

HEXAGRAM 27

I (pronounced YEE) NOURISHMENT (literally JAWS)¹



Component trigrams:

Below: CHEN, thunder, movement, to sprout or quicken.

Above: GEN, a mountain, hard, obstinate, perverse.

TEXT Nourishing. Righteous persistence brings good fortune. Watch people nourishing others and observe with what manner of things they seek to nourish themselves.²

COMMENTARY Persistence brings good fortune to those who nourish themselves on what is fitting. The rest of the passage means that we should observe what people give to nourish others and also what kind of things they choose for their own nourishment. The celestial and terrestrial forces give nourishment to all; the holy sage nourishes everybody from those who are truly worthy to the people as a whole. The timely application of this hexagram is of the highest importance.

SYMBOL This hexagram symbolizes thunder³ rumbling at the foot of a mountain. The Superior Man is thoughtful in speech and frugal in his eating and drinking.

The Lines

9 FOR THE BOTTOM PLACE You released your sacred tortoise and stared at me with mouth agape⁴—misfortune! **COMMENTARY** Looking at me like that is hardly to be regarded as admirable behaviour.

6 FOR THE SECOND PLACE Nourishment on the mountain peak; he abandons normal ways to seek nourishment in the hills⁵—misfortune! **COMMENTARY** The misfortune is due to his having separated himself from his own kind.

6 FOR THE THIRD PLACE He is determined to relinquish nourishment⁶—misfortune! For ten years he performs no useful function and there is nowhere favourable for him to go. **COMMENTARY** Ten years because his ways are utterly perverse.

6 FOR THE FOURTH PLACE Nourishment on the mountain peak⁷—good fortune! He glares like a tiger stalking its prey so ardent is his look—no error! **COMMENTARY** The good fortune is due to light shed from above.

6 FOR THE FIFTH PLACE Normal ways are abandoned. Righteous persistence will bring good fortune to those who stay where they are.⁸ The great river (or sea) must not be crossed.⁸ **COMMENTARY** The good fortune attainable by such people consists in being able to obey their superiors most willingly.

9 FOR THE TOP PLACE Nourishment gives rise both to trouble and

good fortune.⁹ It is favourable to cross the great river (or sea).¹⁰

COMMENTARY The first sentence means that (in any case) we shall enjoy great blessings.¹¹

NOTES (1) The form of this hexagram readily brings to mind the concept of wide open jaws, but the word nourishment must not be taken only in a literal sense; for we are concerned here with all those things which men seek both for their own advantage and for giving succour or assistance to others. (2) For this will teach us a lot about their characters. (3) The lower trigram, thunder, also represents the power of quickening growth; hence its place in a hexagram concerned with nourishment. (4) The shells of tortoises were used for divination. Here, the implication seems to be that someone abandons his sacred duty in his greed (symbolized by 'mouth agape') to obtain what he wants from the person to whom 'me' refers. It may be that contemporaries of the authors of the *I Ching* were familiar with a story to which this sentence pertains. (5) From ancient times, there has been a large body of opinion in China that Taoists and other mystics leading the life of a recluse are odd people who have abandoned their duties to family, state and mankind. However, the *Book of Change*, revered by both Taoists and Confucians, is not likely to be guilty of bias; indeed, in the fourth place, 'nourishment on the mountain' brings good fortune. Perhaps the implication is that those who withdraw from ordinary life more on account of their oddity than because of any genuine desire for spiritual guidance waste their talents and their time. (6) Such extreme eccentricity can only end in barrenness. Those familiar with Buddhism will recollect that the Lord Buddha abandoned nourishment on the advice of his teachers and then came to regret this fruitless method of self-discipline. (7) This line, like the second line, suggests a recluse; but in this case he is well qualified for the spiritual life and obviously gains the fruit of his endeavour. His tigerish glance calls to mind a Master of Zen or, rather, a Taoist sage who has reached a similar stage of enlightenment. (8) In such abnormal times, it is best to stay at home. (9) Our quest for the necessities of mind and body brings mixed results. (10) I.e. to go on a long journey. (11) 'Blessings' means good fortune apparently unconnected with our merits or endeavours.