

HEXAGRAM 23

PO PEELING OFF¹



Component trigrams:

Below: K'UN, earth, female, passive, etc.

Above: K'EN, a mountain, hard, obstinate, perverse.

TEXT Peeling off. At present, there is no goal (or destination) which can be sought with advantage.

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT Peeling off means just what it says. The weak succeed in altering the strong. No advantage is to be gained from seeking any goal (or destination), for this is a time when inferior men flourish. It is best to remain where we are and to accept the situation portended by this hexagram. The Superior Man respectfully contemplates the ebb and flow, the unending succession of repletion and depletion which constitutes the way of heaven.

SYMBOL This hexagram symbolizes a mountain resting upon the earth.² The truly great shower generosity upon those under them to enable them to live in peace and comfort.

The Lines

6 FOR THE BOTTOM PLACE He starts the peeling off at the foot of the bed. There is no steadfastness—misfortune! **COMMENTARY** This implies ridding ourselves of those below.³

6 FOR THE SECOND PLACE He continues peeling off at the edge of

the bed. There is no steadfastness—misfortune! COMMENTARY This implies being left without friends.³

6 FOR THE THIRD PLACE He peels them (all) off—no error. COMMENTARY This implies losing contact with those above and below.³

6 FOR THE FOURTH PLACE He continues the peeling off at the mattress of his bed—misfortune!³ COMMENTARY This presages our being very close to a terrible misfortune.

6 FOR THE FIFTH PLACE A string of fishes symbolizing the high favour enjoyed by maids in the palace—everything is favourable.⁴ COMMENTARY This implies that ultimately we shall be entirely free from blame.

9 FOR THE TOP PLACE The ripe fruit remains uneaten.⁵ The Superior Man will acquire a carriage, whereas the mean man will lose his own house.⁶ COMMENTARY The carriage symbolizes the support of the people. The mean wretch who loses his house is ultimately found useless for anything.

NOTES (1) Peeling off in the sense of getting rid of hindrances (or hinderers) one after another. The first four lines of this hexagram symbolize a process of ridding ourselves progressively of all those upon whom we are accustomed to rely, for the powers of darkness are in the ascendant and no one can be trusted. However, in the long run, virtue triumphs, as indicated by line five, and ultimately we are all the more esteemed for our steadfastness, as can be seen from line 6. (2) The upper and lower trigrams, mountain and earth, symbolize the Superior Man and the people in his care. (3) Because he finds them unworthy. What is said in the various lines about the foot, edge and mattress of the bed means that he is obliged to continue the peeling off process until he reaches those very close to himself; there is no one left whom he can trust to help him in his work of righteousness. (4) This line seems somewhat to contradict the omen provided by this unlucky hexagram. In such cases, what is said in the moving line must be regarded as specially apt for our particular circumstances; i.e. in spite of the wretched conditions prevailing, those who receive this moving line can pursue their goals without fear of failure. (5) Few care to accept advice or help, although the Superior Man will gladly give it them. (6) This line presages great good fortune for the truly virtuous; for, in the end, their virtue is widely recognized and men rally to their support. On the other hand, those who hitherto have managed to obtain good fortune through dishonest methods pursued at a time when virtue was under an eclipse will lose everything they have.