

Chapter 9

Original Text

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Translation

To hold and fill it—better to stop.

To probe and sharpen it—you cannot keep it so for long.

Gold and jade filling the hall—no one can guard them.

Rich and honored, yet haughty—one brings one's own blame.

Achievement completed, name accomplished, withdraw your person—this is the Dao of Heaven.

Word Notes

- □ — **“to hold”**: to keep/maintain.
- □ — **“to fill/be full”**: to reach fullness, saturation.
- □ — **“to stop”**: to cease, bring to a halt.
- □ — **“to probe”**: to gauge, manipulate, intensify.
- □ — **“sharp”**: keen, acute, aggressive edge.
- □□ — **“keep for long”**: maintain in a lasting way.
- □□□□ — **“no one can guard it”**: cannot be securely kept.
- □ — **“haughty”**: arrogant, self-exalting.

- 咎 — “**blame**”: misfortune, calamity.
- 功成身退 — “**achievement completed, name accomplished, withdraw**”: do not occupy the credit; step back after success.
- 天道 — “**the Dao of Heaven**”: Heaven’s natural way.

Chapter Explanation

What one holds and pushes to fullness is better stopped before it is full; what one probes and hones to sharpness cannot be kept so for long.

When gold and jade fill one’s halls, they cannot be guarded for long. When a person becomes rich and honored and then grows haughty, he brings calamity upon himself. Therefore, when achievement is complete and reputation is established, one should withdraw and not dwell in the merit—this accords with the Dao of Heaven.

Discourse

This chapter teaches that, in the affairs of Heaven and Earth, whatever reaches **fullness** must necessarily **wane**, and whatever grows **too sharp** must necessarily **snap**. People fail to grasp this and only know to scramble for power and profit, to chase wealth and rank—unaware that wealth and rank not only **cannot** be kept long, but also become the very thing **everyone covets**, the place where **resentments gather**. If, on top of this, one leans on wealth and rank to act **arrogantly**, one all the more calls misfortune down upon oneself.

Hence, when your work is accomplished and your name recognized, **withdraw**. Have, yet do not **own**; do not **swell** with self-satisfaction. Let **merit** stand without **occupying** it; let every trace of **edginess** be gone. Only thus do you accord with the **natural Dao of Heaven**, and only thus can what you have attained endure.

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