

HEXAGRAM 52

KÊN DESISTING, STILLING¹



Component trigrams:

Below: KÊN, a mountain, hard, obstinate, perverse.

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TEXT Keeping the back so still as to seem virtually bodiless, or walking in the courtyard without noticing the people there involves no error!²

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT Desisting means coming to a stop. When it is time to stop, then stop; when the time comes for action, then act! By choosing activity and stillness, each at the proper time, a man achieves glorious progress. The stillness imaged by this hexagram means stillness in its proper place. The upper and lower trigrams, being mutually opposed, do not go well together; hence the wording of the Text.

SYMBOL This hexagram symbolizes two mountains conjoined.³ The Superior Man takes thought in order to avoid having to move from his position.

The Lines

6 FOR THE BOTTOM PLACE Stilling the toes⁴—no error. Unwavering persistence in a righteous course brings advantage. **COMMENTARY** This passage is implied by the position of this line, which is not out of order.

6 FOR THE SECOND PLACE Stilling the calves.⁵ His heart is sad because he is unable to save his followers. **COMMENTARY** He cannot save them because he failed to retire and wait.

9 FOR THE THIRD PLACE Stilling the loins and stiffening the spine

6 FOR THE THIRD PLACE Thunderous impetuosity—to emulate it at this time will not give rise to harm.⁶ **COMMENTARY** Thunderous impetuosity is indicated by the unsuitable position of this line.

9 FOR THE FOURTH PLACE After the thunderstorm, the paths are muddy. **COMMENTARY** This implies muddled thinking.

6 FOR THE FIFTH PLACE Thunder comes and goes alternately—trouble is at hand! Careful thought will avert loss, but there are affairs needing attention. **COMMENTARY** The first sentence implies that danger threatens our activities. That affairs need our attention is indicated by this central line (of the upper trigram). There will be no important losses.

6 FOR THE TOP PLACE Thunder brings disorder and people stare about them in terror. Advancing at this time brings misfortune. The thunder affects not ourselves but our neighbours—no error.⁷ A marriage causes gossip. **COMMENTARY** That thunder brings disorder is indicated by the failure of the middle line (of the upper trigram) to win (supremacy over this top line). Although misfortune arises, we are not to blame. Fear of our neighbours makes us cautious.

NOTES (1) This hexagram, like the trigrams of which it is composed, symbolizes not just thunder, but the powerful natural forces which lead to the growth and fruition of everything. Such forces, though terrifying in their manifestations, are beneficial in their results—except when their activity is untimely. (2) This suggests that the holder of sacrificial vessel is not easily alarmed, or else that he is very wise and able to distinguish between the apparently dangerous and the really dangerous. (3) Fear is often a good mentor; by causing us to change our ways, it leads to happiness. (4) The ancient Chinese took these matters seriously. In modern parlance, we should say that someone appears who is capable of looking after and protecting those principles and objects which excite our deepest reverence. (5) The Chinese additional commentaries in my possession explain how 'the nine hills' is derived from the form of the hexagram, but they do not explain the symbolical significance of this phrase. (6) The Superior Man usually acts calmly and carefully, but there are times when impetuosity serves a good purpose or, at the very least, does no particular harm. (7) We are not to blame for the trouble afflicting them; but, as the commentary on this line indicates, they may think we are to blame and plan reprisals.