

CHAPTER
4

Section 4

PRIMARY SOURCE *from the Analects*
by Confucius

The Analects, a collection of the teachings of Confucius, was compiled by his students in about 400 B.C. In this excerpt the “Master”—Confucius—expresses his views on being a gentleman. What values and attitudes does Confucius promote?

The Master said, If a gentleman is frivolous, he will lose the respect of his inferiors and lack firm ground upon which to build up his education. First and foremost he must learn to be faithful to his superiors, to keep promises, to refuse the friendship of all who are not like him. And if he finds he has made a mistake, then he must not be afraid of admitting the fact and amending his ways.

Tzu-kung asked about the true gentleman. The Master said, He does not preach what he practises till he has practised what he preaches.

The Master said, A gentleman can see a question from all sides without bias. The small man is biased and can see a question only from one side.

The Master said, A gentleman in his dealings with the world has neither enmities nor affections; but wherever he sees Right he ranges himself beside it.

The Master said, A gentleman takes as much trouble to discover what is right as lesser men take to discover what will pay.

The Master said, A gentleman covets the reputation of being slow in word but prompt in deed.

The Master said, A gentleman who is widely versed in letters and at the same time knows how to submit his learning to the restraints of ritual is not likely, I think, to go far wrong.

The Master said, A true gentleman is calm and at ease; the Small Man is fretful and ill at ease.

At home in his native village his manner is simple and unassuming, as though he did not trust himself to speak. But in the ancestral temple and at Court he speaks readily, though always choosing his words with care.

At Court when conversing with the Under Ministers his attitude is friendly and affable; when conversing with the Upper Ministers, it is restrained

and formal. When the ruler is present it is wary, but not cramped.

When the ruler summons him to receive a guest, a look of confusion comes over his face and his legs seem to give beneath his weight.

When the guest has gone, he reports the close of the visit, saying, “The guest is no longer looking back.”

On entering the Palace Gate he seems to shrink into himself, as though there were not room. If he halts, it must never be in the middle of the gate, nor in going through does he ever tread on the threshold. As he passes the Stance a look of confusion comes over his face, his legs seem to give way under him and words seem to fail him. While, holding up the hem of his skirt, he ascends the Audience Hall, he seems to double up and keeps in his breath, so that you would think he was not breathing at all. On coming out, after descending the first step his expression relaxes into one of satisfaction and relief. At the bottom of the steps he quickens his pace, advancing with an air of majestic dignity. On regaining his place he resumes his attitude of wariness and hesitation.

from Confucius, The Analects of Confucius, Arthur Waley, trans. (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1938).

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Activity Options

- Summarizing Written Texts** Write a list of *do's* and *don'ts* based on these teachings of Confucius. Share your list with the class.
- Synthesizing** With a partner, role-play a discussion about the nature of a true gentleman between Confucius and his student Tzu-kung.

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