



33. Withdrawal

Withdrawal is developmental. The small is beneficial and correct.

EXPLANATION

Withdrawal means retracting. As for the qualities of the hexagram, above is *heaven* ☰, strong, and below is *mountain* ☶, still: Strength is based on stillness; using strength with restraint, one has strength yet does not lightly use it arbitrarily. Therefore it is called *withdrawal*.

This hexagram represents storing yang and subduing energy; it follows on the previous hexagram *sensitivity*. *Sensitivity* is the path of producing joy by stillness, harmonizing yin and yang; to harmonize yin and yang, the most important thing is to first subdue energy. Subduing energy means to still strength and not presume upon it.

The quality of strength in people is connected to the primordial true energy; after one yin comes and mates with it, yin energy gradually grows, and yang energy of course recedes. The developed person at this point knows the yin energy is active as a natural process, and can hardly be fought, and so does not set about repelling yin but first aims to preserve yang. Preserving yang means gathering in the vital spirit and stabilizing it in its place, whereby to subdue the primal energy. If you can subdue that energy, the yang energy is not injured, and the yin energy spontaneously sublimates. Thus there is a path of development within withdrawal.

But withdrawal as a path does not mean avoiding yin, nor does it mean sitting there watching the way things turn out; it means using yin to complete yang. In using yin to complete yang, it is most important for withdrawal to be prompt; if prompt, the yang energy is strong and the yin energy is weak, so withdrawal is easy. If tardy, the yang energy is weak and the yin energy is strong, so withdrawal is difficult.

In this hexagram there are two yins and four yangs: The yin energy is still submitting to the yang energy. Withdrawing at this point, withdrawal is preemptive; thus the developmental path of withdrawal exists when the small (yin) is beneficial and correct. The small being beneficial and correct is when the yin energy has not gotten to the point of injuring the yang

energy. When the third yin arises, yin energy is not beneficial and not correct; it gets out of control and beyond withdrawal. Therefore the developmental path of stilling strength and subduing energy must take place just when the second yin has come forth. Then neither yin nor yang is injured, and yin follows the withdrawal of yang; the benefit and correctness of the small is also the benefit and correctness of the great.

- **First yin:** **Withdrawing the tail is dangerous; don't go anywhere with this.**

EXPLANATION

Dwelling in lowliness is like withdrawal of the tail. In withdrawal of the tail, external influences cannot cause injury, so withdrawal is most beneficial. However, because yin is weak and helpless, if one abides in it, one will not avoid instability of withdrawal, being affected by things, bringing danger on oneself. If one does not use it to go anywhere, withdrawal is secure, and there is no danger. This means withdrawal calls for care in the beginning.

- **2 yin:** **Use the hide of a yellow ox to fasten this; no one can loosen it.**

EXPLANATION

When flexible receptivity is properly balanced and rests in its proper place, external influences cannot penetrate; this is like fastening with yellow ox hide, which no one can loosen. Fastening with oxhide means effecting emptiness and keeping quiet, so external objects do not enter and internal thoughts do not come forth. Withdrawal without withdrawing, this is withdrawal not losing control.

- **3 yang:** **Entangled withdrawal has affliction, but it is lucky in terms of feeding servants and concubines.**

EXPLANATION

Yang in the third place is near two yins; strength is pulled by weakness and does not know to withdraw promptly. This is withdrawal that has personal entanglement; that affliction is very dangerous. The true energy in people is like the master, acquired energy is like the servant; getting entangled in yin and thus damaging the real with the artificial is feeding the servant and losing the master—so it is “lucky in terms of feeding servants and concubines.” This is withdrawal having personal entanglements.

- **4 yang:** **A superior person who withdraws well is fortunate, an inferior person is not.**

EXPLANATION

When strength is used flexibly, and one can store away the yang energy when yin energy has just arisen, this is being good at withdrawal, without

personal entanglements: Being as careful of life as of a jewel, not letting any yin energy subtly spring up in the heart, it is therefore good fortune for superior people. If inferior people are adamant in strength and act arbitrarily, not knowing how to subdue energy, accepting the false and damaging the true, this is unfortunate. This means withdrawal should be rid of personal entanglements.

- **5 yang:** Excellent withdrawal; correctness is auspicious.

EXPLANATION

Firm strength correctly balanced, the positive is associated with, the negative is kept at a distance; choosing the good and holding firmly to it is called excellent withdrawal. Excellence of withdrawal does not let the artificial or false damage the real and true; it is correct and auspicious in every respect. This is withdrawal that is ultimately correctly balanced.

- **Top yang:** Rich withdrawal is wholly beneficial.

EXPLANATION

At the top of withdrawal, strength and flexibility merge; myriad things cannot move you, creation cannot bind you—you are free and independent. This is called rich withdrawal. When withdrawal attains richness, inwardly there is no damage, outwardly no loss. Without subduing energy, energy is of itself subdued. This is withdrawal that is wholly beneficial.

Of the six lines, only in the top line is the body of the real undamaged, so there is no effort to preserve strength needed. In the others, yin and yang are mixed, and the body of the real is already defective—so it is necessary to first subdue the energy, and after that not be invaded by external influences. Practitioners of the Tao should practice the path of nondoing when the body of the real has not been damaged, so as to nurture yang; but once the body of the real has become even a little defective, it is necessary to practice the work of subduing energy so as to guard against yin. The bodies are not the same, so the functions are also different; it is important to know this precisely, for it is an individual matter.



33. *Inaccessibility*

heaven above,
mountain below

There are mountains under heaven, which is inaccessible. Thus do superior people keep petty people at a distance, being stern without ill will.

Inaccessibility means no one can know you. Above is *heaven* ☰, below is *mountain* ☶; there are mountains under the sky. The sky can contain the mountains, but the mountains cannot get near the sky; this is the image of *inaccessibility*.

What superior people see in this is that when people bring trouble on themselves, being injured by petty people, it is because of being narrow and intolerant. Therefore superior people keep petty people at a distance, being stern yet without ill will. To keep petty people at a distance does not mean to avoid them but rather to cause petty people to keep their distance. Not having ill will means to deal with people tolerantly and generously, while being stern means to control oneself firmly.

Superior people who practice the Tao have minds as vast as the sky, embracing all existence, yet aloof of it all. Tolerant of everyone, they live in the world without destroying it, they are in the midst of the mundane yet can transcend the mundane. They are not disliked by lesser people, yet as their self-discipline and conduct are beyond the ordinary, and because they are conscientious, lesser people avoid them even though they themselves do not try to avoid lesser people.

This is like mountains under heaven; no matter how high the mountains are, they cannot get close to heaven. Nothing under heaven is as high or large as mountains are, yet heaven can contain even that which is as high or as large as mountains—how much the more so that which is not so high or large. Only when practitioners of the Tao have the capacity to contain mountains, as it were, can they sustain the heavenly practice and cultivate the heavenly Tao. Being inaccessible without hiding, they are near to invulnerability.

False followers of Taoism in the world who are small-minded and intolerant and get irritated and angry at every encounter and confrontation are naturally disliked and avoided by petty people, but they are never free of obstacles.