

I Ching

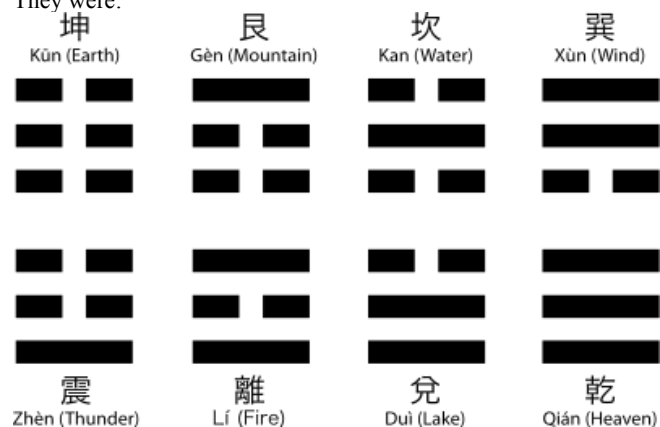
The Book of Changes

A New Interpretation of the Ancient Oracle

History of the I Ching

The I Ching may be the world's most commonly consulted oracle and one of the most widely read books of classical Chinese literature, but it's damn near impossible to find two sources which agree on its origins. So it is with all things which have their roots in the mists of antiquity. Thankfully, we have a myth which gives us a much fuller story than any skeletal narrative of historical facts.

The legend goes that 5,000 years ago China's first emperor, Fu Xi, a half-man half-dragon (the dragon being an ancient Chinese symbol of power) was sitting beside the Yellow River in deep meditation trying to grasp the mysteries of nature. Suddenly the water boiled and storm clouds gathered and an immense dragon-horse rose from the depths with eight symbols glowing on its side. These symbols represented the eight vital forces of nature in all its transformation. Each sign or trigram was composed of three lines, either broken or solid, representing the primordial forces of yin and yang. They were:



Fu Xi quickly sketched these down and passed their wisdom on to his people in a text called the Yellow River Map. Nearly a thousand years later Yu, another legendary emperor, saw a turtle (symbol of wisdom) crawl out of the Lo River with the same markings on its shell and arranged them metaphorically around the 8 primary directions of the compass rose.

The Book of Changes that we know today, however, was not written until another thousand years had lapsed and one man's misfortune precipitated one of the greatest blessings humanity has ever received (as is so appropriate with a book where opposites attract and paradoxes are the law). Wen Wang, a powerful feudal lord, was so overly generous and lax in punishment with those on his lands and so irreverent and nonchalant in the presence of the emperor Chou Hsin (the last ruler of the Shang dynasty) that the emperor grew furious and had him sentenced to death. Spending many years in jail with

nothing but the hot breath of his own death to keep him company, his thoughts grew deep and profound and he turned his attention to the 8 sacred trigrams which by that time were as old as the Bible is today.

Arranging these trigrams into their 64 possible combinations, he derived 64 fundamental transformations that compose all the forces and cycles of nature. To each of these he attached moral and spiritual traits which could help anyone seeking their council gain insight into their situation and their place in the larger scheme of things. He derived a system of consultation which involved casting 50 yarrow stalks which has been widely superseded in favor using only three coins as described below. Wen Wang worked tirelessly on perfecting this system, thinking it would be his final and greatest gift to the world, until under severe pressure from his many powerful friends the emperor Chou Hsin finally, albeit grudgingly, released him.

Bursting from the prison on a glorious spring day when the winds were whipping to and fro and thunderclouds bloomed across the sky, Wen Wang threw the I Ching into the grass, forgetting all about his years of devoted work in the utter bliss of freedom, for he was once again at one with the beloved changes of the seasons and elements that had commanded his mind for so long under lock and key. Luckily, his wife ran and snatched the book from the mud, knowing its value, and stormed after him yelling, "You fool! You damned fool!" as he only shouted back, "I am! I know! I am!" Although furious with him (he didn't stop frolicking to hold her for days on end) she immediately shared the oracle's power and wisdom with all their friends. Wen Wang had no more interest in it. After his death, his son Duke Chou added his own commentaries, and following the Shang dynasty's overthrow became ruler and made the book well known to all those who came seeking his guidance. Word of this magical book quickly spread across the countryside—and eventually across all of China and the world.

On this Interpretation

There are several translations of the I Ching into English, the first from around 200 BC believe it or not. The most popular modern version, however, is by Richard Wilhelm, from which I derived this interpretation. Wilhelm was a German translator and friend to Carl Jung. In fact Jung wrote an introduction for the translation and used the book extensively, relating it to his theories on the collective unconscious and synchronicity. The unfortunate thing about Wilhelm's translation, however, is that it directs its advice almost exclusively toward the male pronoun and relies heavily on patriarchal and hierarchal social formations in relating the significance of each hexagram.

Well what the fuck! This is a guide to nature and its divinity. Since we know now that natural human communities are thoroughly egalitarian, sex- and classism don't seem like they belong in the text. With this in mind I've taken care to omit these elements while doing my damndest to preserve the poetic core of each hexagram. Domestication, marital monogamy, and heterocentricism as well I have peeled from Wilhelm's interpretation like the skin of a banana. Yum.

Another facet unique to this version is the recognition of the incredible danger all life

faces today. No, I'm not talking about 2012. Industrial civilization itself has become an immense natural force which threatens the very foundations of life on earth. We are in the depths of a winter which does not pass with the seasons. War, disease, and starvation; 200 species extinct every day; dead oceans; poisoned rivers; forests torn down to ash and deserts—under the encroaching hand of so-called civilized humanity all of the abundance of nature shrivels and sleeps. Because this force is so tremendous, I have added notes on resistance to it and stressed traditional lifeways in hope of hastening the inevitable spring that will follow this winter. I've kept in mind, though, that these are not elements the I Ching was founded upon and are not fundamentally fundamental to the fundamentals of *most* of the changes described—the lessons contained herein do not always begin or end with resistance. Nor do they begin or end anywhere.

As an anarchist (in company, many would say, of the early Taoists), I see spontaneity, immediacy, and universal egalitarianism (to the point of animism) as deeply natural virtues—personal, social, and spiritual—which all things civilized lack in favor of the artificial, the symbolic, the isolated—a point I'll explore elsewhere someday. In short I believe in freedom as much as wild nature does—whole-heartedly—and this deep spiritual conviction is intertwined with my version of the I Ching. If you don't like it, tough cookies. Tough fucking banana.

I have tried to accentuate, also, the philosophical wisdom of the I Ching, which is twofold (and onefold, har har). First, that all things are transitory. All things are not really things, they are changes—they are motions, gestures, constantly dancing, all things flowing through one another, all-connected, bam. That's why it's the Book of Changes, not the Book of Things, silly! Secondly, it recognizes that all polarities are in fact singularities—that life could not exist without death, nor light without darkness, stillness without motion, spring without autumn, etc—and these things which we conceive of as dualities are constantly in complementary fluctuation. The yin-yang.

I hope this condensed, and thus impoverished, interpretation is no less fruitful for those who seek its guidance.

-Cody Meyocks

Consulting the Oracle

Next, you will need three coins. After concentrating for a moment on the situation for which you seek the I Ching's prophecy, wisdom, or advice, then cast the coins down. If they are mostly **HEADS**, draw a **SOLID** line. If they are mostly **TAILS**, draw a **BROKEN** line. Repeat this six times, drawing each line **ABOVE** the previous throw. Go quickly if possible so you do not lose concentration in the middle of the reading (in other words don't be phony-holy and sit for five minutes between throws trying to get the energy just so—just throw the damn coins). Repeat the throw **SIX TIMES** until you have a stack of **SIX LINES**, forming one of the 64 hexagrams on table on the first page. On the table, line up the bottom trigram in the left column with the top trigram from the row on the top, then find that hexagram in the book (they are in numerical order).

If, for instance, my reading went like so (bottom to top!), with these two trigrams I'd get the hexagram on the right, which is **18. Ku – Work on What has been Spoiled**:

Sixth Throw: Mostly Heads _____
Fifth Throw: Mostly Tails -- --
Fourth Throw: Mostly Tails -- --
Third Throw: Mostly Heads _____
Second Throw: Mostly Heads _____
First Throw: Mostly Tails -- --

After you've read through the meaning of the hexagram, meditate on its deeper significance to the problem (or solution, or whatever) at hand. If you still feel unsatisfied, you may have gotten a bunk reading (although I find these rare). Clear your mind, refocus on the object of your inquiry, and ask again in an hour or two (a day or more may be necessary). Try not to overwhelm your connection with the book—I find three readings at a time to be the maximum amount of juice you can work, and just one is the most potent.

I Ching

The Book of Changes

1. Ch'ien – The Creative

Above: The Creative, Heaven

Below: The Creative, Heaven

This is the hexagram of Power—of the active, creative force in the universe. It is Yang, in all its vitality and strength. It represents motion itself, the essence of the spirit, whether in a cosmic sense (the spirit with which the sun endows the earth) or the human sense (the power with which a truly beautiful person can grace their fellows). Success will come to you from the primal depths of the universe, from the cores of the stars themselves. Your joy, and that of all others, depends on persevering in what is right, heart-felt, and just. Cast out what is inferior and degrading, and let this energy shine. HOOOOO YA!

*The movements of the cosmos are full of power.
The days peel away relentlessly. Live as these,
strong and unceasing. A bull of fire, even in dreams.*

2. K'un – The Receptive

Above: The Receptive, Earth

Below: The Receptive, Earth

Earth never strays from underfoot, it is the most dependable thing imaginable. It carries all things—good and evil, strong and weak, teeny and gigantic—without preference or prejudice. With breadth and purity of character, you too can deal with all situations which arise. Throwing this hexagram implies conformity with the situation, but don't forget the power inherent in the receptive principle. Yang, or active energy, needs Yin, receptiveness, in order to manifest itself—otherwise everything is chaos—so remember you are an equal part in any course of action. When you do find a task you deem worthy of undertaking, though, your role is complacent like a leaf in a stream, not the role of the leader. Assist those who need your devotion. And remember, the more friends you have, the easier your task becomes.

*A fistful of dirt obeys
the shape of my hand
like an eagle rides on the wind.*

3. Chun – Difficulty at the Beginning

Above: The Abysmal, Water

Below: The Arousing, Thunder

“Chun” means the difficulty of a blade of grass which grows against an obstacle. Imagine a chick trying to peck its way out of an egg that is set just so against a boulder! This hexagram represents the process of individual beings sprout from cosmic unity. Times of profuse birth and growth are fraught with difficulties—disaster seems unavoidable as everything struggles to take form. But don't be discouraged; persevere

with help from comrades and all will be well. As the thunder below tries to rise and the water above tries to fall, and they meet in the chaos of a storm. But already, in the gracious lines of the thunder clouds, there is the promise of a coming order. Once the difficulty is passed and the elements have found their way—once the thunderstorm is over—there is peace, and all can breathe easily again.

*In time a tangled
mess of thread becomes
a lovely gown.*

4. Meng – Youthful Folly

Above: Keeping Still, Mountain

Below: The Abysmal, Water

Water at the base of the mountain, a spring gushing forth. As it rushes into the bright air it stops in perplexity at the new world it has encountered, and fumbles in a burbling dance in its new roll. The image of youthful folly. But who can blame the spring for its lack of grace, and who can blame you? It only means that wisdom must be sought. Then, through receptiveness and perseverance as a student of the ways of nature, you will find your way forward. Water always rushes on! All springs lead to a river, slowly filling all the hollow places on their way. Develop your character in this way, feeling your way forward thoroughly and taking care of all those hollow ruts of inexperience.

*This is also the hexagram you get when you are questioning the I Ching's authority! Have faith. If you don't like an answer, focus on the question, let it possess your entire heart like the sun at noon, and do some inner work—re-aim the trajectory of your life a little—and ask again in a couple days. (Not a couple minutes.)

*From the womb of the mountain
liquid babes burble forth
and sloppily tumble down her slopes.*

5. Hsu – Waiting (Nourishment)

Above: The Abysmal, Water

Below: The Creative, Heaven

Rain comes in its time to nourish all life, but there's no use in anxious fretting or trying to spit on the ground to hurry the process along. When the time is ripe, fate will fulfill itself and anticipation will be relieved. Until then, bide your time with joy and strengthen your spirit. Eat well, drink, and be in good cheer so you'll be ready and well fortified when the time comes to undertake your task. Watch as the clouds rise—rain is sure to follow. All you need do is be patient.

*Clouds on the horizon,
my tea cup is bone dry.
Nothing to do but sit and smile.*

6. Sung – Conflict

Above: The Creative, Heaven
Below: The Abysmal, Water

Times of conflict bring great danger—no one wins if each party is too stubborn to meet the other halfway. Deep conniving within and rock-hard determination outwardly ensure a bitter fight in which neither side benefits. Do your best to cultivate an impartial attitude towards the problems at hand. Heaven and water move in opposite directions by their nature—no amount of quarreling will harmonize their inherent tendencies. With such a passionate combination, it's hard to see the situation from the outside, but do your best. Attack the problem at its root, and resolve complications before they have a chance to manifest. Beware of great tasks occasioned by conflict alone—they are doomed to failure.

*One leg walks left,
the other walks right—
my poor groin is no wishbone!*

7. Shih – The Army

Above: The Receptive, Earth
Below: The Abysmal, Water

The image is of the store of underground water hidden inside the earth—a source of power that waits to be tapped when it is needed. In the same way, a people is this same well of power—an army is hidden within their numbers, waiting to be stirred. When the people cultivate abundance and solidarity through generosity and wealth of spirit, they ensure a strong force once the situation becomes dire and they need to take to arms. This also ensures that once they have fought their battle, they have a warm and plentiful hearth to return to. This hexagram could also be representative of a hidden power within that waits to be brought forth when danger or struggle presents itself.

*The sky is arid as a desert, the drought is long,
my mouth is dry. I dig into the ground,
and a well bursts forth that reaches the sun!*

8. Pi – Holding Together (Union)

Above: The Abysmal, Water
Below: The Receptive, Earth

On earth, all waterways hold together, from creeks to rivers to their final unity in the immensity of the ocean. In this way, it's important to unite with others and find commonality both with the ocean of humanity and the ocean of existence. Hesitancy for some to connect in this way is overcome naturally by the course of gravity towards what is common between themselves and others. But don't straggle too far behind—the door

may be locked when you finally arrive to join the party. With those who you share deep bonds, hold together. Like water flows to join with water, so you flow to join with others who are subject to the same laws.

*A lone raindrop, I joined others in a stream.
A lone stream, we joined others in a river.
A lone river, we joined others in the Ocean.*

9. Hsiao Ch'u – The Influence of the Small

Above: The Gentle, Wind
Below: The Creative, Heaven

This is the sign of the subtle exerting influence on the strong, as winds can make the clouds take form but can not condense them into rain. It is a shadowy, weak power that works upon greater forces in gentle ways. The air is formless, it makes no great show of its presence, yet it works upon all that it surrounds with light persuasion. No fantastic leaps are appropriate at this time, only preparations and the storing up of energy can lead toward success. Refine the expression of your nature in subtle ways.

*The clouds above would surely look dull
as fog if the wind did not whip them into lovely billows
like a wolf herds flocks of sheep.*

10. Lu – Treading (Conduct)

Above: The Creative, Heaven
Below: The Joyous, Lake

Here we have the weak, the joyously lowly, the lake, treading on the mighty, the powerful, the heavens. The weak worries it will stir the wrath of the mighty, but the strong takes this in good humor because it recognizes the absurdity of the situation. The balance of these two elements promotes right conduct when each recognizes its harmony with the other, but the weak may seem reckless and wild when treading on the strong. As long as humbleness is kept in the equation, though, all is well and laughter ensues rather than wrathful retribution. Be always kind to lesser things and reverent of greater.

*An ant crawls on my arm—I have to laugh!
If I lift my hand against it,
perhaps the mountain will sweep me off, as well!*

11. T'ai – Peace

Above: The Receptive, Earth
Below: The Creative, Heaven

Here the receptive and the creative meet and join in harmony as the receptive moves downward and the creative moves upward. The lion has truly laid down with the lamb,

and a time of universal flowering and prosperity follows. The serenity of heaven seems to settle beneath the earth, especially in the transition between winter and spring that reaches its crescendo at the equinox as the earth prepares way for new life. One of the purest aspirations one can have is encouraging this harmony that leads the way to youth and growth in nature and brings peace to the heart.

*A baby sleeps against its mother's heart.
Even the river
flows gently, so that it will not wake them.*

12. P'i – Standstill

Above: The Creative, Heaven
Below: The Receptive, Earth

The opposite of the previous hexagram, P'i presents the generative forces separating as heaven moves farther upwards and the earth sinks further into the down. This is the motion of the autumnal months, as the profusion of life that abounded during the summer begins its necessary decay and decline. The summer solstice has passed and a downward sweep toward the equinox slows life to a darkening stillness as leaves no longer burst from the trees—instead they fall in a chaotic dance and rejoin the disorder of the soil. Weakness prevails and vitality is in decline, and so it draws into seclusion to avoid the coming cold. This is the true wisdom of this sign—as one stores grain, store your power in a safe place until hardship has passed.

*A squirrel
scours a bed of dead leaves.
I keep quiet the acorns in my pocket.*

13. T'ung Jen – Fellowship with Wo/men

Above: The Creative, Heaven
Below: The Dependent, Fire

Here, the rising of fire joins with the upward motion of heaven. Although they are different, they work in unison—this is how people ought to associate when they have a common goal. In this way, great tasks can be undertaken with success. If there are many people with an aim that can further humanity, they belong together. Working separately will not further their goals any longer. Friendship and camaraderie must prevail, and all trifles should be set aside or resolved in utter respect and solidarity. When people merely associate with one another around a common goal, this is not fellowship. For fellowship to blossom, you need to allow the spirit of what you hold in common to flow through and unify the diversity of the group.

*Walking a lonely road, I saw another ahead.
On my own destined path, I was following him. Why
should we walk alone in silence when we could laugh together?*

14. Ta Yu – Possession of Great Measure

Above: The Dependent, Fire
Below: The Creative, Heaven

The fire of the sun in heaven possesses all things beneath it, as we can see plainly when all shadows disappear at its zenith each day. However, it does not command of control them, but modestly inspires and encourages their growth of which it is a vital component. Success is guaranteed. Clarity and grace reign out over all things under the influence of one's power. But remember, the sun brings all things into the light of day—whether for better or worse. Remain benevolent, further that which furthers wellbeing and try to diminish that which diminishes it.

*M' the sun kisses my rosy cheeks
and lights my path ahead
without burning it all away.*

15. Ch'ien – Modesty

Above: The Receptive, Earth
Below: Keeping Still, Mountain

The heights of the mountain distribute the rain and sun, and when the lowly earth lies above it in this hexagram it has the curious quality of not having anywhere to sink to. Just balancing is the virtue of this sign, coupled with compassion and blessings. Because Wilhem articulated this so wonderfully, I quote him at length: “It is the law of heaven to make fullness empty and to make full what is modest; when the sun is at its zenith, it must, according to the law of heaven, turn toward its setting, and at its nadir it rises toward a new dawn. In obedience to the same law, the moon when it is full begins to wane, and when empty of light it waxes again. This heavenly law works itself out in the fates of men also. It is the law of earth to alter the full and to contribute to the modest. High mountains are worn down by the waters, and the valleys are filled up. It is the law of fate to undermine what is full and to prosper the modest. And men also hate fullness and love the modest. The destinies of men are subject to immutable laws that must fulfill themselves. But man has it in his power to shape his fate, according as his behavior exposes him to the influence of benevolent or of destructive forces. When a man holds a high position and is nevertheless modest, he shines with the light of wisdom; if he is in a lowly position and is modest, he cannot be passed by. Thus the superior man can carry out his work to the end without boasting of what he has achieved.”

*A great king broke his back while hauling treasure,
and thus could carry none.
The modest one asks for naught*

*but cloth to cover her shoulders. She loses nothing,
even when her body fades, for she knows she can not own
what is the work of the whole universe.*

16. Yu – Enthusiasm

Above: The Arousing, Thunder
Below: The Receptive, Earth

Like a spontaneous outburst of song and dance that relieves the body and mind of its inner tensions, so the first thunderstorm of summer releases electrical energy from the earth and relieves long harnessed tensions in an exalting dance. This is the hallmark of enthusiasm, with bringing tensions to light they are relieved and take on the air of ease and freshness. Utilizing enthusiasm has the strength to unite mass movements, to enthral others to necessary action, and to unite many without fear of secret opposition. Enthusiasm is a kind of magic elixir of the spirit. It brings fellowship and lightness to any gathering, whether with or without serious motive.

*Our laughter rolled through heaven
holding its sides, as we perched on our toes
ready to pounce upon the wine-soaked dance floor!*

17. Sui – Following

Above: The Joyous, Lake
Below: The Arousing, Thunder

The joyous and the arousing join in happy motion, which induces other things to follow it in whatever whims it may take. This is an instruction to incite a following, not by cunning manipulation or by rhetoric and propaganda, but by the sheer joy of a path to be walked itself. A jaunt through the burgeoning forests of life. But that alone is not enough to hold a fellowship together in solidarity—steadfast perseverance and dedication are also necessary elements. But coupled with the necessary rest and recuperation that complements the energetic demands of this happy movement, few can resist such a jubilant proposition.

*They say Pepe sang songs from the bright well
of his heart as he gathered his herbs and flowers.
The birds all followed without thinking.*

18. Ku – Work on what has been Spoiled (Decay)

Above: Keeping Still, The Mountain
Below: The Gentle, The Wind

The image here is of stagnant wind which the mountain throws back. Such a wind spoils the growth at its base—the image of decay. When faced with such a situation, one must work hard to revitalize the spirit of that which has become rotten, and from this degraded mulch bring forth new life the way that plants rise from the soil. When human freedom is corroded it festers in the hearts of all those affected. To embolden those who are downtrodden is a great task—one that requires determination and a nourishing spirit. Don't be deterred by hopelessness and downcast eyes—pain is pain,

and it must be felt deeply before it can be healed. However, take care not to cave in to the overwhelming temptation to give up when faced with such a dismal task. Stir the spirits of those you feel sorry for like the wind stirs all things, and give them a model of lofty tranquility and a source of nourishment as the mountain does.

*Worms in my bowl
may not feed me,
but they are sure to feed my garden.*

19. Lin – Approach

Above: The Receptive, Earth
Below: The Joyous, Lake

This is the hexagram that takes form after the time of the winter solstice—when great power is approaching in the form of the life-giving spring. The two solid lines at the bottom are poised to move upwards through the receptive, broken lines above as great accomplishment is stirring from the depths, ready to take its flight. Beware of the dangers of untimely haste, however, although eagerness and anticipation can be expected in such a situation. With proper consideration of the responsibilities and powers which are about to manifest themselves, any troubles may be avoided.

*On winter wind I heard her singing
from far off one silent day—I knew she was
my love before I saw her lovely face.*

20. Kuan – Contemplation (View)

Above: The Gentle, Wind
Below: The Receptive, Earth

Meditation on the profound ways of nature leads to a hidden spiritual power which works over all those one comes in contact with without their realizing it. This is like the wind roving gently over the grass—the grass sways, without wondering why it does so. This is the image of contemplation—a wind blowing across the earth, searching across it like a wandering eye. Liken the image to a tower on a hillside—one in the tower can see clearly the entire landscape, just as a breeze easily covers vast open lands. In social terms, this also means that all those on the lands around the tower can see the onlooker just as well as she can see them. Thus no deep understanding comes without others noticing, although they may have a hard time putting a finger on their feelings. However, this is not the kind of thought that brings definite conclusions, but one of reverie and a kind of mindless churning over the ways of nature, as seen from above.

*An ant might think the world's no greater
than a forest of tall grass, until it climbs
a flower's peak and beholds boundless miles.*

21. Shih Ho – Biting Through

Above: The Dependent, Fire
Below: The Arousing, Thunder

This is the image of swift justice. When something obstructs the way to harmony, an energetic biting through the obstacle is necessary. As well, when someone has disturbed the peace and prosperity of a people their punishment must be swift and uncompromising. The laws of nature must be kept in balance for human communities to flourish, and anything standing in the way of this can not be tolerated—it must be met with clarity of mind, yet also with force of spirit which makes clear that outrageous breeches to the wellbeing of the community or the natural world will not be left unrecognized, or unpunished.

*On my path along the cliff,
a tree had fallen branches down. No way around—
I shield my face and break through them like a ram of lightning through a gate.*

22. Pi – Grace

Above: Keeping Still, Mountain
Below: The Dependent, Fire

A fire flares up from the earth and illuminates the mountain—the image of grace. Its force is weaker and delicate, like the stars which adorn the sun and moon, yet it has the ability to bring serenity and a sense of beauty to any situation. By contemplating the artistic accents in nature—a perfectly placed spot of lichen, the river-like grooves in a rock, the poignant beauty of a flower so dainty it could hardly hold an ant—we become aware of the intricate movements of energy which compose the greater universe. The same applies to observing the subtleties of human affairs. Grace will not help you to cross great rivers, but it is certainly necessary for refining one's life at home, in love, in tasks, and in community.

*Something different dwells in her today—
some filagree so fine and elegant,
like the anise leaves.*

23. Po – Splitting Apart

Above: Keeping Still, Mountain
Below: The Dependent, Fire

This is the image of a roof collapsing as the foundations of the house give way, as when yin supplants yang in October and November. Dark forces are usurping the light from below, undermining its integrity until it falls invariably like a steep, slender mountain too weak at its base. In times like these, submission to inferior forces is inevitable and the time is not right for action against them. Incompetent people may be exerting undue influence without the hope of good people righting their errors. It is a time to remain

quiet until conditions are favorable to act against such malevolent forces. Broaden the base of the mountain so later it will be strong and can hold up against any of the elements.

*Deep autumn, the leaves
are falling down. What use is there
in picking them up and tossing them to the branches?*

24. Fu – Return (The Turning Point)

Above: The Receptive, Earth
Below: The Arousing, Thunder

This is the hexagram of the winter solstice—a light line enters at the base and begins to supplant the dark forces. From a state of sleep, an awakening—the dawn is beginning to blush warmth onto the cold night sky. The great cycle is beginning again, and there is much hope for things to come. However, as the life-giving energy renews itself, it still needs rest. It is not yet time for it to leap to its feet, and yet it is at peace in knowing its time of triumphant birth is approaching. Good things are to come. Patience and a heart set on revitalization are all one needs to pass the meantime.

*Head hung, lost and 'lone, I felt that I was being pulled
back down to the soil. Then suddenly, a sunrise
from below began to lift me slowly from the ground.*

25. Wu Wang – Innocence (The Unexpected)

Above: The Creative, Heaven
Below: The Arousing, Thunder

Innocence is the natural state of all beings. Only in self-conscious reflection do we breed ulterior motives and try to manipulate our surroundings for purely selfish reasons. Thus, spontaneous, childlike actions are no mark of immaturity but instead are a sign of natural grace. In the springtime, thunderstorms breathe new life into the earth and all under heaven have no difficulty coming into this purely innocent state in which instincts are synonymous with the true spirit of life. In the rain, it is one's natural instinct to recoil to shelter. In love, it is one's instinct to swoon. In hunger, it is natural to eat. These are all virtues of innocence. One could even say in a sense that it is innocence for the eyes to see. Their actions are inherent in their design—they need not plot and plan to fulfill their deepest destiny. In the same way all life is complete from its inception and no striving is necessary to be at one with the deepest intentions of existence. Striving for what happens of its own accord, in fact, is the very thing which leads us away from the natural, spontaneous wholeness of life.

*The wild geese do not intend
to cast their image on the water—
the pond has no mind to reflect it.*

26. Ta Ch'u – The Influence of the Great

Above: Keeping Still, Mountain
Below: The Creative, Heaven

This is the image of hidden power in the mountain—the influence of the great. That which has true power does not need to dominate or control to work its will, its force is exerted through the greatness its being alone. Being overbearing and oppressively forthcoming destroys whatever one is working on, for oppression is a destructive tool of the incompetent. However, storing up vitality within helps one to further one's aims without ruining the harmony of the natural world. As the creative power is here buried within the mountain, so great treasures are buried in the past. Learning from history can help one to embolden and strengthen one's character. Great respect and faith are put in those who have gained wisdom from what has come before. Perseverance in one's goals—even if these are somewhat grandiose—is sure to be beneficial as long as this inner power is maintained as pure and benevolent. Of course, if one's aim is destructive rather than fruitful (both of which have their virtuous implementations, especially in times of oppression and violence) then exerting this force outwardly may be completely appropriate, even dire and desperately needed.

*The spirit that moves all the stars
gushes golden through my heart
and I don't bat an eyelash.*

27. I – Corners of the Mouth (Providing Nourishment)

Above: Keeping Still, Mountain
Below: The Arousing, Thunder

This is the image of nourishing, both oneself and others. Much can be told of a person by what and whom they take good care of. If one nourishes the strong parts of one's spirit, one cultivates a wealth of character—and likewise, fostering weakness begets weakness. The same goes for providing sustenance for others, whether material or spiritual. Through words, actions, prayers, and gifts of generosity we can cultivate and help flourish the parts of the world which we see as worthy of our own unique benefits. Set your sights high on the beings which you choose to assist and help blossom, whether human, animal, plant, mineral, or spiritual. Also take care what you choose to nourish yourself with, both within your body and in your surroundings. Nourishment is a constant flow both inwards and outwards at once—receiving and giving it go hand in hand. Always be mindful that what receives your nourishment (even ideological or financial) will grow wealthy in tranquility and strength. Nourishing dark, manipulative elements will invariably be disastrous. Be wise with this gift, although never frugal.

*I inhale what the trees exhale—
they breathe in what I breathe out—we are each
like babes at the sweet milk of the other's breast.*

28. Ta Kuo – Predominance of the Great

Above: The Joyous, Lake
Below: The Gentle, Wind & Wood

This hexagram denotes a precarious situation where careful measures must be taken to avoid misfortune. The image is of a wooden beam which is excessively heavy in its center and whose ends are too weak to support it and will soon cave in. But this is no time for panic or drastic action—the source of the problem must be sought with gentle penetration into its root causes and the solution sought there. Even if one must renounce the world to find the remedy to this turmoil, they are undaunted and proceed joyously. As when the lake rises above the trees, there is no hope of salvaging them by becoming anxious and flustered. One must simply except the inevitability of this development and move on to new, more stable lands.

*I did not run across the old wood-rope bridge
when I saw it would not hold my weight. I walked
lightfootedly, so it could bear my burden easily across.*

29. K'an – The Abysmal (Water)

Above: The Abysmal, Water
Below: The Abysmal, Water

The situation is dangerous, not because of inner attitudes but because of outer circumstances. As depicted in the two trigrams of Water, one is trapped in a ravine and must, like a river, keep flowing onward in order to find the way out. But a river never fears any challenge in its path—without hesitation it plunges over cliffs and into deep depressions, filling them up thoroughly before continuing its journey. It accepts the challenge as it must and flows onward. Since the river's course is set by its surroundings, and water is too soft a force to augment them them immediately. All it can do is find its way around, under, over, and through whatever obstacles present themselves and it does so ceaselessly. And through this unbending consistency, over time the stream will persuade the entire landscape to work in its favor as it carves itself a favorable path and establishes harmony with its environment.

*I can not fear the coming rapids—my home
is down the river. Wherever water thrashes rocks,
I must find a peaceful current.*

30. Li – The Dependent (Fire)

Above: The Dependent, Fire
Below: The Dependent, Fire

The Fire sign is called The Dependent because flames always rely on some source of fuel to continue burning. So life on earth is bound by the sources of its nourishment, it is inherently unfree. Therefore, one must rely on what is harmonious and beneficial to

keep one's fire of life glowing. This benefits not only oneself but also all of one's relations as s/he illuminates all the things around them. All of nature is radiant in this way. What is dark clings to what is light and what is light clings to what is dark. The sun clings to heaven and the trees cling to earth. Be well in all of your relations and prosperity will abound.

*My campfire's flames rise up to heaven
as the rain falls thickly down, and lights the earth
with an inferno of trees to feed my dying embers.*

31. Hsien – Influence (Wooing)

Above: The Joyous, Lake
Below: Keeping Still, Mountain

Here we have the hexagram of mutual attraction, of love and courtship. The feminine element, the lake, is above. The masculine element, the mountain, is below. This implies the image of a mountain with a lake at its summit, whose peak is concave and so collects water. The masculine has become receptive to the feminine and the feminine has penetrated the masculine! And so it is with affection—no one party can claim priority or dominance when mutual attraction occurs. Each force softens the other until both coalesce in the push and tug of indistinct playfulness. The boundaries between self and other are blurred in their mutual influence, like the two halves of the yin-yang, although they have not reached the stability of total union. The mountain being placed below implies initiative on the masculine part, but this is based more on the principle of desire turned to activity rather than any gender associations. And as we have seen in the necessity of a concave peak, this forward advance is only successful if it makes itself empty and open for advances from the feminine sign as well. Ah, *amor!*

*When our eyes met,
I did not know
who was seeing who.*

32. Heng – Duration

Above: The Arousing, Thunder
Below: The Gentle, Wind

This is the enduring manifestation of the previous hexagram, wooing, in which love has bonded two into one and their affinity lasts firmly into infinity. The gentleness and flexibility of the wind within expands into the energy of the arousing thunder without and brightens all through its endless longevity. A tree limb bends with the wind, holding to the trunk, and so it does not break—it can continue fruiting for years to come. As well, the stars endure through their fixed orbit and never cease giving light. A union such as this endures through the cycles of the seasons. The stamina of this bond is in its consistency and accordance with the principles of decline and regeneration. Abiding by the law of the endless cycle guarantees the hearth of a home stays alight, the bellies of all are never hungry, and the bonds of love remain undaunted—thus they may sustain

through any circumstance. Letting this certainty determine one's actions leads to the promise of stability and happy prosperity. Anyone may lay their trust in one with a heart that endures with this wisdom.

*Our love is like a lantern by the window.
If it dances with the winds,
it will always glow.*

33. Tun – Retreat

Above: The Creative, Heaven
Below: Keeping Still, Mountain

The mountain encroaches upon heaven, which retreats to its heights to avoid the mountain's dark influence. The mountain is forced to stop short of what it can not reach. So in the months of late summer one must see far in advance the coming of autumnal decay and begin preparations early, and in times when inferior influences beginning to mount power it is a wise move to retreat well before a dangerous struggle arises. In this way safety is assured. Regard these shadowy forces with wariness, the time may come to strike against them. For now, though, all one can do is fall back to retain one's composure and to prepare for the turning of the tides.

*On warm summer wind,
a whisper of ice from the distant mountains.
I go run to chop my winter's firewood.*

34. Ta Chuang – The Power of the Great

Above: The Arousing, Thunder
Below: The Creative, Heaven

This hexagram belongs to the month of April, when inner worth (of the individual and the earth) gains great momentum and comes to power. The union of movement (Thunder) and strength (Heaven) give one extraordinary ability, but this is not free of danger. In such an exhilarating rush of power one might make one's play before the time is ripe, or could use energy tactlessly and ruin the object of one's influence. There is also the possibility that one might be overly confident, forgetting to contemplate the repercussions and moral legitimacy of one's actions or to ask for the appropriate help. But don't be daunted—this energy has radical potential to transform the world, as long as one stays firm and intent with their purpose and does not lose their clarity in pride and power. That being said, sometimes great obstacles occasion equally great madness. It is also wise to contemplate awe-inspiring natural forces such as volcanoes and asteroids. Overcoming fear of annihilation is overcoming fear of change, of mortality, and gives one the power that makes all things flow into one another.

*Mid-morning, my fists are full of suns.
With wild bellows I throw them up
and forests rise behind them.*

35. Chin – Progress

Above: The Clinging, Fire
Below: The Receptive, Earth

The image of the sun rising over the earth. As it gains height, it shines ever brighter and with more and more clarity—its breadth of influence expands and ever more things are lit beneath it. In this way one must purify one's spirit and intentions if one wishes to have an enlightening influence on earth. The resulting power is great, and all things benefit. But this power is not to be abused—if it is, those who do not possess it will grow bitter and jealous. One must cultivate modesty and serenity in order to wield this great light in its full zenith. Then harmony reigns throughout nature. Respect for the necessity of night is also one of the great virtues of the day.

*Once I could not see my own hands—
the world a mist of shadows. But ah, now the sun
is high and the flowers open up their eyes.*

36. Ming I – Darkening of the Light

Above: The Receptive, Earth
Below: The Clinging, Fire

Here the light of the sun has sunken beneath the earth—it is a dark time, but the light is not extinguished, it is merely incognito. Likewise, in a time of darkness in which awful people have much power, one must carry their light inside and be wary where they let it peek out as this will make them a clear target for the authorities. One can still let their inner beauty shine, but not too overtly. They must take care especially in social situations, as the agents of control which make the people miserable often find their homes in the hearts of those dedicated to the current order. Beware! For those true in spirit, danger is all around, and strength must be preserved with unwavering zeal within. Find others who carry the candle of resistance and beauty in their hearts, and together you may bear your souls, and mingle joyously around the open fire.

*Walking through the dismal streets, I saw no light
in the shop windows— but did I see a spark just there,
in that woman's downcast eyes?*

37. Chia Jen – The Family

Above: The Gentle, Wind
Below: The Clinging, Fire

Here we have the image of the fire creating wind from its heat—a force generated from within. In this way, the family is a force that is generated from within. Children come from within the mother an father, and their bonds are held intact by their common blood. But not all families are related by heritage—this hexagram may also represent a strong fellowship of companions that one considers like family. Again, they are all connected

intimately by gathering around the heat of a central flame, the wind from its lapping tongues enveloping all in a smoke of brother- and sisterhood. This common element may have purpose—it may be a common duty or goal—but it is fueled by love more than any ulterior motive. And more than it dwells only in the hearth or fire pit, it dwells deep within every member of the family. It is in fact not many flames within many hearts, but a single fire just as a family's blood is a single blood.

*When my sister weeps,
I weep as well. We dry off
with each others' hair.*

38. K'uei – Opposition

Above: The Clinging, Fire
Below: The Joyous, Lake

The flame flies upward, the lake seeps down. This is the image of opposition. While these two trigrams are opposing forces, they retain their natures when they meet because they do not mingle, they separate. And so this is also the hexagram of individuality and opposites. Although all polarities are in truth singularities—such as north and south, male and female, and dream and reality—it is sometimes useful to make the distinctions between them. Especially if one is in an uncomfortable social position, it is extremely important to maintain a certain degree of separation so one can preserve inner integrity. This is also a hexagram to forewarn of divergent courses and quarrels within a group which needs unity to function. In this case very gradual progress towards reconciliation is necessary, if possible. If it proves too stressful and no resolution can be reached, it is best to part paths with respect and dignity.

*Never once
have I tried
to walk through a wall.*

39. Chien – Obstruction

Above: The Abysmal, Water
Below: Keeping Still, Mountain

An abyss of water before us, an unscalable mountain behind—the image of obstruction. The obstacles blocking the way may not be overcome just yet, but don't give in to hopeless resignation or frustration. Retire for the time and use this as an opportunity for enriching yourself. Gather others who are equal to the task. Then, when you return from retreat, you will not be defeated. Hardships such as this throw us back on ourselves, and we should meet the challenge with ready enthusiasm as an opportunity for self-development.

*A bear in my doorway!
How fantastic. I've been meaning to look
For that gooseberry bush.*

40. Hsieh – Deliverance

Above: The Arousing, Thunder
Below: The Abysmal, Water

Here the obstacles have been removed and a return to the natural order of things has begun in full. Tensions are in the process of being relieved, and all grievances are being washed away. The energetic movement of thunder rises and water replaces it in a refreshing transition. It's important not to overdo triumph in such situations, however, lest more troubles arise. Remember that all the tumult is not overcome quite yet, it is only in the stages of retreat. Let minor transgressions go, forgiveness and tranquility will speed the process along. All other hinderances to peace will die away, like thunder fades into the distance.

*The flood has receded
into the riverbank. My feet are muddy
but at least they touch the ground!*

41. Sun – Decrease

Above: Keeping Still, Mountain
Below: The Joyous, Lake

Decrease comes in its own time—it is not always a bad thing. The more one has, the more one needs; the more one needs the more one wants; the more one wants the more burdens stack up and the more worries cloud the mind. It's a vicious cycle. In contrast, the less one has the less one has to loose and worries decrease in proportion. One should not think ill of simplicity in times of poverty—there's no need for pretense. Even with slender means the sentiments of the heart may be expressed. Simplicity is a gift for the soul. It brings us closer to our original nature and reminds us of the things which are truly necessary and nourishing in life—friendship, shelter, food and water. And, of course, a heart close to the greatest wealth of all (which doesn't cost a dime and which no one can possess)—all which arises of itself in the cosmos—from the stars and sun and moon to the trees and flowers and grasses to the grasshoppers and the hummingbirds and the elk to the mountains and lakes and oceans and clouds in the vast sky. This hexagram may also point towards personal transformation. One must sometimes decrease some parts of one's character in favor of others that are worth enriching. Energy spent on lower faculties should be decreased in favor of expending it on higher and more fruitful ones.

*I lost my roof
and gained
the sky.*

42. I – Increase

Above: The Gentle, Wind
Below: The Arousing, Thunder

Here strength from above is sent below to energize what is underneath it. The image of increase, of service, of sacrifice, of martyrdom. This is one of the most fundamental signs in the I Ching. Sacrifice from those with much to further those with little brings a sense of joy and gratitude and ensures the flowering of the commonwealth. Likewise, gaining a higher good in one's actions and ridding oneself of those things which are detrimental brings further oneself and naturally puts one at the service of others, for they will seek out that which has the wisdom of selflessness and generosity. Any undertaking which utilizes the principle of increase will succeed, even if difficult and dangerous. In adverse and oppressive circumstances, however, sometimes it becomes appropriate for very strong individuals to give their lives or freedoms for a cause greater than themselves. All the little things on earth overjoy with gratitude and weep with sorrow.

*Take some water from my canteen,
dear willow tree. The river is low.
Remember me! I get headaches in the winter.*

43. Kuai – Break-Through (Resoluteness)

Above: The Joyous, Lake
Below: The Creative, Heaven

This is the hexagram of April, when inferior forces begin to disappear and disperse and as a result of resolute action, a great change occurs. The image is of a swollen river breaking through a dam. Wilhelm said of this, “Even a single passion in the heart has the ability to obscure reason.” I would like to amend this to say that even a single reason in the heart has the ability to obscure passion. So long as we can reason ourselves into a place of complacent comfort, convincing ourselves that the course is set and we do not have the power to change it, we will never reach the crescendo of feeling necessary to affect positive change. Evil forces must be given a face and vehemently discredited with a strong and pure spirit—this will benefit the wellbeing of all. However, trying to outright strike an enemy which could easily overwhelm one with force is unwise. Being on guard in one's heart and home ensures their weapons find no place to strike and eventually their blades will dull from disuse. It's important not to define oneself in a reactionary stance—that way, evil can not give a name to its enemy and one can focus on enriching the good as well as struggling to tip the scales of evil.

*The lake rose up to heaven
wearing its insignia of invisibility.
Who could have foreseen the cloudburst!*

44. Kou – Coming to Meet

Above: The Creative, Heaven
Below: The Gentle, Wind

Here the principle of darkness, after having been expelled, returns unexpectedly from below. This hexagram belongs to the time after the summer solstice when the motion towards autumnal degradation has begun. There is a cunning, even seductive element to this hexagram, in which one surrenders under the pretense of submission in order to seize power. Or it could represent a lower figure coming to meet a higher one, such as when a pupil comes to meet a teacher, which has the promise of being prosperous as long as it is free of ulterior motives. This image, however, is of the lesser welling up to usurp the greater—the immature coming to usurp the mature, the chaotic coming to overwhelm the established. This is always an opportunity to remind the strong to remain humble, though, as all things which gain power must lose it in the course of nature.

*A wise man came home
with a handful of mugwort
to find a drunk asleep in his bed!*

45. Ts'ui – Gathering Together (Amassing)

Above: The Joyous, Lake
Below: The Receptive, Earth

This hexagram is related to the 8th, Pi, Holding Together. But here unity is even stronger, as the lake is a settled, stable body of water. This gathering of people is either natural, as in a family or an organic fellowship like a tribe or a group of friends, or it is artificial, as in a state or an official organization. People benefit in happiness and wealth when in an organic community where bonds are formed voluntarily and by way of the heart. In an organization which they are forced to participate, however, whether this is a school, a workplace, a prison, or an impersonal mass society, they become confused with their role in the larger scheme of things. Their sense of relationship and connection is placed in a symbolic, disconnected, unaffectionate realm. Thus people become accustomed to a society in which rape, violence, oppression, and war are ways of life. To avoid these terrible conditions, only associate with people whom your heart feels true affinity for and life as far apart from artificial organizations as possible. Remember, though, when people amass in great numbers, they become a target and need to prepare for misfortune. Weapons and medicines are equally important as common spiritual fulfillment, a shared moral system, and raw joy for a community to prosper.

*We gathered as one, drawn
from all directions as if by a sphere
which settled us down at the center of the valley.*

46. Sheng – Pushing Upward

Above: The Receptive, Earth
Below: The Gentle, Wind & Wood

Wood grows out of the earth by adapting itself to obstacles. It ascends toward the heavens slowly but ceaselessly. In contrast to the 35th hexagram, Chin, Progress, which represents expansion, this hexagram depicts direct upward growth—development from lowly obscurity to prominence and power. Seeking wisdom through this gentle ascent ensures that one makes the journey successfully. All undertakings are blessed, and someone of great potential is blossoming. The whole world is waiting for this being to make its due progress, and achieve the great heights for which it is destined.

*Wood it twines
'round the wind
on its way to the sun.*

47. K'un – Oppression (Exhaustion)

Above: The Joyous, Lake
Below: The Abysmal, Water

This is the image of water flowing out of the lake until it is dry and exhausted—the hexagram of oppression. This is the opposite of a condition of prosperity and success—a time when wretched powers dominate all good things under their influence. But a strong person keeps their spirit intact, and will stake their life on following their will which lies at the deepest stratum of their being—the only thing which is superior to external fate. Such a righteous desire leads the way back to return natural harmony and abundance. Becoming overwhelmed by exhaustion may be somewhat necessary in becoming attuned to the hardship and sorrow associated with an oppressive condition. It will also breed a necessary anger and urgency to right the situation, and incite feelings more powerful than fear. But this desperation alone will not further one if they wish to succeed in overthrowing such a terrible power, and must be mended in oneself and others with the spirit of vitality, endurance, and health. Strength, compassion, and wellbeing must work vigilantly to relieve the tension of this unfortunate situation, to fill back up the lake, but one must also not recoil from the natural feelings of stress and depression associated with such a time—it never furthers one to have only a mask of hope without deep spiritual conviction and a critical assessment of the root causes of oppression. Nor does it further one to sheepishly submit to control. It is important to remain fearless, passionate, and uplifting no matter how dismal the situation. Such hardships can not last forever as they are greatly out of balance with the natural harmony.

*The prison walls are high,
but I am blessed, for I see over
all things with the sun's great eye.*

48. Ching – The Well

Above: The Abysmal, Water
Below: The Gentle, Wind & Wood

This is the image of the inexhaustible well from which all things draw their nourishment. Wood draws water upward just as people draw water from a well, and in this way all life shares common foundations. There is great misfortune when the well is overdrawn and the rope can not reach all the way down—as in our current situation where the resources of life are being grossly exploited, and the point is approaching where we will be able to draw forth their nourishment no longer. But one should never fear—the alchemy of life is inherent in the elements and cycles of the heavens and earth, and this ensures ultimate prosperity even if first there is great hardship and oppression. Any social organization which does not satisfy the foundations of life is doomed to collapse and failure, but life in its natural richness and prosperity will persevere.

*From the endless sky I draw my breath,
from the vastness of the earth I borrow my body,
and in the sun, eternally radiant, my spirit's light was born.*

49. Ko – Revolution (Molting)

Above: The Joyous, Lake
Below: The Clinging, Fire

In its universal sense, the combat here signified by the lake and the fire is expressed in the battle of the seasons which compose the cycle of the year—thus the analogy of molting, of shedding an old condition in favor of a new one. In the life of humans, though, this represents the grave matter of overthrowing the ruling system—of overturning age-old conventions and reimagining the way in which we live our lives. Such a task should only be undertaken if the situation is dire and no alternative is available. There is bound to be fiery sorrow and abysmal loss of life in a revolution, and the birthing pains of a new order can be difficult as people must be creative to fill their bellies and hours, but sometimes there is no other way to prosperity. In this case, strong people are necessary to be the uplifting pillars of transformation—they must be utterly selfless and steadfast in their conviction, undaunted by naysayers and opposition. Spiritually rich, deeply thoughtful, and unwaveringly courageous people have the ability to awaken these qualities which lie in all people. By enlightening the people and rousing their spirits to passionate desire for the natural harmony, dignity, and profundity which are the rights of all beings, strong hearts are the front lines of the revolution and blaze through battles into a golden age of humanity. Connection to the deepest levels of profundity is necessary to nurture the peoples' spirits through the hardship of transition and to lead them to a dawn of deep relief, health, and happiness.

*Here's the difference:
on our barricades
now grow wildflowers.*

50. Ting – The Cauldron

Above: The Clinging, Fire
Below: The Gentle, Wind & Wood

Like the 48th hexagram, The Well, The Cauldron is a symbol of nourishment, but this refers rather to the superstructures of a social system or a the larger patterns of an individual lifepath rather than the foundation of life itself. Ultimately the structure and the foundation should be in harmony, and if they are not the building must be remade (their middle hexagram, 49. Revolution). The structure of a community should extend into the invisible fabric of existence and spirit, where it receives consecration and ensures its longevity by maintaining harmony All. Religions have long served as a means to this end, but most have lost their meaning and retain only empty rituals, draconian moral taboos, and archaic texts. These offer nothing enriching or meaningful to the spirit. For much longer, humans have relied on dreams and visions as guides to personal and community relations to the non-human forces of the universe. In these states one can communicate with entities usually out of contact with humans such as the dead, plants and animals, and larger natural forces which appear to us in forms which we can comprehend—usually human. From these visionary are “gods” born. Dreams are not glimpses into separate realms. The entities which communicate with us through them are merely hidden from the five senses we normally use. Just as food in the cauldron could not fathom where the heat which cooks it comes from, so are we baffled by the mystery of life without delving into our most ignored and most powerful sense—the vision. Through dreams and keen observation of the natural world one is sure to come into harmony with one's fate, which is much like wood that lends power to the fire of our lives. Another image which lends itself to this hexagram of a wood-fueled fire heating food is dance, which is the body burning the fuel provided by nature and warming the food which nourishes a community—jubilant reverie, celebration, and an intuitive connection to the forces and rhythms of the earth. Fate and life, likewise, is nothing more than a long, long, elegant dance.

*All our rivers
of life lead
to the ocean.*

51. Chen – The Arousing

Above: The Arousing, Thunder
Below: The Arousing, Thunder

Here we have the image of the terrible awe and fear inspired by a sudden stampede of thunder. When a manifestation of the awesome force of the cosmos shakes us to our core, it is natural to be afraid. But this fear at once rattles the foundations of one's perspective and sparks a profound and positive transition into maturity. Mastering this fear enlightens one to their place in the world. To repeat an image I used earlier, one might tremble at the thought of an utterly devastating earthquake or asteroid, but to overcome this fear is to overcome the fear of mortality and transformation that binds many until they are forced to face it in death. To realize that all things flow into each

other—that all things are transitory and there is no use in striving to grasp onto them—one acquires the wisdom and power of the force which animates all of heaven and earth. God is the name given to this epiphany by the Christian tradition. With it, one may remain composed and reverent through any dangerous task. When one realizes that all life relies on death for sustenance, the very concepts of life and death resolve their polarity and unite with the movement of All. The mortal self dissolves in the eternal ocean of the present.

*I wake to a serpent's tongue
kissing my cold cheek.
So be it, snake, so be it. It swallows its tail.*

52. Ken – Keeping Still (Mountain)

Above: Keeping Still, Mountain
Below: Keeping Still, Mountain

This is the image of the beginning and the end of all movement—keeping still. It addresses the problem of trying to cultivate a quiet heart. However, stillness is always complemented by action, so when the time for action comes one should not remain comatose. This is not even the easiest course, for it pains the heart to be inactive when it has work to do. But the secret for the firmly plated serenity of the mountain is to never let one's thoughts stray beyond one's immediate environment. All distant thoughts make the heart sore. This creates disharmony and separation from a full understanding of an individual's oneness with All. When one realizes that they are caught in the tremendous river of existence and lets it carry them along instead of fighting against the current, they stop seeing strife between individuals and see that all things are indistinct and flow into each other.

*The
mountain
is the mountain.*

53. Chien – Development (Gradual Progress)

Above: The Gentle, Wind & Wood
Below: Keeping Still, Mountain

A tree on a mountaintop makes slow, careful progress from its calm, solid base and so grows with roots firmly in the ground. In this way, one must also make gradual developments in their actions and character in order to ensure long-standing success. It's important to remember gentle adaptability during this growth—haste and drastic measures will undermine the stability of one's foundations. Proceed from the the calm, mountain-like depths of the heart, and no one may deter you on your way upward.

*Ponderosa on the mountain
got its view of all the valley
without straining its neck.*

54. Kuei Mei – Crossing the Threshold

Above: The Arousing, Thunder
Below: The Joyous, Lake

This is the image of a young relationship which has just been designated for long-lasting endurance. When a new couple enters the threshold of their home, neither one has the stability yet to claim seniority either in the community or in their household. They must let the example of others guide them and try their best to foresee the disagreements ahead that usually cause irreparable rifts between people. It is just as important to take instruction on what one is inexperienced in as it is to give guidance when one has the knowledge to teach. Keeping the eternal at the center of one's relationship helps to consecrate the union and keep misunderstandings and disagreements in perspective—they are miniscule in the scheme of things. But the empty pretense of commitment alone will never save a relationship, spontaneous affection is necessary.

*I burned our pheasant on the fire
and the mat you wove cuts up my feet. But you ate that bird
without complaining, and mud never will tread our floor.*

55. Feng – Abundance (Fullness)

Above: The Arousing, Thunder
Below: The Clinging, Fire

This is the hexagram of the summer solstice, when all this are at the height of their profusion. Such a situation can not last, there is a necessary decline which follows, but it benefits one to not to be sad at this bittersweet truth. Only a great character can bring success to such a zenith, and must lead in this time of profuse resources like the sun at its full height, illuminating all things underneath. But the midday sun must begin its decline, as when the moon is full it begins to wane. This hexagram also has the connotation of punishment being administered for grievous transgressions. One must have an abundant strength of character to be properly just.

*The branches of the apple trees
are overwhelmed by heavy fruit—they let fall
their burden's weight, lest their branches droop and break.*

56. Lu – The Wanderer

Above: The Clinging, Fire
Below: Keeping Still, Mountain

A fire on the mountain—the inferno must find new grasses to continue burning. The image of the wanderer. Wild adventures and strange landscapes are the destinies of a wanderer—one's home is on the road alone. It's important for such a character to be humble and unforthcoming when he enters a new place. Wisdom and intuition must

guide the wanderer's path if one wishes to find places they will be welcome. A deep sense of the flow of elements ensures the path will not lead into the abyss. In appearance it's important to be sincere, humble, high spirited, and reliable, and to never overstay one's welcome. A fool will never find hospitality on the road. Putting up defensive pretenses will likewise alienate one from those whom they are destined to enlighten with their wayward fire. Appearing defenseless is also a way to protect oneself from aggression from strangers. The path is lonely and forlorn, as the wanderer's flame is always destined to run out of grass to burn once it reaches the mountain's peak, disappearing with no more than a cloud of smoke which wanders up to heaven, but so it is in the course of all life.

*I ramble on, through forests
and deserts and mountains and cities. I ramble on
and on, and never weary. My home is long behind me, and with me always.*

57. Sun – The Gentle (The Penetrating, Wind & Wood)

Above: The Gentle, Wind & Wood
Below: The Gentle, Wind & Wood

The image of roots gently searching their way deeper into the ground—of the branches of a tree easing gradually into the air—this is the image of the penetrating. Light elements persuade their way into darker elements the way roots reach into the earth, and there they brighten and structure what was once shadowy and chaotic. The wind disperses dark clouds and brightens the sky. It finds its way into shaded nooks and refreshes what has grown stagnant. Undertakings with this gentle persuasion are sure to be lasting and brightening with their influence.

*Our love blew 'round us like the wind's caress,
grew within like slender roots into the hidden
depths of our hearts.*

58. Tui – The Joyous (Lake)

Above: The Joyous, Lake
Below: The Joyous, Lake

The joy of the lake is deep and steadfast and strong within, gentle and yielding without. Friendliness and contentment of this kind can lead one or many to a place of bliss where even death may be shrugged off with easy laughter. Loneliness is not a favorable state for a lake—it will quickly dry up. But if two lakes come together, they replenish each other. So it is with friendship when two companions revitalize each others' knowledge and energy. One who sets out to conquer the mysteries of the universe alone will never be so rich.

*The lake can't contain
its smile beneath
the crescent moon.*

59. Huan – Dispersion (Disillusion)

Above: The Gentle, Wind
Below: The Abysmal, Water

Wind blows over the water and disperses it as mist—the image of disillusionment. Vital power is pent up and must be dispersed through a gentle force. When people become greatly egotistical they forget the common origin of all life and become selfish and rigid. This is a symbol of dissolving the ego and becoming once again humble and revitalized at the foot of the great mystery. The ego obscures the fact that we are truly the embodiment of divine forces, and divides people into separate classes and sects. We must remember that all beings belong to the same family, and act with appropriate love and compassion. This brings people together and allows them to undertake great tasks without anyone assuming an unfair amount of responsibility or credit. Everyone in the group is victorious as long as they recognize themselves as a single organic entity, and if one can spread this commonality across all the earth, the divine takes its place among all things.

*With my death in sight ahead,
I did not count myself above
a single worm.*

60. Chieh – Limitation

Above: The Abysmal, Water
Below: The Joyous, Lake

The lake is finite—it can only contain a limited amount of the infinite supply of water. So it is wise to take and give only as much as is appropriate to any situation. Excess is unwise and leads to gluttony, but undernourishing and being overly frugal is as good as impoverishment. But too little is not the danger here—it is too much of something that one must beware of. Economy is important so one ensures there is enough to go around, both in times of prosperity and in times of need. Don't overdo it. Always only expend what is appropriate for the time, or the lake will overflow and flood the lowlands. But too many limits ravage the mind with worry, so we must as well put limits on limits and allow ourselves to be humans rather than mere calculators.

*The last of the wine
was more than it looked in the jug—I dumped
it at once, and woe! my cup overflowed all over the floor.*

61. Chung Fu – Inner Truth

Above: The Gentle, Wind
Below: The Joyous, Lake

The surface of the lake shimmers beneath the wind. Thus through the visible we catch a glimpse of the invisible. As with an egg, outer forces work to manifest growth within. Far reaching speculations can be extrapolated from such an observation. It is important to be penetratingly sympathetic to if we wish to gain access to others' minds and hearts and effect an understanding relationship with them. Opening the door of interaction through adaptability and empathy gives one great influence. Thus although inner truth is steadfast and reliable, it is also flexible to outer circumstances. One may prepare for anything with a soft but stable core and make lasting bonds of commonality with others even if there there is a rift in appearances.

*A wrinkled woman
and a bright-eyed boy—
both could use a walnut.*

62. Hsiao Kuo – Predominance of the Small

Above: The Arousing, Thunder
Below: Keeping Still, Mountain

This hexagram denotes a situation where precedence is given to the small, the lowly. An example is when one has responsibilities which one is inapt to handle. In such a situation, great care must be taken not to overestimate one's abilities. A bird does not try to soar to its limit—like Icarus it would be burned to cinders in the sun or tire far above the clouds and fall to the earth. Instead, the bird returns frequently to the ground, where its nest is, and enjoys a short flutter from the forest floor to the lower branches—who could be unsatisfied with such a simple position? Exceptional modesty and conscientiousness guarantee good fortune.

*Great ships have sunken on hidden reefs
where small canoes would have sailed on
as safely as a fish.*

63. Chi Chi – After Completion

Above: The Abysmal, Water
Below: The Clinging, Fire

Here we have a situation where the chaotic has taken order. It is not yet at a standstill—small details have to be worked out, but stasis is more or less achieved. This, however, is never a totally stable situation. A lapse into disorder will inevitably follow. One must beware to know when tasks are completed and work is to be retired, or the water in the kettle, so to speak, boils over and puts out the fire below. This is the meaning of water above the fire in this hexagram. In times of balance wise people can foresee threats to

the order before they arise and take the necessary precautions to prevent them from disrupting the harmony which has been attained. However, if we ever relax and think that we've reached some totally stable end, we are made fools of by the inevitable transition of things from rest and order to motion and chaos. No condition is ever totally stable. Don't be fooled by the illusion.

*I held well inside my hut
although the storm had lulled to peace—
I knew, after all, we were only in the eye.*

64. Wei Chi – Before Completion

Above: The Clinging, Fire
Below: The Abysmal, Water

As opposed to the previous hexagram, where the forces of summer have reached their height and are beginning to decay, here we close the Book of Changes with the cheerful outlook of the seasons upturning of winter to spring. Things are hopeful, and success is assured as one's goal can unite opposing forces and bring them to flourish, drawing the order and prosperity of summer from the confusion and shadows of winter. But one must be cautious—the task is dangerous and full of responsibility—the image of a fox crossing the melting ice. This is a proverbial image in China. An old fox crosses the frozen lake cautiously, light on its feet, its ears always perked up listening for a crack underfoot, as even the slightest nick might mean grave danger. However, the younger fox proceeds boldly, recklessly even, and just as it is about to make it to his destined shore falls through a rift in the ice and gets its tail wet, ruining the whole purpose of the crossing. It might as well have swam! The fox should have been more attuned to the right way to conceive of the changes in nature, and brought itself in line with these accordingly. This is the entire premise of the Book of Changes—bring harmony without within, and bring harmony within without. With this principle one may cross the great water.

*From the grain of a seed deposited by autumn—
infinitely small, hopeless and hidden—
all things begin their ascent toward the heavens.*

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