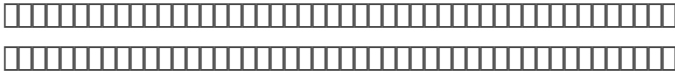


Chapter 63



Translation

Act through nonaction.
Attend to affairs through non-interference.
Taste the tasteless.
Regard the great as small, the many as few.
Repay enmity with De.

Plan for the difficult while it is still easy;
act on the great while it is still small.
The difficult affairs of all under Heaven
must arise from what is easy.
The great affairs of all under Heaven
must arise from what is small.

Therefore the Sage never treats things as great,
and so is able to achieve greatness.
One who promises lightly will rarely keep faith;
one who takes much as easy will meet much that is hard.
Therefore the Sage still regards things as difficult,
and so in the end encounters no difficulty.

Word Notes

- 計 — "**to plan**": To plan for, to deliberate upon.
- 許 — "**promise**": To agree, to assent, to give one's word.

Chapter Explanation

Act with nonaction as one's action. **Attend** to affairs with non-interference as one's approach. **Taste** the tasteless as one's flavor. The **great**, regard as small; the **many**, regard as few. **Repay enmity with De**. **Plan for difficult things** while they are still easy. **Act on great things** while they are still minute. The **difficult affairs** of all under Heaven must begin from what is easy; the **great affairs** of all under Heaven must begin from what is minute. For this reason, the Sage **never waits until things have grown great** before attending to them, and so is able to

accomplish great things. Those who **make promises lightly** will inevitably fail to follow through and prove untrustworthy. Those who **consider too many things easy** will inevitably find much that is difficult. For this reason, the Sage still **treats things as difficult** — and so in the end encounters no difficulty. To treat things as difficult is precisely what ensures they will not become so.

Discourse

The general meaning of the entire chapter concerns acting on difficult things while they are still easy and on great things while they are still small — forestalling disaster before it takes shape, remaining watchful and alert. The entire life's learning of the Marquis of Wu, Zhuge Liang, was drawn from this chapter.

Only the words about "repaying enmity with De" seem at odds with Confucius's teaching, which left me greatly puzzled. After careful reflection, I finally understood. Confucius was speaking for the human realm, and his standard had to be one that every person could practice. That is why he said: "Repay enmity with uprightness." Even repaying enmity with uprightness is something most people find difficult to achieve. If one were to say "repay enmity with De" — would that not be merely pleasant to the ear and impossible to put into practice?

Moreover, the person who asked Confucius about "repaying enmity with De" must have observed that people in the world repay grudge with grudge in an endless, escalating cycle, never reaching a resolution. And so he overcorrected and proposed this idea. But he did not realize that as long as one is conscious of De and enmity and repayment, one still harbors the discriminating mind of self and other. With such a discriminating mind, not only is it impossible to carry out — it also runs contrary to human nature. That is why Confucius did not permit it.

As for what Laozi says about repaying enmity with De — this belongs to the realm of divine transformation, where one has merged into a single body with the myriad beings. Such a person does not know what De is, what enmity is, or what repayment is. Others observe that this person has forgotten both kindness and enmity, and from the outside they describe it as "repaying enmity with De." But in truth, there is no so-called De, no so-called enmity, and no so-called repayment at all.

Revision #2

Created 2026-03-10 22:37:19 UTC by Phil

Updated 2026-03-13 01:43:42 UTC by Phil