



### 3. *Difficulty*

**In difficulty, creativity and development are effective if correct. Do not use. There is a place to go. It is beneficial to set up a ruler.**

#### EXPLANATION

*Difficulty* means having trouble progressing. As for the qualities of the hexagram, above is the pitfall of *water* ☵☵, below the movement of *thunder* ☳☳. Acting in danger, action in danger cannot easily get out of danger; so it is called *difficulty*. This hexagram represents starting the advancement of yang; it follows on the hexagram *heaven*. *Heaven* is the quality of strength; advancement of yang is advancement of that strength. It is precisely because of not being strong that one promotes strength.

The quality of strength is primordial real yang, the original true energy. When this energy mixes with acquired conditioning, it is concealed. But even though it is not manifest, it never completely disappears; sometimes it does appear. But people are confused by things of the world, enveloped in wandering thoughts, so they miss it even when it is right there, unwilling to recognize reality.

When this primal energy appears, this is what is called the "living midnight" in our bodies. At this time we are merged in the qualities of heaven and earth, joined with the light of sun and moon, harmonized with the order of the four seasons. This is the gate of yin and yang, the

door of life and death, the wellspring of essence and life, the root of strength and submission, the crucible for creating life, the alchemical furnace.

The original energy of primordial true yang is herein: Those who know it diligently cultivate it, restoring the primordial within the temporal. From vagueness, it becomes clear; from one yang it gradually grows, until it inevitably reaches the pure completeness of six yangs. This means that in difficulty too there is a path of creativity and development.

However, people are restricted by temperament, influenced by accumulated habit; the primal energy of true yang is deeply buried. Even though there be a time of restoration, the true sane energy is weak and aberrated energy is strong; as long as the true does not prevail over the false, it cannot immediately expand and rise. So it is a matter of carefully containing and securely storing it, preserving this living potential, not letting it be damaged by external influences, making it the basis of restoration. This is why the text says "effective if correct," and it also says "Do not use. There is a place to go."

Correctness is not vacant emptiness without action; "do not use" does not mean there is absolutely nothing to do. But when you have done things by the human mentality for a long time, the mind of Tao is not manifest. Restoring the positive within negativity is action in danger; if you proceed recklessly, desirous of rapid progress, you will increase the danger.

If you want to restore positivity, it is best to first correct the mind. When the text says "It is beneficial to set up a ruler," this symbolizes correcting the mind. The ruler is the leader of a country, the mind is the leader of the body. Set up a ruler, and the difficulties of the nation can gradually be overcome; rectify the mind, and the perils of the body can gradually be dissolved.

Once the mind is right, the root is firm, and the original energy does not dissipate: then one can "advance the fire" according to the time, gradually culling, gradually refining; then what has been lost can be regained, what has gone can be restored. Benefit lies in correctness while in action; this action is not random action, but properly timed action. Then whatever is begun develops, and whatever develops bears fruit.

- **First yang:** Not going anywhere, it is beneficial to abide in correctness. It is beneficial to set up a ruler.

#### EXPLANATION

Firm in the beginning of difficulty, the positive energy at the base, like the foundation of a house, it is beneficial to abide in correctness and make the basis firm. This is like the ruler of a nation; it is beneficial to set up the ruler and nurture the original energy.

- **2 yin:** Difficult to advance, hard to make progress. Mounted on a horse, not going forward. It is not a

**matter of enmity, but marriage. The girl is chaste, not engaged: After ten years she is engaged.**

#### EXPLANATION

Right in the middle of difficulty, one therefore has difficulty making progress—hardship in advancing. With flexible receptivity correctly balanced, one refines oneself and waits for the proper time to act, therefore is “mounted on a horse, not going forward.” Mounted on a horse, not going forward, means that one wants to act but does not act. One does not injure people by the newborn yang, as an enemy, but wants to wait until yin and yang are balanced, to seek a match in marriage. The image of waiting for the proper time for marriage is of a girl who is chaste and not engaged becoming engaged after ten years. This means not seeking immediate solutions when in difficulty.

- **3 yin:** Chasing deer without a guide, just going into the forest. The superior person, knowing the dangers, had better give up; to go would bring regret.

#### EXPLANATION

Petty people without knowledge act arbitrarily, in ignorance, wrongly coveting the celestial treasure; they act dangerously on a dangerous basis. This is like “chasing deer without a guide, just going into the forest.” And it is no surprise. As for superior people who understand the Tao, they should know the dangers, and had better give up and wait for the proper time. If you do not wait for the proper time and rush forward in hopes of speedy accomplishment, you will certainly regret having beckoned danger. This is rushing to seek solutions when in difficulty.

- **4 yin:** Mounted on a horse yet not going forward. Seeking marriage, it is good to go, beneficial all around.

#### EXPLANATION

Flexible yet correctly oriented, refining oneself and awaiting the proper time, the real yang is in view: Precisely the time when one should blend the elixir, one should not slip up on the threshold; therefore, “seeking marriage, it is good to go, beneficial all around.” This is seeking solutions according to the time when in difficulty.

- **5 yang:** Stalling the benefits. Rectitude in small matters is good. Self righteousness in great matters brings misfortune.

#### EXPLANATION

The firmness of yang centrally balanced, the spiritual embryo takes on form; one has “filled the belly,” and it is as though one has received bene-



fit. However, though the spiritual embryo has formed, negative energy has not yet withdrawn, and one is still in danger; this is like “stalling the benefits.” At this point striving ends and nonstriving comes to the fore. Therefore propriety in small matters is good, while self-righteousness in great matters brings misfortune. This is being great but conscious of the small, waiting for the time to be able to get out of difficulty.

- **Top yin:** Mounted on a horse, not going forward, weeping tears of blood.

#### EXPLANATION

At the end of difficulty, this is now the time to get out of difficulty. Weak and helpless, one is astride a horse but does not go forward, and has no whip in one's hand. Though true yang is in view, one still cannot get it oneself, and weeps tears of blood—of what use is it in fact? This is being small and incapable of greatness, having difficulty even when there is no difficulty.

Generally speaking, in the course of operating the fire advancing yang, it is necessary to know the proper timing. By knowing the time to take the medicine, using the temporal to restore the primordial, one can get out of difficulty, one can resolve difficulty. If you do not know the proper timing, and go too far or not far enough, real yang will be trapped by negative energy and will not be able to get out. This is why the statement of the hexagram says that creativity and development are effective if correct; only when correct can they be effective. When effective, the creativity leads to development. Creativity and development that are effective by correctness mean waiting for the appropriate time to get out of difficulty.



### 3. *Difficulty*

water above,  
thunder below

**Thunder in the clouds is held back; the superior person orders and arranges.**

Difficulty means being held back. The reason water ☵, on the top of the hexagram, is here referred to as clouds rather than water is that rain falls from clouds. When thunder ☳ rumbles in the clouds, and there is already the sense of rain, but the rain has not yet begun to fall, just when yin and yang have intertwined and are about to bring to pass what has not yet been possible—this is the image of *difficulty*.

What superior people see in this is that primordial celestial energy is trapped by the force of mundane conditioning, and though it occasionally becomes manifest, it is inhibited and cannot come forth freely: Without effort to foster the celestial and control the mundane, it is hard to gain access to this primal energy, and easy to lose it, missing it even when it is right there.

Therefore, based on its manifest action, the superior person “orders and arranges” the primordial celestial energy, in the sense of cultivating and maintaining it. To “order” means to harmonize the celestial and the earthly, to “arrange” means to adjust their relative proportions. Order without proper arrangement cannot perfect anything; knowledge of the ingredients without knowledge of the process cannot accomplish the Tao.

At the point where one yang arises on the ground of *water* ☵, the passage of contact of earth and heaven, the dividing bridge of life and death, the moment when both disaster and good fortune are possible, practitioners of Tao should quickly set to work, take command, carefully guard the budding awareness, and not let it be harmed by invasion of the force of mundanity.

When you gather the celestial energy as it grows, working uninterruptedly, ordering and arranging, promoting the primal and minimizing the secondary, knowing when to stop at sufficiency, if you do not slip up, even though the celestial energy does not come through at first, eventually it will unfold and expand, like thunder rumbling in the clouds, sweet rain falling of itself. This is what is meant by the saying “After a long darkness, the light is brilliant.”