

Chapter 9



Alternate editions read: .

Translation

Hold it and fill it to the brim —
better to have stopped in time.
Temper and sharpen it to a keen edge —
it cannot long be preserved.

Gold and jade may fill the hall,
yet no one can guard them.
Wealth and rank that breed arrogance
invite their own undoing.

When the work is done and the name established,
step back —
this is the Way of Heaven.

Word Notes

- □ — **"to hold"**: To hold fast, to keep.
- □ — **"to grasp"**: To feel out, to probe; to work and shape.
- □ — **"sharp"**: Keen, sharp-edged.
- □ — **"arrogant"**: Proud, haughty.
- □ — **"ruin"**: Misfortune, calamity.

Chapter Explanation

When what you hold has become full, it is better to stop than to overflow. When what you have grasped and sharpened has become keen, it cannot long be preserved. Gold and jade may fill the hall, but they cannot be guarded forever. Wealth and honor joined with arrogance bring ruin upon oneself. When the work is done and the name established, to withdraw and not remain — this is to follow the Dao of Heaven.

Discourse

This chapter says that among all things between Heaven and Earth, whatever has become full must ebb and recede; whatever has been sharpened to a fine edge must break. People of the world do not understand this principle. They know only how to scramble for power and seize profit, pursuing wealth and chasing rank. They do not realize that wealth and rank not only cannot long be preserved — they are also what everyone covets. They become the focus of universal resentment. If one relies on one's wealth and rank and grows arrogant, one only hastens one's own undoing.

Therefore, when the work is done and the name established, one should step back. To have and yet not possess; to be full and yet not complacent; to achieve merit and not dwell in it; to have not the slightest aggressive edge — only this accords with the natural course of the Way of Heaven. Only this can preserve oneself forever.

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