



18. *Degeneration*

**Correcting degeneration is greatly developmental.
It is beneficial to cross great rivers. Three days
before the start, three days after the start.**

EXPLANATION

Degeneration means deterioration. As for the qualities of the hexagram, above is *mountain* 艮, stopping, and below is *wind* 巽, penetrating: it represents one yin entering and yang stopping it. Also, *wind* is inside stop-

ping, representing stopping the yin so that it does not advance upward; it includes the meaning of correcting degeneration.

This hexagram represents abandoning the false and returning to the true; it follows on the preceding hexagram *joy*. *Joy* is harmonious action, in accord with the time and in accord with truth, not acting in any way that would be improper, so as to prevent degeneracy of action. When people are first born they are utterly good, with no evil, integrated with natural principle. Originally there is nothing to cultivate, nothing to realize; since there is no defect, there is nothing to correct. But when they get to be sixteen years old, yang peaks, producing yin; by the development of habits they become estranged from what is near by nature. This is like the one yin of *wind* arising below two yangs; as negative energy advances, the original being degenerates.

However, before the celestial Tao has yin, it cannot be yang; before human affairs have degeneration they cannot be repaired. This is why the path of correction of degeneracy is valuable. The path of correction of degeneracy is like the one yang of *mountain* stopping on top of two yins, not injured by negative influences. Using this one yang to go back to the root and return to life is the study of working on the fundamental. When the fundamental is established, the path develops. Once you recover your potential, it is like it was always there; this is attaining great development in degeneracy.

Great development is not in degeneration but in correcting degeneration. The way to correct degeneracy is not in empty tranquility without action; it is necessary to work in the midst of great danger and difficulty, to act in the dragon's pool and the tiger's lair. Only then can one restore one's original being, cultivating it into something indestructible. This is why degeneration is developmental, and it is beneficial to cross great rivers. Great rivers are most dangerous and hard to cross; if great rivers are crossed beneficially without injury, then places of little or no danger cannot harm.

However, the benefit of crossing great rivers involves action and process, from which no deviation can be admitted. "Three days before the start, three days after the start" is the secret of the active process. The yin and yang in people is like the waning and waxing of the moon. In the first three nights of the moon's appearance, the yang light appears in the southwest. This is represented by the trigram *thunder* ䷏. On the night of the fifteenth, the moon appears in the east. This is represented by the trigram *heaven* ䷁. On the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth, the light becomes round; this is "three days before the start." On the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth, the light starts to wane; this is "three days after the start." When people's yang energy is pure, this is "three days before the start." Once their yin energy has arisen, this is "three days after the start."

"Before the start" is yang, "after the start" is yin. This is the boundary of primordial and temporal yin and yang. People who practice the Tao need to know clearly whether things are degenerate or not. It is all in this boundary of "before the start" and "after the start." When yang energy is about to become pure, ward off yin to preserve yang; after yin energy has arisen, repel yin to restore yang. If you ward off yin energy before it arises,

and repel yin energy after it arises, then the yang energy that has not degenerated can be preserved, and that which has degenerated can be restored. This is the real science of working on the fundamental, getting rid of falsehood and returning to reality. Correctness is unfailingly developmental, development is unfailingly beneficial.

- **First yin:** Correcting the father's degeneracy; if there is a son, the deceased father is without blame. Danger, but in the end it turns out well.

EXPLANATION

In the beginning of degeneration, the fundamental is still complete; if you ward off yin before degeneration, this is like correcting the father's degeneracy. If he has a son to follow him, the deceased father, who should be censured, can be without blame. However, the way to correct degeneracy is not empty inaction; it requires caution in peril, preventing alien energies due to external influences from arising, and preventing the fundamental from being adversely affected. If one can be careful in the beginning, there will naturally be good luck in the end. This is warding off yin before degeneration.

- **2 yang:** Correcting the degeneracy of the mother, it is improper to be righteous.

EXPLANATION

When strength is used flexibly, flexibility is the root and firmness is the branch. Not being excessively firm, not damaging the flexibility, firmness and flexibility are united, and one is able to change adaptively according to circumstances. This is like correcting the degeneracy of the mother, in which it is not proper to be self-righteous. This is correcting degeneracy without being excessively adamant.

- **3 yang:** Correcting the degeneracy of the father, there is a little regret but not much blame.

EXPLANATION

Correcting the strong by strength, strength is excessive. It is like when the father is strong and the son is strong, correcting the father's degeneracy cannot avoid a little regret. But when degeneracy is corrected rightly, though there be a little regret, it is possible to have not much blame. This is correcting degeneracy too adamantly.

- **4 yin:** Forgiving the degeneration of the father; if one goes on, there will be shame.

EXPLANATION

Only being yielding, with no firmness, not immediately correcting degeneracy when it occurs, relaxing and letting deviousness grow, is like the fa-

ther being degenerate and the son forgiving it. If one goes on this way to cultivate the Tao, one will reap only regret. This is being too weak in correcting degeneracy.

- **5 yin:** Correcting the degeneracy of the father, using praise.

EXPLANATION

Being flexible and receptive, emptying the heart, showing oneself as lacking while praising what others have, is like using praise in correcting the degeneracy of the father. Acting with praise, using the strength and clarity of others to break through one's own ignorance, when there is degeneration one can then restore the state of no degeneration. This is skillful use of flexibility in correcting degeneration.

- **Top yang:** Not serving kings and lords, one makes one's concerns loftier.

EXPLANATION

When strength dwells in flexibility, without greed or ambition, there is no degeneration, and no detriment. Thereby one does not serve kings and lords, but makes one's concerns loftier. Not serving kings and lords means not aiming for fame or profit; making one's concerns higher means valuing spiritual virtues. When one values spiritual virtues and does not aim for fame or profit, one's abode is lofty and one's concern is great. Resting in the highest good without vacillating, one looks down on all—all things are empty. With the basis firm, even without cultivation there is naturally no degeneration. This is not correcting in the absence of degeneration.

So the path of correcting degeneration, working on the fundamental, is all a matter of staying in the highest good by combining yin and yang. If one has not arrived at the realm of ultimate good, even if there is no great degeneration, it is hard to avoid minor degeneration. So great development based on degeneration is made successful by crossing great rivers. When great rivers are crossed beneficially, one enters from striving into nonstriving: essence and life are both realized, and one is physically and mentally sublimated; merging with the Tao into reality, one becomes eternally indestructible, and the path of correcting degeneration is completed.



18. *Degeneration*

mountain above,
wind below

There is wind in the mountains; degeneration. Thus superior people rouse the people and nurture virtue.

Degeneration is when things fall apart. Above is *mountain* 山, below is *wind* 风; this is wind in the mountains. Mountains can nurture beings, wind can stir beings; stirring up and nurturing is the image of repairing *degeneration*.

What superior people see in this is that the vital spirit in humans is like the people, and the natural reality in humans is virtue; when there is degeneration in the natural reality, it is due to not knowing how to rouse the vital spirit to cultivate and nurture it. Therefore they rouse the "people" of the vital spirit, and nurture the "virtue" of natural reality.

Rousing the people must be like the wind gradually rising from below, ascending from lowliness to the heights. Nurturing virtue must be like the stability of a mountain as it nurtures beings, nurturing with richness and warmth. When one is able to nurture, the vital spirit becomes more and more active; when one is able to rouse, natural reality attains development. By rousing and nurturing, that which has not yet degenerated can be preserved, and that which has degenerated can be repaired. By gradual penetration, getting stronger with perseverance, one will eventually advance to the stage of ultimate good without evil, where there can be no degeneration.