

48



JǐNG

THE WELL

The well.

If the city is changed but the well is not,
there will be neither loss nor gain.

Going to draw from the well,
you will not get water from it.

When the bucket is almost up,
it will catch on the well's broken wall.

Inauspicious.

It is useless to move or improve the city if you do not also open a new well or repair the old one. The well is the source of the city's life and must be pure, abundant, and in good repair. The well represents the ruler, who is also seen as the source of the city's life. If he is no longer effective, he must either be reformed or replaced.¹

Lines

first line/6 — — The well is muddy. No one drinks.
There is no game at an old well.

The well is abandoned when it no longer gives good water. There is nothing to be gotten there. A ruler is abandoned when he no longer benefits his people. This bottom line of the hexagram symbolizes the muddy bottom of the well. The passive line (— —) suggests emptiness and passivity.

line two/9 ——— Shooting down a well at minnows.
The water jar is holed and leaks.

Misuse or underuse of one's capacities leads to their destruction. If the well is not used for its proper purpose, it will be made useless. Line two is the place of the subject. Under the present regime, his talents are being wasted. He must aim higher—perhaps at becoming a ruler himself.

line three/9 ——— The well is clear, but no one drinks.
This makes me sick at heart.
The well could be drawn from.
With a brilliant king,
all would share the blessings.

The king does not make proper use of his subject's talents. Therefore a new king—perhaps the subject himself—should take his place.

line four/6 — — The well is relined.
No harm.

It is all right to repair the well rather than dig a new one, to reform the ruler rather than replace him. Line four often presents the solution to a problem encountered in line three. In this case, the solution is comparatively passive (— —): Reform rather than revolution. Line four is also the place of the officer.

line five/9 ——— The well is pure.
People drink from its cool spring.

Line five is the place of the ruler, who is seen as a source of life and refreshment to his people.

top line/6 — — The well's cover is removed.
People have faith in it.
Supreme good fortune.

A new well is opened, one in which people can have faith. A new ruler appears, to whom people give their allegiance. This top line is above the line of the ruler (line five). It shows a new ruler who sets himself above the old one. This presages the next hexagram GÉ (49) REVOLUTION.

STRUCTURE ䷜ 坎 Kǎn Pit (adversity)
 ䷶ 巽 Xùn Kneel in Submission

Submission to adversity. A subject kneels to a ruler who is a source of adversity.

SEQUENCE The protagonist of the previous hexagram KÙN (47) BURDENED was weighed down by his responsibilities as the officer of an inferior ruler. The present hexagram emphasizes the ruler's inability to succor his people and indicates that it is time to reform or replace him.

Note

1. "city" (opening text) — The word 邑 *yí* refers to a feudal noble's fief and to the settlement at its heart. It was also the word used in Shang and early Zhou times to refer to the royal capital.