



6. *Contention*

Contention: There is blockage of truth. Caution and moderation lead to good results, finality leads to bad results. It is beneficial to see a great person, not beneficial to cross a great river.

EXPLANATION

Contention means contention to decide right and wrong. As for the qualities of the hexagram, inside is *water* ☵, dangerous, and outside is *heaven* ☰, strong. Relying on strength because of danger, and causing

danger by force, both have the meaning of violation of harmony; therefore it is called *contention*.

This hexagram represents the downfall of truth and the contest for victory; it follows on the previous hexagram *darkness*. In *darkness* there is danger, yet one is able to stop, whereby to effect progress of the yin of the acquired temperament. People receive the energy of the temporally conditioned yin and yang and five elements, which forms their body; those who have received excessive yin energy are wily, while those who have received excessive yang energy are impetuous. Those whose yin and yang energies are mixed up are both wily and impetuous.

People are such because of their temperaments. Only great sages can change their temperaments, while lesser people are bound by their temperaments; when they are run afoul of, the poison in their negative side acts, and they get excited—they contest for victory, eager for power, they plot and scheme to deprive others and benefit themselves. All such things that deviate from harmony and lose balance—arguments, battles of wit, issues of right and wrong—are called contention.

People who practice the Tao need to know that the nature of the temperament is most harmful. To practice the principles of the Tao in the context of the events of the world, first erase wile and impetuosity at one stroke. Be inwardly strong but not outwardly aggressive; then there may be danger in the environment but there will be no danger in the heart. In this way one may gradually transmute the temperament, and not remain in the clamor of the realm of right and wrong.

However, as long as one is still in the world, there is still the possibility of being afflicted by troubles and difficulties. Even if you are not wily yourself, people can hurt you by their craft; even if you are not impetuous yourself, people can fool you by what they do. This hurts your self-confidence without reason, and even though you have nothing to be ashamed of, you suffer frustration because of it, and reach an impasse. When matters get to where vindication is necessary, rather than desire justification outwardly, it is better to contend with yourself inwardly. Therefore the text says, "Contention: There is blockage of truth. Caution and moderation lead to good results." If you can be cautious and moderate, wrong thoughts will stop and right thought will arise; the impasse can be penetrated, and wile can be changed, victory-seeking can be eliminated.

Otherwise, if you cannot be cautious and moderate, you will lose out in an important matter because of a little anger; impetuosity will appear outwardly while guile will arise inwardly. Without having won others, you will have already hurt yourself. If you are not careful in the beginning, the end will surely be bad.

However, there are also situations where caution, moderation, and self-struggle do not clear the matter up, and it is necessary to appeal to another, depending on someone to distinguish right and wrong. To distinguish right and wrong it is beneficial to see a great person. If you do not see a great person, you will not be helped. A great person is one who corrects both self and others, who is able to restrain people's excesses and encourage their virtues, able to solve people's doubts and develop their intel-

ligence. It is most beneficial to see such a person: Otherwise, being unable to exercise caution and moderation so as to change your own temperament, and also unable to see a great person to expand your perception, relying on your own craft alone, contesting for victory, eager for power, overthrowing truth and following falsehood, contending over what should not be contended about, you will call disaster on yourself. Therefore, it is "not beneficial to cross a great river." By caution and moderation you can see a great person; not being cautious or moderate is "crossing a great river." Caution and moderation lead to good results; being incautious and immoderate lead to bad results. Should not those who practice the Tao contend with themselves to begin with?

- **First yin:** One does not persist forever in an affair. There will be a little criticism, but it will turn out well.

EXPLANATION

Being flexible and deferential, having something to contend about but having no contentiousness in the mind, one therefore does not persist forever in one's affair. However, once involved in a matter of contention, it is necessary to clarify the issue; though there is a little criticism, ultimately it does not turn into a contest, and finally it is possible to conclude the matter well. This is being flexible and not contentious.

- **2 yang:** Not pressing one's contention, one returns home to escape: If there are three hundred families in one's domain, there will be no trouble.

EXPLANATION

When the adversary is on a par, one cannot win, so one does not contend, but returns home to escape. If there are three hundred families in your domain, you can thereby escape the barbs of opponents; though there is trouble, it cannot reach you. This is being strong but not contending.

- **3 yin:** Living on past virtues, rectitude in danger will turn out well. If working in government, do not do anything.

EXPLANATION

Being weak and not daring to contend to begin with, one therefore lives on past virtues. Living on past virtues, keeping to yourself in danger, being careful and prudent, not causing contention and having no contention yourself, ultimately you can finish well. However, once in the midst of contention, even if you don't contend, others will contend; then you should rely on the high-minded and wise to distinguish right and wrong. When the matter is clear, then stop. Therefore in this case if you are involved in government, you do not do anything on your own initiative. This is the weak being able to follow the strong and not producing contention.

- **4 yang:** Not pressing one's contention, one abides by the decree of fate: Changing to rest in rectitude leads to good fortune.

EXPLANATION

When the adamant meet the adamant, an argument is sure to start; but if you can deal with it flexibly, you do not press your suit and so do not contend. Changing the nature of your temperament to revert to the nature of celestial decree, from not resting in rectitude you change to resting in rectitude; then even though you do not seek good fortune, good fortune will follow you. This is being adamant yet reversing oneself and not pressing one's suit.

- **5 yang:** Contend; it will be very auspicious.

EXPLANATION

Firm strength balanced and correctly oriented, one can subdue others by virtue, and is able to change all who are wily and fond of power so that they ultimately do not contend. This is why it is very auspicious to contend in this case, where you correct yourself and others and are able to cause there to be no contention.

- **Top yang:** Even if one is given a badge of honor, it will be taken away thrice before the day is out.

EXPLANATION

Contesting for victory, eager for power, not knowing how to reverse yourself, when you reach the end of contention, even though you have gained victory outwardly, the inward reality is that you have lost in terms of worth of character. Even if you are given a token of honor, it will be taken away thrice before the day is out. To receive a gift once and be stripped of it thrice means that you have gained little from others and lost much from yourself. This is being selfish and inconsiderate of others, and so after all losing one's suit.

So not to contend is auspicious, while contention is inauspicious. If you are not cautious in the beginning, you will surely fail in the end. This is why there should be no contention.



6. *Contention*

heaven above,
water below

When heaven and water go in different directions, there is contention. Superior people plan in the beginning when they do things.

Contention means argument over right and wrong. Above is *heaven* ☰, below is *water* ☵; heaven is most high, water is most low, so heaven and water go in different directions and do not meet. This is the image of *contention*.

What superior people see in this is that aggressiveness and guile, competitiveness and desire for power, are the beginnings of beckoning di-

saster in business and social relations. If one is not careful, one hurts others and damages oneself. Therefore superior people plan in the beginning when they do things; they do not contend with other people, they contend with themselves.

Doing things does not mean one particular action or deed, but all daily activities, practice of the Tao and establishment of inner character. If one does not plan in the beginning when doing things, one's perception of principles will not be clear, with the result that action will not be appropriate. Being temperamental or impetuous, being unbalanced in action, is accompanied by danger. Therefore one should plan in the beginning, doing what is to be done, avoiding what is not to be done, being careful in the beginning, so as to be able to complete the affair in the end.

Doing things means strong action; planning in the beginning means preventing danger. When one acts after planning, and is not careless in action, there is nothing in the world that cannot be done, nothing in the world that cannot be accomplished.

Impetuous action is aberrant action; to act dangerously is to beckon danger. In doing things, if one can plan in the beginning, the human mentality will gradually depart and the temperament will gradually sublimate. Joining oneself to others, looking upon others and oneself as the same, there will be no discordant action.