



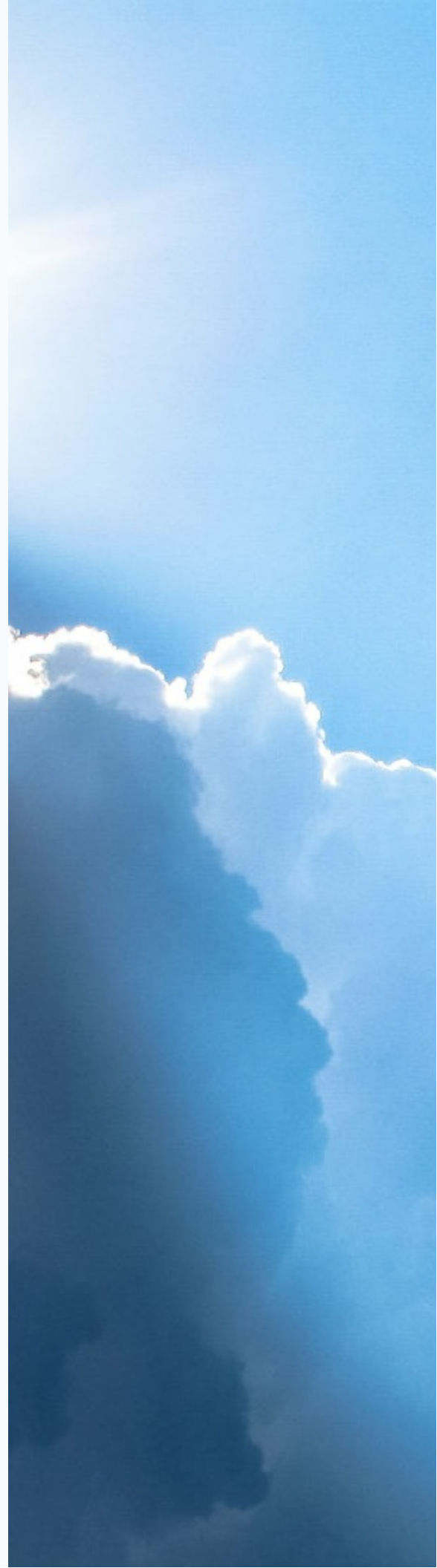
Hilary Barrett

Questioning

Opening a conversation with Yi

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About the Author...

(hello!)



Hello! I'm Hilary Barrett, creator of [Clarity](#) and author of *I Ching, walking your path, creating your future*.

Since the last millennium (!), I've been working as a Yijing diviner, and also helping people to develop their own relationships with Yi.

When I'm not at work, you might find me playing my 'cello in various orchestras, or volunteering, or meandering around the Oxfordshire lanes on a very ancient bicycle.

Introduction

Why your question matters

Every conversation with the Yijing begins with a question - sometimes complex and carefully thought-out, sometimes very simple and open.

The question opens the door into the reading; it also gives us a kind of 'map' of its interior spaces. Paying attention to what we ask, and maybe experimenting with asking something outside the comfort zone, is a way to grow and deepen our relationship with Yi.

In this ebook...

...you'll find reflections, stories and examples of the power of the question in your conversation with Yi. These include...

- Suggestions to ask more far-reaching questions
- Why we leave some questions unasked
- Why you might (or might not) want to ask for a prediction
- A cautionary tale about decision-making with Yi

I hope you enjoy them and find them useful!

Hilary

Questions of choice

from 2016



I spend a lot of time thinking about what we ask the Yi and helping other people find their questions. This is a bit odd, because finding the question really isn't complicated at all. It's not a matter of devising a question nor even really of deciding on one, but of *finding* it: discovering what you're already asking.

I think it's one of those things that are simple but not necessarily easy. And when it isn't easy - when your question doesn't leap to the eye - then talking to yourself helps to unearth it. It works well to ask *yourself* questions.

The simplest one is, 'What do I need to know?'

(It's worth digging a bit more into the answer to that one, to test its truth. Why do you need to know this? What difference will the answer make?)

Another good question question:

'Where is my choice?'

One way I sometimes help people find questions is through the application of some quite dry logic, to find just where they're perched among the branches of their 'decision tree' -

'If I do x, I could do it this way or that way or maybe that way, and I could do that now or later and when should I tell my friends...?'

- well, your question might be about how to do x, but it might be about *whether* to do it at all. We often need to disentangle ourselves from the twiggy bits to get back towards the trunk of the decision and find the choice we have *now*.

This kind of 'decision reading' seems to be only a small subset of possible readings. Certainly the 'decision tree' approach isn't always the most effective way to find someone's true, heartfelt question. (You might end up barking up the wrong tree altogether... ;))

However... while not all readings are 'decision readings', it's hard to think of any reading that isn't about choice.

There is always a choice somewhere. It's not necessarily 'what to do', of course - there may not be anything to be done, or you may not have much meaningful choice in your actions. But you're still consulting Yi about a choice - maybe how to be with the thing, how to think about it, how to relate to it...

And if you're getting tangled up in the 'decision tree', it may be

that there's a prior choice of how to be and relate.

For example - I'd been sunk deep in redesign work for months, and while I was making respectable progress, ye gods and small fishes was it taking ages. What should or could I be outsourcing, and to whom, and how could I avoid having an experience like last time (outsourcing to an 'absentee web designer'), if it's even possible to be sure of avoiding people like that...?

But before I got embroiled in what and how and even whether to outsource, I needed to ask,

'Where is my choice, really?'

I realised it lay in how to think about what I was doing, as I spent hours and hours every day up to my neck in templates and css files. Was this wise? Or self-sabotage? Time-wasting? Was it some other thing I hadn't imagined? Better not to start taking decisions about what to do next until I was more settled in my attitude to what I was doing.

So my first question was *What am I doing with the redesign?* (and my second one was *...and what should I be doing with it?* closely followed by *how about hiring this person to help with the forum menu?*)

(What I was doing, by the way, turned out to be Hexagram 31 changing at lines 4 and 5 to 15 - in other words, not self-sabotage nor yet completely off-track, though with some to-ing and fro-ing. I added a note to [WikiWing](#) about line 4.)

"I just want to know if it's going to happen..."

from 2015



The well-known problems with asking for a prediction...

Often, wanting a prediction is a thin veneer over what we really want. Sometimes I'll encounter a beginner who wants more than anything to know what to do or how to be now, but who feels obliged to ask what'll happen, because isn't that the kind of thing you're *supposed* to ask an oracle?

Logically, it's hard to see how the real question could ever be 'What will happen?' because knowing the future *makes no practical difference in the present*.

Some years ago, when my Mum was seriously ill, I thought of asking Yi for her prognosis - but digging a little deeper, found that

what I really wanted to know was *what on earth can I do with myself?*

I think that's very often the hidden question: if you feel the need to know the future so you'll know what to do now, you're really asking, 'What to do now?' - so ask! As well as being a simpler, more honest approach to the oracle, this gives you an answer you can use - an answer that can create change.

Asking 'What will happen?' can be a sign of disconnection. 'The future' that can be predicted is imagined as something quite separate from us - there's no sense of an unfolding process of creation in which we might be involved. It's not just that we don't see how to apply our own strength or will - if that were the issue, we'd be asking 'How to...?' - but that we don't see how our strength and will has any part anywhere at all. This is profound alienation: like standing on the banks of the river of life, watching it flow past, and keeping our feet dry.

Asking for a prediction seems passive, and logically like a waste of a good question... but does it even make sense? This depends on your point of view, of course. The more fatalistic you are - the more you believe that some things are just destined to happen to you and some are not - the more it makes sense to ask for predictions. I'm more inclined to think of people as mostly the authors of their own lives, so a lot of prediction questions just don't make sense to me: they don't seem to acknowledge the real world.

...and why that isn't the whole picture

For instance, when maybe ten years ago I had a client who wanted a prediction, I talked with her about her question choice: how it was really a bit like asking, 'Will I ever stand on the summit of Everest?' It can't happen unless you intend it, prepare

and try. How there wasn't already a carved-in-stone future where this happened or it didn't - there was only a process of her moving towards it, or not.

She understood what I was saying and agreed, and we went ahead with a reading about how she could become ready and move towards what she wanted. At the end, feeling I'd done rather a good job interpreting and communicating the reading, I asked if she had any remaining questions. And my client told me politely and resignedly that the reading was very interesting, but *'really I just wanted to know if it would ever happen.'*

In other words - the reading had not reached her and had not helped. So much for 'logically', so much for 'sense', and so much for 'an answer that can create change'.

Never, ever again have I tried to talk someone into asking a completely different question. If someone asks for a prediction, I will scratch a little at their question to see if there's another one hiding beneath it - 'What difference would it make to know that?' - and then I accept what they're asking. (Nowadays, when I invite you to a preliminary call before a reading, it's no longer about 'helping to choose the best question' but about *'finding the question you are asking'*.)

The human desire for predictions isn't going away. It's something to respect, and try to understand.

Why do we want to know the future?

Realigning

Why do we want to know what will happen? Actually, I think we don't - not quite. That really would make for a tedious, pointless life, wouldn't it? If you know it all in advance, why bother having the experience? What we want is to feel that our desires might be

aligned with reality - in other words, we want *hope*.

As I said, asking for a prediction can be a sign of disconnection. It's also a sign *that we want to connect*- even if only to dip a toe into the river. These questions express a will to re-engage - if that will weren't present, we wouldn't be asking at all. We'll try navigating the realms of possibility, if someone will just give us even a fragment of a map.

In theory, this could be part of a logical decision-making process: if what I want's possible, I'll persist in trying; if not, I'll divert my attention to something else. Lines from an elementary computer program: 'If... then... else...'.

In practice, I don't believe logic has much to do with it at all. For one thing, it's a rare human being who can truly redirect their attention and energy just because that would be the rational thing to do. No... that's a matter of *emotional* readiness, and we can set up camp at the crossroads for a long time before it arises. It's much more likely that we're divining as a way to court that readiness, tentatively and experimentally.

Engaging with the unknown

It's *difficult*, not knowing what's going to happen. This seems to me to be a very basic human experience: there's a process going on here that's outside my realm of knowledge; I want to connect with it and participate in it, enter into its realm and get a glimpse of how it unfolds. So I divine. (It doesn't matter if that process might be 'the game animals are migrating' or 'the stock market's moving' or 'my boyfriend's changing' - the impulse to divine is much the same.)

Divining lets us engage our will with the unknown. Even a partial, blurry vision of the future has the power to move us in the present. Without seeing the future harvest, how could we go

out in the cold to plough? The vision is the first step to full engagement in creating. With the idea that this is possible, we can form an intention, and then we can start exploring ways to make it manifest.

...and the uncontrollable

The other difficult thing about the future: it's outside our control. If I don't go hunting, I know I won't catch anything - but I might not catch anything even if I do. And in practice, often you want to ask what'll happen because what you want isn't happening (is making a real habit of not happening, in fact). So there's an atmosphere of weary helplessness at that camp at the crossroads, and maybe letting the intention go starts to look possible, after all.

Then asking 'What will happen?' is still a way of creating a present stance: something to lend new shape and *power* to how you engage.

So... what to ask?

This seems a good moment to remember that the question we ask is important *for us* - so we know what we're asking about and can listen better. The Yi will give us the answer we need anyway. So the distinction between 'prediction questions' and 'advice questions' has a lot to do with how we listen, and not much to do with what Yi can say.

Even then... recently I've done one reading where the person was asking 'what will happen?' but received the answer as 'how to be' and one where the person was asking 'what to do?' but received the answer as both advice and 'what will happen'. And both did unquestionably receive the answer: these were readings that 'landed' - unlike that early effort with the woman who just

wanted to know if it would ever happen.

My mistake there was to try to push her straight to 'How can I?' when she didn't know whether she could at all, and had no way to bridge that gap between 'if' and 'how'. The right response to all those problems with asking for a prediction isn't to substitute a different, more proactive question, any more than a brisk jog is a good cure for a broken leg.

Also, at the opposite extreme, there can be a certain arrogance behind 'How can I?' - insisting that the universe dispense the required answer, regardless of what's real. (A wise friend once described this as treating Yi as a mail-order catalogue.) Such questions can be every bit as disconnected as 'what will happen?'

Yet it's still good to question the impulse to ask for a prediction. Perhaps there's a simpler question behind it about how to be, now. Or perhaps a fog of insecurity is obscuring direct experience: 'I can't let myself want this until I know for sure I can have it.' There's a tremendously fine, grey line, though, between that and 'I'll be able to invest in this once I can see it's possible for me' - between postponing life until we know for sure, and being able to believe - or suspend disbelief.

There isn't a right question, or even a better question. But in each case there's an honest question that allows the fullest engagement with life, and that - I think - would be the one to ask.

(Note: a reading behind much of this article:

Question: 'Yi, why do we ask for predictions?'

Answer: Hexagram 45, unchanging.)

Yi and decisions: a cautionary tale

from 2015



Here is a cautionary tale about involving Yi in decision making, how this can get you tied up in an endless series of unpromising readings, and the tremendously simple way to avoid this.

Why is this a cautionary tale? Well, because I've managed to act out the full story twice in the past couple of weeks. That brought the pattern into excruciatingly clear focus for me, so I thought it worth sharing.

The story goes like this:

Prologue: decide, with guidance and encouragement from Yi, to make a certain change. Clarity prevails; all is well.

Chapters 1-5: Work out all the various ways I could do this. Ask

about each one, and get a series of readings ranging from the unenthusiastic (such as 36.1) to the downright horrible (42.6).

Chapter 6: Finally, in exasperated perplexity, ask Yi, 'So how *am* I supposed to do this?' - and receive a perfectly clear and simple answer.

Chapter 7: Reflect quietly on this answer.

Chapter 8: Come up with a way of making the change that resonates with that answer. Ask Yi about that. Get a ringing confirmation from Yi that has distinct overtones of 'at last!' and 'relief!'

You might have thought I'd have learned to skip chapters 1-5 by now. I've been practising and teaching and helping people with ways to hear the true question for a long, long time. Well... maybe it's easier to hear for other people, or maybe it's harder to hear when my mind, convinced that there's a lot to work out here, has already taken off at a brisk gallop though the specifics of 'how'.

So the moral of the cautionary tale is this: ask the simplest, most open question first, *before* you ask about specific options.

This may seem redundant, because you (I mean 'I') may think you (/I) already know all the possible options, so you (/I - please take this as read...) could speed things along by asking about them directly. But no, this does not speed anything along, except maybe a cycle of frenetic tail-chasing. Whereas if you first allow Yi to speak to you about the true nature of the undertaking, then you gain a deep understanding *within which you can become aware of the best option*. Then you can go straight to that - which actually does save time, muddle and tail-hairs.

Now you have the (not very complicated) moral of the story, you

don't really need the cautionary tale itself. But you might enjoy it anyway - it includes some classic Yi moments - and it's also a way for me to let you know what's coming next from Clarity. Here goes...

I've decided to include all the courses and learning materials I offer, now and in future, under the [Change Circle](#) roof. That means raising the price for Change Circle - which brings up the question of what to do about WikiWing, a part of Change Circle, which was never supposed to be a 'premium' offer, but a giant collaborative community undertaking. No-one should ever be priced out of that.

And at the same time, I was turning over in my mind the question of how or whether I could ask for some kind of financial contribution from members of the free forum - without charging everyone, which I'm absolutely not interested in doing.

I asked a series of questions about options without getting very far. Presently, looking at other forums for ideas, I came across the idea of a 'supporter' membership which is basically its own reward, though it comes with a few forum 'perks', like the right to use a signature or store more private messages. Asked about that; received an answer that suggested 'almost there, not quite...'

Brainwave: what about adding WikiWing access to this 'supporter' membership? In reply to that I had 62.2.6 - *ugh*. I'd gone from 'almost there' to 'completely missing the mark'. How did that happen?

At which point, in some exasperation, I asked,

'Then what *is* the right thing to do with WikiWing? (Because in future I don't want to limit access to people who are paying the higher price to be part of Change Circle, that's absolutely not the original vision for the thing...).'

Yi answered with Hexagram 16, unchanging.

So - back to that original vision: this space where we all pool our experiences with each hexagram and line, and write an evolving new 'Wing' based on present-day divination experience.

Something never possible before the internet connected our vast diversity of humanity and gave us the opportunity to connect and co-operate.

And then it dawned on me how spectacularly I would be missing the point if I made an offer along the lines of, 'Become a supporter and get some sort of forum perks - er, how about access to the bookmarking plugin? - oh, and also access to WikiWing.'

Next question to Yi:

'What about *just offering WikiWing access on its own?* So the offer is simply "become a contributor to WikiWing"?'

55.5:

*'A thing of beauty coming
Brings reward and praise, good fortune.'*

I don't know about you, but that answer has a distinct feeling of 'finally, she's got it!' The whole thing really does come together beautifully and naturally - unlike the cobbled-together set of forum perks I was contemplating before. If you'd like to contribute to Clarity, that's probably because you value what the I Ching Community creates: the pooling of insights and experiences, the shared exploration and learning. Which means you're already a natural WikiWing contributor. There's nothing for me to 'put together', because it's already a whole.

So that's what I decided to do - not such a difficult decision after all - and [here it is](#).

But what brought me to this point was the previous question - not asking 'what if I do this? what about that?' but being completely open in asking, 'What's the right thing to do?'

A little further along the line, I had another - erm... - *opportunity* to learn the moral of the tale. I was working out how to price things, and this time the 'brainwave' was to introduce 'pay what you want' (pwyw) pricing - which is exactly what it sounds like: usually the seller sets a minimum payment, and you can pay that, or whatever you choose.

'How about using pwyw for WikiWing membership?'

46 unchanging.

I like that! The implicit question mark ('pushing upward? where to?') is a good fit, because I *don't* know where this could lead. However, it also nudged me on, and a little later found myself asking - reluctantly, because this wasn't my original idea *at all*,

'And what about using it for Change Circle, too?'

Yi said 41.2.5 to 42: Decrease, its Increase, the blessing of offering,

*'Constancy bears fruit,
Setting out to bring order: pitfall.
Not decreasing, increasing it.'
'Maybe increased by ten paired tortoise shells,
Nothing is capable of going against this.
From the source, good fortune.'*

Wow.

So how to go about this? And I set off on a string of readings which I will not bore you with here, asking about what kind of minimum to set and whether to have a 'recommended' price, and if so, what? - and so on. I went quite systematically and logically round all the possibilities, and received answers that ranged from 'meh' to '*nope*'. What had happened to that beautiful 41 to 42 reading, and how was I supposed to get there?

So once again, four 'how about this...?' readings later, frustration brought me to the question I needed to ask in the first place:

'Then how *am* I supposed to go about Pay What You Want?'

40 unchanging.

*'Release. The southwest is fruitful.
With no place to go,
To turn round and come back is good fortune.
With a direction to go,
Daybreak, good fortune.'*

A classic of Yi-wit at my expense; I did my best to be amused.

Once I got thinking about the answer, it was eloquent on many levels. Release: this has to be truly *what you want*. If there is a 'recommended price' that I'm implying you 'should' pay, then there are still knots and tangles involved. Choosing the path that accords with my direction: what am I aiming for here, and what will help?

And also - what I was asking was basically, 'How do I get to that 41 *zhi* 42 reading?' - so it's really not very surprising to receive *the preceding hexagram in the Sequence* in answer.

So I sat with Hexagram 40, read it and inhabited the feel of it,

asked one more 'how about this?' question in harmony with that, and received another clear and unambiguous 'Yes! At last!' answer. (This one is 19.1.2.5 to 8. Everything about it is a beautiful reflection of how natural and simple 'pay what you want' can be.)

Moral (maybe if I repeat myself enough I'll remember this for next time...): when asking Yi's help with a decision, ask the simplest, most open question first. Something like, 'What's the best way to do this?' is fine. Absorb this answer into your thinking; use it to think up options. *Then*, if you even need to, ask about those.

What are weekly readings good for?

from 2012



Or annual readings, or readings for the season or even just for the day... all the readings where the question is just,

'What do I need to be aware of for this period of time?'

or maybe just,

'Advice?'

You might have some ongoing issues in mind - we usually have, after all - but you're not asking about any of them specifically. You're just asking for a guiding principle, something to carry in awareness as you go about daily life.

What they're no good for

Let's start with what these readings *aren't* good for. First, they're no replacement for asking direct questions about a specific decision. If you need to decide whether to do X or Y, just ask 'What if I did X?' and 'What if I did Y?'. Be direct, be straightforward; ask what you need to know. Trying to apply general, open readings to specific decisions is pretty much a recipe for muddle and frustration - especially the 'but which option is this referring to?' kind.

And more generally... I wouldn't rely on an open reading for immediate clarity. My weekly reading does have an immediate effect: it sets the tone for the coming week, often rewriting my priorities and plans for me. (I've taken to doing the planning *after* the reading!) But I wouldn't expect to come to a true understanding of the reading until the end of the week, with the benefit of hindsight.

(I was listening the other day to an online interview with Stephen Karcher. He said that if you have perfect clarity as soon as you cast a reading, any reading, *you're doing it wrong*. The reading is *supposed* to confuse you at first. I don't know if that's absolutely always true, but it's a good principle, I think, and a great antidote to the fear that 'it hasn't worked' if understanding isn't

immediate.)

Another thing these readings aren't good for: a precise description of a fixed period of time. A weekly reading, for me, says something more like, 'Here's an ongoing process that's becoming especially relevant now, so pay attention.' I certainly don't discard it as irrelevant on day 8: it's in the journal, so I do my best to refer back to it and build on it. (This is why I don't do daily readings: I just couldn't keep up.)

Annual readings are tricky in a whole other way. Mine for this year is 56 changing to 23, of all things. It'd be counterproductive, at best, to treat that as a prediction. For me it's more of an underlying theme and 'stuff to work on'.

What they are good for

Weekly readings - annual, seasonal and daily ones, too - are good for three things: learning, guidance in crisis, and awareness.

Learning

This is one thing that's always true: weekly readings always mean learning, at least if I'm paying attention. It goes two ways: the readings give me a better chance of understanding and learning from experience, and experience provides me with new illustrations of the hexagrams and lines.

Also, the readings evolve from one week to the next, and that nudges me to move on. Last week, for instance, one of my moving lines was 9.3:

*'A cart losing its wheel spokes.
Husband and wife avert their eyes.'*

Amongst other things, I saw how the wheels came off on various things I'd promised myself I'd do, and the line suggests to me that this is connected with a breakdown in internal communication in the face of great truth (*zhi gua* 61). My reading for this week begins with Hexagram 53, Gradual Development: slow and steady progress towards marriage and (re)union. I feel it's inviting me to start moving towards an inner reconnection.

Guidance in crisis

Some things just happen, and don't leave you time to ask Yi about them. At such times, I've found very often a recent reading talks to me and sustains me. Of course, that doesn't have to be an open reading-for-the-time, but in practice it often is, perhaps because those readings represent a clear, uncluttered invitation to provide what I need, not just what I'm aware of needing.

Awareness

I need a new metaphor for this for the digital age... but an open reading works a lot like tuning a radio. It takes your attention, hones it and gives it focus, so you're ready to receive messages more clearly. Then the messages flow in, through events, conversations, dreams, reflections, synchronicities. You turn on the radio and hear commentary on your moving line. Or you notice first that the reading describes one situation in your life, then that it also describes another... and then you start to see how these two experiences are images of one another, each reflecting light into the other's mysteries. Experience expands into new dimensions and full colour.

Asking for awareness

from 2011



In the past I've done a lot of readings, for myself and other people, seeking advice about what to do and how to do things. I expect I'll do a lot more of them, too, because they are direct, clear, straightforward and massively useful.

'How can I do this?'

'What's my best path?'

'What if I try this?'

(Or 'What if I commit to this?' - which can yield a radically different answer.)

Lately, though, I've been asking more questions along the lines of,

'What to be aware of here?'

'What's going on with this?'

'What do I need to understand?'

I ask these in the hope that the answer will also show me something of how I can be here (wherever 'here' is) in a well-adapted way. And they do: I've been getting some hugely helpful answers from Yi, that say in effect: 'Here's what's going on, here's where you are, so to live here to the full, to navigate it, be like this.'

A tiny example... I was confronting something that always intimidates me, for no good reason that I could see, so I asked - what goes on here, with me and this thing? (And I was certainly hoping the answer would give me some idea how to be less inadequate about it.)

Yi's answer: Hexagram 29, unchanging. After a moment, I realised this told me very exactly what it was and how to be. These were chasms to learn, and if I held my heart fast, movement would bring honour. (I got on and did the intimidating thing, and it went well.) Very direct, very immediate - a kind of instruction manual for the psyche in the moment.

Also... this kind of reading can create some compassion and patience for oneself. Chasms? OK, maybe it's not quite so pathetic to be frightened. Or - demon country? OK, maybe my efforts here deserve a bit more respect, and maybe it'd help to adjust my expectations about how long it might take to change this particular pattern. I think this sense of *compassionate recognition* is one of the greatest gifts Yi offers.

If readings fundamentally bring about change through awareness - more than through advice or resolution - then what

kind of reading is going to make the biggest difference? Should 'what to be aware of?' be the default question?

Unasked questions

from 2008



A couple of my most startling, transformative readings lately have come when I asked questions I could and should have asked a year or more ago. The issues were on my mind - in some cases driving all I did - yet it never dawned on me to talk with Yi about them.

It doesn't make this much less embarrassing to realise that I'm definitely not the only one: it's amazing how many other things people can find to ask about. If the elephant in the room would

just move to one side a little so I have room to sort yarrow stalks?
Perfect, thanks.

We don't ask where only one answer would be bearable. (That's something I notice most often in people I read for - maybe it's just the easiest motive to see from the outside.) We also don't ask when it just hasn't occurred to us that there could be a different answer. Or maybe we know there's a problem, but would rather not ask about it for fear of knowing what it might have to tell us.

In my case I think I'm often afraid of losing momentum: I've reached a conclusion, I'm secure in my conviction that this is the way forward, and the last thing I want is a reading that might shake that 'knowledge'. (Hm - maybe I'm over-identifying a bit with what I 'know'...?)

So I asked Yi:

Why do we leave certain questions unasked?

(When I say 'we', I mean myself in the first place - I've used the plural just in case anyone can identify. ;))

Yi answers with Hexagram 60, Measuring or Articulating, changing at the second line to Hexagram 3, Sprouting.

Measuring is about setting limits, measuring and defining things, as a way of making them manageable and digestible, bringing them down to a human scale. It improves communication and understanding by asking, 'What's workable? What can I assimilate? What can we live with?'

And Sprouting is about beginnings: the chaos and difficulty and excitement in the creative ferment, and the great need to orientate ourselves in all this. The sprout puts down roots; the army establishes a base camp; we're 'not letting go our dwelling

place.'

When 60 moves towards 3, or is moved by its priorities, we have

*'Not going out of the gate from the courtyard.
Pitfall.'*

This is the gate that leads from the extended family home out into the street. We don't ask questions because we're staying within our four walls. This is familiar space, the comfort zone, or the 'I know who I am, and I know how I fit into the scheme of things, and everything here tells me this is true' zone.

Staying inside these walls leads to a kind of moral and spiritual claustrophobia, as if knowing my world *from the inside* were enough. There's a distinct failure to send out those feudal lords of hexagram 3 to explore broader perspectives and possibilities.

And naturally, the attractions of this home base are stronger than ever if we already feel insecure around an issue, as if we need to rebuild that home base and regroup. Why run the risk of putting ourselves out there with a question, when we've no way of knowing what, if anything, we might receive in return?

Maybe it's time to pick up the divining-beads and walk out of the gate.

Gifts of time from the I Ching

from 2008



Consulting the Yijing certainly takes time. And it also *gives time back*, re-tuned and humming. Setting aside enough time for a reading means greater clarity, better decisions, and just a more grounded, fluent experience.

Also, it makes for much stronger focus and attention: you can see what you hadn't seen before, and stop 'seeing' (and worrying about and adjusting for) what isn't real. Operating in the real world is a time-saver of the first order.

It's interesting to see how all this can fit in when you need to

adopt some kind of system for 'managing' your time. Divination and 'time management' don't seem to have a whole lot in common, but I've an idea that the underlying motivation might be similar. We pick up the stalks or beads out of a desire to understand our experience and find it meaningful; we pick up the organizer or whatever out of a desire to make daily activities meaningful - to get to the end of the day (or week, or year) and feel we've *got* somewhere, not just whirled round the track one more time without derailing.

So the time management people talk about establishing the biggest goals first - knowing what you really want in life - and then mapping out the smaller stages that will get you there, and the still smaller components of the small stages, until you have single tasks you can schedule into your day. Then every day you see both the small do-able things, and also the big beautiful things they're leading to - which is a wonderful thing, as it makes those small things infinitely more attractive and likely to get done.

The only problem with all this is that the whole day can fill up with the do-able little things with no space left. Where's the magic, or the time to respond to synchronicities - or the space to ask an oracle questions beginning with something other than 'How can I...?'

('How can I...?' questions are very useful and creative things, a staple of ordinary everyday life-changing divination. It's just that there are also other kinds of question, and it's good to have the space for those, too.)

What would be a good way to blend all the planning with the unplannable, and leave space for the mystery to get a look-in?

What works for me is to remember to ask Yi about the big picture. It's a way of checking which wall my ladder's leaning on

before I start climbing.

'What would it mean for me to attain that goal I aspire to?'

'What does it mean for me to aspire to that now?'

'What am I here to give?'

These don't yield once-for-all answers, by the way. What started out as a hugely creative, inspiring goal may become something else altogether long before you reach it. It's OK to ask these questions more than once - if there's a time of year when you pause to take stock, you might include readings like these in the process.

Then you'd naturally want to talk with Yi about decisions ('What if I...?') and ask for advice ('How can I...?') And down at the weekly level, I like to bring the planning together with a weekly reading;

'OK, so this week I need to sort this out and work on that and start planning the other... *Yi, what do I need to be aware of now?* I'm not just asking for advice on how to do what I've already decided Must Get Done; I'm opening up for guidance of any kind. Or I might simply ask for 'advice for the week' - and if the advice is hexagram 52, and my existing plan was to chase my tail, I find myself revising the plan.

Of course, there are plenty of other ways to fit these things together. The only essential is that 'planning for real life' shouldn't be allowed to get shut up inside its own small box, with conversations with Yi stored safely in a separate compartment. Before too long, the 'real life planning' box fills up with notions that are both unrealistic and fundamentally lifeless.

Why not discard the boxes - we know Yi isn't going to fit in one,

anyway - and bring all our ways of planning/imagining/coping/aspiring together? So that planning-time is also reading time, or your weekly reading is on the fridge door next to the shopping list, or the organiser program has readings in its 'projects' folder and brainstorming in its 'readings' folder.

This liberates *oodles* of time - time that might otherwise have been spent on things that just aren't a good fit. It also ensures you see openings and creative possibilities that you'd never have seen if plan-fixated. And it means you receive one of the Yi's best gifts - that feeling of living in more dimensions and more colours.



I Ching Chat

If you'd appreciate some
individual help with a reading,

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