

HEXAGRAM 4

MÊNG IMMATURITY, UNCULTIVATED
GROWTH¹

Component trigrams:

Below: K'AN, water, a pit.

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

TEXT Immaturity. Good fortune! I am not one to seek out uncultivated youths, but if such a youth seeks me out, I shall at first read and explain to him the omens. Yet should he ask me many times, just because of his importunity, I shall not explain anything more. (The omen indicates) a need for proper direction.

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT Uncultivated growth! At the foot of the mountain lies a dangerous abyss.² To abide where danger lurks is youthful folly. Yet such rashness may bring good fortune—fortune to be utilized when the moment comes. The passage about not seeking out uncultivated youth and so on means that, should such a youth seek me out, at first I shall be inclined to respond by reading and explaining the omens to him, as the firm line in the middle (of the lower trigram) indicates. But, should he importune me several times, his very importunity would make me cease from further explanation, as this would indicate youthful boorishness. It is our sacred duty to correct the follies of youth through education.

SYMBOL This hexagram symbolizes a watery hole at the foot of a mountain³ amidst uncultivated growth. The Superior Man by determined good conduct nourishes his virtue.⁴

The Lines

6 FOR THE BOTTOM PLACE To enlighten immature youth, it is advisable to apply discipline; even fetters may be required, but to use

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them overmuch is harmful. COMMENTARY Though it is advisable to apply discipline, this must be done in accordance with just rules.

9 FOR THE SECOND PLACE Being gentle with the immature brings good fortune. Taking a wife brings good fortune. Sons will be capable of taking over the household affairs when the strong (young) and the weak (old) are in mutual harmony.

6 FOR THE THIRD PLACE Do not choose a wife who, on seeing a wealthy man, cannot contain herself. Nothing brings advantage.⁵ COMMENTARY Do not take to wife one whose behaviour is disorderly.

6 FOR THE FOURTH PLACE Obstinacy and immaturity cause harm.⁶ COMMENTARY They harm us by leading us astray from the right course.

6 FOR THE FIFTH PLACE Youthful innocence brings good fortune.⁷ COMMENTARY This is because such conduct coincides with what is soft and gentle.

9 FOR THE TOP PLACE In dealing firmly with youthful immaturity, there is nothing to be gained from doing what is wrong.⁸ Advantage lies in preventing wrong. COMMENTARY Preventing wrong has the advantage of bringing senior and junior into accord.⁹

NOTES (1) This hexagram suggests stubbornness (the upper trigram) issuing from the softness of the womb (the lower trigram). While it sometimes happens that youthful rashness succeeds where sober counsels fail, it is nevertheless the duty of the mature man to cultivate the minds of the young and to respond, within reason, to their requests for guidance. As an omen, this hexagram may be taken to imply a case in which a certain amount of rashness may lead to success, but in which older people are not absolved from the duty of guiding the young. There is also a suggestion that the Book of Change itself, though fully responsive to those who make the right approach, will not brook importunity in the form of trivial questions or of seeking to reverse its judgements by further questioning. Whether the omen may be taken to mean that we should go ahead with some rash scheme or that it is time for us to restrain someone's youthful rashness will depend upon the nature of the enquiry, the people concerned in it and the particular moving lines involved in the response. (2) This is deduced from the position of the two trigrams. (3) A reference to the component trigrams. (4) The second sentence is deduced from the first; both are suggested by the component trigrams. (5) This line, besides furnishing a specific warning to those with marriage in view, means generally that this time is unpropitious from the point of view of the enquirer, whatever his question may concern. (6) This line may also be taken as a warning against a too idealistic or visionary attitude.

(7) Here the Chinese text suggests that we are dealing not with youthful folly but with the innocent misdemeanours of quite small children. (8) In other words, we must be very careful to avoid putting ourselves in the wrong by being unjust or too severe in correcting the faults of our juniors. (9) Improperly applied discipline may lead the young to hate those whom they are expected to love. Few young people gladly kiss the rod before punishment.