



## 41. Reduction

Reduction with sincerity is very auspicious, impeccable. It should be correct. It is beneficial to go somewhere. What is the use of the two bowls? They can be used to receive.

### EXPLANATION

*Reduction* means diminishing excess. As for the qualities of the hexagram, above is *mountain* ䷳, still, and below is *lake* ䷹, joyous: Having something to rejoice over, yet immediately stilling it, by stilling the joy there is no errant thought. In the body of the hexagram, in the second and fifth lines strength and flexibility are balanced, emptiness and fullness are in accord; strength does not become rambunctious, flexibility does not become weakness. Diminishing what is excessive, adding to what is insufficient—thus it is called *reduction*.

This hexagram represents the existence of increase within reduction; it follows on the previous hexagram *halting*. In *halting*, one can stop where there is danger, preserving the primordial Tao in the midst of the

temporal. But if you want to preserve the primordial, it is necessary to remove acquired conditioning; and to remove acquired conditioning means to travel the path of *reduction*.

However, reduction as a path means not following desires but stopping desires; many people cannot be sincere in it. If one cannot be sincere, one may start but will not finish; then not only will one fail to gain good fortune, one will also bring on blame. If one can be sincere, every thought is true; sincerity in the mind naturally shows in action. Then good fortune comes even though one does not try to bring it about; as one does not bring about fault, fault is naturally nonexistent.

But even though sincerity in reduction is certainly auspicious and surely impeccable, it is most important that sincerity be correct, that reduction be correct. People in the world who contemplate voidness, stick to quietude, forget about people, forget about their own bodies, and go on like this all their lives without change, are certainly sincere about reduction, but they are faithful to what they should not be faithful to, and reduce what they should not reduce—thus there is decrease with increase, which is still faulty.

So if one can be correct in sincerity, discern whether it is right or wrong, distinguish whether it is false or true, understand it in the mind and prove it in actual events, “there is somewhere to go,” to the benefit of all. But while the benefit of going somewhere is beneficial insofar as sincerity is correct and reduction is correct, actual practice in real life is most important, to finish what has been started. As long as one has not yet reached the serene, equanimous realm of the middle way, work cannot be stopped; one must daily reduce for the sake of the Tao, daily increasing one’s accomplishment. Reducing and reducing again, increasing and increasing again, until there is no more to be reduced and no more to be increased, so strength and softness correspond, inside and outside merge with the Tao, in perfect goodness without evil, wholly integrated with the design of nature—only then is the work of reduction and increase no longer needed.

Therefore the text says, “What is the use of the two bowls? They can be used to receive.” A bowl is something hollow and round; the “two bowls” are the balance of strength and flexibility represented by the second and fifth lines in correspondence. When strength and flexibility are balanced, there is flexibility in strength and strength in flexibility; strength and flexibility are as one. The vitalities of the second and fifth lines subtly join and congeal, returning to the basis, going back to the origin; the spiritual embryo takes on form, and from this one receives the bliss of freedom and nonstriving. One’s fate now depends on oneself, not on heaven. Be sincere in reduction, and within reduction there is increase. This is no small matter.

- **First yang:** Ending affairs, going quickly, there is no fault; but assess before reducing something.

**EXPLANATION**

When one is strong and decisive, bold and powerful, as soon as reduction is mentioned one wants to carry out that reduction; therefore, "Ending affairs, going quickly," reduction can surely be without fault. But reduction in the beginning has the possibility of excessive forcefulness, erring by incorrect reduction. It is necessary to assess whether it is right or wrong, appropriate or otherwise, before reducing anything. Only then can there be increase within reduction, and reduction without any fault. This means reduction requires care in the beginning.

- **2 yang:** It is beneficial to be correct. An expedition is inauspicious. No reduction or increase of this.

**EXPLANATION**

Strong yet balanced, the mind of Tao ever present, the human mentality not arising, yin and yang harmoniously combined, the gold elixir takes on form: Just when you should carefully stabilize it and store it securely, if you do not know when enough is enough and go on reducing and increasing, you will reactivate the human mentality and thus obscure the mind of Tao. This is not beneficial, and even brings misfortune. It is because the strong energy is balanced, not biased or lopsided, that there is no more reduction or increasing to be done. This is not reducing and not increasing either.

- **3 yin:** Three people traveling are reduced by one person; one person traveling finds a companion.

**EXPLANATION**

When one is foolish and ignorant, gives rise to feelings in regard to experiences, cannot reduce the human mentality but uses the human mentality instead, seeks increase but instead gets decrease, this is like three people traveling being reduced by one person. If one knows there is loss within gain, and can reduce the dualistic mind of the human mentality, and increase the united consciousness of the mind of Tao, then yin and yang match each other, and there is gain within loss; this is like one person traveling finding a companion. This means when seeking increase one must use reduction.

- **4 yin:** Reducing sickness, causing there to be joy quickly, there is no fault.

**EXPLANATION**

In pure negativity without positivity, the sickness is already grave; it is lucky if one is flexible yet upright, with yin obeying yang, sincerely seek-



ing the method of immortality of the other to reduce the illness of the self—then even those unable to reduce will be able to do so, and those unable to reduce quickly will be able to do so. Finding gain within loss, not only is there joy, but also there is no fault. This is reducing weakness and seeking increase of strength.

- **5 yin:** One is given a profit of ten sets of tortoise shells; none can oppose. Very auspicious.

#### EXPLANATION

Flexible yet balanced, staying in the appropriate place, by emptying the mind one can fill the belly: Emptiness and fulfillment correspond, firmness and flexibility balance each other; the vitalities of the second and fifth places subtly combine and congeal, giving one a profit of ten pairs of tortoises. [Tortoise shells were anciently used for money.] "One is given a profit" means gaining without seeking gain; the gain comes about spontaneously, naturally, and does not involve forced effort. This is the auspicious path of return to the fundamental, reversion to the origin. Herein lies what is called "Drumming on bamboo, calling the tortoise (symbol of longevity), eating jade mushrooms, plucking the lute, summoning the phoenix (symbol of immortality), drinking from the alchemical crucible." This is the spontaneous increase of strength when weakness is reduced.

- **Top yang:** Not reducing or increasing this is faultless. Correctness brings good fortune. It is beneficial to go somewhere. Getting a servant, there is no house.

#### EXPLANATION

At the end of reduction, this is reduction to the point where there is nothing to be reduced, increase to the point where there is nothing to be increased; by clarifying the qualities of illumination, one rests in the highest good, and there is no reducing or increasing this. Now there is no act at fault, nothing incorrect; completing what has been started, one gains its good fortune. When practice of the Tao reaches the point of resting in the highest good, the mind of Tao is always present, and the gold elixir crystallizes; going on thereby to transmute the human mind, there is all-around benefit. The mind of Tao is the master, the human mind is the servant. When the mind of Tao is in charge of things, every step, every undertaking, is celestial design; personal desires do not arise, and even the human mind transforms into the mind of Tao: "getting a servant, there is no house"—all pollution vanishes, aggregated mundanity is stripped away, and the elixir is perfected. Leaping out of the cage of the ordinary, one's life span is myriad years. This is returning to ultimate good by reduction.

The function of reduction is extremely fine and subtle. It is not a matter of fixed rules, but changes according to the time so as to be effective. In general, the ultimate accomplishment is the unification of strength and flexibil-

ity resting in supreme good without evil. Those who practice the path of reduction should be sincere in reduction, so that they can perfect the beginning and complete the end.

41. *Reduction*

mountain above,  
lake below

There is a lake under a mountain, reducing it. Thus does the superior person eliminate wrath and cupidity.

Reduction means decrease. Above is *mountain* ䷳, below is *lake* ䷹; there is a lake under a mountain. The mountain is above, the lake is below; as the mountain is invaded by the moisture of the lake, it does not rise high, and as the lake is limited by the mountain, it does not overflow—there is gain within reduction. This is the image of *reduction*.

What superior people see in this is that the violence in people erupts as wrath, the self-interest in people emerges as cupidity; once wrath and cupidity arise, they corrode natural reality, so their harm is very great. Therefore superior people control their wrath, striving to change their temperament, so that their nature and feelings are harmonious and peaceful, as steady as a mountain. They quell cupidity, striving to eliminate wandering thoughts, so that their minds die and their spirits live, still and clear as a lake without waves.

Wrath is something that impedes the Way, cupidity is a bandit that disturbs the Way. If wrath and cupidity are not completely cleared up, even if the great Way is in sight it cannot be fully accomplished. Therefore the first step in practicing the Tao is to eliminate wrath and cupidity; when one reduces away anger and desire, the work after that will be unobstructed, and there is hope for the way ahead.

This is why Confucians consider it essential to conquer the self and return to propriety, Buddhists consider reduction of myriad phenomena to emptiness fundamental, and Taoists consider self-refinement to set up the foundation as primary. The sages of all three teachings first taught people to get rid of personal wrath and cupidity.

The Taoist master Tz'u-yang said, "If you want to cultivate the restorative elixir to perfection, first you must refine yourself and master your mind." Refining oneself means refining away this wrath and cupidity; mastering the mind means to control the mind and not give rise to wrath and cupidity. If students are able, while in the midst of reduced reality, to reverse themselves and reduce falsehood, then it will not be difficult to practice the Tao.