

*Articles and tips*  
*from*  
*'Answers' I Ching newsletter 2004*

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## 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 Sectar discovered (or perhaps rediscovered) in 1976. This is explained in full in Mondo Sectar'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*)