr), midday (Dhuhr), afternoon (Asr), evening (Maghrib), and night (Isha). The number of cycles in each worship is set: four for dawn, ten for midday, four for afternoon, five for evening, and nine for night.

There are four movements in worship: standing, bowing, prostrating, and kneeling. In standing, one stands straight and faces forward, hands clasped, feet together, and eyes fixed upon the ground. In bowing, the upper body inclines forward, the neck is lowered, the back is kept level, hands rest upon the knees, and the gaze is upon the feet. In prostrating, one lowers the body and head to the ground, pressing both nose and forehead to the earth, with elbows and abdomen raised, eyes fixed upon the tip of the nose. In kneeling, one sits quietly upon the heels, lowering the head and placing hands upon the knees, with eyes resting upon the chest. These movements combine to complete one cycle of worship, and through all cycles, the worship itself is fulfilled.

Certain rules guide worship: to perform ablution, to wear attire suitable for worship, to pray in a clean place, to observe the proper time, to face the correct direction (qibla, the direction of Mecca), and to hold the correct intention. Five times each day, this worship is carried out; once every seven days, the faithful gather for communal worship; and twice a year, grand gatherings are held.

For those of special devotion, there is a dawn prayer (Salat al-Duha), consisting of two cycles, and in the night, a special prayer (Tahajjud), for which no set number is prescribed. The scripture

states: “O believers, observe the appointed times of worship with care<sup>7</sup>.” Here, ‘the middle’ means to observe the times precisely. The holy prophet has said: “The line between righteousness and betrayal lies solely in worship. To forgo worship when the appointed time has come is to betray the faith.”

## Chapter 14: The Manner of Worship

Worship must be performed with reverence, and the heart must be devout. Worship that lacks reverence and devotion is as though no worship were offered at all. The time for worship must be observed with sincerity, and it must be carried out daily without fail. Through sincerity and unbroken practice, worship bears its fruit.

Worship is the command of the Divine. When the appointed time for worship arrives, the body must be present, for to delay and not attend at the proper time is to prioritize one’s own convenience and to act arrogantly before the Lord. If the body is in the place of worship, then the heart must be there as well; to be bodily present but absent in spirit renders the worship empty and hollow. Those who are arrogant before the Lord are those who defy, and those who are empty of spirit are in error. Defiance leads to ruin, and error prevents one from reaching the path to Heaven.

Therefore, worship must be performed with a focused spirit and a devoted heart. Inwardly, one should be devout; outwardly, solemn. The mind should not wander, nor should one be distracted by their surroundings. One should refrain from scratching the head, shifting the feet, or making any noise. Should one fail in these respects, the worship must be repeated.

As the holy prophet has said: “When offering worship to the Lord (Allah), do so as though you see Him before you. Even if you do not see the Lord, know that He truly sees you.”

## Chapter 15: The Essence of Worship

Worship is a stairway to draw nearer to God (Allah), a path to return to the original source. Human life is a journey from the realm of reason (Li Shi) to the realm of form (Xiang Shi), tra-

7. Quran 2:238.

versing many boundaries along the way. At each boundary, the individual takes on material characteristics, drifting ever further from their primordial position. These layers are separated by numerous stages, with seven primary levels: energy, water, fire, earth, metal, wood, and living beings.

From reason springs energy, which possesses the qualities of motion and transformation. From energy arises fire, bearing the trait of illumination. From fire comes water, with its fluid nature. From water emerges earth, with its cohesive properties. From earth springs metal, with its solidity. From metal arises wood, imbued with the power of growth. From wood comes life, alive with the essence of activity. These forms (manifestations) sustain one another, and within them, myriad emotions take root.

Through movement, desire is born. Growth gives rise to life and death. Solidity leads to union and separation. Cohesion begets dispersion. Circulation transcends boundaries. Illumination produces light and shadow. Motion and transformation result in cycles of activity and stillness. Yet all these emotions are foreign to the true nature of humanity. Emotions obstruct one's essence, and the essence becomes shrouded by emotions, veering from reason and straying farther each day.

Worship transcends these emotional barriers, allowing one to return to their pure, primordial state. Once restored to this state, external distractions fall away, and the true essence shines forth. Standing symbolizes humanity, gazing upward to heaven and standing firm upon the earth. Bowing embodies the posture of birds and beasts, with their backs to the heavens and faces toward the earth. Prostration represents submission, mirroring the stillness of grass and trees rooted in the earth. Kneeling evokes the quietude of mountains, stones, and the solid ground beneath us. Ascending and descending reflect the interplay of water and fire. Movement and circulation signify the essence of energy. Transitioning from motion to stillness is a return to the original state of tranquility.

Through these symbolic actions, worship conveys profound meaning. By transcending each stage, the worshiper journeys back to their original source and draws closer to God. In this lies the true purpose of worship: a return to purity and an approach to the Divine.

## Chapter 16: The Principle of Worship

All things in existence fall into one of two states: "Flow" and "Obstruction." Flow is the principle (the Way), while Obstruction is the form (the material manifestation). Those bound to the material cannot grasp the principle, but those who return to the principle gain insight into both the essence and the material. Yet this does not mean one must forsake the material to seek the principle. If one comprehends the principle, then what once seemed an obstacle becomes a passage; if one fails to grasp the principle, then even what appears clear becomes an impediment.

Man is a being where principle and form are gathered together as one whole. When one is daily ensnared by the material, there can be no return to the state of Flow. Not only the body, but also the heart and spirit become hindered from returning. Why is this? Because the spirit is subjugated to the body. But if one seeks the principle daily, the material cannot impede it; not only the spirit, but the body as well shall not be hindered. Why is this? Because the body becomes transcended by the spirit.

When the spirit is governed by the body, even what seems clear becomes an obstacle. But when the body is transcended by the spirit, obstacles themselves turn to passages. Worship is the artful means by which the body is transcended by the spirit, a wondrous state that transforms obstacles into pathways of Flow. Attaining this state, one no longer perceives life and death as merely life and death, but comes to understand the presence of that which lies beyond both. Likewise, one no longer sees desire as mere desire but grasps the existence of that which is beyond both desire and its absence.

Through this understanding, even if one cannot wholly escape life and death, one may yet transcend them; even if one does not leave desire entirely, one may still cut through it. The transformation of material form allows obstacles to become pathways once more. Thus, the scripture, in urging the people to worship, seeks to return all obstacles to the state of Flow.

## Chapter 17: The Proof of Worship

Worship is the essence of submission to the Lord (Allah). Where there is no lack of obedience, there is no neglect in worship.

# The Exposition of the Five Pillars of Islam

by  
Liu Zhi

Chinese Text

## 一性 第六十三章

小人、大人、同其理。

聖人、凡人、一其性。

唯欲窒而理蔽、習異而性分、則人品之相去遠矣。

五功者、所以合其理、而一其性也。

其殆天之機會、聖凡之市肆乎？

念之效、不起二念。

巴也瞻德大賢、不計弟子名。

禮之效、受誇而無貶。

逆者、傷穆罕默德聖齒、反與之祝美。

齋之效、棄所欲、無往而不順。

賊害一補你爾禿禿花先賢九子、絕無一語。

課之效、一私不存。

穆罕默德至聖、脫袍濟貧、而坐守家庭。

朝之效、無己無物、而渾化於真一。

朝房來謁、勒畢爾賢者曰…經典如藥方、辦功如服藥、效即愈矣、愈而能服、保其強壯耳。

吾聖因副功拜而腿裂、聖凡知愚於五功中見之矣。

## 聖凡 第六十一章

五功、所以觀人者也。

若聖、若賢、若智、若愚、皆能不外五功、而自能成其為人。

聖之所以為聖者、全此五功也。

賢之所以為賢者、效此五功也。

智之所以為智者、知此五功也。

凡愚之所以為凡愚者、不知此五功也。

不知也者、不知其理也、不達其義也。

如飲食然、聖人治其味、而教人食者也。

賢人知其味、而食者也。

智者食之、而知其味者也。

凡愚不知其味、而不食者也。

即勉食之、而終不得其味也矣。

## 忠孝 第六十二章

五功、所以觀人於日用之間也。

事親而不勤五功、弗孝矣。

事君而不敬五功、弗忠矣。

處夫婦昆弟、而不修五功、弗義矣。

交朋友、接鄰里、而不以五功為觀法焉、不道矣。

耳聞、目睹、口言、鼻臭、手握、足行、念慮、思維、而不以五功為用焉、非禮矣。

是以至人之於五功也、日日不間時、時不間息。

## 簡易 第五十九章

聖人之道、淺而深、近而遠。  
其示人也簡易、其告人也諄切。  
然而人不能盡其事、何也。  
聖人示之簡、而人以為繁。  
聖人示之易、而人以為難。  
繁則病、難則勞。既病且勞、其何以行之哉。  
是以行道之人、中途而廢者有之矣。  
服教之人、沒身而失之者有之矣。

## 位育 第六十章

天之所以覆、地之所以載、日月之所以照臨、四時之所以運行、  
雨露時降、草木時生、鳥獸時育、萬物時成、皆所以培道之具也。  
人日享於其間、而不以修道為務者、亦有負造物之意矣。  
勤於天道、盡乎人倫、而位育之功成焉。

## 法聖 第五十七章

五功者、古今之定理也。

前聖之遺範、後聖之軌則、命於主、傳於聖、教於人、而人遵之。是體主而法聖也。

祝乃德曰… 聖人五功之全體、故為萬世觀法焉。

## 法程 第五十八章

聖人設教、將以為人陟天之階也。

天位高遠、故其階次層疊、非一蹴而可盡也。

念、則欲登之意也。

拜、則登之之法也。

課、則絕物之牽也。

齋、則忘己之有也。

絕物而忘己、斯至乎其天者矣。

至乎其天、斯得朝覲之實者矣。

## 功用 第五十五章

五功之為用大也、通天人之幾、悉幽明之故、達性分之微、了生死之義、遠與於穆流行、而不蕩於虛淺。  
近於日用尋常、而益見其實際。  
顧其大而無外、細而無間、與時周旋、互古今而不亂。

## 普概 第五十六章

五功、所以修身之道也。  
其為理也、包乾括坤、無所遺。  
其為教也、概聖越凡、無可免。  
自少及老、統男與婦、而不容姑息。  
其為禮制儀節也、體天地、象萬物、冒神祇、而力省乎於穆。