

# Chapter 45



## Translation

Great accomplishment seems incomplete —  
yet its use is never worn away.  
Great fullness seems hollow —  
yet its use is inexhaustible.  
Great straightness seems bent.  
Great skill seems clumsy.  
Great eloquence seems halting.  
Restlessness overcomes cold;  
stillness overcomes heat.  
Clarity and stillness set all under Heaven right.

## Word Notes

- □ — **"lacking"**: Deficient, incomplete.
- □ — **"empty"**: Hollow, void.
- □ — **"clumsy"**: Dull, unskilled.
- □ — **"eloquence"**: Disputation, argumentation.
- □ — **"halting"**: Reticent, not speaking much.
- □ — **"agitation"**: Urgency, restlessness.

## Chapter Explanation

One who has great accomplishment instead seems to have deficiencies — yet the function of his work is never worn away. One who has great fullness instead seems empty — yet the function of his fullness is never exhausted. One who is greatly straight instead seems bent. One who has great skill instead seems clumsy and dull. One who has great eloquence instead seems halting. Yet what is held within will naturally prevail outwardly. Cold and heat are external weather. One who is inwardly agitated can overcome cold — though it is cold, one does not feel cold. One who is inwardly still can overcome heat — though it is hot, one does not feel hot. Therefore, clarity and stillness — nonaction — naturally set all under Heaven right of itself.

## Discourse

In general, all who accomplish something truly great leave no visible trace, as though they had accomplished nothing. Consider Confucius: he gathered the great achievements of all the sages into one — this was a great accomplishment indeed. And yet he transmitted but did not originate, as though he had accomplished nothing. His *De* matched Heaven and Earth; his learning spanned antiquity and the present — this was fullness in the highest degree. And yet in every matter he said, "What do I really have?" — as though he were utterly empty. His meeting with Nanzi and his meeting with Yang Huo were instances of great straightness seeming bent. His being broadly learned yet claiming no specialty to make his name — this was great skill seeming clumsy. He edited the *Odes* and the *Documents*, established the *Rites* and the *Music*, and compiled the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Where principle could not be explained to others, he did not argue with them. And yet a hundred generations later, without any argument, it became clear of itself. Is not the power of nonaction immeasurably great? Why do people not learn from this?

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