



22. Adornment

Adornment is developmental. It is beneficial to go somewhere in a minimal way.

EXPLANATION

Adornment means beautification. As for the qualities of the hexagram, above is *mountain* ䷳, still, and below is *fire* ䷲, luminous: clear about where to rest, resting in what is clarified, one naturally clarifies illumination and rests in the highest good; therefore it is called *adornment*.

This hexagram represents hidden practice and secret cultivation; it follows on the previous hexagram *observing*. *Observing* is the path of spiritual clarity and alert observation, gradually progressing along with time; alert and observant, one turns the awareness around to look within. Wise yet appearing ignorant, adept yet appearing inept, one stabilizes clarity, so that clarity develops, and understands stopping and stilling, so as to rest in the appropriate place. Clarity and stillness adorn each other; thus clarity is not misused, and stillness does not degenerate into quietism. Clarity is the body of stillness, stillness is the function of clarity; thus clarity is not damaged and stillness is correct, so clarity and stillness are developmental.

Although clarity and stillness adorn each other, one should value still clarity. Still clarity is not empty inaction that does not use illumination at all. But while one is illumined within, one does not show it outside. One rests in clarity and does not rest where it is unclear. Clarity is within stillness; one does not lightly use the clarity of illumination. This is the meaning of self-minimization.

Minimizing oneself, one is prudent and cautious, getting rid of intellectualism, inwardly preserving clarity of spirit; with open awareness that is unclouded, one cannot be moved by anything. There is much benefit in this, but minimization that is too extreme is stillness without illumination; it is not the form of union of clarity and stillness that this hexagram represents—how could it be developmental or beneficial?

Stillness means resting in the highest good, being tranquil and imperturbable. Clarity means clarifying the quality of illumination, being sensitive and effective. Uncontrived when quiet, creative when active, clear in stillness, tranquilly employing illumination, attaining it in the mind and proving it in affairs, only then is it called true stillness and true clarity. When the text here says “it is beneficial to go somewhere,” this simply means that this is the way to test and prove this stillness and clarity. When ordinary people have no concerns their minds are clear, and they know

where to rest, but when they have matters to attend to they get muddled and confused, and don't know where to rest.

If one can be still by virtue of clarity, thereby to nurture illumination, and can be clear by virtue of stillness, thereby to master illumination, clarity and stillness will not be restricted, and can be used according to the time, planting lotuses in fire, hauling a boat through mud and water, the ineffable being of one spirit pervading the universe, clear in stillness and resting in the place to rest.

- **First yang:** Adorning the feet, leaving the car and walking.

EXPLANATION

Being firm and clear-minded, voluntarily humble and self-effacing, living embracing the Tao, is like adorning the feet. The firmness of adorning the feet does not let external artifice injure internal reality; therefore one leaves the car and is content to walk. This is the adornment of firmly preserving rectitude.

- **2 yin:** Adornment is seeking.

EXPLANATION

Dwelling in between two yangs, emptying oneself and seeking others, knowing one's personal understanding has a limit while the understanding of many people is endless, one must seek before knowledge and vision can expand. This is the adornment of weakness borrowing strength.

- **3 yang:** Adorned and luxuriant, perpetual rectitude is auspicious.

EXPLANATION

When firm clarity is excessive, and one only knows how to use understanding and does not know how to open understanding, the clarity of understanding will surely not reach far. Thereby one is "adorned and luxuriant," but it is best if one's firmness is correct, never changing in constancy. Then even if one cannot adorn the exterior, still one can adorn the interior, also a way to bring good fortune. This is the adornment of being firm and acting with clarity.

- **4 yin:** Adorned or plain? A white horse runs swiftly. It is not an enemy but a mate.

EXPLANATION

Dwelling in the upper body, weak and unclear, there is correspondence with the first yang, and one is not ashamed to lower oneself to inquire. Therefore "Adorned or plain? A white horse runs swiftly," hurriedly seeking clarity because of unclarity. However, because one above seeks below, there is the danger of self-importance, which makes most people insin-

cere. It is best if one finds what is right when one is weak; the true heart and genuine intention come forth spontaneously, not forced—when there is no enmity or injury, then it is desirable to seek partnership. This is the adornment of the weak seeking clarity.

- **5 yin:** Adornment in the hills and groves, the roll of silk is small; there is shame, but it turns out well.

EXPLANATION

Being flexible but not firm, holding to the mean without power, alone and silent, keeping to quietude, thus “adornment in the hills and groves, the roll of silk is small.” “Hills and groves” are the wide open spaces where there are no people, and no social concerns. A small amount of silk, yet rolled up, means there are no formalities to be concerned about. No society and no manners is excessively austere, not close to human sensibilities; so it is something practitioners of Tao are ashamed of. However, if flexibility is balanced, even if one does not illumine the great Tao, still one does not slip into quietism, and after all will be able to complete the path auspiciously. This is the adornment of flexibility and self-sufficiency.

- **Top yang:** Adornment by simplicity is impeccable.

EXPLANATION

When firmness and flexibility match each other one naturally clarifies illumination and rests in the highest good, adorned without adornment. When adornment reaches colorlessness, this is called adornment by simplicity. When adornment is utterly plain, clarity and stillness are unified, energy and substance both transmute, integrating with celestial principle, without the slightest fault of human desire. This is the adornment of merging of firmness and flexibility.

So in terms of adornment as a path, the mutual necessity of clarity and stillness is what must be considered important. Understanding stillness and resting in the appropriate place, stabilizing illumination so that its clarity is not clouded, using clarity and stillness according to the time—herein lies the work of hidden cultivation and secret practice.



22. Adornment

mountain above,
fire below

There is fire below the mountain, adorning it. Thus do superior people clarify government affairs, without presumptuous adjudication.

Adornment is beautification. Above is *mountain* ䷳, below is *fire* ䷲; there is fire below the mountain. When there is fire below the mountain, everything below the mountain is bathed in its light, and the fire illumines the mountain. This is the image of *adornment*.

What superior people see in this is that just as the light of a fire below a mountain is not great, when people are lacking in capacity their vision is not far reaching; therefore the superior people administer and clarify the simple matters of government affairs, and do not act presumptuously in difficult matters of adjudication.

Government affairs include such matters as the state of the manners and mores of the populace, finance, taxation, and civil proceedings. The thriving or decay of government affairs is obvious and easy to see; they are not difficult to manage, and can be changed when mistakes occur. When

it comes to the matter and adjudication of criminal cases, however, where life is at stake, there are obscure factors that are difficult to discern; any lack of clarification can bring disaster on the innocent. Therefore only the wise and perspicacious can judge. Not judging presumptuously thus has the meaning of respect for life.

The use of illumination by practitioners of the Tao is also not beyond this principle. Social relations and daily activities are like the affairs of government; the profound and recondite science of fulfilling nature and arriving at the meaning of life is like adjudication. Social relations are the human Tao; fulfilling nature and arriving at the meaning of life are the celestial Tao. The human Tao is obvious and easy to see; anyone with a bit of capacity and intelligence can handle it. When it comes to the celestial Tao, however, it requires the verbal transmission and mental communication of a true teacher, great enlightenment and great penetration, before it is possible to manage it correctly.

When the celestial Tao is truly realized, whatever comes to hand is the Tao; benefiting oneself, one can also benefit others. This is the greatest accomplishment. If one does not have the transmission of a genuine teacher and imposes judgments by arbitrary guesswork, even the slightest error produces a great loss, and misapprehension of human nature and life. How can one judge presumptuously?

Not being presumptuous is the teaching of sages that enables people to nurture small understanding so as to gradually seek great understanding. It will not do to presume upon small understanding and thereby ruin the great work, deluding oneself and deluding others. Indeed, a little bit of knowledge can deceive people very much.