

'Answers' of 2004:
Extracts from Clarity's I Ching newsletter

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SUBSCRIBERS' READINGS	3
<i>Career Prospects in 2004: 56, 9/3,9/4, 23</i>	3
<i>A sense of losing power: 15, 6/1,6/2,6/4, 34</i>	6
<i>Job Prospects: 51, 9/1, 16</i>	10
<i>Retirement: 17, 9/4,9/5, 24</i>	13
<i>Advice for a job search: 28, 9/4,9/5, 46</i>	18
<i>Career progress: 9, 9/2,9/3, 42</i>	23
<i>What am I doing wrong? 19, no changing lines</i>	27
<i>Consulting Yi about past lives. 21, 9/1,9/4,9/6, 2</i>	30
HEXAGRAMS	34
3, <i>Sprouting</i>	34
4, <i>Not Knowing</i>	36
8, <i>Seeking Union</i>	38
13, <i>People in Harmony</i>	40
17, <i>Following</i>	42
24, <i>Returning</i>	45
48, <i>the Well</i>	47
59, <i>Dispersing</i>	49
60, <i>Articulating</i>	51
DIY CORNERS AND OTHER ARTICLES	53
<i>Links to audio</i>	53
<i>What does it mean when a hexagram has no changing lines?</i>	53
<i>Taking the I Ching off the shelf</i>	54
<i>Incongruously positive answers</i>	55
<i>'Contradictory' moving lines?</i>	55
<i>More ways with moving lines</i>	57
<i>Understanding the Relating Hexagram</i>	58
<i>Cautionary lines</i>	60
<i>Telling 'yes' from 'no'</i>	61
<i>Good and bad fortune?</i>	63
<i>Different perspectives</i>	66

Subscribers' readings

To make it easier to find a reading with hexagrams you're interested in, I've included the hexagrams in the title for each subscriber's reading. This 'traditional' format for writing hexagrams and lines is 'first hexagram, moving lines, second hexagram'. For instance, 56, 9/3,9/4, 23 means hexagram 56 changing at the third and fourth lines to hexagram 23. 9/3 means 'nine at the third place': a 'nine' is a moving yang line; a six is a moving yin line.

Career Prospects in 2004: 56, 9/3,9/4, 23

"I am from China in July, 1997, and I have worked in a biological research company in Victoria BC, Canada since Jan. 1999. I am a technician in the lab.

I was born in Nov. 14, 1956--a female.

What will happen in my career or job in 2004?

Thanks a lot,

Jie"

The I Ching answered with Hexagram 56, Travelling, changing to Hexagram 23, Stripping Away. It sounds as though you will, at the very least, have the opportunity to move on...

Primary hexagram: 56, Travelling

This describes you as a traveller: someone with a distant objective, who has stopped just for a while among strangers. It's a strong indication that you are not truly 'at home' in your present job, and shouldn't regard it as more than a 'staging post' on your journey. You're not going to bring about major changes in the way this company does things, and nor are they having a significant influence on you.

'Travelling, creating small success,
Travelling, constancy means good fortune.'

That is, your small degree of involvement with the firm you work for brings you small rewards - and this has been the only sensible strategy, as there is no place here for your larger self. But good fortune in the longer term comes from 'constancy' - which I think means not just persistence, but also continuing truth to yourself and your more remote ideals.

This may be quite a confusing feeling for you, because it is so different from how things felt when you first left China. At first, you were doing something great and important, fulfilling your destiny - now, the journey is still going on, but in small steps and without dramatic changes. It's as if you and your decisions have moved from the centre of things to the periphery. This stage actually demands every bit as much self-reliance and independence of mind as your initial move. As a traveller, you provide your own standard to judge by.

And you need to be able to use it:

'Above the mountain is fire. Travelling.
The noble one with clear-minded care
Uses punishments and does not drag out legal proceedings.'

The fire above the mountain sounds to me like the camp fire for a group of travellers. Before it burns out, they must settle any disputes, not carry their disagreements with them. The same principle applies when you are travelling alone: you need to take your decisions, act on them (even if it hurts) and move on - to limit how much time and energy you'll expend in the process of deciding.

Change

With the two central lines changing, you are travelling across the threshold from feeling to action - never easy! You might be spurred on by the feeling that there is more you can do - and afraid, at the same time, that such feelings may not fit well with the real world. But if you are absolutely present to all the guidance the real world offers, it may be surprising what comes to you.

Changing line 3

'Wanderer burns down the rest house.
Loses her young helper.
Constancy brings danger.'

I'm afraid this does indicate that you could lose your job - not through neglecting it, but actually through being too enthusiastic. This line describes someone who looks into things too hard, asks for too much from other people, and generally lives at a higher degree of intensity than her surroundings can sustain. Could you be trying to make more of your job than it can really offer you?

Obviously, continuing in this way is dangerous. But before you stifle your ambitions and make a last-ditch effort to fade into the background... 'danger' in the I Ching is not always something to be avoided. You might have valid reasons to test the capacity of your job and relationships to breaking point.

Changing line 4

'Traveller with a place to stay,
Gains property and an axe.
My heart is not glad.'

Here is the alternative picture, of the year you can expect if you manage not to 'burn down' your current position: greater job security, perhaps the offer of a rise in pay ('property') or status (the axe, symbol of authority). Yet this is not something you can rejoice in. Perhaps the problem is that it still doesn't feel altogether secure - or perhaps you just don't feel sufficiently connected to this firm and this job to feel happy about the assurance of staying there.

Relating hexagram: 23, Stripping Away

I think that this reading as a whole is asking you whether you have arrived in the position that really brings out your full potential. When someone asks, 'And what do you do?' you may be able to answer easily, but how much excitement and enthusiasm do you feel?

If you have the feeling that there is more you can do with your life, what will it take for that fresh potential to emerge and grow? The painful truth is that, as a rule, the familiar and safe scenario has to be stripped away from us to create the space for new growth.

Hexagrams 23 and 24, Stripping Away and Returning, form one of the I Ching's 'out with the old, in with the new' pairs. Stripping Away is the first part of the process: losing the old and familiar. On the surface, your job is secure; underneath, the life is going out of it. Presently, the surface may also fall away - and if you're unprepared, this leaves you feeling very lost indeed.

'Stripping away.
No harvest in having a direction to go.'

This isn't necessarily about having the courage to make the break from the old job, but rather having the courage not to hang on when the break makes itself, and to allow something truer and more alive to emerge. You're not being asked to start making detailed plans for the future and fix on your 'direction to go'. Part of the lesson of Stripping Away, in my own experience, is that if you don't clear out the old completely, then what you think are new ideas will turn into repetitions of old, familiar, 'safe' patterns. So the best thing you can do with feelings of insecurity is also the hardest - just to live with them.

Yet not making plans doesn't mean being unprepared:

'Mountain resting on the earth. Stripping away.
With generosity from above, creating quiet places below.'

The harder you hold on to the old ways, the worse Stripping Away will feel. But this kind of change doesn't absolutely have to happen through pain and crisis. The 'mountain' of your current status and job security can be 'eroded' gradually and gently, creating a fertile valley below where people can be at home. You can concentrate instead on your untapped potential: a wide-open, unexplored landscape beyond the mountain.

[Jie's reply](#)

'Dear Hilary:

Yes, you are right. Our company just laid off 30 people because of financial and market problems, but I am there still. I wonder it may stay until July or longest might be for another two years if they will get the loan from local government.

Thank you very much

Jie'

A sense of losing power: 15, 6/1,6/2,6/4, 34

"Hi Hilary,

My situation that I would love to have some guidance on is as follows. I have been in an intimate relationship with M for just over one year. Before that we were close friends for about seven years.

The hardest thing about our relationship is that we are very very similar so at times it is very hard to know what is going on for who and at other times it is very tempting to project all the difficulties onto him and feel very arrogant and smug - not healthy qualities in the eye of the I Ching. I learn again and again from the I Ching not to interfere with his process and to withdraw when our communication is getting stuck etc. As a result of doing this, something that is starting to happen quite regularly with me is that the part of me that I identify as my ego keeps feeling like it is losing power which I am sure is a good thing long term, but feels very threatening and life endangering in the here and now.

What I would like for now is guidance on how I support myself to become humble and accepting in the face of what feels like such a huge and controlling ego!

Many many thanks
J"

Dear J,

I asked the I Ching on your behalf,

'What is the best way for J to respond to this sense of losing power?'

I phrased it this way in order to be as open as I could to all possible answers, without setting an 'agenda' for the oracle. In fact, the answer responds very closely to the way you originally phrased the question, in terms of humility and acceptance versus the ego. Yi answered you with Hexagram 15, Humility, changing to Hexagram 34, Great Vigour. It sets your desire to be more humble in the context and atmosphere of immensely strong willpower.

Humility and Great Vigour in this reading are not antagonistic at all: they work together. Humility is a way of relating to Great Vigour, but Great Vigour also supports and energises Humility.

Primary hexagram: 15, Humility

'Humility' may actually be a slightly misleading translation for what this hexagram is about: it doesn't mean denying your strengths and gifts or trying to hide them. Bradford Hatcher wisely calls this hexagram Authenticity: that doesn't mean self-abnegation any more than it means throwing your weight around.

You've already taken the unusual step of not projecting your fears out onto your partner and making him into a personal 'project'. Looking at this reading, I think the next step would be to acknowledge the sense of fear and threat as a perfectly acceptable, loveable part of yourself - rather than setting out to banish it, like a hero facing a monster. The most basic meaning of this hexagram is Uniting: there is only one of you.

And literally, it is about words that unite, that hold close to reality. So within your relationship, this is about truth in communication. No need to wear a mask; no need to communicate anything less than yourself.

'Authentic, creating success.
The noble one completes it.'

The noble one, the one with vision and integrity, can carry authenticity through to a successful conclusion: this is an ideal to aspire to. The authentic person will never be distracted from what she has to do, because she has no need to prove anything about herself. This is why the core of Authenticity is Release: freedom in every moment to choose your own course, with no puppet strings to be pulled or buttons to be pushed!

Time and again, I've found this hexagram comes up to remind me not to exaggerate. For instance, beware of the idea that the relationship depends on your becoming a better person. It's quite safe to take your role much more lightly; you may be amazed at how little depends on you. What if... there were no heroic battle to be fought with an ego-monster, no great sacrifices to be made? What if you didn't need to go to any extremes at all?

'In the centre of the earth there is a mountain. Humility.
The noble one reduces the many to increase the few,
She weighs things up to even out their distribution.'

The earth is low-lying, accepting, and offers no resistance; the mountain is massive, solid and distinct. And 'humility' in the Yijing is a combination of the two. The earth masses together into mountains and is eroded again to enrich the valleys: balance is created through a constant cycle between amassing a solid centre, and giving generously of yourself. It seems you can't have one without the other.

Relating hexagram: 34, Great Vigour

You're looking specifically for ways to 'support yourself to become humble and accepting' - and this second hexagram is what you are looking for. The reading isn't just about being humble about Great Vigour, but being humble with Great Vigour!

This hexagram may be the I Ching's take on aspects of yourself you're inclined to condemn. It shows a combination of strength and purpose: both sheer energy, and

also your vision of the kind of relationship you want to have, and the kind of person you want to become within it.

You mentioned that you've been learning to withdraw: that's the pattern of Hexagram 33, Retreat. (Maybe you've received that one already?) Looking at the sequence of hexagrams, Great Vigour is what all your Retreats are for. You withdraw to avoid being compromised, to ensure you don't lose any part of yourself; then comes a resurgence of strength. 'Things cannot end with retreat, therefore great vigour follows.'

'Great vigour,
Harvest in constancy.'

Power brings results when it is true will-power - based on truth to principles, in the long term ('constancy'). So this Vigour doesn't mean that you'll charge in aggressively or unthinkingly. It's not about testing your strength (which doesn't generally work well in this hexagram, especially not against immovable obstacles), but about standing your ground. 'Retreat means withdrawing; Great Vigour means standing still.'

'Thunder dwells above heaven. Great vigour.
Noble one treads no path that is without ritual.'

Another note of warning: there is nothing anarchic about true power; thunder moves on the basis of unchanging natural laws. 'Ritual' in human life is a way of ensuring that one moves with such great powers as the love between two people, not against them. So for you this might mean the ways you and M have established of handling the intensity of the relationship. Better to put more energy - more of yourself, that is - into your existing ways of communicating and being together than to experiment, or try to break the mould just for the sake of it.

Change

These three moving lines describe ways of dealing with the new environment of a more intimate, intense relationship: moving away from the feeling of being threatened with a loss of control over your own destiny, towards a sense of growing fulfilment within the relationship.

Changing line 1

'Humble, humble, the noble one
Makes use of crossing the great river.
Good fortune.'

'Crossing the great river' means taking a risk in order to continue an important journey - and in particular, making a commitment to a relationship. So I think this refers back to your 'crossing' into an intimate relationship. Great humility - or great integrity and authenticity - is what allows you to continue the journey and makes the commitment worthwhile.

I think this works because with humility, you don't bring preconceptions with you that this new territory must be organised in the same way as life back on the other side of the river. The inner strength of humility allows you to stay motivated without knowing what comes next; it means you can be yourself regardless of how M sees you. And the promise is of 'good fortune' - of easier, stronger relationships because of this.

Changing line 3

'Integrity calling out.
Constancy, good fortune.'

Even when the outer forms of your communication with M are variable, and periodically feel empty or 'stuck', your integrity can still 'call out' to him. The inner connection stays strong: an unwavering call, justifiably confident of being heard and finding a response.

Changing line 4

'Nothing that does not bring harvest,
Giving signs of authenticity.'

In the smallest things you do, you can give signs of your true colours. Without needing consciously to 'show him', your underlying authenticity and commitment will come through. Ultimately, there's no need to withdraw, or to watch for his response, or to 'defend yourself'. By staying constantly open so that the same 'signal' of your true self can keep on coming through, you create a more complete meeting and union of the two of you; the results can only be good.

"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song."
Maya Angelou

Job Prospects: 51, 9/1, 16

"I have been going to college for a year and a half. I am a 41 year old man and, before going to college, was a truck and taxi driver here in Los Angeles California. I discovered I have a sleep disorder that keeps me from behind the wheel and that's why I'm going to college so late in life. Anyway, in May I will have a certificate as a communications technician in the electronics field and I would like to know if I am going to finally get a decent job anytime soon. That's it, my question is "Are my prospects good or bad for the near future in the job department."

thanks,
Conrad"

Hi Conrad,

I asked on your behalf,

What are Conrad's job prospects?

Yi answered with Hexagram 51, Shock, changing to Hexagram 16, Motivation. This presages continuing change, but also strong motivation on your part that keeps you travelling through it safely.

Primary hexagram: 51, Shock

'Shock' represents thunder, which the ancient Chinese understood to erupt from the earth in Spring, awakening new life as it came. But it is also connected with unseasonal thunder, and with earthquakes, representing profoundly shocking, potentially disastrous change. This does not feel in the least safe:

'Shock, creating success.

Shock comes, fear and terror.

Laughing words, shrieking and yelling.

Shock spreads fear for a hundred miles.

Someone does not lose the sacred ladle and libation.'

This picture of mass panic and hysteria recalls the profound shock of discovering you had to change jobs: it's a sense of having the ground taken from under your feet, and things you expected to stay solid falling round your ears. When you leave the relatively stable world of college, you can expect to step back into the same kind of atmosphere.

But it's important to hold in your mind that such shocks happen for a positive purpose. This hexagram comes after 49 and 50, the Revolution and the Vessel that founds the new government and way of living, 'putting away the old' and 'grasping renewal'. One way of living has been overthrown, and you have been working on founding a new one - and congratulations, by the way, on your new qualifications!

What you need now is a sense of continuity, a connection with something of yourself that stays constant through all this upheaval.

The 'someone' who does not spill a drop from the sacred ladle is your model here. He is a young priest who has inherited the responsibility for everything that is sacred: the temples, the earth, the grain, all those things that are unmoved by political or social change. The successive waves of change roar about him, but he is miraculously untouched. He's developing the power of the following hexagram - to Keep Still inwardly, not to react.

This is the challenge for you: to hold firmly to what is most important - and that is not the way you earn your living. The Shock helps to 'create success', to reopen the way to your creative spirit, because it shatters the dried-out edifices of 'what you do', renewing your connection with the essence of who you are.

(Ordinary social perceptions tend to keep building up the edifice:

'What does he do?'

'Oh, he's a driver' or 'He's a technician'

- and the conversation ends there, as if this had conveyed any real information about who someone is.)

So I would be surprised if you had the opportunity to settle into a comfortable job for life, though I'm sure you will always be able to 'create success' for yourself. I think you can confidently expect more change to come.

'Repeated thunder. Shock.

The noble one in fear and trembling sets things in order and is watchful.'

In other words, you are not wrong to be anxious and on the alert. You could use the energy this gives you to change the way you think about employment, maybe focussing more on continuously developing the skills and connections that will keep you constantly in demand.

Relating hexagram: 16, Motivation

This second hexagram represents the underlying willpower and enthusiasm that sent you back to college to learn something new, where others might just have been stunned helpless by the shock. I hope you'll forgive me if I save space in everyone's inbox by giving you a link to some notes on Hexagram 16 from a previous issue!

This motivation of yours, that will keep you going through any number of changes, needs strong foundations in self-knowledge. According to the sequence of hexagrams, Motivation arises when someone has both Great Possession (of talent, friendship and opportunity as much as material wealth) and also Integrity or Humility. Because you know the abundance of opportunities in the world, and also know your own capabilities, you can make the forces of change your own to use - not just something that 'happens to you'.

'Motivation.

Harvest in setting up feudal lords to mobilise the armies.'

I think this is advice to complete your preparations now so that you'll be ready to 'mobilise the armies' to find work as soon as you have that certificate in your hand. The ancient kings of China needed a network of feudal lords for communication, control, and their ability to raise an army. This represents the networking, research, information and forward planning you need to expand your scope and ensure success. You don't want your motivation to run ahead of your preparations - that would be like raising a mob, not an army.

Change

Finally, the moving line text that connects Shock with Motivation:

51, line 1:

'Shake comes, fear and terror.
Afterwards, laughing words, shrieking and yelling.
Good fortune'

This is very much like the text for Shock as a whole, except for the addition of 'afterwards' and 'good fortune'. So while the line re-emphasises that you can expect repeated change, not settling stolidly into a job for life, it also shows that the initial panic at change is followed by laughter. It reminds me a little of a roller-coaster ride: shrieks of fear, but also laughter, as you know that this will end well, and the upheaval isn't going to hurt you.

Retirement: 17, 9/4,9/5, 24

"I am 68 years of age and continue to work as a School Psychologist. Have wrestled with the idea of retirement and am conflicted about how I would spend my time without the every day stimulation of my position.

My question would be: What would retirement mean for my life?

Thanx,

Chuck Swenson"

Hi Chuck,

Yi answered your question with Hexagram 17, Following, changing to Hexagram 24, Returning: in essence, it is saying that retirement will let you follow your own path.

'Following.

Creating success from the source, harvest in constancy.

No mistake.'

Actually, I wrote about this hexagram just a few short issues ago, so I hope you won't mind if I give you a quotation...

"I think that 'Following' is a matter of moving smoothly and willingly with the current of events. In the old Chinese, the word probably originally showed a grave mound, a foot at a crossroads, and meat given as an offering. For me, this brings to mind the origins of feng shui as the art and science of burial sites: when strong currents flow through life's landscapes, you need to orient yourself carefully in relation to them. A sacrifice made at the crossroads, or for the journey, would be an offering for smooth flow, and a sign of willingness to follow."

...and a link to the [original article](#).

Getting older is obviously one of those un-ignorable currents, an engine of direction and purpose in life. The essential here is that retirement will free you to follow your inner guidance ('from the source') through to real, lasting achievement. You absolutely do not need to worry about stagnating or having nothing to do.

It's not as if you were without inner resources. When you retire, you move on from Enthusiasm and will-power (Hexagram 16): instead of being 'led' by the constant stimuli and motivations of work, you discover a new kind of inner drive, fluent and powerful. This has its own natural rhythms:

'At the centre of the lake is thunder. Following.

In the same way, the noble one at nightfall

Goes inside for renewal and rest.'

No need, I think, to imagine age 68 to be 'nightfall'! The point is that life moves in cycles: you don't need to be constantly on the go in order for your life to mean something. So you can safely retire, relax and get back in touch with yourself: find the 'inner thunder' that you want to express.

The relating hexagram, Returning, shows a quietly growing inner awareness of who you are and where you're going. Maybe it's this emergent 'sense of direction' that keeps bringing you back to the possibility of retirement?

'Returning, creating success.
Going out, coming in, without haste.
Partners come, not a mistake.
Turning around and returning on your path.
The seventh day comes, you return.
Harvest in having a direction to go.'

The essence of this hexagram is that you can afford to relax and trust in your own inner knowledge to lead you to the right place at the right time. Again, life moves in cycles. Retirement means a movement away from the people you have worked with; this does not mean that you are turning into some kind of hermit. When you walk your own path, people with the same goals and interest - 'partners' - will join you. And it remains quite possible that the path will lead you back towards education in some new role. As your new 'direction to go' emerges, you can expect positive results in like measure.

However, it's in the nature of Returning that you may not yet be ready to turn what you are beginning to know into specific goals and projects. This is traditionally the hexagram of winter equinox: a time when the light is beginning to return, but decidedly not yet time to start the usual business of farming and trade again:

'Thunder dwelling in the centre of the earth. Returning.
The ancient kings closed the borders at winter equinox.
Itinerant merchants did not travel,
The prince did not tour the regions.'

The kings, who knew what they were at, closed the borders over winter to quiet the 'noise' of daily activity so people could listen to and watch over the rising energy. The message for you is very similar to the advice from Following: it will do you no harm to take some time out. You don't need a line-up of new projects ready for when you retire: you'll become aware in due course of where the path leads next.

You have two changing lines in this answer, enlarging on the same message. Naturally you will be looking for projects and groups where you can invest your considerable energy and make a meaningful contribution - but it will do no harm to acknowledge this for the pivotal change it is, and to take stock of your strengths, like a farmer surveying what he has grown.

Line 4:

'Following makes a catch. Constancy, pitfall.
With truth, staying on the path with clarity,
How could this be wrong?'

What retirement brings you depends in large measure on your own approach. You can 'follow' the course of events as if life were a hunt, given meaning by what you could catch and have to show for it, to prove that you're 'going somewhere' worthwhile. You can ensure that you always have an answer ready for the question, 'What do you do?' This is an utterly natural desire, and all part of finding your feet among those wide-open days, unstructured by 'working hours'. But in the long run it is not a good idea.

It's easier to find your feet if you don't run yourself off them. Rather than hurtling from one 'must do' to the next for the sake of stimulation, better to develop a strong grasp on the here and now - to 'connect with the flow of events rather than your will', as Stephen Karcher puts it.

Line 5:

'Truth to excellence: good fortune.'

Retirement is a dramatic change - or a whole succession of dramatic changes - but there are things that stay constant. What you have already achieved, your skills, your high standards, what you do outstandingly well: this is all still with you, and can give you quiet confidence to last you through any number of changes

I also have the feeling from looking at these two lines together that Yi is trying to deflect your attention from the question of how you will fill your time, towards an awareness of all that time as a wonderful resource through which you could be led to something of genuine 'excellence'.

Chuck's reply:

"Ms. Barrett:

Please forgive me for this late response to your kind consideration of my question. My computer has been far from co-operative in our efforts to communicate.

Thank you for your sensitive readings of Hexagrams 17 and 24 in consideration of my question concerning retirement. Your reading certainly is most sensitive and insightful- gentle and compassionate, as if we were lifetime companions. Your interpretations have offered me newfound confidence and support and are a summary of all that is important to my decision.

I wish you to finally know that I have now decided to retire and that this school year will be my last year. I now know that, in retirement, I will "... follow my own path".

Your reading has inspired me to share with you my own path and how the I Ching has been a part of the tapestry of my life.

I grew up a mountain man in western Minnesota- a child of Nature's theatre of seasons. From the moment of first awareness, I became dimly aware of relentless, and sometimes cruel, dramatic changes. Life on our tiny, rural farm was a scramble for mere existence locked in a struggle with the dualities of Nature. As a reflective, hard working, Nordic lad, I wrestled to order the changes swirling about me.

Local Lutheran Pastors offered guidance for my struggle. This struggle was to be answered through a Divine Purpose: "It's God's Will". This patient, long suffering panacea left me still empty, and never dimmed my fervent quest, which by now was in high gear.

Somewhere around my twelfth year, I swore a fierce self-promise: I was "...going to leave the farm, absent myself from the terrorism of the four seasons and the ever increasing mortgage- this to discover answers to life through travel and study".

I sit now, 56 years later, with a resume full of interesting positions- all centered about the Human Condition. I have read nearly all of it, witnessed its depravity and inspiration, have spoken to everyone around it, and even considered some of it for myself.

My tale remains optimistic, but my fragile grasp on life's Dualities has sprung from an unlikely source for a Minnesota farm boy. The I Ching was eventually to become my Source while I meandered through the existential cul de sacs of life. I decided that this Book, which still survives after 3,000 years, must have something to say to me.

I cannot remember when I first stumbled upon the I Ching, somehow it suddenly appeared in my life. With my usual zeal, I poured over the literature and first purchased the Wilhelm translation, later to add Karcher and various other texts.

I then began casting hexagrams until it seemed I would run out of pennies. But truth was to remain elusive. The I Ching readings seemed to retreat into a highland mist- evasive, elusive and unformed, beyond my ken. At times, I sensed a fleeting contact, but during other times it seemed as if the I Ching was toying with me. But I persisted.

After many faithful years with the I Ching, I now sense it has indeed been speaking to me, but at a spiritual level far above my earthly consciousness. A mystic map of change had been slowly becoming a part of my unconsciousness, beyond my immediate awareness. This patient, sometimes-exasperated I Ching had always been working with me. My first reminder was to be: What is important is ineffable.

My ambivalence and sometime lack of personal courage have clouded my struggle with the I Ching. Sometimes, the I will suddenly respond to my question with a startling clarity and purity. It is at this very instant that I shrink back hoping to

deny and to avoid such a message. I have stood there many times, at the very edge of resistance and hesitation. But it is in this same Crucible that my growth has been most assured.

My Map is much frayed, tattered, and heavily creased with thousands of miles yet to be charted. But, I now sense more order and personal acceptance in my quest as I continue my lifelong struggle with the duality of Nature and Human Existence.

PERSONAL READINGS:

I offered my retirement question for your consideration and was delighted to see your response in my E mail listings.

I then decided that before I read your response, I would offer this question to the I Ching: "Ms. Barrett is about to offer me a response to my question about retirement, what should be my thoughts as I read her response?"

The answer was Hexagram 23, fixed. Karcher entitles this Hexagram: STRIPPING. Karcher speaks thus: 'This is the end of an old cycle and the preparation for the new. The old structure is dissolving so new action can emerge. That is where heaven is moving. Adapt to what is coming. Do not impose your will.'

The synchronicity of our two casts and the everlasting Mystery of the I Ching, stunned me! The I Ching, for one magical moment, had also joined our hearts, far above our earth bound existence.

I leave you now and offer my warmest personal regards, affection, and gratitude for the part you and the I Ching have played in my journey.

Charles Swenson
Vista, California

"When experience is viewed in a certain way, it presents nothing but doorways into the domain of the soul, and they are all found in the present moment."

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Advice for a job search: 28, 9/4,9/5, 46

"I've been learning Yi-Djing for six years, which I consider as a short time, so I still have problems understanding it.

I desperately need an insight in my life situation.

The background is this:

About 1,5 year ago, I've quit a 5,5 years long job, because of the dissolution of the institution. At the same time I had some health problem (an operation), which broke me psychically, so now I'm living pretty much isolated, unsure in my self and sociophobic.

Anyway, in spite of all, I'm an active new job seeker and managed to find one, which unfortunately didn't last more than 3 weeks. The problem was in my inability to work among bad people with totally unprofessional attitude and low payment.

I've tried at some other companies, passed into fewer selection, but didn't manage to get a job.

Few month ago, my father got pneumonia, then deep venous thromboses, he is total pessimist and obsessed with his health, he is in some kind of a depression, thinking that he'll never be healthy again.

My older sister has lost her job recently, she is 33, I'm 30, we are living with our parents (they are retired), (in spite of our age, in Serbia and Montenegro this is a usual situation, because of a bad economy standard).

So I think that my family is in pretty desperate situation.

I would really appreciate Your insight. I have many question in my head, such as :

1. Am I capable of doing any job because of my unsureness?
2. Will my sister and me manage to find new jobs?
3. In what direction is my family's life moving?
4. What is the solution of my family problems?

And there is more, both me and my sister are unmarried, without stable love-relations and this situation lasts for many years and I've begun to think things will never improve.

Still, I'm not a pessimist, I want to believe that something good must happen.

I just hope I wrote all relevant facts, which could help you finding the right question for me. The most important question for me at this moment is Will I manage to find a stable job soon?

I like very much Your Yi interpretation, they are clear and understandable. I'm visiting Your Clarity site regularly, and it helped me understand many things, such as meaning of some hexagram combinations, and many other things.

Best wishes, hope you'll find my letter interesting enough to do a reading for me.

Hope I'll hear from You soon.

Mirjana"

Dear Mirjana,

I asked Yi for advice for you on how to find a good job, and received Hexagram 28, Great Overstepping, changing to Hexagram 46, Pushing Upward. Pushing Upward represents what you want to do in the long term - climb on up out of trouble and into better times - and also the confident, progressive attitude you need now to pull you on towards future success. And Great Overstepping stands in the foreground of the reading to represent the current strain on you and your family, and the challenge this represents to step outside the 'norms'.

Primary hexagram: 28, Great Overstepping

To 'overstep' means both to go beyond the 'normal' limits, and also to cross over, to make a transition. I understand that you feel 'broken', that you are looking for something stable and reliable - but I think that Yi is encouraging you to understand what's happened and what's needed now in a different way.

'Great Overstepping, the ridgepole warps.
Harvest in having a direction to go.
Creating success.'

The ridgepole of the house is the single beam that sustains all the weight of roof and walls. Here, it is starting to buckle under the weight. It represents the structure of your job, your family, your self-image, everything that has kept you safe and provided for: it is under huge strain. But the extraordinary discovery of Great Overstepping is that this does not mean that you are broken. You're more like a hatchling coming out of the egg, your strength built up by years of nourishment within that secure structure. Now the shell is shattered, and your world shows every sign of falling round your ears - but in fact you are growing strongly.

So although you are reaching out for stability, what you most need to carry you through is a 'direction to go'. Stopping everything from falling down is one half of it: knowing what you don't want to happen for all those you love. But beyond that, what do you want, and where do you want to be for yourself? You don't have to stick with what is usual and familiar to you - you can step outside the boundaries of what you've always done, or indeed what your family has always done, or just what is 'normal' or 'common sense'.

This is a huge mental leap, to discover the creative energy at your core and your endless ability to generate new ideas. And this while you feel at breaking point!

'The lake submerges the tree. Great overstepping.
Noble one sets up alone without fear,
Withdraws from the time without sadness.'

You'd expect water to nourish trees, just as you'd expect big challenges and great emotional incentives to spark off your own initiative. But too much water threatens to drown the young tree altogether; having too much at stake is overwhelming. The noble one deals with this through self-confident withdrawal. If you find it hard to fit in with other people in a workplace, this is not something to be afraid of or depressed about. Being unusual does not make you wrong. So you can use this as a cue for some of the creative thinking you are so good at! Can you express yourself, and provide for yourself, outside the system? Work as an independent freelancer, maybe?

Change

These two changing lines give you some more specific advice on how to go about your job search.

Line 4

'Ridgepole at the peak. Good fortune.
If there is more: shame.'

First of all, this line is Yi's response to your worry about whether you can find work and hold onto it. You can. This line describes the ridgepole of the house holding firm, definitely not buckling under the strain. You have great resources to tap into, not least the strength of your family: take care of your connections, the ways you replenish your strength, and you will do well. The key is not to pile more weight onto yourself: don't load yourself with more issues or more responsibility than are really yours to deal with. If you have a tendency to put in all you have, to take on everything at once, then recognise this and manage it with care!

Line 5

'Withered willow sprouts flowers,
Venerable wife gets upright husband.
No blame, no praise'

This is imagery of old and new. In some ways you are 'withered' beyond your years by your experiences. But willow is the most resilient and vigorous of trees: if you cut willow branches to build with and stick them into moist ground, they will take root. You have this same vigorous, lively core. But your next opportunity to express this may not be with new roots and shoots, but only with flowers. That is, with something beautiful, but not necessarily lasting. It is like an older woman taking a

young husband: undoubtedly enjoyable, but without children, which means without provision for the long-term.

Better to grow flowers than to stay withered; better to enjoy your own vitality than to stifle your initiative by waiting for the 'right' thing to do. So when you discover the opportunity to do work you enjoy and where you can blossom, enjoy it. It's important not to idealise it - not to mistake flowers for shoots - but equally important not to demonise new opportunities just because they are not for the long term. Part of being true to yourself is cultivating your ability to change; taking on short-term projects you can really enjoy could be the first step to break through your old limits and start to create new patterns for yourself. So as you 'take inventory' of your gifts and what you have to offer the world, don't be afraid to focus on what you enjoy rather than just what you 'ought' to be doing.

Relating hexagram: 46, Pushing Upward

This second hexagram offers you the mindset and bigger picture you need to 'overstep' old limits and think outside the box. Essentially, this hexagram advises you to understand the immense strains of the present time as part of a steady climb upwards towards better things. Though having said that, you may also need to 'overstep' the conventional ideas of how people are 'meant' to push upward through their careers!

The theme of Pushing Upward is putting in the work to make steady, reliable progress. Because you have the talents and energy to invest, along with the support of your family willing you on, and because you know things can be better, you are bound to keep striving upward.

'Pushing upward, creating success from the source.
Make use of seeing great people.
No doubts.
Set forth to the south, good fortune.'

Of course you feel the tension between how you want things to be and how they are. Pushing Upward is about feeling that, knowing you can get from here to there, and getting started. 'Great people' are those who can help you - you certainly shouldn't be afraid to ask for practical help - but they are also those who inspire you, because they show you an image of your own inner 'great person'. This is the vision you can use as inspiration.

Yi specifically acknowledges that you might well have doubts about this: it is not easy to believe in progress before you see it. But you can do it - there is truly no place for doubt; you can have confidence that your effort will bring results. The 'south' is the region of action: this is a cue to get down to work with renewed conviction! The journey might take you outside familiar territory or beyond the point where you feel in control - but this is no disaster; the possibilities are greater there.

Having said that, though, there is absolutely no call to rush things or try to achieve everything at once. Pushing Upward means progress step by step - like the growth of a plant through the soil.

‘Centre of the earth gives birth to wood. Pushing upward.
In the same way, the noble one with patient character,
Builds up small things to attain the lofty and great.’

The plant pushes upward gradually, step by small step, feeling its way; the patient earth supports and nourishes its growth. You need both of these qualities: the impulse to grow, but also patience and the willingness to be gentle with yourself. Lofty and great trees do not spring up overnight - and nor should you expect yourself to leap overnight into the ideal job (or to turn into a self-confident freelancer, or whatever path you choose...). Remember the two moving lines: one says you succeed provided you don't overburden yourself; the other suggests the way forward could be through something enjoyable but temporary. Once you have chosen your 'direction to go', you'll make best progress by breaking the journey down into small, manageable steps.

Mirjana's reply:

"Thanks again for a wonderful, wonderful reading you've done for me in the last issue, it seems that both you and the Yi understood me most deeply. You've given me the right insight and advice. You've said right things and I very much appreciate it.
Best wishes,
I'm looking forward to next issue.
Mirjana"

"Unless you walk out into the unknown, the odds of making a profound difference in your life are pretty low."
Tom Peters

Career progress: 9, 9/2,9/3, 42

"Hi Clarity friends:

My question is about work.

I've worked as an English teacher for years. Right now I've starting to do translations (From Spanish to English) for some of the outsourcing needs of an editorial in Spain. So far the work is fine and I enjoy it a lot, since it's challenging and offers better income than teaching. I would like to ask I Ching about my future possibilities in this area and for suggestions on how to improve it.

I believe it's a pretty simple question, but let me know if you need any further info.

Thank you

Laura"

Where can I go from here with my translation work?

Yi answered with Hexagram 9, Small Taming, changing to Hexagram 42, Increase and Blessing. I think the second hexagram indicates the potential here and the enthusiastic attitude with which you're entering in on it. The first one, Small Taming, indicates that it will not all be smooth sailing, though I doubt you will meet any insuperable problems.

Relating hexagram: 42, Increase

To start with the big picture, and what you are looking towards: of course, you're quite right that translation work offers a far better income than teaching. Hexagram 42 indicates that you have the chance to step into a flow of blessing. The more involved and committed you are, the greater the rewards. This follows on as the 'other side of the coin' from Decrease or Offering - you don't mention what you have had to give up in order to pursue translation work, but whatever 'offerings' you've made can be rewarded here.

'Blessing, harvest in having a direction to go.
Harvest in crossing the great river.'

To get the most out of the potential in this new use for your skills, you need to 'have a direction to go' - to know the goal you're aiming for - and to be prepared to venture into new territory. When looking at the advice of this hexagram you have to bear in mind that it's describing the broader canvas, the longer term - but in the longer term, at least, you can afford to plan a long way ahead and to take risks.

'Wind and thunder. Increase.

The noble one sees improvement, and so she changes.

When there is excess, she corrects it.'

To get the full benefit of Increase, you need an improvisatory, flexible approach. It's not about setting rules or creating routines. Does this mean less job security than in teaching? Perhaps; it certainly means less predictability. So rather than having rules for yourself that you abide by regardless of circumstances, it's better to make improvements and correct mistakes whenever the opportunity arises. (Also good advice in translation work, of course...)

Primary hexagram: 9, Small Taming

This is the immediate challenge that confronts you here, and it does present difficulties. Blessing is what you are looking for, and can very probably find, but Small Taming may be all you can do with it at present. There is a 'great divide' here between the full potential available, and your own ability to get 'on top of things' and get the most out of it. It could be thoroughly frustrating for you.

To 'tame' has multiple meanings: it means to build up or accumulate, and to nurture, but also to keep something in check or restrain it. Think of your position in the translation 'industry' as like a farmer trying to work with the forces of nature - taming and nurturing at the same time. Specifically, you're the 'small' farmer, one who has just entered into whole new land of possibilities (with hexagram 8), but who faces practical difficulties as she learns how to come to grips with it. So she can expect lean times at first, enforced improvisation as she tries to get beyond the subsistence level.

'Small taming, creating success.
Dense clouds without rain
Come from our Western altars.'

The dense clouds represent stored-up potential: they are what you need in order to get to work. But do they rain? Not quite. This is the kind of frustration you can expect - I wonder whether this might not represent work opportunities that are there, but don't quite materialise. At all events, you can expect to encounter small setbacks. You can have a very clear vision of the possibilities, and yet still be frustrated in practice - inner division is just part of the experience of Small Taming. The earnings potential is definitely greater than in teaching, but judging from both hexagrams, the job security is probably less.

By the way, if you ask further questions about this as you go on, do look out for Hexagram 26, Great Taming. This is the master farmer, who has sufficient strength and experience to harness all the potential at her disposal. The difference between the two is well expressed in the trigrams, those three-line figures that interact within each hexagram. The master farmer is represented by the weight of a mountain, checking and storing up the creative power of heaven. As the 'small tamer', you only have the power of the wind at your disposal, and this calls for a different strategy altogether. You cannot stamp your identity on the circumstances or bring them under your control. What you can do is to influence things indirectly, by adapting and shaping your own skills to what the situation demands.

Small Taming is preparation for Treading - walking behind the tiger, trying to get the full benefit of its energy without being mauled. In both situations, you are dealing with forces bigger than you are, that you cannot altogether master. So instead you have to adapt. Before you go out to follow the tiger (of market forces? competition?) you need to prepare, to gather your resources and learn new skills.

'Wind moves above heaven. Small taming.
A noble one cultivates the natural pattern of *de*.'

This is about working with what you find rather than trying to change it. It's actually quite a lot like the work of translation: shaping your own expressions to fit another person's mind. And this also means working on your own *de* - your strength and character. Diplomacy, tact, and above all flexibility will be called for!

Change

I think the two changing lines are each in their own way to do with building up that *de*, that ability to make the most of the opportunities on offer, step by small step.

Line 2:

'Pulled back onto the path. Good fortune.'

This suggests that your first steps may be decided for you by circumstances - it's literally about being pulled, like an animal on a leash. But this is not a bad thing at all. Before you start fighting against the restraints, look to see whether they're not actually leading you to what you need. Maybe what gets in your way guides you to where you belong... maybe what you need will come to you so that you don't miss anything after all... maybe you can even claim this path proudly as your own...

I don't, of course, know what this path might be that you're pulled onto. Further training, maybe?

Line 3:

'The spokes come loose from the cart wheel.
Husband and wife avert their gaze.'

'Husband and wife' can point to any kind of partnership, between people or between people and circumstances. (It once even described a failure of computer programming to connect.) But the first question for you has to be, are you sure that your relationships are strong enough to carry this new weight? You need - urgently - to make sure that everyone involved is travelling willingly in the same direction - it's all too possible to get so wrapped up in your own perceptions that you fail to notice the other person's. Make sure it all fits together - make sure the vehicle is strong enough to bear the weight over this new and considerably bumpier road.

Laura's reply

"Hello Hilary :

I've just read through my reading , and it was perfect! The taming power of the small is what this kind of job is all about! So much goes into the smallest detail. For one thing, I'm not naturally good at details, and since this job forces me to pay particular attention to them, I am improving my perception and have grown more conscientious about the job itself, and I find this new awareness influences all areas of my life. Like "cleaning my closet " , so to speak.

It is a long, sometimes winding road, and frustrating and tiring at times. I continue with my teaching, so I have "sacrificed" most of my free time. I do not plan to give up teaching. I mean, translating would have to become a very stable income, which for the time being is not the case. As for my "control" over the situation, I Ching is absolutely right, as usual: I am just a tiny element in the whole picture, so I "restrict" myself, to produce the job as well as I possibly can.

And I have become very conscientious, maybe that is the greatest of blessings!

Another interesting thing that struck me in the reading, was the suggestion of accumulating skills, because I have had to avail myself with all kind of tools, like dictionaries, specialised in some cases, the translator which helps out with the typing and the body of the translation, then all kinds of regular encyclopedias, graphics, maps, and so on. I tell you a lot of improvisation was present in that I just had to "wing it". I definitely need to improve both, my English and my computer skills.

I've long come to terms with the idea, that I will never stop being a student, it has always opened doors for me, and since I am getting a bit better at details it all seems to fit in. As for my team of helpers, I can rely a lot on Suri, my husband, who unlike me, is great with details, is an avid reader of English and helps me a great deal with the writing and particularly the last edition.

Anyway, I will re-read the reading, several times as I do with the translation, to make sure I take care of all the details .

Thank you very much for putting my question forward

Love to you and your dear ones!

Laura"

What am I doing wrong? 19, no changing lines

"Hi,

First, thanks for putting together your newsletter. I really enjoy it. I hope you can add to my understanding of a recent reading.

I am 47 and recently ended a 2 year relationship. This was, needless to say, not my first "failed" relationship, so I asked "what am I doing wrong in my relationships?"

I received Hexagram 19 with no changing lines:

||:::

Well, the timing (misfortune in the 8th month) is spot on, but I don't get how to apply the rest of it to answer my question. Any ideas?

Thanks in advance!
Witch"

Dear Witch,

I can certainly offer you a few ideas - of course, you will have to decide on your own judgement which ones 'fit' your particular circumstances. But can I just say first of all that there are a whole lot of assumptions in your question...

- * that relationships are 'meant' to last a lifetime and anything else is a failure
- * that you've done something the same every time
- * and that that 'something' is wrong

So I wouldn't be altogether sure that Hexagram 19 is describing 'what you're doing wrong' - but insofar as there is a pattern to how you go about your relationships, I'm sure this reading will describe it for you.



Hexagram 19 is called Nearing, and there's nothing obviously 'wrong' with doing that! The old character shows a tall figure with a great eye bending over a group of little people (represented just by their mouths): someone approaching and looking down. In its oldest meaning, this was probably an ancestral spirit returning to watch over the people and bless them.

This idea becomes more than an anthropological curiosity when you look at how Nearing follows on from Corruption, Hexagram 18. That refers back to an ancient process of 'diagnosing' an illness or misfortune by divining which ancestor, angered by neglect, was causing the trouble. Once identified, they could be given due attention and honour; Hexagram 19 follows, I think, because the honoured ancestor is once again Nearing benevolently to offer blessings.

Translating this into modern-speak: most of us have many neglected 'ancestors' in the form of patterns inherited through the family, tightly sealed complexes of energy and habit that need to be attended to and honoured to release their power back into circulation. And since you've received Hexagram 19, it's highly likely that this is what you've already done. You can understand what draws near at hexagram 19 as a guide, a higher self - and as your own whole self, with that 'ancestral' energy integrated and strong.

So you are most unlikely to be unwittingly repeating negative family patterns: you draw near with strength. Some of this shows in how you phrased your question for Yi: no victim mentality, no 'why do I always have such bad luck?' - you're ready and willing to be the responsible one in the partnership.

This same theme is reflected in the Image:

'Above the lake is earth. Nearing.
In the same way, the noble one teaches and reflects
untiringly,
Accepts and protects the ordinary people without
limit.'



So you offer tolerance, limitless acceptance, understanding and guidance. You're altogether present for your partner, strong and responsible. How, exactly, could any of this be a problem?

Perhaps, like most things, it can be a problem in excess. With this hexagram unchanging all its qualities are emphasised - but there is no 'relating hexagram'. You're fully present, but to whom? What (or whom) are you nearing? There's an empty space there - as if all your energy were caught up in approaching and giving, with none left to shift into responding and receiving. I've known people characterised by hexagram 19 to make others feel overwhelmed: [RJ Lynn](#) says its basic meaning is to 'look down on', and that it's also the name of a siege machine.

Hexagram 19 works as a pair with Hexagram 20, Contemplation: drawing back one step from doing, in order to become more fully aware. The *Zagua* says of this pair, 'Someone reaches out, someone seeks.' Amongst other things, this is a relationship model: a balance between drawing near, and being ready to See the other person in their entirety. Receiving Hexagram 19 must be encouragement to look at those dynamics.

But I agree with you that the most obvious sign of anything 'wrong' in hexagram 19 lies in the Judgement:

'Nearing.
Creating success from the source, harvest in constancy.
Reaching an end in the eighth month means a pitfall.'

So there is overwhelming (that word again!) positive potential here, but disaster if you 'reach an end in the eighth month'. The eighth month, according to the Book of Songs, is the time for harvest. What does it mean to reach an end - a high point - with harvest?

Harvest is the high point of the year, of course: the culmination of activity, reaping the results of the year's work. Perhaps the trouble lies in forgoing - or avoiding - the winter that follows. How do you feel about the idea that relationships - and individuals - have seasons of advance and of retreat from intimacy? (That retreat - getting away from others just to preserve one's sense of self - is in hexagram 33, the opposite and complement of Hexagram 19.) The difficulty many people have with Hexagram 19 is a desire to seize and hold onto the good results they can see in front of them, not allowing the process to continue for fear they might lose it all again.

Winter in ancient China was a time for retreat: storing the harvest, and closing up your home, sealing yourself away. The fields lay empty: there was nothing to be done. Hexagram 24, Returning - the inner seed of Nearing - describes the depths of winter as a time for introspection, attending to one's own inner spark and sense of direction, not for 'business as usual'. So I wonder whether you have been taking the time to internalise the gifts of your relationships.

I hope some of this helps.

Consulting Yi about past lives. 21, 9/1,9/4,9/6, 2

For the last issue, I asked Yi what might happen if people consulted it about past lives. (This wasn't a question specifically for Lynett, or even specifically for me - just an exploration of the question as a whole.) And Yi answered with Hexagram 21, Biting Through, changing at lines 1, 4 and 6 to Hexagram 2, the Receptive.

At the time I included just a couple of paragraphs of 'first impressions' about the reading - but the reading is owed more than that, without a doubt. So since there were no readers' requests for readings this time, I've worked on this one instead - nothing like comprehensively, but in a bit more depth than before. To gather my 'impressions' of it last time around, I looked at the hexagram names and how they fitted together, my own feeling for the hexagrams as a whole, and of course the moving lines. To build on this, I've looked at the hexagram texts in more detail, and at the complete 'foursomes' of related moving lines.

Consulting Yi about past lives would mean Biting Through to the Field - to the raw stuff we're made of, or the space where all our potential can be realised. As the relating hexagram, this is what past life investigation through the oracle would be aiming for - its aspiration, and at a deep level what it is really about.

This feels like a bigger truth than latching onto any one past identity. Earth, the Receptive, is not about ideas or reasons why, but about the power to make things happen: not the seed, but the nourishment for its growth. Maybe this puts the whole quest for knowledge of past lives into perspective: perhaps it's about exploring potential and enlarging the sense of self, rather than getting to a specific name or story.

'Earth.

Creating success from the source, harvest in the constancy of a mare.

A noble one has a direction to go.

Going before: delusion. Following: gains a lord and harvest.

In the southwest, gains partners.

In the northeast, loses partners.

Peaceful constancy brings good fortune.'

The mare is gentle and easily guided, and she covers the ground 'without limit'. Past life exploration should broaden definitions of self, give the feeling that there are fewer boundaries. The noble one has a goal and purpose in life, but no preconceived ideas about how to get there. Perhaps all your 'lives' work together to the same end.

To 'go before' literally means being a pioneer, breaking new ground. It sounds like entering into life as if you were your own first incarnation. Quietly 'following', building on the work done before, brings better guidance and less confusion. (Of course, these lines could also be about the importance of accepting guidance when seeking out knowledge of past lives: the two meanings can co-exist.)

There's a balance to be attained between finding and losing partners - achieving more by working with others, and individual accountability and responsibility. This brings to mind Wyatt's point about 'past' lives being part of a single whole, like tracks on a disc: it makes just as much sense, I think, to think of all your own lives as simultaneous - and so Yi could be talking about settling down peacefully in partnership with a greater community of (small 's') selves.

Or such, at all events, would be the ideal to aspire to. But with Hexagram 21 in the foreground, it will not come easily. Biting Through is hard, determined work in the search for truth.

'Biting through, creating success.
Harvest in making use of litigation.'

When I wrote about this hexagram back in Issue 39, I said it was about getting through obstacles, 'especially through illusions of separation' - and the title character refers specifically to yarrow-stalk divination, always a sterling way of cutting through illusion.

As Stephen Karcher reminded me, Hexagram 21 is especially associated with the ritual meal that gets through the obstacles between the ancestors and the living - that is, it cuts through the illusion of separation from the past. While past lives aren't part of ancient Chinese belief that I know of, the connection is still there. Biting through the obstacles restores a functioning whole - like cutting through an insulator, completing a circuit. This is about asking Yi to help us break through whatever separates us from the bigger 'partnership of selves'.

Biting Through works towards Beauty, Hexagram 22: first you uncover the essence, then you can express it, whole and unvarnished. So Yi would make past life work into work towards a more whole self-image. Once again, this is obviously not just about getting hold of some famous name or biographical details to 'wear' like a badge. Hexagram 21 means devouring the information, taking it in and making it a living, functioning part of yourself.

Looking at those moving lines, 1, 4 and 6...

Line 1 (with 35,1, 36,6 and 22,6):

The tradition says that the first and sixth lines are suffering punishment, not applying it. Apparently, investigation into past lives often does begin in a search to make sense of present trauma. Yi's first step is to refuse to allow these explorations to be used for escapism:

'Shoes locked in the stocks, feet disappear.
No mistake.'

The oracle will lock you down by the ankles and keep you from running off after fantasies. Wherever you are now is where you are meant to be - 'not a mistake'.

More than that: this is where you find your opportunity. (This line 'bites through' to 35, Prospering: the hexagram of maximum opportunity, your chance to shine.) Perhaps because this is where you feel the full extent of what you don't have or the potentials you haven't realised. Perhaps the truth of who you are comes out more strongly not when you soar and transcend, but when you are all too earth-bound? And perhaps this identity is a very simple one, without name, and beautiful in its ability to take on the colours of the moment?

Line 4 (with 27,4, 27,3 and 22,3):

'Biting through dried, bony meat,
Gaining a bronze arrow.
Harvest in hard toil with constancy,
Good fortune.'

This line shows what could be achieved through past lives divination. With just the first and sixth lines, the message would be just 'stick to reality and stop hiding from it'; but here there is the chance to 'gain a bronze arrow'.

This is biting through to Nourishment (hexagram 27) - completing the circuit. It's an extremely strong, purposeful line. Hexagram 27 is the structure that supports nourishment, and the space for metamorphosis. Any line that connects to it suggests an opening to change your 'shape', finding a new position in the cycle of life, perhaps finding a new source of nourishment.

The intense, passionate tiger of 27,4 is making his presence felt here, bones cracking between his jaws. This is about getting more engaged in life here and now, not drifting off into denial. But the search goes right through the usual structure of things to the marrow of existence, and reaches the prize of the arrowhead.

What you have to 'eat' in your present experience is because of this arrow - and what you have next will come from how you use it. This is what you need to hold onto as you immerse yourself completely in the here and now.

Line 6 (with 51,1, 52,1, and 22,1):

'Why wear a cangue that covers your ears?
Pitfall.'

The cangue is a yoke-like punishment device - and people seem to choose to wear it, as this line implies, when there is too much that they don't want to hear. Biting through to Shock, Hexagram 51 - the very foundations are shaken, and the world is suddenly not at all what it was supposed to be. Sue suggests that belief in reincarnation can be a way not to hear that we die; Anon said that the discovery could be hard to take. It seems to me that in either of these ways, focusing divination on past lives could be used as a cangue.

The related lines suggest a better way to process the information: first by distancing yourself from it, taking it less personally, before you start looking forward again - and steadying yourself, from the ground up. And then getting your feet (once again) firmly back on the ground, discovering the practical application of what you know, step by step. No comfortable rides to enlightenment are on offer here.

"You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment."
Thoreau

Hexagrams

(Thanks to [LiSe Heyboer](#) for all the Chinese characters.)

3, Sprouting



The name of this hexagram clearly resembles a seedling: a root and the beginnings of leaves, reflecting the priorities of every germinating seed. I have to insert a proviso here: Harmen Mesker has been looking into early meanings of this character and thinks it's more likely to have meant a military encampment than a seedling at the time the oracle was first written. But to me the hexagram is still Sprouting: new life, seeking to establish itself, with roots before leaves.

For the garrison or the seedling, the priorities are much the same: create a secure centre, and extend your scope cautiously from there into the wider world. This hexagram is the very beginning, where you start to know who and where you are, in amongst a sea of things you don't know. It's the 'paired' hexagram with [4, Not Knowing](#), where you have to experience that ignorance to the full in order to learn anything.

'Sprouting: seeing, and not letting go your dwelling place.
Not knowing: disordered and also clear.'

So Sprouting means looking right round, extending your awareness as far as possible: the aim is to increase the compass of things you can know or call yours, your 'territory'. You want to explore new experience, but also to stay rooted.

Of course, even as you orientate yourself, you also discover that some things out there are opposed to you! The more you explore, the more your parents say 'no'; the ground is hard and the stones don't move aside for you; the local people may or may not welcome the garrison. All the more reason to hold onto your dwelling place: you're holding onto your secure sense of self.

'Sprouting.
Creating success from the source, harvest in constancy.
No use to have a direction to go,
Harvest in establishing feudal lords.'

Sprouting is crammed with pent-up creative potential, but giving it a 'direction to go' - setting goals, making definite plans - is of no use at all. You're like a king working to establish himself in a new kingdom: first of all, he needs 'feudal lords', who will be his ears, eyes and hands in the remoter parts of the country. There will be time enough for policy initiatives when he has a clearer vision of what's out there, and is more sure of his grasp on it.

By taking time to lay out the basics for growth - the knowledge, helpers, and lines of communication - you actually increase the possibilities and enlarge the territories available to you in future. Narrowing your focus and directing your efforts in one direction (like the Army does in Hexagram 7) at this stage would only limit you.

It is not often easy to live with 'no direction'. The nuclear hexagram here hints at just how difficult it can be: it's 23, Stripping Away, a hexagram of loss and often-excruciating 'clearing out'.



Hexagram 3,
Sprouting



Hexagram 23,
Stripping Away

It, too, says that there is 'no harvest in having a direction to go.' The core need here is to clear the ground of preconceived ideas about where you're headed, or even who you are, so that the new growth can emerge naturally and find its own shape. Consequently, this hexagram often comes as a reminder that you stand at the very beginning and are trying to predetermine too much, too soon.

The trigrams of Sprouting are 'clouds and thunder': the fertile chaos of beginning, with strong sexual associations in Chinese tradition.

'Clouds, thunder. Sprouting.
Noble one weaves with the warp.'

The challenge here is to disentangle the proliferation of possibilities and weave a fabric of meaning, one with clear patterns and pictures. In other words, it's to make sense of things! The noble one starts with the warp threads - and here there is a huge double meaning, as the Chinese for warp is *jing*, as in *Yijing* or *Daodejing*. (Or *ching* as in *I Ching*: these are just different ways of writing the same word.) The word means 'principles' and hence also the 'classic books' that form the basic structure of knowledge. It is too early for specific goals, but not for basic principles: the warp threads cannot be added to the cloth as an afterthought.

4, Not Knowing

(You can still [listen online to an audio recording](#) of some personal experiences with hexagram 4.)



This has to be one of the more uncomfortable and frustrating hexagrams to receive. And then there is its reputation as the Yijing's way of issuing a reprimand when you ask too many questions.

It's true that that's what it sounds like:

'Not knowing, creating success.

I do not seek the young learner, the young learner seeks me.

The first consultation is clearly informative.

The second and third muddy the waters,

Confusing, and hence not informative.

Harvest in constancy.'

But it would be a mistake to get 'stuck' on this reputation. For one thing, Yi is not like some irascible grandparent who gets fed up with being questioned - and anyway, its repertory of rude responses to misguided questions is much more impressive than this. More seriously, there is so much more to be learned from Not Knowing.

It's worth knowing that this hexagram often dramatises someone else's perspective, warning you that this is what you'll encounter. It's not an uncommon scenario when someone receives hexagram 4: they'll be in a hurry, eager for answers, while the person they're questioning is reluctant. If they keep on asking they may provoke a negative emotional response - anything except the answer they were hoping for. And Not Knowing is the very opposite of Radical Change (Hexagram 49): this role of the ignorant petitioner is not something you can transform by force of will.



4, Not Knowing



49, Radical Change

But the real question is, why would we want to? It's only when you don't know that you can learn anything: the position of the learner is an honourable one, not an embarrassment to escape. The Judgement says firmly that there is 'harvest in constancy'; the commentary on the Judgement says that 'his will (the questioner's) responds to mine'. So when you're sure that Yi is speaking directly to you through the judgement (rather than enacting someone else's response), there's no need to feel dismissed. There is actually encouragement here to keep learning - only not by clutching for answers.

Not Knowing stands at the very beginning of our experience - the second half of the Yijing's first inverted pair of hexagrams, where yin and yang intermingle for the

first time. [Hexagram 3, Sprouting](#), expands its range of possibilities, but stays rooted:

'Sprouting: seeing, and not letting go your dwelling place.
Not knowing: disordered and also clear.'

The young ignoramus steps out into the world, and finds it to be much bigger and more confusing than she ever imagined. I was strongly reminded of this the other day when I dipped into a beginners' book on NLP (neuro-linguistic programming). Learning, it said, started with 'unconscious incompetence' - when you don't even know what you don't know - and progresses into 'conscious incompetence'. At this stage,

'You know enough to know that you are not very good and it takes a lot of your conscious attention. This stage is uncomfortable, but it is also when you are learning the most.'

So Not Knowing is not an embarrassment, but a stage of learning. It may even be a stage that passes naturally in its own time as your understanding develops: the nuclear hexagram, Returning (#24) indicates that at heart this is about awareness that grows from inside. And the Image suggests that this comes about not so much through the answers you can get, as through experience:

'Below the mountain, spring water comes forth. Not Knowing.
The noble one uses the fruits of action to nurture his character.'

Notes

That beginners' NLP book: Principles of NLP, Joseph O'Connor, Ian McDermott
[More on the Image of hexagram 4](#)

"We learn nothing from the things we know."
John Cage

8, Seeking Union



This is one of those hexagrams connected with the story of Yu the Great, the conqueror of the floods. After his years of labour, he summoned lords and spirits to meet him on a mountain-top to found the new world. Fangfeng arrived late, and his punishment was execution. (The word usually translated as 'on all sides' is also Fang's name.)

There are many stories surrounding this time: Yu killed monsters, banished demons, drained noxious swamps. In essence, he was making a world fit for people to live in again. Remember that Seeking Union comes only after the intense, focussed campaign of the Army.

'The Army means grieving. Seeking Union means delight.'

In the time of the Army, the ends justify painful means and 'collateral damage'. But now that concentration of effort has created a new time, when choices are made not out of grim necessity, but out of a sense of what flows naturally and harmoniously.

Yu's new world is a safe space for people to make choices without being inhibited by old fears. And this is very often the meaning of this hexagram in divination, especially when it's unchanging: you choose! You choose what to believe and how to understand your world; you choose where you belong in it. Most of all, you choose your relationships, which make up the fabric of your world. If your life were a blank slate, with 'the rules' and 'the priorities' erased, what would you draw?

'Seeking union, good fortune.

Retracing the oracle consultation to its source: fundamental, ever-flowing constancy.

Not a mistake.

Not at rest, coming on all sides.

For the latecomer, pitfall.'

The first message here is that it is good to make these choices, to be in there at the centre of things and get involved. It is not good to be like Fangfeng and try to balance indefinitely on the fence. 'Seeking union, good fortune... for the latecomer, pitfall.' Better to be in there at the centre of things, to be involved.

And then - this is one of the hexagrams Yi most often uses to question you.

Retracing your consultation to its source means asking yourself where your question comes from. Not where it leads to, not its logical consequence, but the deep-seated vision, or value, or need that gave rise to it.

The 'source' might just be the future you are envisaging. This is what you orient everything towards - and the strongest magnet drawing new experiences and possibilities into your life without rest, and from all sides. It is 'not a mistake' to take the time to find that source!

The trigrams seem to be telling the same story of founding a new world of relationships:

'Above earth is the stream. Seeking union.

The ancient kings founded countless cities to connect those named as feudal lords.'

Relationships are meant to form as naturally as water flows together. That is, to be based on natural connections and inclinations, not just on a sense of duty or necessity. But they don't create and maintain themselves: if you expect your relationships to be alive and healthy when you need them, you need to create the places and occasions to renew the connection.

"The answer is no until you ask the question."
Mark Tidwell

13, People in Harmony

I think the name of this hexagram would be better translated as 'Creating harmony between people'. Just looking at the moving lines reveals that peace, love and harmony are not foregone conclusions in this hexagram - and that, I think, is precisely why its creative potential is so great.



LiSe's site says that the old character for tong, harmony, means perhaps a box and its lid, probably a mould used for casting. So it is a sign of people fitting together well, or of people made in the same image, but at all events of something that is designed, rather than 'just happening'. It means sharing, having things in common, agreeing - and is also the name of a 12-yearly meeting of feudal lords.

In readings about relationships of all kinds, this is a hexagram for co-operation. In romantic relationships, think of building friendship and enjoying one another's company; in business readings, think of joint ventures, and getting out of the competitive, win-lose mindset.

Once in a while, this hexagram refers to the relationships within people as well as those between people. They can be relationships between inner voices (adult and child, for instance), or between different traditions and ways of knowing. Then tong would involve bringing all of these together in inner conversation.

'People in harmony in the wilds: creating success.
Harvest in crossing the great river.
Harvest in a noble one's constancy.'

Where and what are 'the wilds'?

In SJ Marshall's [Mandate of Heaven](#) you can actually see where they might be on a map: the wilds of Mu, where King Wu is said to have gathered all his newly-allied troops to address them before the final battle against the Shang.

For me, the key is that the wilds are open: way beyond the familiar physical and mental boundaries of 'people like us'. So the people who create harmony in the wilds are deliberately meeting on neutral ground, and radically expanding their whole idea of who 'people like us' might be. By 'crossing the great river' they take the risk of going outside their own familiar territory into the unknown. They'll need the 'noble one's constancy' to make the most of the opportunity: not just dogged conservatism, but imaginative persistence that takes the longer view.

The sequence from hexagram 12, Obstruction or Standstill, has a lot to say about what is achieved in hexagram 13. In the time of Obstruction, there could be no communication at all, because of the 'non-people'. Or rather, I think, because of an 'us versus them' mentality that could categorise some people as 'beyond the pale', not true individuals. Now, there are no 'non-people'. And whereas in the trigrams of hexagram 12, the earth fell away below and heaven rose mutely above, now there

is fire below flaming up to join with heaven, reflecting the lights that already shine there.



Hexagram 12:
Earth below heaven



Hexagram 13:
Fire below heaven

Fire represents human consciousness, our inventiveness and our capacity for 'holding together' and understanding. When communication can't happen effortlessly (as it does in hexagram 11), then hexagram 13 shows what it takes:

'Heaven joins with fire. People in harmony.
In the same way, the noble one sorts the clans and differentiates between people.'

I imagine the clans gathering around the fire under the night sky, and the noble one using clarity of vision to keep the peace. It's interesting that he does so by recognising differences first, and how they come from people's clannish roots. Differences need acknowledging and respecting before people's natural defensiveness can be disarmed. (The hidden core of this hexagram is 44, Coupling, showing how joining with very different people can have far-reaching consequences and stir up ancient fears.)

The direction and purpose of all this work is the paired hexagram, Great Possession (14): creating something immeasurably greater than the sum of its parts. Hexagram 14 shows how true wealth is found in exchange; Hexagram 13 creates the environment where this becomes possible.

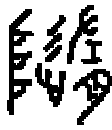
One final note. A member of the I Ching Community asked Yi before the US election how feasible it was for Kerry to win, and received 13 changing to 14. With hindsight, he doesn't quite know what to make of this answer, and neither do I. But I just wonder...

13, line 2:
'People in harmony in the ancestral hall.
Shame.'
<http://www.sorryeverybody.com> ?

13, line 5:
'People in harmony first cry out and weep, then afterwards they laugh.
Great leaders direct their coming together.'
<http://www.apologiesaccepted.com> ?

OK, that's more political than I'd normally let myself get. Just wanted to share this one.

17, Following



I think that 'Following' is a matter of moving smoothly and willingly with the current of events. In the old Chinese, the word probably originally showed a grave mound, a foot at a crossroads, and meat given as an offering. For me, this brings to mind the origins of *feng shui* as the art and science of burial sites: when strong currents flow through life's landscapes, you need to orient yourself carefully in relation to them. A sacrifice made at the crossroads, or for the journey, would be an offering for smooth flow, and a sign of willingness to follow.

'Following.

Creating success from the source, harvest in constancy.

No mistake.'

This hexagram begins in the same way as the whole Yijing begins: with 'the source, success, harvest, constancy', *yuan heng li zhen*. Together, these four words show the presence of Creative Force, driving through to completion. There's a sense of inevitability; 'it follows'; everything will fall into place.

In divination, these 'currents' that events float on are usually beyond our conscious grasp. They may have entered your life through your personal inspiration and drive (hexagram 16), but now be revealed as something altogether larger and more profound. A stream of synchronicities, for example; the subliminal, automatic patterns of response of a tennis champion 'in the zone'; the cycle of the housing market; the changes in your mood. Hexagram 17 marks the time for honouring these and Following where they lead.

Of course, there is also a time not to follow. Corruption, Hexagram 18, is the contrasting pair of Following and also its opposite. It marks the time when the unknown forces beneath the surface are working to corrupt and infect life from within. Then, they have to be interrogated, brought to awareness and integrated into waking life. This provides the stability for 'crossing the great river' - a new direction.

But in a time of Following, there is no call to battle the currents or search for their causes. Sometimes this hexagram can come as reassurance, in response to a question like, 'Why isn't this working?' or 'How can I overcome this blockage?' Not only is it beyond your power to fight, but you may not need to fight it at all: despite appearances, there is 'no mistake' in the direction of events. (Though it may take a couple of months or years before you can understand why not.)



Hexagram 16:
Enthusiasm
(Thunder over the earth)



Hexagram 17:
Following
(Thunder in the lake)



Hexagram 18:
Corruption
(Wind below the mountain)

The trigrams of Following show thunder, the power of change and renewal that surges up through hexagram 16, hidden beneath the surface of the lake. It represents motive forces below the threshold of consciousness, like the dragon who sleeps over winter on the lake bed.

'At the centre of the lake is thunder. Following.
In the same way, the noble one at nightfall
Goes inside for renewal and rest.'

In the first place this is (uncommon) common sense: if what you need, your mood or your market, is at a low ebb, then rest and wait, don't burn the midnight oil. But it also suggests going inward as a means of reconnecting with the motive forces: incubating a dream, for instance, might be a modern equivalent to the offering at the crossroads.

Response from Stephen Karcher

"Hi Hilary

I read your description of 17. I really think you should take the Pair into account here and see the dynamic between 17 and 18 as very important in a description of either. To me, there is a direct flow and a challenge in 17 to confront the "corruption" seen in 18. I would say that 17 "pushes us" toward 18, that 18 is "pulling" the energy flow across the Pair Matrix toward realization through a confrontation with the inner corruption which will emerge sooner or later. The "let go" part refers to your current fixations. You "let go" in order to liberate the energy, make it available.

This Pair is intensely connected, through both rotation and conversion. I read this sort of Pair (11:12, 17:18, 53:54 and 63:64) as "sites of intense shamanic and ritual activity" that connect human and spirit levels, bringing the energy into our world.

In the case of 17 and 18, the connections are so strong that I feel you must see the flow of energy between them and the challenge it represents in order to talk about the Pair or either of the hexagrams in it. So I would find it problematic to see them as simply moving in opposite directions, doing completely opposite things. The "flow of spirit" in 17, into which we "insert ourselves", following with ease, leads us directly to the challenge of confronting corruption and "managing" it, using the new spirit to confront the parental imagos that are our introjection of the corrupted culture around us.

Note too that in Chris Lofting's "stimulus/response" system based on trigram swapping, the stimulus or push for 17 is 54. That means the context of the Following (as response) is: "being led by forces beyond your control into a radically new situation that can renew the time." Context or push for 18 is 53, the gradual steps that carry out the change. This is an inversion where you first reach out to something then integrate it to pass to realization. So you have a picture of a radical push behind 17 that carries you into a set of steps or rituals or whatever

that can "manage" the corruption within. Thus you connect personal issues to cultural renewal.

best wishes,
Stephen”

24, Returning

‘Things cannot be altogether exhausted.
On the outside, stripping away brings things to an end;
On the inside comes turnaround,
And so Return follows.’

Hexagram 23, Stripping Away, eliminated everything that was not alive and growing. It tore away the old images, ideas, purposes, attachments... whatever was draining and wasting vital energies. And given the nature of human attachment, this probably hurt. But it also cleared the ground for new growth, leaving nothing in its way; Return is the time for coming back to life.

The nuclear hexagram of both Stripping Away and Return is Hexagram 2, Earth, the Receptive. So both hexagrams are part of the work of making things possible: clearing and renewing the space that sustains limitless growth. In Hexagram 24, a single yang line is welcomed by five open yin lines above it.



Hexagram 23,
Stripping Away



Hexagram 2,
Earth, Receptive



Hexagram 24,
Returning

‘Returning, creating success.
Going out, coming in, without haste.
A partner comes, not a mistake.
Turning around and returning on your path.
The seventh day comes, you return.
Harvest in having a direction to go.’



Return, in the old Chinese character, shows a foot going out from a town, and a road to walk on. So the first movement of 'returning' seems to be to go away from the crowd, and getting 'back on track'. This is not so much about a return to any particular place, as a return to your own path. It means getting back to fundamentals, to what you know to be right.

In readings, Return can be a reminder to simplify the question and touch base. It comes up very often in relationship questions, and frequently it's tempting to interpret it as meaning that the other person will return. In my experience, this isn't usually what it's about. The first step in 'returning' goes away from other people, back to your own path.

On a larger scale, this is about the whole cycle of 'going out and coming in': in human relationships, out of the group and back into it. Returning means having the space to change direction and orientate yourself 'without haste' or anxiety. The nuclear hexagram, Earth, speaks of finding partners in the southwest, losing them

in the northeast - a balance between integration and individuation. With Return, this becomes a cycle. There is 'the root of de (of personal power and character), small and also distinct among things' (from the *Dazhuan*) - and then this new spark of self is ready for involvement, and 'partners come'. You meet this partner, or partners, because you're on the same road: in practice, this can be the forging of new connections or the renewal of old ones. (But it definitely does not encourage making a diversion to run after anyone!)

Returning when the seventh day comes means starting again at the end of a cycle. Whether or not this was the original intention, it does correlate with the movement of yang energy through a hexagram, as Balkin describes it: 'If one begins with *Qian* (pure yang) and, starting from bottom to top, replaces each line with its opposite, in six transformations the yin lines will have fully displaced the yang lines, and *Qian* (pure yang) will become *Kun* (pure yin). The seventh transformation then begins a new sequence, with a yang line moving up from the bottom.' This is a reminder that there is a natural cadence to events, a time for each stage, and the return is not to be hurried - the same message as in the *Daxiang* (the Image).

But it is still purposeful: allying that nascent spark of energy with a 'direction to go' brings harvest. This is the integration and involvement part of the cycle. First came relaxation and release from guilt or compulsion ('without haste... not a mistake'); then comes re-engagement with purpose. The moving lines seem to tell a similar story of 'going out and coming in'.

The *Daxiang* emphasises that all this happens in its own time:

'Thunder dwelling in the centre of the earth. Returning.
The ancient kings closed the borders at winter solstice.
Itinerant merchants did not travel,
The prince did not tour the regions.'

Of the twelve hexagrams that traditionally marked the months of the year, Hexagram 24 is the darkest. The moment of the year when light begins its Return is also the moment when the days are shortest and the light most remote. The trigrams represent this as thunder in the centre of the earth: in Spring, it will come roaring to the surface, awakening everything to vigorous growth. But for now, the fields and the borders are closed; it is time for introspection, not for business as usual. This hexagram doesn't herald a triumphal return, but a gradual recuperation and recharging. The spark of life needs nurturing in stillness.

"Retrace your path, return to the source, re-establish what is important, restore the Way"

Stephen Karcher's *Total I Ching* on Hexagram 24

48, the Well

(You can still [listen online to an audio recording](#) of some personal experiences with Hexagram 48.)



The name of this hexagram is very straightforward: the Well. The old character, which looks like a noughts-and-crosses grid, is usually said to be a picture of a grid of fields, with the well at the centre. But it is also the exact same shape as the frame used in ancient China to support the sides of the well: examples have been found dating from 1300BC.

This very simple image has a wealth of meanings in divination, just as the well has a wealth of practical and symbolic meanings in real life. As the population grew, the well would have been absolutely essential for life. And beyond that, it was a social centre, and building and maintaining it was a shared, social task. So the condition of the well would be a good index of the health of relationships within the group.

But as so often, it's the most elementary literal understanding that gives rise to the most far-reaching symbolic interpretations. A well is a way of reaching the water. Ordinary life carries on across the fields; the well-shaft connects this daily activity to another, life-giving dimension.

The connection, the way of reaching, seems to me to be the essential. It can represent friendship, social connection and shared roots, or a personal ability to 'tap into' your reserves of strength. It can also represent a connection to underlying truth - hence Yi's not infrequent use of this hexagram to represent itself.

'The Well. Moving the capital city, not moving the well.
No loss, no gain,
Going, coming: welling, welling.
Almost there, yet the well rope does not quite reach,
Breaking your pitcher,
Pitfall.'

When ancient Chinese rulers had to move their capital cities, they could take with them all the paraphernalia of everyday life - except for the well. This connection is not something you can own: it must be recreated afresh in each new place. And it will neither lose nor gain: our politics cannot change its essential nature. (Though connection to the source can and does cause political change - see Hexagram 49!)

The contrasting pair of 'going, coming' represents not only the movements of people, but also the passage of time (like 'buying-selling' meaning 'trade'). In sharp contrast, 'welling, welling' highlights the unchanging nature of the Well - as if its shaft were dug at right-angles to time, to bring up meaning from the invisible world into everyday life, bridging the unbridgeable. (The hidden core of the Well is Hexagram 38, Opposition.)

But this will not happen by itself. There is always water in the well, but not everyone will reach it - and if you can't reach the source, or lack the means to contain it, it will never help you.

So receiving Hexagram 48 is often a sign that there is real work to be done. Its roots lie in the desperate isolation of hexagram 47, Oppression. One who experiences Oppression is like a tree hemmed in on all sides by walls, unable to trust the words that connect them to others or make sense of the world. And so she (or he) is cast back on her own inner resources - where Yi hints that she will find some transformative 'mutual encounter' at the heart of the experience.

Together, Oppression and the Well describe a single experience of outer oppression, turning inward, and connecting to the source - but from opposite perspectives. The square of walls around the tree becomes the square well-frame, and the 'pit' is transformed: what you find at the core is independent of change on the human scale; it doesn't require anyone to 'make sense' of it.

This reminds me of those myths where the hero must visit dark depths to bring back the gift of life. The trigrams tell the same story: in Oppression, the essence drains inward, from outer lake to inner stream. And with the Well, it is brought back into circulation, inner wood opening the way to the water.



Hexagram 47,
Oppression



Hexagram 48,
the Well

But in the Yijing, the 'hero' who brings back the water is a whole society, working steadily and prosaically together to keep their well in good order. The best any individual can do is to get involved in this effort:

'Above wood is the stream. The Well.

The noble one labours with the ordinary people to encourage them to help one another.'

The stream suggests shared toil in the face of a challenge; the inner wood suggests an adaptive, intelligent response to it. But this is also a plain and literal image of exactly how immersed the noble one is in his work: looking down through the water, you can still see that wooden well-frame.

"No loss, no gain.
Going, coming: welling, welling."
Yi

59, Dispersing



The old character for 'Dispersing' shows flowing water, and a man at the mouth of a cave, looking around with a stick in his hands. He seems to me to be trying to get the measure of a newly flooded landscape, though he might also be holding a knife and releasing the flow of blood from a sacrifice. But at all events, a powerful flow has been released from its usual channels and is free to find its own direction. There are no more barriers or boundaries; the whole, solid means of dividing and understanding the world have crumbled away.

'Dispersing' means a change of state: ice melting, water evaporating, clouds dissolved. At every stage, there is more free movement, more space, and longer perspectives for clear vision. It leaves an empty slate, being made ready for the more vital, flexible articulations of Hexagram 60.

And this is quite a challenge:

'Dispersing, creating success.
The king enters his temple.
Harvest in crossing the great river,
Harvest in constancy.'

Once the flood is visited on you, or once you have unleashed the flow of emotion yourself, there is definitely no returning to normality - normality is somewhere down the river. The king enters his temple to reconnect mundane understanding with something larger than normal-scale ideas, and to receive guidance in this wide-open landscape. He doesn't 'take charge' in his own right: superheroes are not required here. Instead of finding purpose and meaning in preservation work, people have the new project and goal of crossing the great river (which may have come to them). They have a clear view now into unknown territories, and an opportunity to embrace the unthinkable.

'Wind moves over the water. Dispersing.
The ancient kings made offerings to the Highest and established the temples.'

This alludes to the substance of offerings: the spirits are nourished by the rising vapours. What lasts is the constant circulation of energy between humans and spirits. Temples that endure for millennia are made, not of immense rocks, but of wind and water.

The process of dissolving the old boundaries and articulating a new understanding - Hexagrams 59 and 60 - pivots around the nuclear hexagram of 27, Nourishment. This is about renewing the structures of life, all the personal and social 'ecosystems' that provide nourishment. It restores impeded circulation!



Hexagram 59



Hexagram 27



Hexagram 60

There are many ways you might experience this hexagram in practice.

In relationships, the removal of all boundaries or obstacles to vision can create a renewed flow and connection - and, paradoxically, difficulties in ordinary communication when the usual shared concepts and understanding melt away. Instead, people can become overwhelmingly present and visible to one another, with no more concept of 'personal space' or emotional privacy. The truth comes into plain view: this may or may not be comforting.

It often leaves people feeling lost, without their usual mental landmarks: 'here is my job,' 'here is what I believe, what I can do, who I am.' Dispersing is the opposite of Feng, Hexagram 55, the city where Wu received his mandate: amidst the floodwaters, it's hard to know what you are 'meant' to do. And this can dissolve self-limiting beliefs, so that you understand your own potential on a larger scale.

60, Articulating



This is the hexagram of limits, boundaries and junctures: all the ways we have of dividing the world up to make it comprehensible. The ancient character shows a man approaching his food, along with bamboo plants - whose natural 'articulations' were used to measure both volume and pitch. The weights and measures that allow people to trade, the contracts that allow them to work together, the language that allows us to develop ideas and relationships - all this is the province of Articulating.

'Articulating, creating success.
Bitter articulation does not allow for constancy.'

Whether the limits or articulations can be something you create for yourself, or part of some large-scale legal agreement, they will always come from personal agreements. The limits that don't allow for constancy - the ones that can't last - are not the ones that are misguided, or too extreme: they're the ones that taste bitter.

This was one of the first hexagrams I got to know through experience, when we were negotiating to buy a house. To cut a long and tortuous story short, various bitter limits didn't last, the negotiations failed, and I learned that the whole process of setting ground rules and ensuring mutual comprehension is not optional. Receiving this hexagram is a fairly clear sign that these things will not sort themselves out if ignored.

In relationship readings, Hexagram 60 is still about setting ground rules: clarifying expectations, making sure you both mean the same thing by the same words, and simply that you understand one another. And once again, this is not optional: you can't assume the other person will just know these things if they're not put into words.

We tend to place more emphasis on removing limits than imposing them - but in the Yijing, these are two sides of a single coin. That is, Articulating completes the work started by Hexagram 59, Dispersing. Dispersing describes free flow that dissolves obstacles, and seeing beyond boundaries into the far distance. In human relations, this is uninhibited communication.

Opening the gateways, dissolving the obstacles, restoring the flow: if Articulation is to be sweet and lasting, all this is essential - but not sufficient. The old divisions and connections were obstructing true communication or understanding, and they are Dispersed; to restore communication, on all levels, there must be a new language, one that will grow organically as bamboo to Articulate the true nature of things.



(The Mars Climate Orbiter was lost because European and US engineers were using different units of measurement. Someone failed to Disperse and Articulate...)

Hexagrams 59 and 60 share a common nuclear hexagram: 27, Nourishment - or more literally, 'Jaws', the structure that supports nourishment ([see table above](#)). Together, they are like aspects of a circulatory system, with its vessels both free from obstructions, and intelligently directed to meet the organism's needs.

A larger-scale image for the same process would be the development of irrigation to provide for a growing population - and this is used in the *Daxiang* (the Image):

'Above the lake is the stream. Limiting.
The noble one carves out and calculates the measures,
She reflects on power and virtue in action.'

The noble one seems to be developing an irrigation scheme through practical experimentation. The stream flows into the lake and rises from it, both carving it out and revealing its capacity - just as actions feed into character and flow out from it. The rules and limits that decide how you channel your personal power are best decided not through abstract principles, but on the basis of what works.

"Art consists of limitation. The most beautiful part of every picture is the frame."
G.K. Chesterton

DIY Corners and other articles

Links to audio

This year I experimented with DIY corners in audio format. You can still listen to these via the archived issues online:

[Quick introduction to I Ching readings for decision-making](#)

[Getting from the general to the specifics](#)

[Questions about questions \(enrolling Yi as divination coach\)](#)

What does it mean when a hexagram has no changing lines?

As you might expect, that depends on which hexagram it is! Most often, it means something like '!!!'. That is, it's the I Ching's way of saying, 'here is everything you need to know in a single image.' It's as if it is speaking to you very - slowly - and - simply to get an important message across.

This can also mean that until you have learned the pattern of this hexagram, seen how it applies to your life and risen to its challenges, there will be no shifting it: this will be your inner and outer reality. Of course, depending on the hexagram, you may not want to shift it.

On occasion, the fact that a hexagram has no moving lines can modify its meaning in unexpected ways. A few examples:

- 11, Flow. The great flow of creative energy through life, not filtered or directed by any objective. This does not turn out to mean Peace, but quite unpredictable, sometimes explosive results.
- 46, Pushing Upward. Growing towards a goal - but perhaps one strangely detached, unrelated to other people.
- 1, Creative Force. Often appears unchanging in association with genuinely wonderful ideas that, for whatever reason, can't come to fruition at this time.

I really think these have to be learned from experience: gradually relating your fund of readings to the inner logic of the hexagrams. And when you're trying to come to grips with an unchanging hexagram that's new to you, try asking yourself whether this hexagram feels sufficient and complete in this situation. 'What if this were all there was to it?'

Taking the I Ching off the shelf

The I Ching is extraordinary - literally, outside the realm of things we can understand and systematise. And so it is traditional to honour the oracle by treating it in a way that constantly brings to mind its special status. The book is to be kept on a high shelf, wrapped in red silk. The coins used to consult it must be bought specially, purified in incense, never used for anything else. Or else coins are not good enough; you need yarrow stalks harvested from a sacred site. And above all, the book itself is only to come down from its shelf for matters of the greatest importance; the oracle is not to be pestered with your petty, day-to-day concerns.

I do have great respect for this tradition; I think it is very important to appreciate the magnitude of what you're doing when you consult with the oracle, and to find some way to define a 'sacred space' for your readings. But this doesn't mean that the book has to remain on the shelf until a moment of major crisis. I have the book alongside me as I work, my beads for consulting in my pocket, and more often than not, a recent reading shaping my thoughts. And all this feels right for me.

How about you? Involving the I Ching closely in every area of your life might leave you with less respect for the oracle - or with more respect for your own life. It might threaten to smother your own moral, intuitive and natural response - or it might awaken and liberate them.

Reasons to involve the I Ching

If your copy of the I Ching has been undisturbed on its high shelf for a while, why should you take it down? Well, reading when you don't have a crisis on hand allows you to experience and learn the hexagrams and lines in a less emotionally charged atmosphere. It allows you to see the patterns unfolding in your life at a deeper level, and hence both to avoid disasters and to seize opportunities to step 'outside the box'. And the content of the readings doesn't have to be life-changing in itself: there is great value in the simple awareness of being in touch.

Ways to involve the I Ching

If you have a crisis to manage or a big decision to make, then thinking of questions for the I Ching isn't generally a problem. (Though choosing one is another matter...) But here are some other ways to get the book off the shelf:

Start with that basic optimism of divination: life can be more harmonious, richer and more fulfilling. You could simply ask for guidance for some period of time - I find that a week works best. Or you could single out some area of your life to enliven: a relationship, a job, the way you handle some recurrent situation - and ask,

'How can I improve this?' or 'What do I need to know now about this?'

And finally: having asked, ensure you have the time to attend to the answer!

"The best way to truly understand the Book of Changes is to use it."

Jack Balkin

Incongruously positive answers

The question of how to deal with negative answers and turn them to positive use is one thing... the question of what to make of positive answers when you're feeling anything but is quite another. It's not uncommon to ask about the cause of a problem and receive an answer that sounds like a cause for nothing but rejoicing. So what does this mean?

It can be reassurance... it can also be a reminder of your good fortune, and a suggestion that you view your situation through new eyes. A few examples:

Hexagram 14, Great Possession. You are rich! If you don't feel that way, could it be because you haven't put your gifts into circulation? Or maybe (my own experience, this!) your definition of 'wealth' needs expanding.

Hexagram 11, Flowing. All the 'small things' will be swept out of life - but to you, they may not feel so small, and the experience may be anything but peaceful.

Hexagram 35, Prospering. There are opportunities there to be seized, talents to be used to the full: sunshine and hay to make in it, in fact. But if you remember, in the Parable of the Talents there was one man who kept the money he was given safe by burying it in the ground, Hiding his Brightness. The gifts of this hexagram come with risks attached.

Hexagram 46, Pushing Upward. Anyone who presses on confidently, single-mindedly, without anxiety, can expect to make progress. Anyone else might take this reading as an opportunity to reassess how single-minded they really are.

'Contradictory' moving lines?

"Hi

I have a question for you. When using the I-Ching I often get moving lines whose meanings contradict each other. How should I interpret this?

All the best to you and yours,

Tad"

There's quite a full answer to this question in the 'Pivots of Change' lesson of [Clarity's I Ching Course](#). Hopefully these three brief excerpts will act as a helpful starting point...

“There are basically three possible answers:

- The lines are telling a story
- The lines represent alternative choices or attitudes
- The lines represent different people within the situation

Lines telling a story

This is a very frequent format when you ask about the future - what you can expect from a certain course of action, what opportunities or problems it might present. If, for example, you ask for a reading for the upcoming year and receive multiple moving lines, this is their most likely 'rationale'. A conspicuous effect of this pattern is that the lower lines, which are nearer to your current experience, will look a lot more intelligible than the higher ones. Also, the higher lines may be more remote from you as possibilities, because there are more choices to be made, more problems to be worked through, before you reach them..."

"Lines as alternatives

Thinking of multiple moving lines as alternatives can bring about a major change of perspective! For someone trying to turn the reading into a neat, harmonious interpretation they may be a problem; for someone seeking to turn it into positive action, they look more like a wealth of opportunity. After all, moving lines represent not only what is changing, but also the points where you can intervene to bring about change.

The 'alternatives' model is the most common explanation of apparently contradictory lines in response to a 'how to' question. But it can also emerge when people ask for prediction, especially if they are tacitly attempting to evade their own responsibility for the outcome. The Yijing says in effect: 'How will it come out? Well, what do you choose?'

Often, as soon as you entertain the idea of alternatives, everything becomes clear..."

"Lines as different people

Where several people are involved in the situation... or where you really can't see yourself in one or more of the lines... or where two changing lines are obviously interacting... then it is time to consider the possibility that these lines represent people. Unsurprisingly, the essential element in such a reading is your intuition (but beware of attributing the less pleasant lines to people you don't like!)"

"I do not believe in meaningless coincidences."
Deepak Chopra

More ways with moving lines

Last time I covered the basic ways of understanding multiple moving lines within what to me is 'ordinary' divination. What I didn't mention - and a couple of helpful readers have mentioned :) - is that there are other ways of working with them, or sometimes not working with them, altogether.

First, there are methods for reducing the number of moving lines to read when the oracle gives you several. Harmen Mesker helpfully posted [Zhuxi's method](#) at the I Ching Community last year.

Alfred Huang in his [Complete I Ching](#) offers a different, simpler method, passed down from his own teacher, Master Yin:

"1. If there are two moving lines - one yin and the other yang - consult only the yin moving line.

2. If the two moving lines are both yin or both yang, consult the lower one.

3. If there are three moving lines, consult only the middle one.

4. If there are four moving lines, consult only the upper of the two nonmoving lines.

5. If there are five moving lines, consult only the other, nonmoving line.

6. If six lines are all moving, consult the Decision of the new gua, the approached gua.

7. Since there is a seventh invisible line in the first and second gua, Qian and Kun, for these gua consult the seventh Yao Text, called All Nines or All Sixes."

(extract from *The Complete I Ching*, Alfred Huang, p17)

For myself, I don't use either method. I feel that a rich, complex reading is a good sign of a rich, complex situation; I'm more interested in experiencing the complexity than in reducing it.

If you read just a few posts further down in that I Ching Community archive, you'll find Bradford explaining the 'transitional hexagram' method that he and Mondo Secter discovered (or perhaps rediscovered) in 1976. This is explained in full in Mondo Secter's *I Ching Handbook*, and in Bradford's Introduction, available to download from [his site](#). The basic idea is that when you change the first line of your hexagram, you create a new one - and then change the next line within that hexagram, not the original one. So - at least as far as I understand it - you have the sense of progressing through the change step by distinct, independent step, rather than of relationships and tensions within a single picture.

An example we saw at the ICC recently: Hexagram 28 with the third and fourth lines changing. First you're told that the roof beam is buckling disastrously, next that it is holding up successfully, and all will be well provided nothing more is added. You might be left feeling a little like Schrödinger's cat before the box was opened.

With the transitional method, 28 would change to 47 after the 3rd line, so you'd read 28,3 and 47,4 - changing 47,4 brings you out at hexagram 29, just as in the ordinary method. 28,4, the beam holding up, wouldn't be involved at all.

So with the transitional method, you won't have to envisage your beam both sagging and straight, or your Vessel both upended and upright. This may be initially more complex than the ordinary, non-cumulative method, but at least it will make more sense: Bradford says it 'almost always tells a more coherent story' for him. It has the advantage of not making you see from several mutually contradictory perspectives within the same hexagram.

For me, this is also its disadvantage. Those two lines of hexagram 28 suggest that the outcome still hangs in the balance, but the smallest human intervention could push things either way. You can look at the lines and their contexts (hexagram 47 versus 48, and the approaches or beliefs suggested by 47,3 as compared with 48,4) to find what the determining factors could be.

Understanding the Relating Hexagram

"I am still very confused about how to use the relating hexagram. I mean, it is a huge difference between outcome and place of inquirer. How do you know which it is describing?

For instance I had this very positive reading to go forward with something, then the relating was Obstruction, NO. So what to do when that happens. How do you deal effectively in that scenario. I'll give you the whole deal.

My question was, What is the result of going to the big city to see the performance in June? (Background: also could give reason to connect with a friend, but the performance is the main reason for going so soon)

Got hexagram 61 w/ 1,2,4 moving lines ending with 12. I am truly confused with this answer. (I like S. Karcher's moving line 1 in Myths much more than the others, seems appropriate).

best wishes,
G"

Hello G,

I couldn't agree more: working out how to use the relating hexagram is often the trickiest part of an interpretation. And there isn't really a fixed rule for this: Yi (Change) and fixed rules somehow don't go together well... Each hexagram has its own unique way of interacting with other hexagrams, and so the role of any relating hexagram is going to depend on the dynamics of its relationship with the first hexagram. And of course, all this will only start to make sense within the context of your particular question.

This sounds prohibitively complicated, but the best approach is often the simplest one. For instance, here's how I'd work through your example. This isn't a complete reading: I'm just 'showing my workings', as my Maths teacher used to say - showing the questions I would ask myself to work out how the reading fits together.

61, 12: inner truth, obstruction. How does that expand into a single idea? Inner truth and presence to obstruction... fully realising and experiencing at your heart's core the obstruction to communication.

How does this connect with the question? In the foreground, it is all about going to the performance. But the background issue, the longer-term one, is your connection or lack of it with your friend. The relating hexagram can describe the backdrop, something ongoing rather than acute; it can also describe where you're coming from, your subjective experience behind the question. And it describes something underneath, that your question doesn't explicitly address.

All this together suggests that hexagram 12, and maybe the whole reading, is mostly about this friendship. Would the trip be a way to reconnect and overcome the obstruction? In other words, what, if anything, can Inner Truth do to shift it?

This is where personal experience is an essential. Mine with Hexagram 61 as a primary hexagram suggests that it doesn't overtly change the second hexagram so much as it intensifies and focuses its experience, pulling it through into reality. (Sometimes more real than you would like.)

But as always, the most direct answer will come from the changing lines. (Interested readers without an I Ching book to hand can look them up here) Just a very quick take on those (since this is not meant to be a full reading!):

Line 1: the connection has to be quiet and simple; having something 'other' or hidden about it is not good. Maybe this means that you can't usefully combine these two purposes in one trip?

Line 2: there is the potential for a real, heartfelt connection. (Not guaranteed to be realised in practice, though.) But note it can work well from a distance, 'calling from the shadows' - being physically together might not be as important as you think.

Line 4: A partnership pulls apart, but this is not a mistake. Maybe you can only experience the performance and/or other aspects of the trip to the full if you are not 'yoked' together with your friend?

So what would happen about the Obstruction? I think you would get to its Inner Truth - vividly experience the real reasons for the original disconnection. From this reading I would think that there are ways to transform the Obstruction - but this trip as you've conceived of it now isn't one of them.

Cautionary lines

"I have a question about receiving a cautionary line in a proactive context.

For example: Say I ask the question : "Considering that I wish to be a world famous football player, what should my action be regarding X (a football coach)?"

And say I get Hex 62.6 to 56 as a reply.

Could an answer like this mean one SHOULD invite disaster?
Or could an answer like this indicate to stay away from X's lessons?

A different example:

Say I have been in a tight spot. A cosmic stalemate. Stymied about a next move, keeping to myself, isolating, etc. And I ask the Yi "What do I do (to improve the situation)?" and Yi gives back 55.6 to hex 30 as a reply.

What could a line like that mean within the context and the question?
Throw off the stalemate?
Or, this is a bit of a fated thing here, not much to do about it? To actually embrace the stalemate type of thing?

Thank you."

Basically, when the answer to 'what should I do?' is a description of some course of action with disastrous results, common sense says this is a description of what not to do.

Or to put it another way - if you're on your way down the road and see one of these with lights flashing...



...would you respond by closing your eyes tightly and driving straight on?

Ominous lines in the Yijing actually are a lot like warning signs, and just as impartial. They often don't offer advice as such: there's no 'should' or 'ought to' anywhere except in the interpreter's mind. You can use those flashing lights to ensure you get flattened, and you can use Hexagram 55, line 6 to ensure nothing good ever happens to you - but both of these are strictly optional!

62, line 6 reads:

'Not meeting at all, passing by.
The flying bird is netted.
Pitfall
Known as calamity and blunder.'

To quote this month's reviewed book (again!):
' "Passing by" means missing a goal by overshooting it... You have great ambitions and dreams of grandeur. But they will do you no good if conditions are not appropriate and you are not up to the task...'

So I'd suggest not only not taking lessons with X, but revisiting the nature of the ambition in the first place. 62,6 strongly suggests that ambition exceeds capability - a more useful focus might be on becoming a better football player, less attached to recognition.

And 55, line 6 reads:
'At Feng, in his hut,
Screening off his dwelling place,
Peeping through his door.
A solitary one without people,
For three years sees no-one.
Pitfall.'

The message of 55,6 is that you've been in mourning and isolation for far too long. Most likely there are opportunities, but someone shut away like that would never find them. Time to get out.

Telling 'yes' from 'no'

"Dear Hilary,

I have often wondered how to go about interpreting a yes from a no as advice - particularly when you ask a Should I... kind of a question? It would be interesting to know your views and those of others.

Regards
Archana"

Hi Archana,

That's a very good question, thank you. The answer to it comes in two parts.

Firstly - if I'm interpreting the answer to a 'should I...?' question, I imagine the answer to be simply part of a conversation. For instance:

'Should I start this project?'

'Well, it would be fantastically hard work, but your efforts would be rewarded.'

(Hexagram 46)

or

'Your enthusiasm's running away with you here, and if you try to organise anything you'll land in trouble.' (34, line 1)

Looking at these two imaginary answers, you can see the first one is like an answer to, 'What would it be like if I started this?' while the second is more of an answer to, 'What do you think of this idea?' These are the two most likely 'angles' for an answer to a 'should I?' question: if in doubt, I'd suggest reading it as a prediction of what to expect if you went ahead.

Of course, neither imaginary answer explicitly says 'yes' or 'no': that will come from the questioner's personal response to the answer. Hexagram 34, line 1 might inspire someone to engage their brain first, sketch out a more modest plan, and then ask again. Hexagram 46, Pushing upward, might sound like a 'yes' in the abstract, but it could still remind someone who already had a life full of commitments not to take more on.

And the second part: for myself (and customers), I simply never ask a question that expects a 'yes'/'no' answer. I suggest that instead of 'Should I...?' questions you ask 'What if I...?' and 'What would it mean if I...?' questions. Then you can look at the picture Yi gives you, and use it to answer your own 'should I?' question. After all, if you really wanted an oracle to give you just a 'yes' or 'no', you could just have tossed a single coin. You talk with Yi instead because you understand that life is a little more complex than that - and perhaps also because your decisions are your own.

"A conclusion is the place where you got tired of thinking."
from Harvey Cohen

Good and bad fortune?

"Hi Hilary,

My background was first astrology, and then I learned the I Ching. It gives me a slightly different perspective because, in astrology, any aspect can be looked at as good or bad depending. For example, in a horoscope chart you can have trine aspects (flowing, positive) or square aspects (challenging, agitating). But if your chart is all trines and no squares, you become lazy and rarely actualize your potential.

When I ask the I Ching oracle a question and get an answer like Hexagram 12, I can interpret this as telling me, "stand still even if it feels like stagnation" and this is something different than hexagram 52; keeping still, transcending the need for horizontal development in favor of vertical development.

Or with hexagram 23, instead of interpreting that answer as "deterioration", I can see instances where separation is necessary or inevitable, and doesn't necessarily have to be a bad thing, like a snake shedding its skin--transformation and change.

I feel oppressed by the judgement that the I Ching hexagrams always give; "good fortune/bad fortune" or "some remorse" or "guilt vanishes". I can see how, despite the traditional value assignment given, every step of one's life is a development that is only going to be temporarily positive or negative. Clinging to the middle way will create the least amount of energy lost needlessly, and will always yield the best material world results over the long haul.

I like how I Ching author, Carol Anthony, discusses how fate works as a mathematical certainty. What the I Ching teaches us is the laws of fate, to the extent that we can comprehend them. But I feel a deep need to see an I Ching book written with all of the judgment left out, so that each hexagram can be treated as a scientific principle of natural law, without regards to good/bad or right/wrong issues.

Susan"

Hi Susan,

My own use of the I Ching is not so very different from yours, I think. I know Hexagram 23 as a necessary part of life, a process with positive potential. I also know how excruciatingly painful it can be, especially when someone is passionately attached to whatever 'dead skin' needs to be cut away. And also how very raw and exposed people can feel when being 'stripped' in this way. (A better hexagram to express a decisive personal choice to 'change skins' and bring about transformation would be hexagram 49.) The I Ching contains the constructive, creative uses of painful experiences deep within its text and structure, but also represents pain, or dead ends, or futility, with vivid honesty. So you might choose to go through a hexagram 23 experience, or to avoid it, or if (as more often happens) you find

yourself in the midst of one you can at least learn from the I Ching how to move with it and support its 'space clearing' process. By the way, the Judgement of Hexagram 23 doesn't say that stripping away is a bad thing. It says there is nothing to be gained by having a 'direction to go' - which is very different.

I can see why you would react against such blunt statements as 'good fortune', 'pitfall' (aka 'misfortune'), 'shame', etc. But I think perhaps you may be neglecting an important difference between a negative auspice in an I Ching reading and one in an astrological chart. The misfortune in the I Ching reading will, more often than not, be something you can avoid altogether by a change of course. It's hard to deny that some actions in life are a better idea than others. Enthusiastically plunging all one's money into some dubious 'business opportunity' would undoubtedly be a learning experience of the first order - ultimately a good swift kick back towards that 'middle way'. Someone who asked the I Ching about this project in advance might get an answer that 'setting out brings a pitfall' - perhaps with added comments about charging headfirst into strong hedges and getting horribly stuck. Then they would have the choice of learning from their reading, or learning from experience.

So I think an I Ching with the original, simple messages of good or bad fortune expunged would be an I Ching with its teeth and claws pulled. Is it judgemental to make it clear when someone is about to lose all their money? Or sabotage a precious relationship? Or on the other hand, to give warm encouragement to someone who is afraid to risk making a change for the better? One of the principles of natural law, at least as embodied in the I Ching, is that if I do something half-baked, I'll end up in a mess. I appreciate very much having an oracle that tells me what I'm walking into, without beating euphemistically about the bush.

You'll notice that this is not primarily about right and wrong; I don't actually think that moral judgement enters into the I Ching text nearly as much as some commentaries would suggest. It has a lot more to do with practical results and human experience: what works and what doesn't. Ideas of right and wrong emerge from the interaction of our own inner compass with the pictures the I Ching creates.

One other thought: there is a lot more to the auspices in the I Ching than initially meets the eye. Often there is no auspice, just a haiku-like image, though commentators have an unfortunate tendency to rush in and categorise the line as 'good' or 'bad' as if the absence of an auspice were just an oversight. But when the auspices are used, it is with great precision and subtlety. It's all too easy, because the same words appear again and again, to give them formulaic meanings, and/or fail to take in their import at all. Or to rank them in a hierarchy of auspiciousness from 'nothing that does not bring harvest' down to 'calamity and blunder', as if each reading could be translated into a mark out of ten. In fact 'danger' can be something to avoid, or something to go into with your eyes open; 'without fault' or 'no mistake' has meanings ranging from 'stop worrying that there is something wrong with this' through to something suspiciously like damning with faint praise. And these nuances are to be found through a combination of text, context and

interpretation. (Bradford Hatcher is particularly good at bringing out these subtle distinctions - see his work at <http://www.hermetica.info>.)

So in de-clawing the oracle you would also be losing more of the message than you perhaps realise. Look at 28,6, for instance, which describes getting out of one's depth and drowning:

'Too far, wading. Submerging the head.

Pitfall.

No mistake.'

No mistake??? The interpreters come out with versions ranging from 'do not make this mistake' through to depicting this as self-sacrifice: ultimate misfortune for the one who drowns, but not wrong. Eliminating the auspices here would eliminate most of the complexity and a lot of the message. This is the kind of line that helps to convince me that the original authors of the oracle knew what they were at.

very best wishes,

Hilary

(And I can't resist adding Susan's reply! 🙏 :

"Hi Hilary,

Wow, what a brilliant reply. A million thanks. I have to admit, your analogy of taking the judgment good fortune/bad fortune out of the hexagrams would be like declawing and defanging the 'animal' is really exceptionally good insight. I guess I was in a rut of not liking what the I Ching was pointing to me to see

Susan"

Susan, you're not the only one to pass through that particular rut! I could sell deckchairs down here...)



"Isn't it strange how much we know if we only ask ourselves instead of somebody else?"

Richard Bach, Illusions

Different perspectives

Two questions I'm quite often asked:

"Can you cast the hexagram for someone else? Doesn't that mean that the hexagram will be for you, not for them?"

"Can I cast the hexagram for myself? Doesn't that mean that my own desires will bias the reading's outcome?"

I think that both these questions come from the same basic conception of divination with Yi: that it's tricky, elusive, with a bunch of hoops you have to jump through to get a genuine answer. I've found that you can cast hexagrams for yourself or for someone else, and the answer will be just as genuine.

Some people seem to think that the light of truth is hidden in a box somewhere - or maybe in a whole series of boxes - and you have to find exactly the right key(s) to get in. I rather see it the other way round: we live in the box, and the light is shining on it from all sides - it'll pour in through any window we open, and glimmers will keep on finding their way in through the cracks no matter how much we try to seal them.



"Questions are in boxes, and the answers they get only fit the size of the box."

Anna (from *Mister God, this is Anna*)