

HEXAGRAM 29

K'AN THE ABYSS



Component trigrams:

Below: K'AN, water, a pit.

Above: K'AN, water, a pit.

TEXT Abyss upon abyss—grave danger! All will be well if confidence is maintained and a sharp hold kept upon the mind; activities so conducted will win esteem.

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT Abyss upon abyss; this involves grave danger; but, like water flowing without ever spilling over, he traverses

the abysses without ever losing confidence (in his ability to succeed). That his keeping a sharp hold on his mind will enable him to win through is indicated by the firm line in the middle (of the lower trigram). That his activities will win esteem implies that his pursuit of a goal (or destination) will bring tangible results. None can escape from dangers sent from heaven, but earthly dangers are (nothing worse than) mountains, rivers, hills and precipices.¹ Kings and princes use dangerous devices to protect their realms.² The timely application of this hexagram is of vast importance.

SYMBOL This hexagram symbolizes water flowing on and on and abyss upon abyss.³ The Superior Man acts in accordance with the immutable virtues and spends much of his time instructing others in the conduct of affairs.

The Lines

6 FOR THE BOTTOM PLACE Abyss upon abyss! In one of them, he tumbles into a cranny—misfortune! **COMMENTARY** Namely the misfortune of getting lost upon the way.

9 FOR THE SECOND PLACE Danger lurks within the abyss; only in small matters can he obtain what he desires. **COMMENTARY** Though he obtain these trifles, he remains within the abyss.⁴

6 FOR THE THIRD PLACE Abyss upon abyss rears up and the danger is acute. He falls into a cranny and there is nothing he can do to help himself. **COMMENTARY** This presages our ultimate failure to accomplish anything at all.

6 FOR THE FOURTH PLACE A flagon of wine and a bamboo food-basket—both. These objects were handed to him through a hole (in the rock). To the very end he remains free from blame.⁵ **COMMENTARY** This passage is suggested by the nature of the line, which forms a border between yielding and firm.

9 FOR THE FIFTH PLACE The abyss is not filled to the brim; (the flowing water) maintains its level—no error! **COMMENTARY** This is because the line, being central (to the upper trigram), indicates (a level) that is not too high.⁶

6 FOR THE TOP PLACE Bound with black ropes and imprisoned amidst thorns, for three years he fails to obtain (what he seeks).⁷

COMMENTARY The line indicates that we lose our way and suffer misfortune for three years.

NOTES (1) I.e. they are dangers which can be surmounted with confidence and skill. (2) These are another form of earthly danger which it is possible to surmount. (3) The trigram K'an is usually inauspicious; here it occurs in duplicate as the upper and the lower trigram; thus, the implication is that we are beset by grave dangers from which, if we can escape them at all, the utmost skill and confidence will be required to extricate ourselves. (4) Whatever small successes we may win will not have any effect in lessening the danger that threatens. (5) The terrible trouble in which we find ourselves occurs through no fault of ours; others are able to help us to some extent—but it looks as though their help may serve only to prolong our agony. (6) The danger threatening whoever receives a moving line for the fifth place is relatively less serious than for many of the others whose enquiries are answered by this unfortunate hexagram. (7) This situation is far from cheerful, but not as hopeless as the situation of those who receive moving lines in the second and third places.