



THE WANDERER

The wanderer.
Small is blessed.
It is auspicious to keep wandering.

The wanderer's journey will end only when he finds a good place to stay. He is a little man who seeks a ruler and a home. He has not found them yet, but will if he keeps looking.

Lines

first line/6 — — He travels meagerly.
This is what procures disaster.

He travels either not far enough or without sufficient money and provisions. The opening text says small is blessed, but this is too small. Extreme smallness is suggested by the line's low position and by its being a weak line (— —).

line two/6 — — The wanderer reaches a stopping place.
He keeps his possessions,
Gains a young servant,
And stays.

The wanderer finds a safe and comfortable place to stop for a while. No one robs him and he is given a servant. Line two is the place of the subordinate.

line three/9 — — The wanderer's stopping place burns.
He loses his young servant.
It is dangerous to remain as one is.

The respite from his wanderings proves only temporary. Line three is almost always inauspicious.

line four/9 ——— Ending his wanderings,
He gains possessions and an axe.
“But my heart is not content.”

He finds a home, but remains dissatisfied. Line four is the place of the officer, whose ruler gives him a weapon and wealth. He remains dissatisfied either because he wants higher rank or because he is thinking of his previous ruler.¹

line five/6 — — He shoots at a pheasant.
Though his first arrow misses its mark,
He ends with praise and command.

The wanderer's talents are recognized and rewarded by his ruler. To shoot at a pheasant means to seek high office. The brightly colored pheasant symbolizes a brilliant minister.²

top line/9 ——— The bird's nest burns.
The wanderer's laughter
Becomes a howl of despair.
He loses an ox from his fields.
Misfortune.

What seemed a safe haven is destroyed. The bird builds his nest in too high and exposed a position. The wanderer seeks too high a rank. The top line of a hexagram is above the line of the ruler (line five) and therefore often has to do with conflict between a subject and his ruler.³

STRUCTURE ☲ 離 Luó Shining Light (shining, within)
 ☳ 艮 Gēn Keep Still (stop, stopped)

The wanderer does not stop (lower trigram ☳) until he finds a place where he can shine (upper trigram ☲). The place where he first stops (☳) goes up in flames (☲).

SEQUENCE The protagonist of FĒNG (55) ABUNDANCE was a vassal of the defeated Shang who found a place in the new Zhou order right away. The protagonist of the inverse hexagram THE WANDERER is forced to leave the first place he finds and wander on until he finds a more permanent one. Many of the dispossessed Shang became wandering merchants after their defeat.

Notes

1. "But my heart is not content." (line four) — See GĒN (52) KEEP STILL, line two.
2. "pheasant" (line five) — See MÍNG ZHÌ (36) THE BRIGHT PHEASANT.
3. "loses an ox from his fields" (top line) — See DÀ QIÁNG (34) BIG USES FORCE, note 3.