

Chapter 47



Translation

Without stepping through the door,
one knows all under Heaven.
Without peering through the window,
one sees the Dao of Heaven.
The farther one ventures out,
the less one knows.

And so the Sage knows without journeying,
perceives without looking,
and brings all things to completion without striving.

Word Notes

- 門 — "**door**": The door of one's dwelling.
- 窗 — "**window**": The window.
- 越 — "**the more... the more**": Increasingly, ever more.

Chapter Explanation

Without going out the door, one can know the affairs of all under Heaven. Without peering out the window, one can perceive the Dao of Heaven. Ordinary people, the farther they venture out, the less they know. Therefore the Sage, without journeying, knows all principles. Without looking, he discerns the names of all things. Without acting, he can accomplish all things.

Discourse

Confucius said to Zigong: "Do you think of me as someone who has learned many things and memorized them all?" Zigong replied, "Yes — is that not so?" Confucius said, "No. I have one thread that runs through it all." This is because Dao gives birth to the myriad beings — it is of one root. If one grasps this one thread and knows the source of all that exists, then the myriad beings are known without seeking to know them.

Otherwise, if one seeks knowledge from the branches and leaves, even if one researches for ten thousand upon ten thousand years and expends an immeasurable amount of spirit and energy, one

will still be unable to discover the ultimate reason of things. And inevitably, the more one researches, the less one perceives and knows. This is because one takes what one perceives and knows to be real, and what one does not perceive and know to be nonexistent. Yet the things of the world — some have form, some are formless; they shift and transform in a thousand ways, ten thousand variations, defying prediction. To cling fixedly to perception and knowledge alone — is this not exceedingly narrow?

In former times, Confucius knew the rites of the Yin and the rites of the Xia; he knew the events of a hundred generations to come. Yet he did not arrive at this through the study of historical records, for the states of Qi and Song lacked sufficient documents and scholars. He knew the shangyang, the one-legged rain-bird; the pingshi, the giant aquatic fruit; the Sushen arrows, flint-tipped shafts of the Sushen people; and the Fangfeng bones, the giant skeletal remains of the Fangfeng clan. Yet none of this was arrived at through the methods of physical science.

Mencius said: "The heavens are so high, the stars and constellations so remote — yet if one seeks the underlying principle, the solstice a thousand years hence can be calculated while sitting." Yet this, too, was not worked out through specialized astronomy or by calculation with a telescope.

The Buddha gazed upon the vast cosmos of three thousand great-thousand worlds as though it lay in the palm of his hand. Yet neither was this achieved through ocean voyages and expeditions, nor through the use of a telescope.

All of this is because the Sage has grasped the root source. The myriad beings all return to him. All that exists lies within one's own nature. What need is there to venture out and look?

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