



### 34. Great Power

**Great power is beneficial when correct.**

#### EXPLANATION

*Great power* means yang energy is strong and vigorous. As for the qualities of the hexagram, above is *thunder* ䷳, active, and below is *heaven* ䷀, strong: Strong within, effective in action, strong action does not cease—therefore it is called *great power*.

This hexagram represents advancement of the vigorous energy of yang; it follows on the previous hexagram *constancy*. *Constancy* is the achievement of perseverance in the path. Perseverance in the path means strong practice in the body, with the mind firm and stable and the will far-reaching, never turning back for even a moment, reaching deeply into self-realization; this is possible only for people of great power.

People of great power have extraordinary direction in life; they observe all things with detachment, and may let them go or take them up. Having powerful will, they can carry out powerful affairs, do what others cannot do, be what others cannot be. Transcending the ordinary and entering into sagehood, they do what is rare in the world. Like a movement of thunder rising from earth to the sky, they startle the ignorant and amaze the worldly, shaking up all.

However, the path of great power calls for power to be correct; if it is not correct, power is not great and its application is not beneficial. The people in the world who follow deviated paths, whether they cling to voidness or stick to forms, taking the artificial to be real, and do not fear danger and trouble, sometimes never changing all their lives, are indeed powerful, but their power is not correct—not only is their vigor unable to be great, but they even harm life by power. Then what is the value of power?

So the path of great power is only beneficial when it is correct. Correct means correctly oriented, reasonably ordered. Orderly power means one has inner autonomy and self-control, and the will is upright and correctly oriented, while outwardly one does not act arbitrarily and so one's conduct is upright. When the will is correct one is firm and strong and irrepressible; unmoved by myriad things one is inwardly vigorous and powerful. When action is correct, it is effective and decisive; able to accomplish tasks, one is outwardly vigorous and powerful. Will makes action firm, action makes will complete. Cultivating the inner and the outer at once, even those without power can become powerful, and the powerful can become great. There is no limit to the benefits of power applied correctly.

- **First yang:** With power in the feet, it is inauspicious to go forth on an expedition—there is truth in this.

#### EXPLANATION

In the beginning of great power, one should empty oneself and seek people to learn from, thoroughly clarify the principles of essence and life and only after that act. When the powerful rest on their strength and go forth impetuously, imagining that they will climb to the heights, in a hurry for accomplishment, this is "power in the feet." The power of powerful feet advances rapidly but also regresses quickly—to go far would definitely be unfortunate. We can believe in this as a matter of principle. This is power without prudence in the beginning.

- **2 yang:** Rectitude is auspicious.

## EXPLANATION

Governing the inward with firmness, responding to the external with flexibility, outwardly lacking yet inwardly having more than enough, being powerful without being rambunctious, power is in balance; when it is balanced it is right, when it is right it leads to good results. This is power with strict self-mastery.

- **3 yang:** For inferior people the use is powerful, but for superior people the use is nil. It is dangerous to persist in this. A ram butting a fence gets its horns stuck.

## EXPLANATION

Advancing impetuously, without a care, not inwardly strong but outwardly vigorous—inferior people may hope for fame and gain in this way, but if superior people who practice the Tao persist in using outward power when it is appropriate to realize all is empty, that power is useless. It is not just that the power is not correct—even if it were, it would injure oneself before getting anything from another. This too is a dangerous path. It is like a ram butting a fence—it will surely get its horns stuck. This is power that adamantly strives for externals.

- **4 yang:** Correctness is good; regret vanishes. The fence opened up, one does not get stuck; power is in the axle of a large vehicle.

## EXPLANATION

When one is strong and firm yet able to be flexible, yin and yang merge, and the gold elixir crystallizes. This is the time when one should correct others, after having corrected oneself. Therefore correctness is good, and regret vanishes. "Correctness is good" refers to the goodness of correcting oneself; "regret vanishes" refers to the vanishing of regret in correcting others. Also, being close to associates who defer to the wise with open minds, represented by yin in the fifth place, one not only does not ruin one's own power, one can also expand the power of others; this is like the fence being opened up so that one does not get stuck, and putting power in the axle of a large vehicle. This is power correcting oneself and correcting others.

- **5 yin:** Losing the goat in ease, let there be no regret.

## EXPLANATION

When dwelling in the body of motion in a condition of weakness without firm strength, people cannot be vigorous even though the time calls for vigor; this is like losing a goat in a state of ease. But even if people can't be



vigorous, it would be fortunate if they opened their minds with flexible receptivity and borrowed the knowledge of others to break through their own obstructions. If they can empty their minds, they can fill their bellies, then those who are not powerful can become powerful, and those who are powerful can become great. This is borrowing the power of others when one is not powerful oneself.

- **Top yin:** The ram running into a fence cannot retreat, cannot go ahead; there is no benefit. Struggle will produce good results.

#### EXPLANATION

If one is ignorant and acts arbitrarily, indulges in guesswork and goes off on tangents, a lifetime of studies will after all be useless. This is like a ram having run into a fence, unable to retreat or go ahead. At the culmination of action, disaster has already developed, so it is impossible to pull out of it; at the end of an affair, it is too late for regret—how can one go on to success? Unable to withdraw, unsuccessful in going ahead, one's whole life is wasted—what benefit is there? So for people who are weak and lack capability, rather than apply power by themselves and get hurt in the process, it is better to quickly empty the mind and seek a teacher. Studying when stumped, exerting effort to practice what is learned, working intensely while struggling through difficulty, not worrying about not reaching the realm of great power—this is originally not being powerful yet becoming powerful through resort to what is right.

In each of the six lines there is a path of power, but they are not the same in terms of good and bad effects. Power within, able to correct the self, is only represented by yang in the second place. Power outwardly, able to correct others, is only represented by yang in the fourth place. So practitioners of the Tao, when they have not yet comprehended the Tao, should first rectify themselves; once they have comprehended the Tao, they should rectify others as well. Correcting oneself is practice of the Tao; correcting others is establishment of virtue. Practicing the Tao, establishing virtue—only this is correctness of power, greatness of power. The benefit in correctness of great power requires perfection of virtue by the Tao as its ultimate achievement.



### 34. Great Power

thunder above,  
heaven below

**Thunder is up in the sky, with great power. Thus do superior people refrain from what is improper.**

Great power means expansion of empowerment. Above is *thunder* ䷳, below is *heaven* ䷀; this is thunder up in the sky. Thunder is something strong and intense, its energy is very powerful; when it climbs up in the sky, startling all with its vibration, its powerful energy expands even more. This is the image of *great power*.

What superior people see in this is that just as when thunder ascends into the sky in season it can thus vivify beings, so can people develop character when they carry out their activities according to reason. Therefore superior people refrain from whatever is improper.

Propriety means the moderation of activity and repose, the ordering of engagement and disengagement, guiding self-cultivation and social relations. When ordinary people follow their impulses and do whatever comes to mind, perhaps greedily pursuing idle imaginations, indulging in emotions and giving free rein to desire, this is all improper.

Doing what is improper is not conducive to growth or empowerment. Even if one becomes powerful, this is power that abandons the real and enters the false, empowering that which should not be powerful. This is really not power.

If one can avoid looking at what should not be looked at, avoid listening to what should not be listened to, avoid saying what should not be said, avoid doing what should not be done, act properly and refrain from what is improper, then whatever one does is proper.

Propriety is reason, reason is celestial. If one puts celestial reason into practice, human desires do not arise; then every step one takes is in accord with the sublime Tao. One is then a companion of heaven, with the same achievement as thunder. Dwelling in the midst of the elements, one is not constrained by the elements; living among myriad things, one is not harmed by the myriad things. Is that power not great?