



24. *Return*

Return is developmental. Exiting and entering, there is no ill. When a companion comes, there is no fault. Reversing the path, returning in seven days, it is beneficial to have a place to go.

EXPLANATION

Return means coming back. As for the qualities of the hexagram, above is *earth* ☰ ☱, obedient, below is *thunder* ☳ ☴, active; when activity obeys the mind, the heavens turn in their course while human affairs proceed successfully. Also, in the body of the hexagram one yang moves below a group of yins; this is the first return of yang energy. In both senses equally is the path of return, so it is called *return*.

This hexagram represents the return of yang within primordial yin; it

follows on the previous hexagram *adornment*. *Adornment* is being clear-minded and resting in the proper place, thereby to nurture clarity and operate the "fire" to gather primordial true yang. Gathering true yang is the path of returning yang in the midst of yin, reordering personal affairs, by which one can appropriate the creativity of nature and comprehend life and death, so that return is unfailingly developmental.

Though the path of return is developmental, nevertheless people accept the false and neglect the real; most do not know the return of the real. If you know it, it is near at hand—the mind of Tao appears, the human mentality retreats, and you can exit and enter the midst of yin and yang without being adversely affected by yin and yang. It is necessary to know the timing of return; it is not to be forcibly sought before the proper time, and should not be missed once the time has come. Only then can one find the real.

When people are first born, they are all good, with no evil; then when they get mixed up in acquired conditioning, yin injures their yang, and there is loss of original natural reality. But even though it is lost, it is never totally nonexistent; there still is a breath of living potential within. This may appear at times, but people do not recognize it even when it does, because they are deceived by personal desires and confused by worldly affairs.

To return it, restore it, it is necessary to take advantage of times when this living potential appears and set about quickly gathering it—only then can it be one's own. If the living potential has not yet appeared, and you keep to quietude in empty silence, how can it return? Thus it returns "when a companion comes," and only then can one be without fault. The character for "companion" is written as a conjunction of two moons; one is yang, and one is yin. When yin culminates, yang is born; there is yang within yin—this is called "a companion comes." If yin does not culminate, yang is not born, and the companion does not come; if the companion does not come, yin and yang do not interact—then where would creative energy come from?

Therefore it is necessary that a companion come for the living potential to appear; the living potential appears with the interaction of yin and yang—gather it and put it in the furnace of creation, and in a moment calamity turns into blessing, punishment turns into reward. Before there was fault because of loss of true yang; now that true yang is restored, one can be without fault.

But though one can be impeccable by restoring this, the way to do it involves work in an orderly fashion, restoring it gradually; one cannot restore it immediately, or even if one does restore it immediately it cannot be stabilized. It is necessary to first refine oneself and master the mind, waiting for the time to act. Therefore, "reversing the path," reality returns "in seven days." "Reversing" means turning around and operating in reverse, away from progressive conditioning back to the original integrity of the real mind; "seven days" is the number of the yang fire. The energy of harmony of essence and feeling in people is the yang fire; this is the real. The restlessness of acquired energy in people is the yin fire; this is the false.

The real completes life, the false injures life. "Reversing the path" means first reversing this false fire so as to return to the real fire. In seven days the yang fire arises and the yin fire dies out: Utterly empty and silent, within black there is white; the primordial energy becomes manifest from within nothingness. Gradually gathering and refining it, one can crystallize the restored elixir.

This path is not difficult to know, but it is difficult to practice; when you know it, it is most important to practice it. If you know it but do not practice it, that is tantamount to not knowing. "Having a place to go" and promptly setting about cultivating it, it will surely return gradually, from a single yang, until six yangs are pure and complete. What can compare to the growth and fruition of that return?

- ***First yang:*** Returning not far; no regret.
Very auspicious.

EXPLANATION

In the beginning of return, true yang has not been lost; as soon as some external influence creeps in, it is immediately repelled, most serenely and easily. This is return which is not far. Returning not far, the human mentality does not arise, the mind of Tao is always present, and there is naturally no regret. If you can be careful in the beginning, it naturally turns out well. This is return in which the original yang has not been lost.

- ***2 yin:*** Good return; auspicious.

EXPLANATION

When knowledge is limited and one cannot understand how to return to the beginning, but nevertheless one is flexible and receptive in the right way, aspires to equal the wise, sees and associates with superior people imbued with the Tao, borrowing their clear knowledge to break up one's own ignorance, then even one who does not know return will know return, and even one who cannot return will be able to return. This is called good return. This is return in which the weak borrow strength, the flexible borrow firmness.

- ***3 yin:*** Repeated return; danger, no fault.

EXPLANATION

When return to good is not stable, and you return again and again and lose it again and again, this is called repeated return. Yet if your nature is flexible and your will is firm, and you are singlemindedly intent on return, and you handle yourself in danger, if you can do it once you can do it a hundred times, and if you can do it a hundred times you can do it a thousand times. Even though you may be ignorant, you will surely gain understanding, and even though you may be weak you will surely become strong; even though faulty at first, you can thereby come to be without

fault. This is return in which one studies when at a loss and strives diligently to carry it out.

- **4 yin:** Traveling in the center, returning alone.

EXPLANATION

Being flexible but finding what is right and not being influenced by petty people even while in their midst, using the things of the world to cultivate the principles of the Tao, able to be clear-minded by oneself and skillfully returning to the beginning, is return in which one knows by learning and carries it out keenly.

- **5 yin:** Attentive return; no regret.

EXPLANATION

Flexible receptivity in proper balance, following appropriate guidelines, proceeding in an orderly manner, acting on the basis of what is fundamentally inherent and not wishing for what is outside of it, this is called being attentive in returning. Returning to attentiveness, one attains without thought, hits the mark without striving. This comes from natural realization, and since there is no loss, there is also nothing to restore. Not bringing on regret, one is spontaneously free from regret. This is return in which one knows by birth and practices it easily.

- **Top yin:** Straying from return is bad; there is trouble.
A military expedition will end in a great defeat, which is disastrous even for the ruler of the nation; even in ten years there is no victory.

EXPLANATION

At the end of return, following acquired conditioned yin, not knowing primordial yang, doing things by the human mentality, with the mind of Tao totally obscured, this is straying from return and after all not knowing how to turn back; it is inevitable that this momentum will call on misfortune and bring about disaster. People like this are deluded and do not understand: outwardly they contend for victory and crave power, while inwardly their mental spirit is maimed. This is like carrying out a military operation ending in major defeat, which is disastrous even for the ruler of the nation. Even if there should be victory over the long run of ten years, still there will inevitably be only ruin. This is never knowing there is return, from start to finish.

There is the *return* of natural time and the *return* of human affairs. The *return* of natural time is the manifestation of true yang, which comes about spontaneously. The *return* of human affairs is the stabilization of true yang, which comes about through effort. Only when natural time and human affairs are united can there be completion. Leaving aside the top line of the

six, "straying from return," the other five lines all indicate a path of return, whether carried out intensely or calmly or with concerted effort; in all of them the ultimate accomplishment is returning to the original self.



24 *Return*

earth above,
thunder below

Thunder is in the earth; return. Thus did the kings of yore shut the gates on the winter solstice; caravans did not travel, the ruler did not inspect the regions.

Return means reversion and restoration. Above is *earth* ☰ ☱, below is *thunder* ☳ ☴; there is thunder in the earth. Thunder is something very active; when thunder stirs in the earth, the mechanism of enlivening operates, and myriad things are born.

What the ancient kings saw in this was that as everything revives when the positive creative energy operates, so does the living potential return to humans when their positive energy becomes manifest. So they closed the gates on the winter solstice, not allowing caravans to go forth and trade, not allowing the ruler to go out and inspect the regions. This was all to get people to emulate the restoration of heaven and earth, nurturing this point of living potential, not letting it be damaged.

What is the living potential? The potential is the natural innocent mind inherent in humans. This is the progenitor of life, the source of yin and yang. Once it falls into temporal conditioning, it becomes covered by temperament, and cannot be consistently manifest. When it occasionally does manifest, this is the time of the return of the celestial within the mundane.

This time, however, is hard to gain and easy to lose; most people do

not know it, and miss it even when it is right there. Because of this, the mundane gradually grows and the celestial gradually wanes. When the celestial is exhausted and mundanity is complete, there is only death.

The shutting of the gates on the winter solstice is so that when the positive energy returns people will nurture it. Caravans not traveling means not allowing involvement with external artificialities to damage inner reality. The ruler not inspecting the regions means preventing keenness in criticizing others coupled with dullness in cultivating oneself.

Once the gates are closed, one is careful and strict; inwardly thoughts do not arise, external things do not enter. Thus the positive energy cannot leak out.

Thus it was that the ancient kings established their resolve for the sake of the world, and established order to enable the people to live. When superior people who practice the Tao refine themselves and master their minds, illumination arises in inner openness, and the living potential is activated; they should quickly gather it into the furnace of evolution, conscientiously forestall danger, carefully seal it and store it securely, fostering its growth from vagueness to clarity, until there is eventually a return of the celestial energy to pure completeness. This is the same idea as the ancient kings shutting the gates on the winter solstice.

This time when the positive celestial energy first returns is the passageway of life and death; if you can avail yourself of it, you enter the road of life, but if you lose it you wind up on the road of death. "Shut the gates" here means closing the door of death; when the door of death is closed, the door of life opens. Heaven borrows human power, humans borrow celestial power; when heaven and humanity work together, the elixir of immortality crystallizes in a short time, without requiring years of effort. Unfortunately, most people do not seek the personal instruction of a genuine teacher, and miss the opportunity that is right before them.