

## Hexagram 21 – Gnawing and Biting



*Gnaw to reach the essential by removing the unnecessary.  
Bite through the obstacles to unite.  
Success.  
Benefit from knowing consequences.*

### **Image Tradition**

*What we open to possesses our being.  
Named: gnawing and biting.  
Gnaw to reach the essential by removing the unessential.  
Bite through the obstacles to unite.  
Success.*

*Firmness and yielding distributed.  
Action with wisdom.  
Power and discernment uniting into wholeness and beauty.  
Yielding at the center moves toward wholeness.  
Benefit from knowing the circumstances and the consequences.*

**Structure:** Wisdom of fire ☲ above, and action ☳ below: energetic and effective action with wisdom.

The hexagram has the image of an open jaw about to bite through an obstruction (4<sup>th</sup> line). To bring forth our life's wholeness, we must strip ourselves of what obstructs us from realizing our wholeness and bite through our self-centeredness, that which separate us from the sacred and Earth Interbeing.

To strengthen our capacities to finally overthrow our self-centeredness, we diminish the ways our being self-centered harms the wholeness of our ourselves and the Earth Interbeing. Reducing our indulgence in consuming more than we need increases our respect and care for interbeing. Strengthening our belonging as equals within interbeing weakens our privileged identities. We recognize whatever we open to possesses our being.

At some point on the path, wanting for life to continue on Earth for generations to come becomes more important. Wise investigation informs us whether what we want to do will bring harm or benefit to the Earth Interbeing. This investigation requires an uncompromising honesty to discern the consequences of an action. If an activity benefits all and not just ourselves or our group, then we judge our activity as wholesome. If the activity supports self-centeredness and only benefits us and our group, then we can simply let it go.

However, our cultural conditioned self-centeredness and beliefs have rooted themselves deeply into our being. Sometimes, we cannot simply let things go. For example, our social fear of the disapproval of others goes far back into our ancestral history. Yet within a hierarchic, highly divisive culture, that social fear of being shunned by our group becomes entangled with social status, biases, privileges, identities, and more. In such situations, we face the challenge of going along with the harmful ways of the culture to avoid disapproval or to act within the group in ways that align with the purpose and values of the Earth Interbeing. We have to bite through our conflicting values and decide to do the harder but right thing to do. We have to accept the inevitable personal

consequences of disrupting the harmful ways of the group. Yet we have prepared ourselves for disapproval because we have changed our group identity from self-serving individuals to interbeing with the Earth.

We face many such overwhelming challenges on the path to wholeness with the Earth Interbeing. However, our actions and wise discernment unite and transform into our wholeness and beauty. Empty of self-centeredness, we move compassionately toward restoring the wholeness of the Earth Interbeing. Our wise action persistently centers on the continuation and thriving of life on Earth. Our compassion arises from knowing our interdependence and how our actions reverberate throughout the interbeing.

**Line 1:** The line avoids behaving in ways that it now recognizes have harmed itself, others and the Earth.

Confucius: “Inferior people are not ashamed of unkindness and do not shrink from injustice. If no advantage beckons, they make no effort. If not intimidated, they do not improve themselves. But if they are made to behave correctly in small matters, they are careful in large ones. This is fortunate for these people.”

**Line 2:** In this situation, the line abstains and renounces specific behaviors that have resisted the lines efforts to curb them. No great harm results as the wrong-doing justified the harsh discipline, but the line did not see the subtle hidden with the obvious.

**Line 3:** When a culture for a long time has supported ways of living that endanger the Earth Interbeing, people come to blindly accept the harm they do as a cultural norm. The line’s efforts to end these dangerous ways stir up poisonous hatred against it. The weak line can only act in small ways, but it frees itself of harming the Earth Interbeing.

**Line 4:** Upon investigating principle, the line sees the truth and understands what it must do. The line succeeds in its arduous effort to transform great obstacles and harmful cultural conditions. By remaining remains hard as metal and straight as an arrow, it bites through the ways of living that endanger not only the wholeness of the Earth Interbeing but its wholeness as well.

**Line 5:** The line has difficulties making a decision because of its ambivalence about whether to yield to the expectations of others or to do follow the path of wholeness, the correct but harder thing to do. It wisely chooses to further the Earth Interbeing despite its anticipated that others will disapprove.

**Line 6:** The line has caused so much harm and persistently ignored the many warnings of the wise that release from the consequences of its behavior proves impossible. The line, deaf to wise counsel, receives a severe punishment.

Confucius says, “If good does not accumulate, it is not enough to make a name for someone. If evil does not accumulate, it is not enough to destroy someone. Therefore, inferior people think goodness in small things has no value and so neglect them. They think small sins do no harm and so do not give them up. Thus, sins accumulate until they can no longer be covered up, and their guilt becomes so great that it can be no longer wiped out.”