



23. *Stripping Away*

Stripping away does not make it beneficial to go anywhere.

EXPLANATION

Stripping away is dissolving. As to the qualities of the hexagram, above is *mountain* 艮, stopping, below is *earth* 坤, following: Yin grows as it

goes along and yang stops; furthermore, in the body of the hexagram, there are five yins, which have dissolved it down to one yang—the yang energy is about to be exhausted and the yin energy is about to become pure; therefore it is called *stripping away*.

This hexagram represents acquired yin dissolving yang; it follows on the previous hexagram *biting through*. In *biting through*, action requires understanding, so we first investigate principle. Investigating principle means investigating the principle of waning and waxing of yin and yang.

People are born with five elementary combinations of yin and yang from heaven and earth; once they have life, they have essence—essence and life reside in one body. When people are first born, essence and life are one, the primordial and the temporal are merged into one, yin and yang are as yet undivided, wrong and right are as yet not distinguished; they are the image of wholeness. Then as they grow up and their energy becomes full, the primordial yang culminates and mixes with acquired conditioning—one yin surreptitiously arises. Then as the days and years go by, yin energy gradually grows, and yang energy gradually weakens. Until it wanes completely, yang energy does not stop; this is like the body of this hexagram, which five yins have stripped down to one yang.

At this point, yang cannot overcome yin; what remains is very slight yang. If people do not know this and still take the false for the real, and go somewhere to do something relying on their strength, they will surely come to the complete exhaustion of yang energy, which is very detrimental.

Here developed people have a way to suppress yin and enhance yang, which does not let yin energy dissolve yang completely away. That is where this one point of yang energy is not yet exhausted; they accord with it and stabilize it, getting rid of intellectualism, shutting out conditioning influences, and returning to the fundamental, original foundation.

What does not allow yang to avoid turning to yin is the circulating energy mechanism of heaven and earth; yet what is able to preserve yang in the midst of yin is the power of the practice of reverse operation of sages. Since sages have a path that is before time and yet not violated by nature, they can use it to usurp creation and turn life and death around. As for ordinary people, they go along with the course of creation, which strips away yang by yin; when yang energy has waned away and become pure yin, how can they not die? At the one hexagram *stripping away*, the sage has simply said that it is not beneficial to go anywhere—any who value essence and life would do well to understand this right away.

- **First yin:** Stripping a bed of the legs, destroying rectitude brings misfortune.

EXPLANATION

Yin surreptitiously arising, dissolving yang from the bottom, is like stripping a bed of its legs. The stripping away of the legs of the bed may be slight in terms of energy, but the harm is very great; the misfortune of de-

stroying correctness begins here. This is stripping away in which yin energy has just begun its advance.

- **2 yin:** Stripping a bed of its frame, destroying rectitude brings misfortune.

EXPLANATION

The yin energy creeps up as it grows, like stripping a bed of its frame. Below the frame are the legs, above the frame is the bed; as the yin energy gradually climbs, about to rise onto the bed, it struggles with yang for power—the misfortune of destroying correctness arrives inexorably. This is stripping away in which the yin energy gradually grows strong.

- **3 yin:** Stripping away without fault.

EXPLANATION

At the top of the body of submission (*earth* ☷), not submitting to yin but submitting to yang, corresponding with yang (top line), this is the yin of peace and quiet, even when in stripping away it is possible to be without fault. This is stripping away in which yin energy submits to stopping.

- **4 yin:** Stripping away even the skin on the bed, misfortune.

EXPLANATION

Yin energy has aggregated and climbed up, the six yangs have already been stripped away to the fourth yang, the yin is strong and the yang is weak, and the action takes place on top of the bed—the disaster drawing near is like stripping away even the skin of the person on the bed; misfortune has arrived. This is stripping away in which one does things with yin energy.

- **5 yin:** Leading fish, gaining favor through court ladies: beneficial in every respect.

EXPLANATION

In the middle of the body of stillness (*mountain* ☶), close to yang, the true yin that appears within energy is admitted. The phenomenon of true yin not only does not harm yang, it also can govern the group of yins, leading them to obey the yang. This is like one fish in the lead, with a school of fishes following behind as one; in human terms, it is like a queen advancing to the favor of the king with a group of court ladies. Those who know this use true yin to preserve true yang; thus when one is true all are true, and stripping away cannot strip this away. This is good and beneficial in every respect. For those in whom this is actualized, this is yin energy obeying yang, with no stripping away.

- **Top yang:** A hard fruit is not eaten. The superior person gets a vehicle. The inferior person is stripped of a house.

EXPLANATION

At the end of stripping away, the yangs have been stripped away, still leaving one yang that has not yet been stripped away. Those who know this accord with it and stabilize it, so that it is not damaged by the mass of yin, like a hard fruit that is not eaten. In the fruit is a pit; if you keep the pit, you live, if you lose the pit you die. Life or death is only a matter of gaining or losing this one pit. Ordinary people lose this pit, while superior people keep it. This is because superior people know this pit is the basis of continual renewal of life and continual evolution, and so they preserve it and protect it. Then not only are they invulnerable to yin energy, they can even use yin to complete yang. This is like obtaining a vehicle and riding in it safely. As for inferior people, who follow their desires, they can only press forward and cannot step back; when they have used up yang, they will in the end return to the great flux. This is like being stripped of one's home, losing one's shelter.

Among the six lines of *stripping away*, those in which yin damages yang are inauspicious, while those where yin obeys yang are auspicious. Practitioners should accord with these latter and stop there, so as to preserve the yang. Accordingly stopping there, in the moment of reversal *stripping away* turns into *return*. If people can know that *return* is latent in *stripping away*, and set to work where this one yang is not yet exhausted, then they will find the way to restore the primordial while in the midst of the temporal. How many people can know this celestial device?

23. *Stripping*

mountain above,
earth below

Mountains are joined to the earth. Those above secure their homes by kindness to those below.

Stripping means removing. Above is *mountain* ䷳, below is *earth* ䷁; mountains are joined to the earth. Mountains are high, the earth is low; joining mountains to the earth, the excess of the high is removed and the insufficiency of the low is fulfilled. This is the image of *stripping*.

What those in high positions see in this is that just as mountains cannot be stable unless they are joined to the earth, those in high positions cannot be secure unless they are kind to those below them. Therefore they take away from the high and give to the low, to enable those below to find their places. This is because the people are the basis of the country; when the basis is secure, the country is at peace—then those in high posi-

tions can also live peacefully in their homes and administer noncoercive government.

Among practitioners of the Tao, those with capacity and knowledge are the high ones, and those without capacity or knowledge are the low ones. When those who have capacity do not presume upon it, and those who have knowledge do not depend on it, and they take their excess of capacity and knowledge and pass it on to those lacking in capacity and knowledge, joining the high to the low, being fulfilled but dwelling in emptiness, then elevation is true elevation, fulfillment is true fulfillment. They transform the artificial into reality, rest in ultimate good unwavering, and abide securely in their homes, invulnerable to external influences.

The secure home for humans is benevolence; taking from those above to give to those below, when the inversion is made, *stripping* changes into *return*. Having returned, it is possible to rely on benevolence; the mechanism of enlivening operates, and nature and life are secured. In securing "their homes by kindness to those below" the celestial mechanism is finally revealed.