



Concealment of Illumination 36. *(Injury of Illumination)*

In concealment of illumination, it is beneficial to be upright in difficulty.

EXPLANATION

The name of this hexagram has two meanings: The word for “concealment” also means “injury.” In the qualities of the hexagram, above is *earth* ☷, receptive, and below is *fire* ☲, luminous; illumination within receptivity, being illumined yet conforming to the times, using accord to nurture illumination, it is therefore called *concealment of illumination*. Also, light being within darkness, there is illumination but it is injured, so it is also called injury of illumination.

This hexagram represents being personally illumined and truthful, withdrawing the firing. It follows on the previous hexagram *power of the great*. *Power of the great* means strength in action. Being strong in action requires knowledge of when to advance and when to withdraw; if there is advance but not withdrawal, power is excessive and will surely injure the illumination. When illumination is injured, power is ruined. This is why the work of withdrawing the firing is important.

Withdrawing the firing means concealing illumination in the most recondite, secret place, and not using it lightly. In practice of the Tao, the reason for advancing the fire and using illumination is simply to advance to illumination because of not being illumined. Once one has advanced to illumination, and inside and out are lucid and clear, then one can conceal one’s illumination and nurture it unbeknownst to others, eventually to reach the realm of consummate good without evil, causing illumination to be free of any defect. Only then can it be said the fire returns to the origin, a mass of harmonious energy, which has energy but no substance, the original spirit of innate knowledge and capacity unobscured, neither material nor void, yet both material and void, not constrained by matter or voidness. Inside and out, all is illumined.

Illumination that is not revealed is better than illumination that is openly employed; this illumination has no form or trace that can be espied. Only when there is no form or trace to be seen is it withdrawal of the firing so that the fire returns to the origin.

But this withdrawal of the firing, the path returning to the origin, is also a reverse path. What is reversed? The illumination that is produced is reversed back inward, so there is illumination but one doesn’t use it oneself. Having illumination but not exercising it does not mean vacant in-

action can accomplish the task; therein is the work of preventing danger and the path of constant recollection.

The essential point is in returning when in difficulty, where one cannot be free. If one returns in favorable situations but cannot return in adverse circumstances, then the fire will not return to the origin, and the light will not penetrate reality; eventually there is sure to be injury. Therefore in concealment of illumination it is beneficial to be upright in difficulty. Maintaining correctness in difficulty, withdrawing in accord with the time, illumination does not suffer injury, and the basis of the elixir does not leak away. This is referred to by the classic *Understanding Reality* in the lines, "Even if you know the cinnabar and lead, if you don't know the firing process it is of no use. It all depends on the power of practical application; if you deviate even slightly you won't crystallize the elixir."

The rule of spiritual alchemy is in the firing: Too little firing and the elixir doesn't form, too much firing and the elixir is damaged. When the elixir has been completed, you should quickly halt the firing, rest, and gently nurture it, keeping to the center and embracing the one, deeply concealing the illumination in imperceptibility, not allowing so much as a spark of fire.

- **First yang:** Concealing illumination in flight, letting the wings hang down; a superior man on a journey not eating for three days has a place to go. The master is criticized.

EXPLANATION

In the beginning of concealment of illumination, though there is no manifest form of injury, there is already the imminence of injury; one should quickly withdraw the fire so as to avoid its harm. This may be represented as like "concealing illumination in flight, letting the wings hang down"; or in terms of a person, "a superior man on a journey not eating for three days has a place to go." Flying with the wings down, traveling without eating, understanding when to withdraw and hastening to do so, nevertheless "the master is criticized," because withdrawing the fire is something that is done after the solidification of the spiritual embryo; there is naturally real fire, and one doesn't use artificial fire, and so one appears to be ignorant and inarticulate, which people dislike, so there is unavoidable criticism. However, though there be slander and criticism, one may be hurt outwardly but one is not hurt inwardly. This is withdrawing the fire before injury.

- **2 yin:** Concealment of illumination. Getting hurt in the left leg calls for rescue; if the horse is strong, it bodes well.

EXPLANATION

If withdrawal of the fire is a bit slow, and therefore damage is suffered, it is like illumination getting hurt in the left leg. However, if one is flexible,

receptive, and open minded, upon suffering injury one knows to use a strong horse to speed to rescue oneself from the fault of inability to withdraw early. It is possible thereby to avoid getting to the point of great damage to the illumination, so this too is a way that bodes well for good results. This is withdrawing the fire when damage is suffered.

- **3 yang:** Illumination concealed, going south hunting, catching the big chief; hasty correction won't do.

EXPLANATION

Equipped with both strength and illumination, operating the natural true fire, one burns away the human mentality, the chief villain. Once the human mentality is gone, aberrant fire naturally vanishes. This is like "illumination concealed, going south hunting, catching the big chief." However, the human mentality has discriminatory consciousness dwelling in it, which is the seed of routine existence throughout time; it is not easy to get rid of this, and if one is too fierce about getting rid of it, that will conversely stimulate deviant action of aberrant fire, and the true fire will suffer damage. So "hasty correction won't do." Gradually dissolving it, the human mentality will eventually vanish. This is operating the true fire so that illumination is not damaged.

- **4 yin:** Entering the left belly, finding the mind in which illumination is concealed, one leaves the house.

EXPLANATION

Nurturing illumination in profound secrecy is likened to "entering the left belly." The illumination in the left belly cannot be seen, is not perceived or cognized. Thus can one find "the mind in which illumination is concealed," and leave the house, leaving minding and entering into unminding—then how can any aberrant fire flare up? This is withdrawing artificial fire so that illumination is not damaged.

- **5 yin:** Concealment of illumination in a basket is beneficial if correct.

EXPLANATION

Keeping to the center, embracing unity, not using illumination at all, while illumination is always there, is what is referred to by the expression "within is the natural true fire; in the furnace, the glowing river." This is like illumination concealed in a basket; it is beneficial when correct. Concealment of illumination that is beneficially correct is outward insufficiency with inward abundance. This is nurturing the true fire so illumination is not damaged.

- **Top yin:** The darkness of nonunderstanding; first ascending to heaven, then descending into the earth.

EXPLANATION

If one does not understand the firing process and only knows how to go along using illumination and does not know how to reverse and withdraw illumination, this is reverting to darkness by not understanding. Reverting to darkness by not understanding is without benefit, and in fact harmful; one brings misfortune on oneself. This is like first ascending to heaven, advancing illumination, then descending into earth, damaging illumination. The gold elixir is gained and then lost, and all the effort that has gone before is wasted. This is not knowing to withdraw the fire, so that illumination winds up damaged.

Nurturing the fire is nurturing illumination; withdrawing the fire is concealing illumination. When illumination is concealed and stored within, fire returns to its reality, open awareness without obscurity, eventually to become sublimated, returning to formlessness. But it is necessary to know the firing process of withdrawing the fire to nurture illumination. If you do not know the process, not only will you be unable to nurture illumination, you will also obscure illumination. This too is “injury of illumination”—how can this accomplish anything?



36. Concealment of Illumination

earth above,
fire below

**Light enters into the earth, illumination is concealed.
Thus do superior people deal with the masses, acting
unobtrusively while in fact illumined.**

Concealment of illumination means being illumined but concealing it. Above is *earth* ☷, below is *fire* ☲, associated with the sun; this is light entering into the earth. When light enters into the earth, there is light within darkness. This is the image of *concealment of illumination*.

What superior people see in this is that when practitioners of the Tao are among the masses, if they use their illumination too much, they will startle the ignorant and amaze the worldly, easily bringing on abuse and slander. Therefore superior people deal with the masses by acting unobtrusively even though they are in fact illumined.

Dealing with the masses means facing the unenlightened with enlightenment; acting unobtrusively means concealing enlightenment and nurturing it. The beings produced by heaven and earth are not equal, the masses of people are not equal in terms of intelligence. There is a mixture of aberration and sanity, and everyone is an individual; how can every individual be totally good? Acting unobtrusively in dealing with people means dealing with them on their own terms, seeing the totality as one organism. This means having a quality of breadth like that of the earth, which supports everything and accepts everything, being responsive to everything in an adaptive way.

But acting unobtrusively does not mean that one does not use illumination at all. It means that one is outwardly unnoticeable but free from inward obscurity, so there is inner light within outer darkness. One is able to distinguish in every case who is wise and who is foolish, who is aberrated and who is sane. But though one harmonizes with others, one is not influenced, and though one associates with others, one does not become clannish. One's patterns of activity and passivity, absence and presence, are indiscernible to others; one is like the sun, which is bright when it rises, but also bright in secret when it has set. This is what is meant by the saying that a great hermit may well live in the city.