

## HEXAGRAM 21

### SHIH HÔ GNAWING<sup>1</sup>



*Component trigrams:*

*Below: CHÊN, thunder, movement, to sprout or quicken.*

*Above: LI, fire, brilliance, beauty.*

**TEXT** Gnawing. Success! The time is favourable for legal processes.

**COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT** When something is gripped between the jaws, we speak of gnawing and with this gnawing we associate success. The firm and the yielding are separate<sup>2</sup> and the two trigrams representing these qualities are movement and brilliance respectively. Thus thunder and lightning are brought together and emit brilliance.<sup>3</sup> The yielding obtains the central position and rises upwards (from the centre of the lower to the centre of the upper trigram). Although this arrangement is an unsuitable one, it favours the process of the law.<sup>4</sup>

**SYMBOL** This hexagram symbolizes lightning<sup>5</sup> accompanied by thunder. The ancient rulers, after making their legal code perfectly clear to all, enforced the laws vigorously.

*The Lines*

**9 FOR THE BOTTOM PLACE** Their feet are shackled so that they may not walk—no error is involved!<sup>6</sup> **COMMENTARY** This method is used to prevent (evil-doers) from progressing (in their wickedness).

**6 FOR THE SECOND PLACE** Gnawing flesh so that the nose is hidden in it—no error!<sup>7</sup> **COMMENTARY** This is indicated by the position of the line (a yielding one) above a firm one.

**6 FOR THE THIRD PLACE** Gnawing dried meat, he was poisoned, but not severely enough to indispose him for long—no error!<sup>8</sup> **COMMENTARY** His being poisoned is indicated by the unsuitable position of this line.

**9 FOR THE FOURTH PLACE** Gnawing dried meat on the bone, he found a metal arrow-head (embedded in it)—remaining determined in spite of difficulties will bring good fortune! **COMMENTARY** However, no ray of the good fortune here indicated is visible as yet.<sup>9</sup>

**6 FOR THE FIFTH PLACE** While gnawing dried meat, he encountered a piece of gold (embedded in it)—unwavering determination now will bring down trouble, but no error is involved.<sup>10</sup> **COMMENTARY** That we shall not be to blame for the trouble is indicated by the suitable position of this line.

**9 FOR THE TOP PLACE** He wears a wooden cangue which hides his ears—misfortune! **COMMENTARY** This implies dullness of hearing (or intellect).<sup>11</sup>

**NOTES** (1) The concept of gnawing is suggested by the component trigrams, which are regarded (owing to the arrangement of their lines) as not commingling; they are as separate from each other as the upper and lower jaw when something tough is being gnawed. (2) The firm and yielding lines more or less alternate; or the lower trigram can be regarded as filled with the power of thunderous force, while the upper trigram, representing beauty, is soft and yielding. (3) I do not know what the ancient Chinese views on thunder and lightning were; it appears from this that they were regarded as two forces which, like steel and flint, emitted brilliance when brought into sharp contact with each other. (4) A pair of trigrams both with yielding centres is not felt to be a good arrangement; that it nevertheless favours the process of the law may have been suggested to the writer of the Text by the fact that the weak lines (morally weak people?) are fully contained by the strong (prison walls, warders and so forth?) (5) Li, the upper trigram, stands for lightning as well as for fire, beauty, etc. (6) This line suggests that extreme

firmness would not be culpable at this time. (7) The meaning of this line is not at all obvious. The Chinese additional commentaries take it to mean that we may do a little harm to our own interests but that we shall not deserve blame for what happens. (8) This line presages trouble through no fault of ours which will not, however, incapacitate us for long. (9) Whatever good fortune is on its way to us is not visible as yet. In other words, the situation looks more gloomy than it is, so we must follow our course with firmness. (10) If we persist with our plans, trouble will arise; the only comfort we can take is that we shall not be to blame for it. (11) This suggests that, for the present, we should not put much trust in our own judgement.