



Clarity

Yijing, Book of Stories

Hilary Barrett

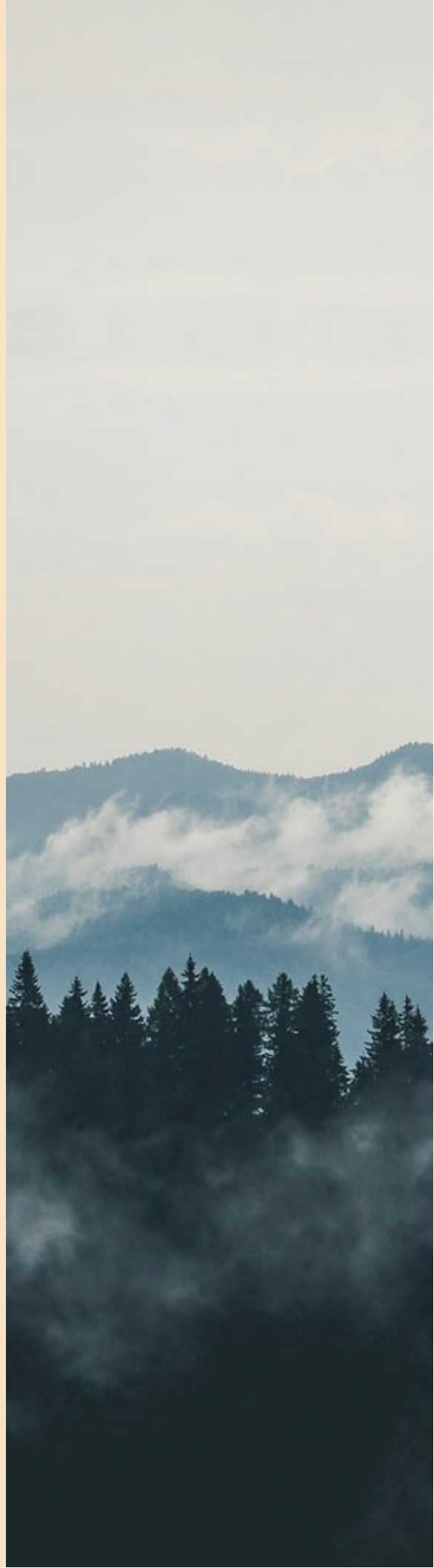


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Introduction

(also - hello!)



I'm Hilary Barrett, creator of *Clarity* and author of *I Ching: walking your path, creating your future*. Thanks for downloading this ebook!

About Clarity

Clarity is the one-woman mini-business where I provide I Ching readings, courses and classes. It's also host to a remarkable I Ching

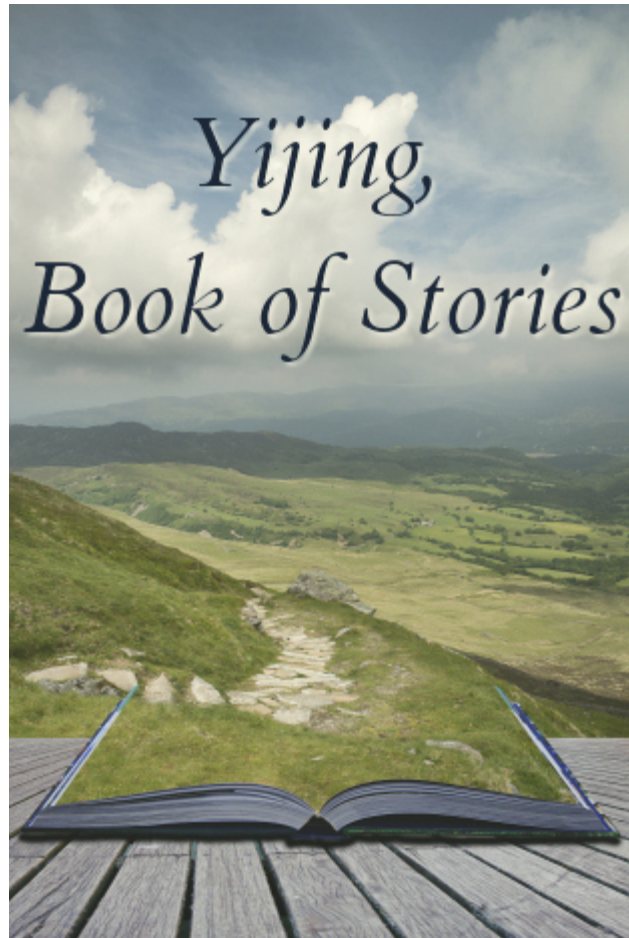
Community where people share their readings and insights. If you're not already a member, [you are warmly invited to join.](#)

About 'Book of Stories'

A friend's comment about 'storytelling' with the Yi got me thinking: isn't that exactly what it does? How it connects with our train of thought - or interrupts it? And then I started wondering about all the different stories Yi might tell in the course of a single reading. It turns out there are quite a few.

I hope you enjoy reading through these, and find them useful in your own readings.

Book of Stories?



Stories are a big part of how readings work. When we've gone round and round the situation a few (dozen) times in our thoughts, and everything is stale and stuck, Yi says, 'Imagine, it's as if...' - and everything changes. How I got here, where 'here' is, what paths might be open to me now - it all looks different.

Stories are a richly eloquent way for the oracle to say, 'You are *here*' and reveal a whole landscape that was hidden. And they're a language we all speak - one we all think in, all the time. We don't just live our lives, we *tell* them.

I travelled into London one weekend, and came home with a

story to tell of getting lost on the Underground - my own woeful little travelogue. It has misunderstandings, helpers and guides, toil, suspense (would I still catch my train?), escape (Persephone?)... all packed into 40 singularly ordinary minutes. And the daily routine is no different - an endless stream of roles and sagas and casting questions.

Sometimes the story Yi tells echoes the one we're telling ourselves; sometimes it twists it just a little; sometimes it blows it sky high. If I ask about a situation that feels like a burden of responsibility I must carry (so my story's all about heroic struggle to bear the load), perhaps I'll receive Hexagram 28 line 4 - bearing up under the weight, conscious of the dangers of too much stress and strain. Or there might be 7.3, or 40.3, each telling a rather different story about carrying a burden. Or I might get 59.1.2 - what if I have the whole story upside-down, and this thing I'm labelling a burden is actually what carries me and keeps me afloat?

Those are all examples of Yi telling *tiny* stories, little vignettes in a single line.

'Shouldering a burden while also riding in a carriage
Invites the arrival of bandits.
Constancy, shame.'

A film studio would spin that out to at least twenty minutes, don't you think? Misunderstanding, incongruity, consequences, reaction... Yi covers the lot in eight words, and we follow along with pages of commentary.

But Yi has so many other ways to tell stories...

Book of stories: myth and legend



Shared stories?

If you think about it, some stories play a big part in our conversation even though we never tell them in full. With a story everyone knows, you don't need to tell it; you only need to allude to it.

'No, he isn't Prince Charming' becomes a short way of saying, 'This is not the story of Cinderella: he isn't going to single you out, lift you out of your humdrum existence into a palace of happily-ever-afters...' and so on. We do something similar if we talk about Londoners reacting stolidly to terrorism with 'the Blitz spirit', or if we call a source of temptation a 'serpent'.

Alluding to our shared stories is a tremendously succinct way to

invoke a lot of meaning in just a word or two. Naturally the Yi - possibly the most succinct book in the world - uses this.

Only this makes for tricky moments in interpretation, because story-sharing is a tenuous thing. Even in the examples I just gave, the 'serpent' won't mean so much to you if you're not from a Judaeo-Christian culture, and my idea of 'Blitz spirit' is already a lot hazier than my father's might have been, because he was there to help clear the rubble. (He never mentioned any 'spirit', but I've inherited his fear of the sound of air-raid sirens.) In fact... if you're younger than I am, or American, the Blitz probably isn't a 'shared story' at all.

So if I can't even be sure what stories I might share with readers of this post, what are my chances of knowing what stories might have been shared by the first users of the oracle? And in readings, when do I get to say, 'Here Yi is clearly referring to this story,' when is it better to stick with, 'This would probably have reminded a contemporary reader of this story,' and when am I just making stuff up?

Reliable sources

Scholars look at historical records and other ancient texts and find possible allusions. For instance, we can be fairly sure that the prince receiving horses in Hexagram 35 is Prince Kang, because of the inscription on [this vessel](#):



SJ Marshall read the history of the Zhou conquest and identified the name of Hexagram 55 with the garrison capital *Feng*; Stephen Field, because he's also translated *Tian Wen* ('Questions of Heaven', a poem made up entirely of questions about Chinese myth and cosmology) is especially well-placed to recognise its characters and stories in the Zhouyi. (In fact his book is a superb source - the best I know - for both historical and mythical allusions, and gives far more detail than other sources.)

So the diviner sits on the back of the scholars, like the wren riding the eagle, and finds she can give people new stories to think in - an essential part of divination.

On the face of it, the question for a diviner seems to be less 'can I know this is a real reference?' and more 'will this help?' But I'm still careful only to tell the stories I'm sure of, and ignore associations that seem to be simply the translator's invention. Stories are powerful things - and people base their understanding and decisions on what the oracle says - and the only thing I can be sure will help, frequently in ways I can't imagine, is *what the oracle says*. Diviner beware.

The Yi's big stories

Here are some stories I would definitely tell as part of a reading:

The Zhou Conquest, of course, the book's one big unifying story: the modest little Zhou people receiving the Mandate of Heaven to overthrow the Shang rulers.

This is recent history for the book's first users, rewriting their whole world, and it colours the ancient text vividly: crossing rivers, the struggle in the northeast, western neighbours, strange alliances, the long historical resonances of the marriage of King Yi's daughters (no wonder 11.5 changes to 5!), and of course the big moments: 49, 55.

Linked with this story, there's Prince Ji in 36 and his mirror image, Prince Kang, in 35. Then Wu in 55 also has his reflection from a much earlier time: the Shang progenitor King Hai in Hexagram 56 (and 34, and maybe also 23).

And reaching further back into mythical times, there's Yu the Great, conqueror of floods and banisher of demons, limping on through hexagrams 8, 39, 43 and 44.

I think those are the stories I would rely on, though there are plenty of other tantalising hints, and there must surely be much more that we've lost. Perhaps a contemporary reader would have

Book of stories: what follows



The Sequence of Hexagrams is one of my own favourite sources of Yijing stories. Not that the hexagrams are like successive chapters in one big narrative - the architecture of the Sequence is *much* more subtle, creative and interesting than that - but simply that in the moment of a reading, you can orientate yourself by looking one step back.

If you're looking at your reading and wondering, 'Where am I in all this?' then the Sequence will probably help. It shows you where you've been and how you got here - or how you can get to where you need to be. Sometimes Yi's answer is one step ahead of you, as it were, and then the Sequence helps you catch up.

A couple of examples...

Nourishment needs Great Taming

In 2016, with a lot of help from Yi, I redesigned the Clarity website. This reading was about embarking on changing the forum's appearance myself.

For the previous redesign, I'd paid someone else to make a matching template for the forums, and I was left with the impression that the forum appearance was Much Too Hard for me to take on. On the other hand, I didn't want to throw money willy-nilly at things I could potentially do myself without too much trouble. In the end I asked a carefully time-limited question,

'What about setting aside a week to work on the forum templates myself?'

Answer: Hexagram 27, Nourishment/ Jaws, with line 6 changing:

*'Origin of nourishment. Danger, good fortune.
Fruitful to cross the great river.'*

I decided it was worth trying to be the 'origin of nourishment' and commit some time and effort to this. (And in the event I waded into the river and did get most of it done, though I needed help to sort out the menu.)

Nourishment follows from Great Taming, because,

*'Things are tamed, and so there can be nurturing, and so
Nourishment follows.'*

...which really hardly needs any commentary beyond *farmers grow food; food feeds people*. What kind of Great Taming might

this situation call for? I think the clue was in the Image:

'Heaven dwells in the centre of the mountain. Great Taming.

A noble one uses the many annals of ancient words and past deeds,

And builds up his character.'

Literal nourishment requires the cultivation of food; becoming the source of forum-coding 'nourishment' requires the cultivation of knowledge. The 'many annals of ancient words and past deeds' were to be found in the Vbulletin help documentation and across various support forum threads. I still had plenty to learn at the time of asking, but everything I needed was available.

Inner Truth arises from Measure

A friend kindly invited me round to visit... in what turned out to be probably the most expensive private home I've ever been in. I found the whole thing weirdly disconcerting, and wasn't quite sure why. Perhaps something to do with finding someone who's more or less 'like me' (we have things in common, and in some parallel universe I might have followed the same career) living in such a space. So to help me reflect and understand, I asked Yi,

What to learn from the experience of visiting this home?

Hexagram 61, Inner Truth, unchanging.

I could learn something about inner truth... something about what I trust, and why, and where and how I feel connected, and the nature of blessing. Hexagram 61 shows the inner space of a life, inside the home - and seeing that quite different space gave me a clearer view of my own.

Inner Truth follows from Measuring, and the Sequence says,

"Measuring and also trusting it, and so Inner Truth follows."

Often, I read that as trust arising between people because of the 'measures' they share - language, standards, expectations. Here, it seems to be talking about how each person's own set of 'measures', and how the truth of a person's life arises from that framework: our individual limits, routine, expectations, mindset... everything that seems normal and natural to us, amounting to what we might call a 'way of life'.

(A tiny example -

'What would you like to drink?'

'Water, please.'

'There's a water filter over there.'

There was a long moment when I stared dumbly and could not see a water filter. I was looking for a plastic jug, so I couldn't see the large unit set into the kitchen wall. A mismatch of Measures.)

Our individual Measures become something we can trust and stand in for ourselves. The inner truth of my friend's life is fundamentally not mine, and not something I can covet any more than I can want to be someone else. That tremendously driven working life is not for me - and actually, nor is the task of filling such a vast space with a sense of 'home'.

Following and passing along

In readings like these, the Sequence provides a foundation for understanding the whole. It's 'here's how you get here' or 'here's where this comes from' - a 'handover' of experience from one

hexagram to the next. Given the context of the Sequence, I can make connections with what I've already experienced (the vBulletin manual, the invisible water filter) and move on to what Yi's showing me with the answer.

The *Xugua*, the Wing about the Sequence, uses a single textual formula to describe how each hexagram follows from another. This formula is always translated with some simple variant on 'and so x follows' or 'hence what follows is x' - except, that is, by Ritsema/Sabbadini, who have,

'To anterior acquiescence belongs the use of x.'

...which is interesting. A quite literal translation might (*might* - I am not a scholar of Chinese) be, 'therefore receiving the use of x'. The important word is *shou*, 受, 'receive' or 'accept', which **has roots in an image of passing something from one hand to another**. When you cast a hexagram, it's the Sequence that hands it to you.

Book of (very big) stories



In the previous article, I mentioned the larger-scale architecture of the Yijing's Sequence of Hexagrams. This doesn't only tell stories: it reveals correspondences and relationships, conversations that bounce to and fro across the Sequence, not just unfolding in a straight line of 'before' and 'after'.

What these bigger stories do for readings (at least for me, so far) is hard to describe. They place the reading in a big, broad context, and give you a sense of an underlying theme, which *colours* the rest of the interpretation in ways you can't really pin

down.

Perhaps a couple of examples would help...

An example reading

Question: 'What next with this work?'

Answer: Hexagram 3, Sprouting, changing at lines 1, 2, 5 and 6 to 4, Not Knowing.

Receiving a pair of hexagrams as an answer offers rich food for thought, including an emphasis on this place in the Sequence: *'You are here (nowhere else - only here).'* 'Here' is, naturally, the very beginning of everything: growing, reaching out, exploring, experimenting. Something as simple as that is useful to know.

This hexagram pair also stands at the beginning of the Vessel Casting arc that reaches from 3 to 50, creating a 'container' for the hexagrams in between, full of interesting reflections and symmetries - see the [Vessel Casting posts](#). So the answer to 'What next?' is not only 'Begin!' but also 'Begin *casting*' - you're creating the mould, the shape, for something solid, well-founded and potentially transformative.'

Another example reading

'What about buying this webinar software?'

A 'webinar' is an online event accessible through your browser, normally a talk with slides with some Q&A. I haven't really found a use for these in Clarity - too much broadcasting, not enough conversation - so when there was a special offer for lifetime access to a provider, I wasn't that interested. But then again, considering it was lifetime access for something like the normal monthly fee, maybe I should think about it? So I asked Yi.

Answer: Hexagram 34, Great Vigour, changing at line 2 to 55, Abundance.

That was enough of a nudge that I bought the offer - which is odd, since I still don't really know what to do with it.

So... I might look at the big Sequence patterns to get an idea of where I am with this, or where I need to be. This one is part of a more complex pattern in the Sequence that I haven't written about before, so bear with me...

'Livestock hexagrams', 25 to 34

Hexagram 34 is the last in a set of ten hexagrams, originally pointed out by Scott Davis as part of a pattern of hexagrams with 'big' and 'little' in their names. I've noticed two things that make this a distinct set: the trigrams, and the imagery.

Trigrams first: the central pivot of the set is the pair 29-30 - Repeating Chasms and Clarity, 'below and above' according to the *Zagua*, water and fire. Flanking and reflecting across this centre are two pairs composed of the trigrams wind, lake, thunder and mountain (27-28 and 31-32), and the decade is framed by two pairs composed of thunder/mountain with heaven (25-26, 33-34). Perfect symmetry.

And imagery: there's a lot in here about keeping livestock. (Livestock do show up elsewhere in the Yijing, but generally as offerings, whereas this decade concentrates specifically on farming.) The animals seem to be deliberately placed, in the outer pairs - 25-26, 34 - and in the centre, where hexagram 30 refers to 'rearing cattle'. ('Rearing' there is the same word translated 'Taming' or 'Accumulating' in the names of hexagrams 9 and 26.)

What does that mean?

Well... I think there is an overarching theme for this 25-34 decade, about *being guided in the use of power*.

The outer hexagrams (25-26, 33-34) express a challenge: can you have a clear, functional relationship with heaven, in your action and stillness? You might call it 'being in *dao*', being guided. How might someone attain that?

The central pair, 29-30, provides the key: there must be light, insight and culture, a framework of connections to think with - [Hexagram 30's net, that catches the bird](#). And this doesn't mean detaching from or expelling what's dark and wild: 30 follows from 29, as the suns are bathed and renewed each night in the pool at the end of the earth. Rearing cattle is good fortune: we need to include and tame nature, so we can build up a resilient, flexible security that comes from inner resource, not from aggressive power.

The flanking pairs, 27-28 and 31-32, perhaps suggest the means: we could build a living structure to contain and nurture, and that might become a sustainable way of life.

Perhaps there could be a virtuous cycle: if you have sufficient understanding to keep and rear livestock, then animal vitality can nourish and sustain higher culture, which makes possible a more fully integrated relationship with heaven, so you are guided to greater insight and can exercise Great Vigour...

Applying the story to the reading

The trigrams of hexagram 34 really represent quite a tall order: heaven inside, absolute truth, to be translated into thunder's action and initiative out in the world. Not easy, to apply all that energy without hubris and self-destruction; how am I to keep my horns out of hedges? Or - to put this in terms of my question - how am I to use this quite high-powered marketing tool in a way

that's truthful, gentle, helpful and not obnoxious?

(It's one of those tools that's regularly used to be thoroughly obnoxious, for instance by announcing a live event - 'Show up now or miss out, there won't be a recording!' - and just setting a recording to play at the scheduled time, leaving unwitting visitors to wonder why the questions they submit in the 'live' chat aren't answered. *Ugh.*)

The big story of the 'livestock hexagrams' is on a much grander scale than my little question about buying a webinar solution, of course - it really makes the question look remarkably silly. But it also acts as the individual steps of the Sequence often do, pointing me back towards what it takes, what's required *before* this hexagram.

Buying the webinar software means Great Vigour - but Great Vigour, in this context, isn't just about what I own. It's about knowing how to use energetic resources, within a living structure that secures the connection between heaven and thunder, between inner truth and outward action. For me that might mean business structures or the patterns of my working life - both, I should think. This'll mean Great Vigour - once I've travelled through this process of learning, understanding, nurturing and building.

So I still don't know how to use webinars - but after looking at the Sequence, I at least have a much clearer idea of *what* it is I don't know!

Book of nuclear stories



A 'nuclear story' (my term for something many people have described before me) is found within a single hexagram, by 'unpacking' its trigrams and nuclear trigrams. It unfolds a kind of 'hidden adventure' for the hexagram.

I realise I've written this up for [Change Circle](#) members in some detail (see [this Wiki article](#) and the linked pdf and call recording), but not really mentioned it on the blog, so here - as one more of the many ways that Yi is a 'Book of Stories' - is a whirlwind tour.

A hexagram's formed of two trigrams - lines 1,2,3 and 4,5,6. But folded up inside it, in overlapping lines, are another two

trigrams: lines 2,3,4 and 3,4,5. Those are the *nuclear trigrams*. Put them together, and you have the nuclear hexagram, the heart or seed of the original.

But you can also combine main component trigrams with nuclear trigrams to form yet more 'hidden hexagrams'. I've found it most satisfying to look at just three nuclear hexagrams:

- lines 123,234, making an 'encounter' or 'Call' hexagram
- lines 234,345, the true nuclear, the core work
- lines 345,456, expressing a higher potential, learning or gift

These three hexagrams between them tell the cast hexagram's underlying story. You could think of it as a way to imagine the hexagram as a novel, or an epic poem... or a blockbuster film...

Playing with nuclear stories...

"The Great Taming"

Our impulsive hero is called to take a stand, to speak up, to decide what she's really about. Maybe her neighbourhood's turning into a ghost town because everyone's going to the soulless restaurant chain down the road, so she decides the place needs its own café, makes her case to the local authorities and gets permission to open her own...

...and then she finds that running a café is vastly bigger and more complicated than she ever imagined. All her plans amount to nothing, and she's compelled to learn on her feet, divine what the locals really want, and adapt as she goes.

...so that ultimately she learns to nourish both her own life and her community in a sustainable way, and finds new equilibrium.

(Hexagram 26: 'call' nuclear hexagram 43, Deciding; true 'work' nuclear 54, Marrying Maiden; final, 'higher' nuclear 27,

Nourishment.)

OK, perhaps that one isn't blockbuster material. Maybe sci-fi...?

"Traveller"

Aboard the multi-species interstellar ship seeking a new planet to call home...

...there's a catastrophic cascading systems failure that demands an unprecedented response...

...and they can only be saved from destruction by creative use of the different species' unique characteristics. (The hive mind that can survive in vacuum and the individualist that can see in ultraviolet, or some such.)

(That one's Hexagram 56: 'call' nuclear hexagram 53, true nuclear 28, 'learning' 38.)

Well, possibly I shouldn't give up the day job - but hopefully you see what I mean, how the the three nuclear hexagrams can tell a story of their own.

If you receive Hexagram 56, the Traveller, you might encounter it at first as the flight of the geese, searching for a place to belong. You might find that the real work and adventure of being the traveller involves 'standing alone without fear', finding your environment won't bear the weight of your true identity and purpose so you must carry it all yourself, feeling the stress of that and the risk of overstepping the mark. And ultimately you might have an opportunity to learn to live with difference at a higher and more creative level.

Nuclear stories reflected in changing lines

And...you can look not only at the hexagrams, but also the

moving lines within the hexagrams. (I have Luis Andrade, Sparhawk in our I Ching Community, to thank for suggesting I look into this fully.)

So line 3 in Hexagram 56 is reflected at the very beginning of that hidden, inner story as 53.3.5.

(If you draw Hexagram 56 with line 3 changing, and then alongside it draw each of the four trigrams it contains *with changing line included*, you can see where this comes from. The first trigram is mountain, with its third line changing; the second, made of lines 2,3,4, is wind/wood, with its second line changing.)

So... if the protagonist of 'Traveller' were an anti-hero who triggered the system failure and lost friends... well, perhaps his back-story might involve losing his father to the failed settlement of an inhospitable planet, and a driving frustration at how long the journey is taking. Perhaps that's why he burned out life support in an impatient attempt to boost the engines.

(Who knew this oracle would make it so easy to write clichéd sci-fi? We can probably get a romantic sub-plot out of 28.2.4, and the moral of the story from 38.1, in which our hero can only save the day by overcoming his reflexive aversion to the slug aliens. *Or something.*)

Using nuclear stories in readings

Outside Hexagram Cinema, though, *how could you use this in real-life readings?* Well... with discretion. Do I want to explore the full-length epic of a temperamental webserver, or an incipient dental abscess? Probably not, no. But for a big question, something larger-scale and longer-term, nuclear stories come into their own.

When you're not sure where to start or how to 'get into' a reading,

the 'Calling' nuclear may give you a foothold. It answers questions like, 'Yes, but why would that happen?' or 'Yes, but where's that coming from?'

A big reading often works itself out in both waking and dreaming life - and the core nuclear can show those workings. Dream imagery especially can show up in the lines of nuclear hexagrams; it's very exciting when that happens in a client's reading.

(When doing an in-depth reading for a client I always read through the full nuclear story, but I wouldn't share it all in our first call - not when a single changing line can be reflected in as many as *five* nuclear story lines. It's possible to have too much of a good thing.)

It also works itself out in *other readings*. I just found a smallish reading I cast showing up as the true nuclear hexagram (and moving line) of a bigger one; it's surprising how often this happens. Yi's redirecting my attention by showing me where smallish thing fits in the bigger scheme of things.

In conclusion? No conclusion, really... just explore, let your readings tell you stories, see where they take you. Also, maybe the slug aliens really aren't so bad.

More help with your readings

For access to private forums, the
Yijing Foundations Course and
confidential chats about your
readings by phone or Skype -

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