

## Hexagram 60 – Jie Limits



*Limits and discipline.*

*Spiritual influence nourishing all*

*Bitter discipline not permitting benefiting all.*

### Structure:

- Water ☵ above lake ☱, water within a lake. A lake can only hold so much water before it floods.
- Danger over joy. Capable of joy in danger, warding off danger by joy.
- Water above and below. Water held together by a lake.

Natural limits underlie constant change. The eye cannot capture how water flows over a rocky stream, yet each drop precisely follows the laws of Earth. The dramatic dance of trees swaying in a great wind and the wheeling of stars overhead follow the rhythms set by the same laws that guide the movements of Creation. Diverse lifeforms spread around the planet constrained by ecologic limits.

People are subject to the moral laws, which limit and regulate human behavior and interactions. Sages stay close to basic needs and restore what they take from others, restoring the natural balance. Exceeding natural limits cause imbalances, and if not checked, can lead to disruption and death. Over time we have learned natural and moral limits from the suffering humanity has caused by ignoring them. The wise willingly accept these limits and live joyfully within the spiritual path.

### Virtues as limits

Learning how to live on Earth with each other in balanced ways is the human responsibility. When we knowingly exceed natural and moral limits to indulge our self-cherishing and hostility for others, we separate ourselves from interbeing and the spirit. The sage does not exceed natural limits and laws and knows how to avoid the extremes of too much or too little.

The virtue<sup>1</sup> of moral discipline regulates and communicates the spirit's love. Sages use self-discipline to shape their lives in ways that free them from complicity with what harms so that they can bring forth ways of the spirit into the world<sup>2</sup>. Moral discipline restrains and limits our behavior, but for sages this virtue is not a set of rules imposed from outside, but the immanent rhythms of how they live and make their love meaningful to others.

The world conditions our tendencies for self-cherishing but not selflessness. Worldly concerns shape what has form, but not the formless. The wise adapt to changing conditions within the world, but their devotion to the spirit never changes.

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<sup>1</sup> **Virtues** shape our behavior and align us with the spirit. The Tao brings forth the good and great, which we experience as love. The Tao causes all life to develop and flow within natural limits, regulating and organizing love, which we call a moral discipline that benefits all. The Tao transforms life so that each attains its true nature, a power that we call justice that ensures that all life has the means to achieve its potential according to its being. The Tao harmonizes all life within interbeing, which we call wisdom, separating what endures from what perishes. The completed sage uses these virtues to shape the world.

<sup>2</sup> **World** does not refer to the Earth but to how people live on Earth. The world – civilization, culture, history, society, science, economy, education, technology – is embedded as a subsystem within the natural system. People create their world through the choices they make.

### **Consequences of exceeding limits**

Our dissatisfaction with others and our willingness to harm others to get what we want separate us from the spirit. We harm others and the Earth when we go too far beyond sufficiency. Everyone needs shelter, but the selfish build mansions. Everyone needs food, but the selfish let others starve while they feast. We need to defend ourselves, but the selfish use force to get what they want. The foolish ignore boundaries and indulge their harmful feelings and thoughts, often with fatal outcomes.

Life motivates us to stay within natural and moral limits by imposing ever greater levels of suffering until we finally exert ourselves to put an end to our reckless behavior and return to a balanced life. The first time that we intentionally harm others and the Earth for self-benefit, spiritual forces administer a mild penalty as a warning to halt in time on the path of wrong-doing. Yet when we persistently ignore a life lesson, we suffer increasingly severe consequences.

### **Moral discipline**

Limits are troublesome when they make us feel constrained from doing what we want to do. Yet the meaning of life dissolves for those who try to capture unlimited possibilities within their lives. People achieve significance through setting limits for themselves, the backbone of a virtuous life. Freedom comes from limiting our behavior to natural limits and moral discipline, responsibilities we have voluntarily taken for ourselves. Those who play with life never amount to anything.

Moral discipline begins with the choice to care for all life and the Earth, our spiritual responsibility. Those with established virtue can discern what harms and what benefits. Knowing limits, the wise do not exceed them and make restitutions when they realize that they have thoughtlessly exceeded them. We discipline ourselves and community to live in balanced ways with other beings, giving back for whatever we take from others.

A spiritual practice begins with the self-discipline of learning and practicing morality. People have the power to choose between acting selfishly to benefit themselves or acting in ways that benefit all. Exercising a moral discipline reduces harmful behaviors and increases benefiting all and the Earth. Just as our feet provide us a means to move, self-discipline, the basis of all the virtuous qualities<sup>3</sup>, gives us the way of moving our life along a spiritual path.

The wise learn to persist in the spiritual path by adapting to the situation. They stop when they approach a limit, act when the time calls for action, and get out of danger in ways that benefit all.

Sages maintain their discipline even in unfavorable situations, flexibly keeping to the spirit and not letting difficulties disturb the mind or affect their resolve. The situation may be dangerous, but they are not in danger. The situation may be in the hands of others, but sages have the inner freedom to live the ways of the spirit. Pleased with the limits set by the spirit and aware of the aim of life, sages remain content with a glad mind.

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<sup>3</sup> **Virtues** shape our behavior and align us with the spirit. The Tao brings forth the good and great, which we experience as love. The Tao causes all life to develop and flow within natural limits, regulating and organizing love, which we call a moral discipline that benefits all. The Tao transforms life so that each attains its true nature, a power that we call justice that ensures that all life has the means to achieve its potential according to its being. The Tao harmonizes all life within interbeing, which we call wisdom, and separates what endures from what perishes. The completed sage uses these virtues to shape the world.

We should not persist in excessive and painful discipline when it inflicts severe restrictions on self and others, causing injury and rebellion. We need limits within our practice and avoid going to the extreme. When discipline becomes painful there is no sweetness – only bitterness. Our attention stays on the pain rather than the pleasure of bringing to life the ways of the spirit. Imposing suffering and servility on ourselves does not give us joy but rather harms our body and spirit.

Hypocrisy, the imposing of limits on others without applying them first to ourselves, provokes resentment and resistance. The path of limitation requires us to model wanted behaviors so that others can emulate them. We make the limitation possible for others by our own feelings of contentment and joy in living a disciplined life.

The wise remain pleased with their lives and focus on their duty to benefit all. They use difficulties to nourish joy and use joy to guard against imbalances. The situation may be up to others, but living the ways of the spirit is up to us.

**Line 1:** The line knows that the present limitations of time and conditions impede communication and relationships. The line wisely quietly rests and waits for the times to change.

**Line 2:** It is good to hesitate when the time for action has not come but no longer. The wise quickly seize the moment when the time for action comes. Anxious hesitation leads to regret because of the missed opportunity.

**Line 3:** Those who do not know enough to have discipline and live beyond limits will suffer. The undisciplined lament a situation brought about by themselves. They have nobody else to blame.

**Line 4:** The line imposes restrictions first to itself calmly and gently, without force. We have stability when we contentedly live within natural limits and with others.

**Line 5:** The line imposes limits upon itself and others in an agreeable manner. Those with inner mastery keep a glad mind even in a dangerous situation. The line models the discipline of the strong who remain adaptable. Others naturally emulate such an example so that whatever they undertake succeeds. In this way, the line extends its spiritual blessings to benefit all.

**Line 6:** People will not endure severe restrictions. The more severe, the more unavoidable is a reaction. A tormented body will rebel against excessive asceticism that imposes a persistent and systematic ruthlessness against oneself. Yet at times, such ruthlessness may prove the only means to remedy self-cherishing, which otherwise would make the line vulnerable to irresolution and temptation.