

*Hexagram notes*  
*from*  
*'Answers' I Ching newsletter 2004*

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# Hexagrams

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

## 3, Sprouting



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Hexagram 3,  
Sprouting



Hexagram 23,  
Stripping Away

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

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

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

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

## 4, Not Knowing

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



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

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

'Not knowing, creating success.

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

The first consultation is clearly informative.

The second and third muddy the waters,

Confusing, and hence not informative.

Harvest in constancy.'

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

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



4, Not Knowing



49, Radical Change

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Notes

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

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

## 8, Seeking Union



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

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

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

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

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

'Seeking union, good fortune.

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

Not a mistake.

Not at rest, coming on all sides.

For the latecomer, pitfall.'

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

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

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

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

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

'Above earth is the stream. Seeking union.

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

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

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

### 13, People in Harmony

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



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

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

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

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

Where and what are 'the wilds'?

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

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

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

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



Hexagram 12:  
Earth below heaven



Hexagram 13:  
Fire below heaven

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 17, Following



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

'Following.

Creating success from the source, harvest in constancy.

No mistake.'

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

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

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

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



Hexagram 16:  
Enthusiasm  
(Thunder over the earth)



Hexagram 17:  
Following  
(Thunder in the lake)



Hexagram 18:  
Corruption  
(Wind below the mountain)

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

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

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

### Response from Stephen Karcher

"Hi Hilary

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

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

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

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

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

best wishes,  
Stephen”

## 24, Returning

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

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

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



Hexagram 23,  
Stripping Away

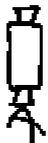


Hexagram 2,  
Earth, Receptive



Hexagram 24,  
Returning

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Retrace your path, return to the source, re-establish what is important, restore the Way"  
Stephen Karcher's *Total I Ching* on Hexagram 24

## 48, the Well

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Hexagram 47,  
Oppression



Hexagram 48,  
the Well

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

'Above wood is the stream. The Well.

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

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

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

## 59, Dispersing



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

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

And this is quite a challenge:

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

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

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

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

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



Hexagram 59



Hexagram 27



Hexagram 60

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

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

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

## 60, Articulating



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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