



48. The Well

The well: Changing the village, not changing the well; no loss, no gain. Those who come and go use the well as a well. If the rope does not reach all the way into the well, or if the bucket breaks, that is unfortunate.

EXPLANATION

A well is water with a source, which nourishes people inexhaustibly; it has the meaning of nurturance, development. As for the qualities of the hexagram, above is *water* ☵, dangerous, and below is *wind* ☳, penetrating: gradually progressing so as to get through danger, though there is danger one can get out of it, as wood plunged in water emerges from the water. Therefore this hexagram is called *the well*.

This hexagram represents accumulation of effort to cultivate virtue; it follows on the previous hexagram *rising*. *Rising* means harmonious progress in practice, a way to increase spiritual virtue. When spiritual virtue increases, and one has accordingly advanced to the state where there is no

difficulty or danger, the basis is firm and stable; free from danger oneself, one can then resolve others' problems. With this one accumulates achievement and cultivates virtue, using what one has developed oneself to nurture others' development. Genuine within, this genuineness reaches out, so there is benefit to others and no harm to self. This is like a well: Changing the village doesn't change the well; no loss, no gain, passersby use the well as a well.

When the self-development of practitioners of Tao is sufficient, this is like a well having water in it. To develop others after having developed oneself is like "changing the village." To develop others by one's own development is like "not changing the well." Development of others must be based on self-development: As is self-development, so is development of others; this is like a well having "no loss, no gain." Developing others by self-development, others and self are both nurtured; this is like those who come and go using the well as a well.

If one insists on trying to teach people before one has attained the Tao oneself, this is called lacking the basis. Development without the basis lacks inward mastery; arbitrarily used, it creates confusion, and without having helped anyone else one first loses oneself. This is like trying to get water from a well, but the rope does not reach all the way, or the well water breaks the bucket; one brings misfortune on oneself. This is because the business of guiding others comes after the completion of the great path. When the path is completed, mind and body are autonomous; based on previous realization to enlighten others, one can thus benefit others and not harm oneself. Therefore the main theme in each of the six lines is self-development.

- **First yin:** Mud in a well is not to be consumed.
There are no animals at an abandoned well.

EXPLANATION

If one is stupid and foolish and does not know to seek teachers for self-development, yet presumes to have what one has not, and wishes to develop others in imitation of lofty illuminates, this is like an abandoned well with mud in it and not water; with an accumulation of all sorts of pollutants in it, even animals ignore it. How can such a one develop others? This is one with no knowledge at all of self-development.

- **2 yang:** The depths of the well water a frog.
The jar leaks.

EXPLANATION

While in the midst of self-development, if one wants to develop others before one's own development is sufficient, one will be of no benefit to others, and will harm oneself first. This is like the depths of a well producing water sufficient only for a frog, or a jar leaking water. There is a limit to the moisture; with little to help others, there is much loss to oneself. This is one whose self-development is insufficient.

- **3 yang:** The well is cleared, but not drunk from; this is the concern of one's heart. It is worth drawing from. When the ruler is enlightened, all receive the blessing.

EXPLANATION

Having progressed to the top of the lower position, this is when one's own development is accomplished and one can thus develop others. However, there is difficulty at hand; if one does not meet people who can understand, this poses a limitation and makes development impossible. This is like when a well is clear but people do not drink from it. However, even though there is no one to drink from it, nevertheless when spiritual virtues are highly developed, people who observe them are subtly influenced. This is why it is "the concern of one's heart." Why is it a concern? Because it is worth drawing from. It is to be hoped that there are rulers or powerful people with clear eyes who will trust and employ the enlightened; then everyone will have a spiritual model, and will receive blessings without end. This line refers to one whose self-development is fulfilled.

- **4 yin:** The well is tiled, without fault.

EXPLANATION

In the state of danger (*water* ☵), though one lack the power to develop others, it is fortunate if one remains upright even in weakness, and knows how to develop oneself. This is like a well being tiled to prevent danger, without damage inside or loss outside, so no one can fall in. This refers to one capable of self-development.

- **5 yang:** The well is pure, the cold spring is used for drinking.

EXPLANATION

Yang inside yin, outwardly empty while inwardly full, emptiness and fullness as one, firmness and flexibility combined, the great path is completed. This is called water with a source; it is like a well being pure, a cold spring—its nourishment is deep and rich, and it can be used without exhaustion. This refers to completion of self-development and ability to develop others.

- **Top yin:** The well is being drawn from; don't cover it. Great fortune.

EXPLANATION

When self-development is attained, that is like work on a well being completed—thus the mouth of the well is not to be covered. Guiding according to the person, one is able to benefit others and not harm oneself. The good fortune is already in the beginning of self-development. This means that development of others must be based on self-development.

So the work of developing others is to be done after attainment of the Tao. One cannot develop others as long as one has not oneself attained the Tao. If one insists on trying to develop others prematurely, one will suffer the misfortune of a "broken bucket." Those who would take care of others must first know how to take care of themselves.



48. *The Well*

water above,
wind below

There is water above wood, a well. Thus do superior people comfort the people and urge reciprocity.

The well has the meaning of nourishing people. Above is *water* ☵, below is *wind* ☳, associated with wood; there is water above wood. When

water rises above wood, the wood is moistened and becomes pliable, being nurtured by the water. This is the image of *the well*.

What superior people see in this is that the people must be nourished, and when they are nourished they must be educated. Therefore they teach them to work so as to have plenty of food and warm clothing, so as to nourish their bodies, and teach them to know courtesy and understand duty, to get along in harmony and help each other, so as to nourish their minds.

When body and mind are both nourished, people return to pristine simplicity and purity, forget their travail, become unified, and enter the realm of unconscious obedience to the laws of God.

The human body is the country, the human spirit is the people. To order the spirit and carry out the Tao day and night is to comfort the people; to take to good, correct faults, get rid of falsehood and keep truth, combine vitality, energy, and spirit, and join the earthly to the celestial—this is urging reciprocity. This kind of comfort is that whereby one forgets falsehood; this kind of urging is that whereby one cultivates reality. When falsehood leaves and reality remains, the path of nourishment is consummated.