



20. *Observing*

Observing, one has washed the hands but not made the offering; there is sincerity, which is reverent.

EXPLANATION

Observing means alert observation, being careful. As for the qualities of the hexagram, above is *wind* ☴, penetrating, and below is *earth* ☷, receptive; it has the meaning of gradually progressing in accord with proper timing, advancing without impetuosity, with alert observation; therefore it is called *observing*.

This hexagram represents alert observation with clarity of mind; it follows on the previous hexagram *degeneration*. In *degeneration*, wind is inside stopping, which stops yin energy from entering; this is how degeneration is corrected. The way of correcting degeneration is not possible without the achievement of attentive observation with clarity of mind.

The achievement of attentive observation is all a matter of restoring the primordial while in the midst of the temporal, reversing the ordinary flow while in its very midst. When the yin in people is strong and the yang is weak, it is like the present hexagram's four yins arising one after another while the two yangs gradually dissolve; the strength of yang energy is going to be erased by yin energy. Attentive observation with clarity of mind reverses this weak yang so that it is not injured by yin energy.

But people's temperaments are fixated, and accumulated habits are already deep-seated. The yin energy cannot be made submissive all at once, so it is necessary to use gradual cultivation, going along with its desires to gradually soften and guide them, causing it to naturally evaporate, naturally transform, naturally submit, naturally retreat.

This means that when the real comes the false naturally submits; if one can be truthful inwardly, then acquired influences will naturally disappear. Yang gradually advances upward, and yin submissively retreats downward. Yang governs yin and yin obeys yang; yin and yang in harmony, inside and outside are one. This is like when honoring a deity, when one has washed the hands but not yet made the offering, there is sincerity, which is reverent. Whenever you honor a deity, first you clean your hands and make your faith sincere within; after that you present offerings, reverent without. By the gradual effect of sincerity, you communicate with the spirit of the deity, not in a physical sense. This is the meaning of looking up to a deity.

The path of cultivation of reality is like honoring a deity: first you make the mind sincere and truthful, then you practice it in the body. Spiritual clarity works silently, swift without being hasty, entering by sincerity, functioning with flexibility, penetrating the barrier between yin and yang, producing light in the openness within. From observation of the spirit reaching observation of the great, a black pearl hangs in the great void, illuminating the whole world as though it were in your palm. Then every step is in accord with the sublime Tao; all yin submits and all yang returns.

The understanding of the spirit is up to the person: It requires clear knowledge of the subtle meaning of this hexagram, being receptive yet advancing like the wind, the advance based on receptivity. If you know this, then with spiritual observation and great observation you preserve the real and eliminate the false, so there is eternal life. If you don't know it, then with small observation and shortsightedness you accept the false and reject the real, thus injuring life. It is simply a matter of the difference between truth and falsehood in observation.

- **First yin:** Ignorant observation is not blamed in inferior people, but is shameful in superior people.

EXPLANATION

In the extreme of ignorance, people ruin and abandon themselves, willingly remaining in base folly without changing. Stubborn ignorance and opinions without knowledge are not worth blaming in inferior people whose only concerns are material comforts, but when it comes to superior people who practice the Tao, who should observe the great and not the small, if they willingly remain in a base state, this is simply shameful. This is the lowest observation.

- **2 yin:** Peeking observation is beneficial for a woman's chastity.

EXPLANATION

When flexible yet balanced, even when in the midst of inferior people one is not influenced by them. But even if one is not influenced, when only cultivating one's own yin without seeking the yang of the other, one's vision is not far-reaching; it is like observing by peeking out from inside the door, not daring to go out the door. In women, it is beneficial for keeping their chastity, but when it comes to men doing work it is not advantageous. This is observation which is not far-reaching.

- **3 yin:** Observing personal growth, promoting and repelling.

EXPLANATION

On the boundary of upper and lower observation, this is observing whether one's personal growth is good or bad, and promoting the good while repelling the bad. Observing one's own growth, if it is actually good, one promotes it, and also observes the good in others to increase one's own good where it is deficient. Observing something that is not good in one's growth, one withdraws from it and repels it, but does not immediately observe the good in others, first getting rid of what is not good in oneself. This is observation knowing when to advance and when to withdraw.

- **4 yin:** Observing the glory of the country, it is beneficial to be the guest of a king.

EXPLANATION

Being flexible and finding what is right, associating with people imbued with the Tao, is called observing the glory of the country. When one is able to observe the glory of the country, borrowing the great vision of others to remedy one's own small vision, then the small can become great. Letting another be the host while one is the guest oneself, this is like the benefit of being the guest of a king. This is observation borrowing greatness through humility.

- **5 yang:** Observing personal growth, a superior person is blameless.

EXPLANATION

When *wind* advances into the position of central balance, firmness and flexibility match each other: Just as when the great medicine emerges and crystallizes the jewel of life, observing personal growth is observing the great medicine produced in the self and returning it to correct balance. When the medicine returns to correct balance, the medicine itself is the fire, the fire itself is the medicine—in one hour you watch the elixir form. But the accomplishment of this one hour is hard to attain and easy to lose; it is necessary to be a superior person of great vision with profound understanding of the firing process before one is free from stumbling in error. This is great observation with striving.

- **Top yang:** Observing the growth, the superior person is blameless.

EXPLANATION

At the end of observation, the spiritual embryo is already formed, and one can dwell in flexibility with strength, from observation of the great again observing the spirit, giving up striving and entering into nonstriving. Observing growth here means observing the surreptitious growth of yin energy so as to repel it. When yin energy is completely withdrawn and yang energy is pure and whole, the real person emerges, not bound by creation. Only then is one a superior person practicing the Tao. This is observation completing beginning and end impeccably. This is nonstriving spiritual observation.

So the path of alert observation, involving observing the spirit and also extensive observation, should never be departed from by those who practice the Tao. It begins with striving, by extensive observation, and ends in nonstriving through spiritual observation. When spiritual observation and great observation are as one, the medicine is real, the firing process is in order; how could the gold elixir not develop? The function of observation is great indeed.



20. *Observing*

wind above,
earth below

Wind is over the earth, observing. Thus did the kings of yore set up education after examination of the region and observation of the people.

Observing is watching, looking. Above is *wind* ☴, below is *earth* ☷; there is wind blowing over the earth. When wind blows over the earth, wherever it goes everything sways and dances along with it; this is like people being moved and influenced by what they observe. This is the image of *observing*.

What the ancient kings saw in this was that every particular region has its own atmosphere, every particular region has its own character; therefore it will not do to cling to one system to teach or rule them all. Hence they examined the atmosphere of each region and observed the character of the people, setting up education according to the region and giving guidance according to the person.

Just as the wind blowing over the earth goes over hill and dale, east, west, south, north, unhindered wherever it goes, so also was the teaching of the kings of yore. All those who are invested with the responsibility of teaching others should emulate the kings of yore and observe the locality and the character of the people so as to be able to teach them effectively.