



50. *The Cauldron*

The cauldron is basically good; it is developmental.

EXPLANATION

The cauldron is a vessel for refining by heat, whereby something new is obtained. As for the qualities of the hexagram, above is *fire* ☲, lumi-

nous, below is *wind* ䷚, penetrating: Producing illumination through following an initiatory process, the mind becomes daily more humble, while illumination increases daily. In the body of the hexagram, in the second line (yang) and the fifth line (yin), emptiness and fullness correspond—within illumination is the ability to be empty and open, within obedience is the capacity for fulfillment. When empty and illumined, that enlightenment illumines all, and the mind cannot be moved by the vagaries of wealth and status. When fulfilled yet docile, all virtues are developed, and neither fortune nor calamity can disturb one's nature. Producing illumination by following an initiatory process, following the process by opening awareness, emptiness and fullness balance each other. It is like the light of fire increasing when it gets wood, like the unrefined energy of wood being all transformed when it meets fire. Because it has the meaning of refining heating, it is called *the cauldron*.

This hexagram represents refining the great medicine; it follows on the previous hexagram *the well*. *The well* indicates following a process and passing through danger; having gotten through danger, the true yang trapped by conditioning is released, and the great medicine is born—then one can accordingly further illumination and operate the “fire” for refinement. The work of refinement is the means by which to sublimate earthly energy and stabilize celestial energy, causing the raw to ripen and the old to be renewed, whereby it is possible to illumine the mind and to solidify life. Therefore the cauldron is basically good and it has a developmental path. The basis is the potential of everlasting life of goodness; the cooking of the great medicine in the cauldron is the firing of this living potential to make it incorruptible and permanent. But in this path there is process and procedure; even the slightest deviation and the gold elixir will not form. Therefore people must first thoroughly investigate the true principle.

- **First yin:** When the cauldron overturns on its base, it is beneficial to eject what is wrong. Getting a concubine, because of her child she is not faulted.

EXPLANATION

At the bottom of the cauldron, if people have inferior qualities and are ignorant and foolish, their bases often overturn and are not upright. If you want to set up the cauldron, it is not useful to take the new, but rather it is useful to get rid of the old. If you can get rid of the old, then what is wrong is expelled and the base won't overturn; even and upright, it stays in its place and doesn't shift. This is like a concubine, whose status is originally low but becomes high when she bears a child; she can also thereby not be faulted for her earlier errors. This represents the matter of refining the self, the beginning work of setting up the cauldron.

- **2 yang:** The cauldron is filled. One's enemy is jealous, but cannot get at one; this is lucky.

EXPLANATION

Strong and balanced, true yang has returned and filled the belly. Once the belly is filled, the Tao mind is ever-present and the human mentality does not arise. This is like one's enemy being jealous, but unable to get at one. This represents nurturing the mind of Tao and naturally being free of the human mentality.

- **3 yang:** The lifting hooks of the cauldron are removed; the activity is impeded. Rich meat is not eaten. When it rains, lack is regretted. It turns out well.

EXPLANATION

When only firm, without flexibility, not knowing to empty the mind after having filled the belly, this is removing the lifting hooks of the cauldron; though one comprehends life, one does not yet comprehend essence, and the activity is blocked—one is unable to pass through the preliminaries and arrive at the end, so that one's life be the same as that of the universe. Remaining a single ignorant individual, missing the ultimate attainment, is like not eating rich meat. It is lucky when one remains upright when strong; when it rains, one's travel is impeded, when one has a lack or flaw one repents. If one repents, one can empty the mind, and once one can empty the mind one's activity will be unimpeded. From comprehending life one also comprehends essence, and ultimately can complete them with good results. This represents having the mind of Tao and also emptying the human mind.

- **4 yang:** The cauldron's legs are broken, spilling the food received for service. The physical being is enriched, but there is misfortune.

EXPLANATION

On entering illumination by following the initiatory process, the gold elixir takes shape; this is when one should guard against danger, foreseeing peril, and use the spontaneous fire of reality to burn away acquired mundanity. If at this point strength is dragged by weakness, the legs of the cauldron will break; rousing the human mentality injures the mind of Tao. This is like spilling the food received for service; the jewel of life is again lost, after having been gained. Even though the physical being remains, the spirit is lost—that misfortune is unspeakable. This represents arousing the human mind and obscuring the mind of Tao.

- **5 yin:** The cauldron has yellow hooks with a gold handle. It is beneficial to be single-minded.

EXPLANATION

When flexible receptivity is correctly balanced, emptying the human mind and using the mind of Tao, this is like the cauldron having yellow hooks and a gold handle. Yellow symbolizes the center, and "yellow hooks" means the centers of the hooks are hollow. "Gold handle" means the handle of the cauldron is solid. The handle of the cauldron is passed through the hooks—strength and flexibility balance each other, emptiness and fullness correspond; the fire is the medicine, the medicine is the fire. At this point it is beneficial to be singleminded, with undivided attention, forestalling problems, not necessitating excessive augmentation or diminution. This represents emptying the human mind and nurturing the mind of Tao.

- **Top yang:** The cauldron has a jade handle. This is very auspicious, entirely beneficial.

EXPLANATION

In the end of use of the cauldron, when the work of renewal in the cauldron is finished, neither being nor nonbeing remains; things and self revert to emptiness. In stillness one is uncontrived, in action one is spontaneous. Strength is flexible, flexibility is strong. Without applying strength, strength is complete; without applying awareness, awareness is penetrating. One has reached the stage of complete sincerity, in which foreknowledge is possible. This is like a jade handle on a cauldron. It is a handle, yet is pure jade: Firmness and softness are as one. The temperament and constitution are transformed, body and mind are both refined. Merging in reality with the Tao, this is the ultimate achievement of practice of the Tao, the complete ability of sages. Transcending yin and yang, one is not constrained by yin and yang. Therefore it is very auspicious, entirely beneficial. This is the complete integration and assimilation of the mind of Tao and the human mind.

In working on the cauldron, there is firmness and softness, advancing and withdrawing, adding and subtracting. Unless you reach the stage where being and nonbeing do not stand, and spiritual creativity is incalculable, you cannot be said to have reached the ultimate achievement. If you do not know the methods of firmness and softness, advancing and withdrawing, adding and subtracting, then you will either fall into the removal of the cauldron's hooks of line three, or the spilling of the food of line four. The slightest deviation produces a tremendous loss. Therefore practitioners of the Tao should promote illumination slowly, according to the initiatory process, carefully watching over the firing.



50. *The Cauldron*

fire above,
wind below

There is fire on top of wood; a cauldron. Thus do superior people stabilize life in the proper position.

The cauldron stands for the process of refinement by fire. Above is *fire* ☲, below is *wind* ☴, associated with wood; there is fire on top of wood. Fire and wood in one place refining things by heating is the image of *the cauldron*.

What superior people see in this is that just as a cauldron is a means of cooking things but cannot accomplish this without the action of wood and fire, in the same way that Tao is the means of bearing life, but stabilization of life cannot be accomplished without the work of entry and understanding. Therefore they gradually cultivate practice on the basis of the proper standpoint to stabilize their life.

"Proper" means not being partial or biased, not being hypocritical or dishonest; the "position" or "standpoint" is the opening of the mysterious pass, the door of the earthly and the celestial. "Stabilization" means concentration without fragmentation. "Life" means the primordial generative energy.

If one can make one's standpoint correct, so that one's position is proper, one enters the Tao gradually and practices it with understanding; benevolence, justice, courtesy, and knowledge root in the mind, vitality, spirit, the earthly soul, and the celestial soul combine, the elements of vitality, energy, spirit, essence, and intent integrate—energy becomes replete, the spirit becomes complete, and life is stabilized.

The path of stabilizing life lies entirely in work in the right place. To be incapable of the proper position is to be ignorant of the mysterious pass. To be ignorant of the mysterious pass is to be ignorant of life. Being ignorant of life leads to attachment to voidness or clinging to form, taking the false to be real, entering into the byways of auxiliary methods. Then not only is one unable to stabilize life, one is even prone to injuring life.

Life is the primordial sane energy. Life is what is correct, what is correct is life. The correct standpoint, the proper position, is carefully preserving the sane energy in the mysterious pass, maturing and refining it with both gentle and intense effort, working by day, cautious by night, not letting any external energy contaminate the cauldron and furnace. Aiming to correct that which is not correct, aiming to stabilize that which is

unstable, proceeding from effort to finally reach spontaneity, returning from confusion to order, the work of stabilizing life in its proper position is consummated.