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GUĀN

## WATCHING

He washes his hands,  
but does not make an offering.  
Faithful allegiance  
is as good as sacrificing an ox.

He prepares to offer sacrifice but does not. Rather than making a small independent offering, he remains the faithful follower of a ruler whose great sacrifices have more power to attract the support of Heaven and the spirits. He continues to watch rather than act.<sup>1</sup>

### *Lines*

first line/6 — — He sees like a child.  
All right for a little man,  
but trouble for a lord.

Since his powers of observation are limited, his field of action should be limited too. This weak line (— —) in the lowest place is like a little child.<sup>2</sup>

line two/6 — — Peeking out from within.  
Be passive as a woman.

From her place inside the home she cannot see enough of the outside world to safely take action in it. Line two is associated with women because it is inside the inner (lower) trigram, like a woman inside her home. In this case, both the line and the trigram are passive.

line three/6 — — “They watch what I do.”  
He advances and then retreats.

People look at him when he steps forward and he realizes he isn't strong enough to go on, so he steps back. Line three, at the top of the lower trigram, often shows someone in a low position who takes a step too far ahead. The one who looks at him may be his ruler.<sup>3, 4</sup>

line four/6 — — Behold this nation's glory!  
It is favorable to be a vassal of its king.

He kneels in submission (passive line — —, upper trigram Xùn ䷶ Kneel in Submission) to a glorious ruler. Line four is the place of the officer, who submits to his ruler (line five). The word 賓 *bīn* “vassal” literally means “guest.”

line five/9 — — “They watch what I do.”  
A lord will come to no harm.

He is strong enough to accept scrutiny. Line five is the place of the ruler. He is either a ruler who is watched by his subjects or a rising subject watched by his ruler.<sup>3</sup>

top line/9 — — “I watch what they do.”  
A lord will come to no harm.

He watches what others do, preparing to take action. This top line leads on to the next hexagram SHÍ HÈ (21) BITING THROUGH.

STRUCTURE ䷶ 巽 Xùn Kneel in Submission  
䷶ 坤 Kūn Acquiescent (passive, a crowd)

He acquiescently (lower trigram ䷶) kneels in submission to his ruler (upper trigram ䷶). Or: A crowd of followers (䷶) kneels in submission to him (䷶).

SEQUENCE In LÍN (19) LEADERSHIP, an underling began to exercise leadership. Here in WATCHING, he sees that it is not safe to carry this too far and that he should remain a faithful subject.

## Notes

1. “washes” (opening text) — Some commentators believe that 盥 *guàn* “washes” is a mistake for 灌 *guàn* “pour a libation.” Both these actions are preparations for sacrifice.

2. “sees” (first line), “behold” (line four) — These both translate

觀 *guān*, the name of the hexagram. The phrase in line two translated “peeking out from within” also includes the word 觀 *guān*.

3. “They watch what I do.” (lines three, five) — This is usually translated: “I look at my life.” Gao (1947) interprets it: “I watch my officials.”

4. “He advances and then retreats.” (line three) — See also XÙN (57) KNEEL IN SUBMISSION, first line.