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(kǎn) The Abyss

Danger repeated [the abyss]. But if you have sincerity in your heart, success. If you act, you will find rewards.

- **Six in the first place:** Danger repeated. You enter into a dangerous water pit. Misfortune.
- **Nine in the second place:** The pit is deep and dangerous. Seek only small gains.
- **Six in the third place:** The arrival of the repeated danger (multiple pit-traps). Dangers in leaving and in entering the pit trap. Don't!
- **Six in the fourth place:** (this line has to do with the bronze containers used in sacrificial rituals, replacing them with earthenware pots, and with either a wine ladle or angelica coming from a window. The one clear statement is:) In the end, no danger [or blame].

- **Nine in the fifth place:** The pit trap is not full. The hill [or sandbar] is not flat. No danger.
- **Six at the top:** Bound with ropes, placed within prison walls. For three years, not getting out. Misfortune.

Image

Water piled upon water: the image of danger. You should constantly act with moral strength, practicing both teaching and service.

Here the natural image is of abyss piled on abyss, or multiple man-made pit-traps. The danger is that one will fall into one of the many pits. So the advice is primarily cautionary: this is really a very dangerous situation, where misfortune is more probable than success. Nevertheless the hexagram as a whole says good fortune results from sincerity. For truly misfortunate situations, no actions are recommended: presumably the best one can do is to endure. Where there is only danger, however, as in line two, small gains may be possible; presumably large undertakings are not. One may be imprisoned for quite a long time, and be so constrained by conditions and events that the prisoner feels tethered with ropes and surrounded by prison walls of thistles and thorns. However, if it is time for a sacrificial offering and you do not have the usual means for doing them, you may use very humble means, which would be unthinkable in better times.

Remember that change never ends; and that the worst misfortunes end too. This may be a very bitter time, when you have little or no freedom. However, even times as bad as this have their uses. You should still find ways to act with kindness and to practice

teaching and service on a very small scale at such times. Remember that the great King Wen was imprisoned for years before his son founded his long-lasting kingdom. Use this time, as he did, to write or to put your thoughts in order, and you will continue to grow even within this temporary captivity.

Shaughnessy, 70–71, 295–296.

Lynn, 317–323.

Wilhelm/Baynes, 114–118.