



28. Excess of the Great

When the great is excessive, the ridgepole bends. It is good to go somewhere; that is developmental.

EXPLANATION

Excess of the great means there is an excess of yang energy. As for the qualities of the hexagram, above is *lake* ☱, joyous, and below is *wind* ☴, entering. Going along with what is inside, delighting in externals, following what one desires, when happiness culminates it produces grief. In the body of the hexagram, inside are four yangs and outside are two yins; yang exceeds yin, and yin does not come up to yang—therefore it is called excess of the great.

This hexagram represents harmonious blending of the medicinal substances, in which fullness requires use of emptiness. It follows on the previous hexagram *nurturance of the great*. In *nurturance of the great*, one is strong yet can stop and be still; stilling strength, not letting yang energy get too excessive, is properly the means to nurture strength.

In spiritual alchemy, the path of the gold elixir, we take two times eight ounces of the polar energies and congeal them into an embryo; it requires that the great and small be undamaged, and both realms be complete. If yang energy is too strong and yin energy too weak, then yin and yang are not in harmony, and you lose the path of continual renewal; when yin culminates there will be decay, and when yang culminates there will be deterioration—going on in this way, the trouble of “the ridgepole bending” and breaking is inevitable. When the ridgepole snaps, the whole house falls down. In the same way, practitioners of the Tao who promote yang too much, who do not know when enough is enough, who can be great but cannot be small, suffer damage to their spiritual house.

If you can proceed breezily without becoming too intense, being harmonious and easygoing without clinging, mastering the ability to adapt to changes, preventing danger and being aware of perils, then firmness and flexibility will correspond, yin and yang will balance each other: Though great, you can avoid excess, so that it is beneficial to go somewhere—consummating essence and perfecting life, you develop without hindrance.

- **First yin:** Spreading white reeds; no fault.

EXPLANATION

When one is by nature weak and also dwells in an inferior position, weakness is excessive; the extreme of prudence is like spreading a mat of white reeds to place an offering, not presuming to go ahead of others. Presumptuousness vanishes, and there is naturally no fault of excessive greatness. This is being small but nonetheless excessive.

- **2 yang:** A withered willow produces sprouts; an old man gets a girl for a wife. Altogether beneficial.

EXPLANATION

Firm, yet able to be flexible, using yin to balance yang when it is excessive, not letting excess go too far—this is like a withered willow producing sprouts, an old man getting a girl for a wife. Yin and yang match, so the living potential is always present; firm and strong but not injurious, this is naturally altogether beneficial. This is using flexibility so firmness does not go too far.

- **3 yang:** The ridgepole bends; misfortune.

EXPLANATION

Employing strength strongly, only knowing how to go forward and not how to withdraw, losing the gold elixir after it has been attained, the misfortune of the ridgepole bending is inevitable. This is excessive use of strength.

- **4 yang:** The ridgepole is raised; good fortune. There is another shame.

EXPLANATION

Great yet able to be small, the mind equanimous, the energy harmonious—this is like the ridgepole being raised and not crumbling; action meets with good fortune. When practice of Tao reaches the point of greatness capable of smallness, this is already the joining of yin and yang: One should not be too yielding any more, because if yielding is excessive it will damage firmness, and the great path will be impossible to complete—one will become a laughingstock, and only reap shame. This is firmness using flexibility appropriately and not excessively.

- **5 yang:** A withered willow produces flowers, an old woman gets a young man for a husband: no blame, no praise.

EXPLANATION

Being strong in joy but unable to yield in joy is like a withered willow bearing flowers, an old woman getting a young man for a husband: Being

too luxurious and self-satisfied, when yang culminates it gives rise to yin, and the real is injured by the false, as a matter of course. It is fortunate when strength is balanced, and one has inner autonomy and is not deluded by external influences; thereby one can be blameless. But, having filled the belly, if one cannot empty the mind and rest in the center, then there is no praise either. This is excess of the great in the sense of being strong and continuing to apply full strength.

- **Top yin:** Excess reaching the peak of destruction is unfortunate; there is no blame on other people.

EXPLANATION

At the end of excess of the great, being ignorant and acting arbitrarily, not knowing the medicinal substances or the firing process, doing whatever comes to mind, going astray and not returning, the damage is worse the higher one goes; excess reaches the peak of destruction. One calls misfortune upon oneself—it is no fault of others. This is excess of the great in the sense of being weak and entertaining illusions.

Looking over the six lines, excess of the great is inauspicious, not going too far is auspicious. Within excess of the great there is still a way of not going too far; it lies in people skillfully combining yin and yang so that they end up in proper balance—it is important not to be one-sided or partial.



28. Great Excess

lake above,
wind below

Moisture destroys wood in excess. Thus superior people stand alone without fear, and leave society without distress.

Great excess is excess of the great. Above is *lake* ☱, associated with moisture, below is *wind* ☴, associated with wood. The nature of water is to flow downward, the nature of wood is to float upward; when water rises above wood, it can destroy wood, and when wood descends below water, it can be destroyed by the moisture. This is the image of *great excess*.

What superior people see in this is that just as a great excess of moisture can destroy wood, so can a great excess of talent and intelligence in people destroy their character. Therefore they take the model of water rising above wood in the sense of standing alone without fear, and take the model of wood descending below water in the sense of concealing themselves and being free from distress; thus they accomplish the will of a person of exceeding greatness, and perfect the character of a person of exceeding greatness.

Because superior people who practice the Tao consider nature and life to be the most important matter, they look down upon all existents as empty of absoluteness, being like a clear lake unsullied by the dust of objects. They make use of the phenomena of the world to practice the principles of the Tao, playing a unique tune on an individual harp. Unmoved by the prospects of life or death, they stand aloof of all things without fear. Like the flexibility of wood, they have talent but do not presume upon it, they have intelligence but do not rely on it. Though simple in appearance, they hold a treasure; concealing their illumination and nurturing it in obscurity, they do not seek to be known to others. They are hidden in a profound privacy and have no distress.

Having no fear means that one cannot be constrained by things, having will and energy far beyond that of others. Having no distress means that errant thoughts do not arise, and one has cultivated development far beyond that of others. Because of having no fear and no distress, one can accomplish that which is rare in the world, and be beyond the perception and beyond the reach of ordinary people.