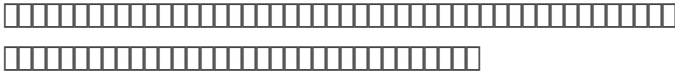


# Chapter 78



## Translation

In all under Heaven, nothing is softer than water,  
yet in attacking the hard and the strong,  
nothing can surpass it —  
for nothing can take its place.

That the soft overcomes the hard,  
the weak overcomes the strong —  
there is no one under Heaven who does not know this,  
yet no one can put it into practice.

Therefore the Sage says:  
"One who bears the filth of the state  
is called the lord of the altars of soil and grain.  
One who bears the calamities of the state  
is called the sovereign of all under Heaven."

Straight words seem paradoxical.

## Word Notes

- 攻 — "**to attack**": To assault, to batter.
- 垢 — "**filth**": Grime, defilement.
- 土神 — "**altar of the earth god**": The earth deity.
- 谷神 — "**altar of the grain god**": The grain deity.

## Chapter Explanation

Of all things soft and weak under Heaven, nothing is softer or weaker than water. And yet in attacking the hard and the strong, nothing can surpass it. This is because water by its nature flows downward, and nothing can change this. Therefore the soft can overcome the hard, and the weak can overcome the strong. No one under Heaven does not know this, yet no one is able to put it into practice. Therefore the Sage said: "One who bears the filth of the entire state is called the lord of the altars of soil and grain. One who bears the calamities of the entire state is called the sovereign

of all under Heaven." These are straight words, yet they seem to say the opposite.

# Discourse

To bear humiliation and place oneself beneath others, to abide in softness and weakness — this is what people loathe. They do not understand that only what is softest and weakest can overcome what is hardest and strongest.

Just look at water and you will understand. Among all things under Heaven, the hard can be broken and the strong can be weakened. But water has already reached the extreme of softness and weakness — there is no way to destroy it further.

Therefore, a person who abides in softness and weakness, who can bear humiliation and place himself beneath others, must possess the capacity for tolerance. One who does not shy away from danger and hardship must possess the capacity for shouldering responsibility.

Such a person can serve as the lord of the state and the sovereign of all under Heaven. He is certain to pursue well-being for the state and all under Heaven.

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