

## Hexagram 48 The Well



*The well.*

*Changing social structures, not changing the fundamentals of life*

*Life does not become more or less.*

*Going, coming: sacred waters of life surging.*

*Muddy water. The well-rope not reaching the water.*

*Breaking the well-jug. Flow of life blocked and its meaning lost.*

**Structure:** Wood ☵ is below, water ☵ above. The wood goes down into the Earth to bring up water.



**Ideogram:** Two vertical lines cross two horizontal ones, representing eight fields with equal access to a central well.

### Images

- A well dispenses the source of nourishment.
- A tree draws water out of the earth to benefit all its parts.

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 moral discipline. The Tao transforms life so that each attains its potential according to its being, which we call justice. The Tao transforms life so that each accords with the great harmony, which we call wisdom. These immutable virtues<sup>1</sup> of the Tao create enduring conditions.

Life comes and goes, and all life experiences its inexhaustible abundance. We experience life as a vivid arising experience, a process of growth and decline, the giving and taking of life. Generation after generation, the ever upwelling, inexhaustible experience of life remains available to all beings. Situations and times may change, but life endures, the unchangeable within change.

In traditional rural communities, the central common well provides the life necessity of water. Anyone can come to the well and bring the water up from its source. Likewise, anyone can draw from the wellspring of the sacred through the depths of their being. Just as stone cases a well, deeply established virtues provide the means to a lasting connection with the spirit. Our virtues develop as we move on the path away from what harms and toward caring for the Earth Interbeing.

### Completing the spiritual path

All life has a spiritual potential, the innate capacity to fathom the spirit and to manifest it within the world. People have the choice nurture their spiritual path or to develop their self-cherishing and hostility for others. While everyone has an inner access to the spirit, only a few have the insatiable diligence and persistence needed to break through the barriers of selfishness and ill-will to fathom their spiritual depths and to bring forth the sacred into life.

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<sup>1</sup> For the words balance, complicity, cosmos, exceptionalism, harmony, interbeing, virtue, ways of the spirit, world, and worldly concerns, please visit [www.wayofhumanity.net](http://www.wayofhumanity.net) for the Glossary, which provides a brief definition of their meaning as used in this commentary.

Just as life cannot survive without a dependable source of clear water, neither can we fulfill our lives without a reliable source of spiritual nourishment. Not making a spiritual quest leaves life unfulfilled and without benefit. Some may fail in their spiritual path to penetrate to the roots of life and remain fixed in convention, a failure as complete as not having a spiritual path. Others may suddenly collapse and neglect their path or do not go all the way, achieving nothing. Many wander in a muddy life without meaning or purpose, ignorant about how to nurture their spiritual being or even belittling the effort.

The wise do not permit the difficulties of the spiritual path to vex them. They learn how to persistently align their lives with the ways of the spirit. No matter how often we feel disappointed by what happens, we must start again. We must make the effort again and again to break through our willingness to harm others for self-benefit, to learn from our mistakes, and to move through the many dangers that separate us from others and the spirit.

For the rope to reach the bottom of the well and the waters of the spirit, the wise penetrate their deluded beliefs to find the actual source of life. This divine yearning for the springs of life remains alive, always in motion, always striving forward. Then hardship, even misfortune, becomes a source of strength in this quest.

### **Dispersing blessings**

Just as the well fulfills its purpose when others draw its water, so should we benefit from what sages offer and translate their wisdom into our lives. We must not only draw the spiritual water from sages, but also to make it part of life. Wisdom not put into practice has no value.

When sages finally reach the sacred and can bring what they have experienced to life, they become the inexhaustible source from which others can quench their spiritual thirst. Those who have deepened their virtues and live a spiritual life have the responsibility to nurture others and to manifest the spiritual path within the world.

Sages bring to the world the waters of life that well up from the depths, keeping a clear access to the central meaning of life and ever holding fast to the ways of the spirit. The more others take from the sage, the more the sage has. A clear overflowing spring nourishes all without hindrance. In this way, sages fulfill their lives. The spiritual life transforms the sage who then transforms the world by bringing the spiritual path into the world.

### **The Book of Changes**

The Book of Changes has proved itself a reliable and inexhaustible source of spiritual nourishment for all who seek to draw from its wisdom, connecting those who draw from it with the spirit. Spiritual seekers need a teacher for guidance. Those who approach a great spiritual teacher with faith and respect will receive wise guidance on how to move through adverse situations and find the wisdom needed to move forward. Those who muddy the well by doubting the I Ching or its guidance thwart their spiritual progress.

We cultivate our virtues to reach the spirit. The Book of Changes teaches us the qualities of a life worth living. It gives us insights into the fundamental issues of our lives and guides us on how we can nourish the virtues necessary to connect with the spirit and to manifest its ways within our lives and in the world. The I Ching helps us to know the sameness of life for all and our common need to live in harmony with the spirit. The Book of Changes builds our capacities to respond to life in ways that benefit all.

The waters of life surge up from the spiritual depths. The sage persistently maintains a clear access to this central life source for fulfillment and for the well-being of all.

**Line 1:** The weak line depicts an abandoned well with mud at the bottom. As it has no water, it cannot benefit others. Nobody comes to the well; thus, it remains outside the flow of life, and time passes it by. Others do not seek out those who throw themselves away. The more we live the ways of worldly concerns, the less value we have to offer others.

**Line 2:** The clear water within the well seeps downward into a gap, losing the upward spiritual direction of its way. The line possesses good qualities but neglects them, and so others do not draw from it. As a result, its virtues deteriorate. The line associates with those who shun the path and can no longer accomplish anything worthwhile.

**Line 3:** Others do not call upon a sage to lend its wisdom to move through dangers, which saddens the sage. Instead, the sage creates its own opportunities to serve with wise partners within the community and extend its blessings to all.

**Line 4:** While workers line the well with stone, others cannot use it to draw water. The effort results in an enduring source of clean water. During this time, we can little for others until we deepen our spiritual being.

**Line 5:** The clear, cold spring water of the well has risen to the well's rim, and others come to its refreshing water to quench their thirst. Sages have an inexhaustible inner wealth as they draw from the ways of the spirit. The more people draw from the sage, the greater its inner treasure. The rising of the water to the top of the well makes its spiritual blessings available to all, fulfilling its function and purpose.

**Line 6:** All come to the well for water without restriction. No matter how many come, all find what they need. The dependable well has a spring that never runs dry, and it serves as a blessing for the whole community. The line represents the supreme fulfillment of the spiritual path. The sage has completed its spiritual path and now has the responsibility to further others in theirs. The wise draw from the teachings of sages and follow their example of how to live in the world in ways that benefit all.