

HEXAGRAM 20

KUAN LOOKING DOWN¹



Component trigrams:

Below: K'UN, earth, female, passive, etc.

Above: SUN, wind, wood, bland, mild.

TEXT Looking down. The ablution has been performed, but not the sacrifice.² Sincerity inspires respect.

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT Looking down in its most important sense means that looking down which takes place from on high.

Willing acceptance and mildness are conjoined.³ (The fifth line) is correctly centred for looking down upon the world. What is said in the foregoing text refers to those who look down upon their subjects⁴ and transform them. They contemplate the sacred activities of heaven and note how the seasons unfold, each in its proper time. It is because the holy sage makes these matters the subject of his teaching that all the world accepts his dominion.

SYMBOL This hexagram symbolizes wind blowing across the earth.³ The ancient rulers visited the different regions to keep watch over their people and carefully instruct them.

The Lines

6 FOR THE BOTTOM PLACE Looking at things in a childish way is not blameworthy in ordinary people, but in the Superior Man it is a misfortune.⁵ **COMMENTARY** For such conduct is suited to people of inferior worth.

6 FOR THE SECOND PLACE Watching through door-cracks is of advantage to women. **COMMENTARY** Nevertheless it is also shameful.⁶

6 FOR THE THIRD PLACE By contemplating our own lives, (we learn to) advance or retreat (as required by circumstances). **COMMENTARY** This is the way to keep to the right path.

6 FOR THE FOURTH PLACE Contemplating the conditions of a realm guides us as to whether we should become the ruler's guests.⁷ **COMMENTARY** Those engaged in this way enjoy universal esteem.

9 FOR THE FIFTH PLACE The Superior Man does no wrong in keeping a watch upon our lives.⁸ **COMMENTARY** In this passage, 'our lives' means the lives of the people.

9 FOR THE TOP PLACE Nor will it be an error for the Superior Man to contemplate his own life. **COMMENTARY** He contemplates his own life when troubled as to what course to take.

NOTES (1) This word often means 'contemplation' and I have so translated it when the context so requires. (2) This is generally understood to mean that the first step has

been taken or that one has bound oneself to follow a certain course (as by entering the government service, for example), but that the main duties are yet to be performed. (3) A reference to the component trigrams. (4) Kuan never means look down in the sense of 'despise', but always in the sense of, 'heed', 'watch over' and so forth. The name of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was later translated into Chinese as Kuan Shih-yin—She Who Looks Down upon the Cries (i.e. Sufferings) of the World. (5) It might be supposed that the Superior Man is incapable of such conduct; hence this passage must refer to one who is trying to be or who thinks himself a Superior Man. (6) If the enquirer or the one for whom the enquiry is being made is a woman, she will gain by keeping a secret watch, but it cannot be done honourably in this case. (7) In ancient China, many scholars, such as Confucius himself, wandered from kingdom to kingdom and principedom to principedom seeking a ruler wise and virtuous enough to profit by their teachings. It was by observing the splendours or miseries of each realm that they were able to form preliminary judgements and thus decide whether the ruler might be worth approaching or not. The implication is that we must not accept something as good without waiting to discover whether the alleged good qualities are genuine. (8) It is not wrong for us to be curious about the affairs of others if our motive is to be of more help to them.