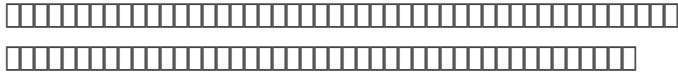


Chapter 28



Translation

Know the masculine, yet hold to the feminine —
become a stream in the valley for all under Heaven.
Constant De never departs;
one returns to the innocence of the infant.

Know the bright, yet hold to the dark —
become a standard for all under Heaven.
Constant De never errs;
one returns to the Ultimateless.

Know the glorious, yet hold to the humble —
become a valley for all under Heaven.
Constant De is at last complete;
one returns to unhewn wood.

When unhewn wood is split, it becomes mere implements.
The Sage employs the whole, and so becomes chief among all.
Thus the great fashioner does not cut.

Word Notes

- 雄 — "**masculine**": The male among birds; by extension, strength and assertiveness.
- 雌 — "**feminine**": The female among birds; by extension, yielding softness.
- 谷 — "**stream in the valley**": A mountain brook running through low ground.
- 轅 — "**the crossbar of a carriage**": The horizontal bar at the front of a carriage upon which one leans forward in a gesture of respect. In ancient times, when showing reverence from a carriage, one would bow forward and lean upon this bar.
- 差 — "**to err, to deviate**": To go wrong, to miss the mark.
- 斲 — "**to cut apart**": To sever, to cleave.

Chapter Explanation

One knows the masculine and its strength, yet **holds to the feminine**, taking softness and yielding as one's guiding principle. This is like **being a stream in the valley for all under Heaven**, positioning oneself in the lowly place. Being a stream in the valley for all under Heaven, positioning oneself in the lowly place — **the constant De never departs**, and one **returns to the harmonious qi of the infant**. One knows the bright and its radiance, yet **holds to the dark**, taking obscurity as one's guiding principle. This is like **being a crossbar for all under Heaven** — one who always bows low. Being a crossbar for all under Heaven, always bowing low — **the constant De never errs**, and one **returns to the emptiness of the Ultimateless**. One knows the glory of honor, yet **holds to the humble**, taking modesty and deference as one's guiding principle. This is like **being a valley for all under Heaven**, receiving all things with openness. Being a valley for all under Heaven, receiving all things with openness — **the constant De is at last complete**, and one **returns to the undivided wholeness of unhewn wood**. When **unhewn wood is split apart, it becomes implements** — each with only a single use. But when **the Sage employs this unhewn wood**, he can **become the chief of all who use implements** — his use is not limited to a single thing. Therefore **the great fashioner does not cut apart** the undivided wholeness of unhewn wood.

Discourse

Confucius said: "The noble person is not an implement." This is precisely what "the great fashioner does not cut" means. For once a person has become an implement, he has only a single use and cannot serve many purposes. Moreover, he is used by others and cannot be his own master. Take machinery, for instance. If used by good people, it may revitalize industry or defend the nation and protect the people — rendering genuine merit to the world and virtue to humankind. Yet after prolonged use it eventually breaks down. Once broken, people cast it into the dung heap or the rubble pile. If used by brigands, it may destroy people's homes or take people's lives — an accessory to evil, hated by all the world through all the ages. Alas! Heaven brings forth raw talent that becomes implements for the world's use, and yet it comes to such an end as this. Is this not deeply lamentable? Is this not bitterly unjust? I, reaching this point in my words, cannot restrain myself from weeping aloud on behalf of all the talented individuals throughout all ages and all lands. Persons of brilliance and outstanding ability, people of extraordinary talent and remarkable skill — they exist in every age and every place. In truth they deserve to be called great implements, sharp implements, precious implements. Yet examine the historical record: how many of them achieved lasting merit or lasting virtue? The great majority were exploited by treacherous ministers, entrapped by ruthless strongmen, made accessories to tyranny, bringing disaster upon the nation and calamity upon the people. In their own time their reputations were ruined and their lives destroyed, hated by all. After death they left behind a stench that lingers for ten thousand years, reviled and cursed. The world hates them, curses them. I alone grieve for them, pity them. They were implements, used by others, unable to be their own masters. Only by becoming a noble person can one avoid being exploited.

Someone may ask: "If everyone becomes a noble person, with no one consenting to be used, and there are no more implements in the world — can things still function?" The answer is this: "The noble person is not an implement" does not mean having no use. It means holding within oneself the primal substance from which all manner of implements can be fashioned, yet not assuming a

fixed implement-form. When one sees clearly that the world cannot do without a particular implement, only then does one manifest a kind of divine implement — one possessing wondrous function yet having no fixed material form — to relieve people and benefit things. Once used, it returns at once to primal substance, and one is not appropriated by others. In former times, Confucius served as an overseer of livestock and as a keeper of granaries — this was a modest display of the divine implement's function for people to see. When he served as Minister of Justice and presided at the Jiagu conference, that was because he saw that things could not go on without the divine implement, and he briefly exercised its wondrous function to rescue the state of his father and mother. Yet when Dao could not prevail, he departed at once, never completing even three years in a post — this was returning the divine implement to primal substance. Min Ziqian, though possessed of virtue, firmly refused the Ji clan's summons. He did not dare venture forth to put it to the test — this was because he lacked the ability to transform from the heart and return to primal substance at will. Ran You levied taxes for the Ji clan; Zilu was killed in the turmoil in Wei — not only could they not transform, they could not even conceal their implements. Alas! Not being an implement — how difficult it truly is!

The method for becoming an implement at the right moment is the compass-rule of "following one's heart's desire without overstepping the bounds." Confucius transmitted this to Zengzi. Zengzi developed from it the method of the measuring-square. Zengzi transmitted it to Zisi. Zisi said: "In hewing a handle from a handle, the model is not far off." The "model" there is the same as the compass-rule. Zisi transmitted it to Mencius. Mencius said: "The compass and square are the utmost of circles and squares; the earlier sages and the later sages — their standard is one and the same." The "standard" there is also the compass-rule. And because there was no one to carry on the transmission, and the Way of the Sages was about to perish, they had no choice but to commit to writing even the wondrous method of returning to primal substance. Thus it is written: "Great and transforming — this is called sagely. Sagely and beyond all knowing — this is called divine." After Mencius, few have understood this wondrous method. Among scholars of repute, the most they could manage was to conceal their implements and wait for the right time, preserving themselves through wisdom. Beyond these, all others — heroes, warriors, literati, strategists alike — if employed by a good person, they became fine implements; if employed by a bad person, they became lethal implements. Only Zhang Zifang obtained this method from the Daoist tradition. When Zifang attempted to assassinate the First Emperor of Qin, he was still an untempered sharp blade that could not sheathe its edge. The Old Man of the Yellow Stone transmitted the method to him, and only then could he select, employ, and conceal implements. He manifested as a wondrous implement that set the great wheel in motion. He made use of the Hegemon-King of Chu's fierce implement to destroy the mighty Qin — avenging his lord and kin. He then made use of the Founder of the Han's great implement to destroy Chu — saving the people of all under Heaven. When the work was accomplished, he made his excuse and departed, returning to his primal substance. As for the Marquis of Huaiyin, the Marquises of Jiang and Guan, Xiao He, Cao Shen, and Chen Ping — though they served as generals, chancellors, marquises, and kings — they were merely accessories attached to the great wheel, nothing more.

Beyond Zifang, there was also the Marquis of Wu. Because Wang Mang had falsely invoked the Duke of Zhou, and Cao Cao had falsely posed as King Wen, the reputation by which sages sustained the world had been corrupted beyond repair. The Marquis of Wu wished to rectify this tradition of legitimate succession. Moreover, he was approached by the Former Sovereign with

utter sincerity. And so he revealed himself as an implement of loyalty and integrity. Yet whether leading armies abroad or governing at court, he never changed the garments and cap of his former days — he showed only half his implement-face. Even before leaving his thatched cottage at Longzhong, he already harbored the intention to withdraw. Even that half-revealed implement was one he planned from the start to return to primal substance. Regrettably, the times he encountered were unfavorable, and before he could dissolve the implement and restore the primal substance, the implement itself was shattered. From that time on, even fewer have understood this principle.

Today, the study of implements has been developed to its utmost. It has brought convenient transportation and advancing civilization, and I heartily welcome it. But there remains something higher: the state of not being an implement that becomes a divine implement; the divine implement that dissolves into no implement at all — the most exalted and wondrous study of Dao. I humbly wish to join with all the humane people under Heaven to arise together and investigate it. If the people of the world regard this as pedantic and refuse to inquire even once, then I still have a lesser teaching for preserving one's implement. I respectfully offer a single word of counsel: Conceal your implement and await the right moment.

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