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## 21. *Biting Through*

**Biting through is developmental. It is beneficial to administer justice.**

### EXPLANATION

*Biting through* has the meaning of the mouth closing when eating something. In the body of the hexagram, the yangs on the top and bottom sym-

bolize lips, the three yins symbolize teeth, and the yang in the middle represents something in the mouth. Also the qualities of the hexagram are *fire* ☲, luminous, above, and *thunder* ☳, active, below: Acting with unfailing clarity, acting only after clear understanding, it has the meaning of action that is not in vain; therefore it is called *biting through*.

This hexagram represents the study of investigating things and finding out principle; it follows on the previous hexagram of *overseeing*. In *overseeing*, two yangs oversee four yins, whereby to advance yang and gather medicine. However, the medicinal substances have different degrees of gravity and energy, the firing process has intervals of time; the slightest miss can produce a tremendous loss; so this work of finding out principle is indispensable.

Excellence or inferiority in learning to comprehend essence and life is all a matter of finding out principle. Understanding one part, you can practice one part; understanding ten parts, you can practice ten parts. If you know essence but not life, or know life but not essence, or know striving but not nonstriving, or know nonstriving but not striving, or know the medicinal substances but not the firing process, or know the start but not the finish, this is all incomplete investigation of principle, which will inevitably result in failure of practice.

If you want to act on something, you should first understand it; first understanding, then acting, all actions will be as you will. This is why *biting through*, using action within understanding, is developmental. Action with clarity is always based on understanding; its development and fruition may be symbolized by the administration of justice. Nothing in the world is harder to administer than justice; if the true conditions of justice are not clear, right is considered wrong and wrong is considered right—arbitrarily applying penalties, the calamity extends to the innocent, mistakenly injuring essence and life.

Practice of the Tao is like administering justice: Discerning true and false, right and wrong, is like the judge deciding good and bad; getting rid of falsehood and keeping truth, so as to preserve essence and life, is like the justice administration rewarding the good and punishing the bad, so as to alleviate the burden of injustice. When you investigate and find out true principle, it is clear in the mind and evident in practice; fully realizing essence and perfecting life, it is unfailingly developmental and beneficial.

- **First yang:** Wearing stocks stopping the feet, there is no blame.

#### EXPLANATION

If one is strong but unenlightened and goes forward rashly, this forward movement will surely bring error. This is why stocks are put on to stop the feet, so as to regulate one's steps and prevent wrong moves. If one does not make any wrong moves in the beginning, one will not bring about error and blame in the end. This indicates that in traveling the path it is important to first thoroughly investigate its principles.

- **2 yin:** Biting skin, cutting off the nose.  
There is no blame.

## EXPLANATION

If one is weak and not firm, and one's perception of principle is not yet true, one gets only the surface skin and does not yet get the deep gristle. If one is in a hurry to practice principles that are not truly understood, this will not only fail to help one's inner state, it will also harm one externally. This is like biting skin and cutting off the nose. The nose is that by which fragrance and odor are distinguished. When the mouth eats something, the nose smells it first: As the mouth does not know the flavor, though the nose can discern it, it is still of no use. It is fortunate if when one is weak one is still balanced, and does not presume to practice as long as perception of principle is not yet true. Then one may be without blame. This is investigating principle without yet penetrating it.

- **3 yin:** Biting on dried meat, running into poison.  
There is a little shame, but no blame.

## EXPLANATION

On top of two, the conscious perception is a bit higher than those two, and is a stage further advanced than the two. This is like biting dried meat. Meat is inside skin: When meat is dried, it is necessary to tear into it to taste the flavor. In this third place, though one is advancing, one has not yet attained the real. It seems to be right, but isn't; if one acts in error, it will surely bring on trouble, like biting into dried meat and coming upon poison. So if the will is strong but the nature is weak, one will not be able to accomplish things, yet neither will one fail; though there is a little shame, after all one can be without blame. This is investigating principle and gradually penetrating.

- **4 yang:** Biting bony dried meat, one gets the wherewithal to proceed. It is beneficial to work hard and be upright: This leads to good results.

## EXPLANATION

Dwelling in the body of light (*fire*), above three, investigation of principle has advanced a stage beyond those three. This is like biting bony dried meat. Bony dried meat is meat on the bone; it is sinewy and bony, and when it is dried it is not easy to strip off the meat. If one does not penetrate cuttingly and go in deeply, one cannot see reality; in terms of representation, this is getting the wherewithal to proceed, while in terms of principle this indicates the benefit of hard work in the correct manner. The benefit of hard work in the correct manner is that one can forcibly discern what one could not discern, attaining deep realization, penetrating every subtlety, so as to be able to strip away all falsehood, which only seems to be right, and thus find the reality with lucid clarity. When one clearly under-



stands action, one's actions are all bound to lead to good results. This is investigating principle and seeing truth.

- **5 yin:** Biting into dry meat and finding gold, if one is correct and cautious, then there is no error.

#### EXPLANATION

Above four, flexible, open, balanced, the investigation of principle is a stage more advanced than the four. This is like biting dry meat. When investigation of principle reaches the fourth stage, right and wrong and false and true are clearly distinguished. This is like dry meat that is flavorless when bitten into, and is not to be chewed on further. However, even though there is no flavor, one should still be familiar with the old and know the new, doing further work on the principles one has already understood; seeking further clarification of what is already clear, one can make sure there is not the slightest doubt or confusion, and then seriously put it into practice. This is represented as finding gold, and in terms of principle means being correct and cautious. Gold means understanding that is ultimately balanced; being correct and cautious means being right yet remaining alert and wary. Open and balanced, alert and wary, one will truly see that there is a primary principle; understanding it within and proving it without, all acts conform with the Tao and all affairs are auspicious. This is finding out principle with no doubt whatsoever.

- **Top yang:** Wearing a cangue, destroying the ears—misfortune.

#### EXPLANATION

If one is strong but unenlightened, not knowing how to distinguish truth, one misuses intelligence and gets sidetracked, wasting a whole life, eventually going to one's destruction. This is why wearing a cangue or pillory-like yoke, destroys the ears. If the eyes are bright and the ears sharp, but one cannot understand truth, one should shut the eyes—why go so far as to destroy the ears? In general, when deluded people do not understand the great Tao, it is because of wrong study and wrong inquiry, listening to blind teachers, not distinguishing reality from falsehood, either sticking to emptiness or clinging to appearances; when they therefore bring on misfortune and suffer harm, the root of the calamity is in the ears. What comes from you returns to you; if you are unclear in the beginning, you suffer injury in the end—this is certain. This is not knowing how to find out principle at all.

So the work of investigating principle requires you to strip off layer after layer, stripping away until you get to the bones and marrow of the Tao. When there is no doubt or confusion at all, only then is this true knowledge and clear vision. If you haven't gotten to the marrow of the Tao, there is still obstruction, and you cannot be said to have found reality; you should not act arbitrarily, for then you will bring disaster on yourself.

“Even if you know the cinnabar and lead, it is useless if you don’t know the firing process. The whole thing depends on the power of cultivation; if you deviate in the slightest, you won’t form the elixir.” Indeed, the work of investigating principle is no small matter.



## 21. *Biting Through*

fire above,  
thunder below

**Thunder and lightning, biting through. Thus did the kings of yore clarify penalties and proclaim laws.**

Biting through is when the mouth closes in the process of eating something. Above is *fire* ☲, below is *thunder* ☳; the fire accompanying thunder is lightning. This is thunder and lightning in the same place. Thunder shakes things, lightning illumines things. Within punishment there is reward, within killing there is vivifying. It is like when eating something the mouth must close; it does not move at random, and when it moves it discerns the flavor of the food. This is the image of *biting through*.

What the kings of yore saw in this was that when violent and vicious people walk inescapably into the jaws of death, it is because they do not know there is criminal law; therefore they established laws clarifying

major and minor penalties so that people would know that they should not commit crime. When there were those who did not accept the rule of the kings and intentionally transgressed even though they knew the laws, the kings assessed the gravity of their offenses, proclaiming uniform laws so that people would know the law cannot be escaped.

First informing people with clarifications, then punishing offenders with authority, life and death are clear, punishment and reward are both used. When those who execute the law do not impose unjust punishments, and those subject to the law accept the consequences of their deeds, there is no barrier between the two sides. This is represented as biting through.

Penalties and laws were explained and established by ancient kings for the sake of the world and the livelihood of the people. Those who administer laws should emulate the ancient kings in first clarifying them before executing them, in order to avoid mistakenly injuring life.

The people who have false ideas about attainment of the Tao, who are unable to first thoroughly examine its principles, but take up practice recklessly and get sidetracked in auxiliary methods, either clinging to emptiness or sticking to form, wishing to seek long life but instead hastening death, are like the criminals in the times of the ancient kings. They are chewing on nothing, they have nothing to get their teeth into—what is the benefit in fact?