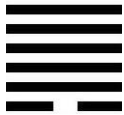


Hexagram 44 – Overcoming Conditioned Behavior

 *Self-cherishing and hostility for others.*
Powerful attraction.
No benefit from grasping the self.

Structure: One weak line enters from the bottom, but the five top lines restrain it.

The hexagram marks the fifth month in the Chinese calendar, June-July. At summer solstice, the force of darkness reappears and ascends, which ultimately will overcome the forces of light.

This hexagram describes the dangerous situation when harmful culturally conditioned behaviors appear, eclipsing our awareness of the spirit. When we experience a situation for which we have been conditioned, it triggers an emotional reaction, an emotional pattern that runs automatically and impels us to act in ways not in our best interest. The heightened emotional charge of an emotional reaction pattern clouds our perception, making it difficult to perceive the situation as it truly is.

Our conditioned denial of the sacred, coupled with beliefs in our self-centeredness, individualism, and exceptionalism, separate us from the sacred Earth Interbeing, the root of our willingness to harm others for self-benefit. Emotional reactions keep us in an emotional turmoil and keep us from solving actual problems.

Emotional reactions keep our lives in a loop of destructive behaviors that becomes more egregious the more they run. Unchecked emotional reactions generate further disturbances and imbalances. Whenever we experience an interaction or situation that makes us impulsively angry, fearful, or greedy, our emotional reactions run.

Even though these behavior patterns have no other meaning than to cause suffering, most Western people consider them normal human behavior. When emotional reactions cause actions that harm to the Earth Interbeing, some begin to feel remorse and regret for their actions. They become aware of the discrepancy between their behavior and their values to care for the Earth Interbeing.

The wise seek and preserve their equanimity, the capacity to accept and face whatever they encounter in life and to respond well to whatever they experience without collapsing into an emotional reaction. By avoiding this inner emotional turmoil, they remain calmly centered in their spiritual path. Until they know how to respond to a situation wisely, the wise retreat and allow situations to unfold without their intervention, simply letting them be.

We have the possibility to step out of the turmoil and divisiveness of our conditioned reactive lives. Recognizing that we suffer from emotional reactions and knowing that our cultural conditioning has caused them opens us to wanting to overcome what keeps us apart. At the end of suffering, we awake from the delusion that we are separate from what we experience.

We need to dismantle our densely reactive emotional conditioning ourselves. Nobody can do it for us. Before we can move others and the world away from an omnicidal culture, we first must free ourselves from that culture's conditioning. Until we can do that, we will view the world and others through our reactive conditioning, blind to the transformative path. By changing ourselves, we awake to a deep love and compassion for all.

First, we cultivate a focused attention as our tool to dismantle emotional reactions. To dismantle conditioning, our attention must have an energy level greater than that of the emotional energy that binds with the conditioning. We use this focused attention to form a strong container in which we experience the emotion within the conditioned reaction. Once we have fully experienced the emotion, we have broken the bond between the conditioning and the emotion. We experience the emotional energy that the broken conditioned bond releases as heightened attention and ultimately the sacred presence.

A breath meditation cultivates a strong, focused attention. This most basic and certain attention strengthening practice joins a stable awareness of breathing with the bodily sensations of breathing. The meditation practice teaches us how to focus our attention on our breath for an extended period of time without losing focus, just what we need to dismantle conditioning.

If we have a weak attention, we will move away from the breath without even knowing it. We start thinking about something else than following our breath and get lost in thought. Yet, as soon as we become aware of the distraction, simply return to the breath and continue focusing your attention on the breath. Gradually, we will learn how to cultivate attention and not let emotional reactions consume it. When we let emotions come and go, their released energy strengthens our attention.

If we have a weak attention and attempt this dismantling practice, then the energy of the conditioned emotional reactive bond will overpower our attention. The energy of attention will then flow into the conditioned bond, strengthening its reactivity. We need to give ourselves time to strengthen our attention, a gradual process.

The practice of dismantling emotional reactions consists of several steps.

- Recognize the turmoil confusion and heightened energy of an emotional reaction within an interaction or situation.
- Immediately pause and physically retreat to prevent yielding to the urgent and strengthening impulse to emotionally react.
- Firmly hold that impulse to emotionally react within attention despite the discomfort that you will experience.
- Within attention, drop whatever explanatory story you have given to the emotions. The story may be attached to a very dense emotional pattern, but they are still words. You may have to make this effort several times to drop the story until you experience only the emotion.
- Within a compassionate attention, completely feel the emotion. Compassion arises out of a stable attention. By having this quiet container, we allow ourselves to fully experience the emotional suffering and the compassionate knowing that all beings suffer.
- Stay with the uncomfortable emotion. Where in your body do you feel it? Massage yourself there to help focus on the emotion. Be curious about the emotion. Emotions are the language of the body. Stay with the emotion and fathom its meaning.
- At some point, without any intervention of your part, you will suddenly feel joy, the ecstasy of seeing something that you could not see before. This joy arises from the releasing of the emotional energy that bound it to conditioning.
- Stay with the heightened energy, which becomes presence, the experience of the sacred coming through the distortions and defilements of the conditioning. Feel the love. Conditioning blocks sacred love from coming through. When you have this experience of heightened love, imagine pouring your energies into the problem situation to transform it into a loving experience. In this way, you experience the world changing. You have changed the world.

- Some of this heightened energy flows into attention to increase its power. Yet unless you intentionally disperse the extra heightened energy, it will flow back into conditioning. You can calm yourself by radiating love and energy to all beings and the Earth.
- Once calm, just rest within love.
- Don't just get up and take-up where you left off. Patiently, give yourself time to digest and absorb the released energy and allow the situation that had triggered the emotional reaction to unfold on its own. Use the teachings of this instance to inform you how to better manage the inevitable next relationship problem. You will come to know how to respond in ways that benefit all.

Success for this practice depends upon the strength of our attention. You may find that you cannot contain the emotion within presence, that the energy of the emotional reaction overpowers your attention. Try the method again after you have worked on growing attention through the breath meditation.

Our emotional conditioning run deep and wide. We cannot imagine that we can overcome it in one step. We need to remain vigilant for the next emotional reaction. But now we have a way to manage and undo our conditioning. Our mastery grows each time we use this dismantling process successfully. As we become more vigilant for the rising of an emotional reaction, we will start dismantling sooner so that eventually our emotions become waves rather than eruptions.

Within a compassionate attention, we see emotional reactions as patterned emotional waves that fall apart and cease to function. When we cultivate attention, our lives become an ongoing journey into the mystery of being.

Line 1: When emotional reactions arise unchecked, they strengthen and degrade our resolve to benefit all and activate our willingness to harm. The wise undo these reactions as soon as they become aware of them to avoid them becoming a serious problem later.

Line 2: If we indulge emotional reactions, they absorb the energy of our attention and take root, bringing out their true character. The wise hold these feelings as if guarding a dangerous prisoner, yet with gentle care.

Line 3: The line did not take seriously the dangers of an emotional reaction and dismantle it when it first arose. As the reaction has strengthened, the line now finds it hard to disentangle itself from it. At this point, only a determined resolve to preserve the spiritual path can tame these feelings in the midst of the dangers they have already caused.

Line 4: The emotional reaction has overtaken the line, which acts out the harmful conditioned emotional pattern, causing others to distance themselves from it.

Line 5: The line aligns its actions with the ways of the spirit and trusts in the transforming power of love to overcome its emotional reaction.

Line 6: The line dismisses the spiritual path and resists the emotional reaction directly on its own. The line becomes deeply entangled with it, but it has only itself to blame for the ensuing humiliation.