

HEXAGRAM 12

P'I STAGNATION, OBSTRUCTION



Component trigrams:

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

Above: CH' IEN, heaven, male, active, etc.

TEXT Stagnation (obstruction) caused by evil-doers. Although the omen portends ill for the Superior Man, he must not slacken his righteous persistence. The great and the good decline; the mean approach.

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT This passage indicates that the celestial and terrestrial forces are without intercourse and that everything is out of communion with everything else.¹ High and low do not mingle and the state boundaries within the empire have been obliterated. Yin, the dark principle lies within; Yang, the light principle, lies without—weakness² within, strength without. Mean men are at the centre of things, superior men at the fringes. The way of the mean waxes, that of the Superior Man wanes.

SYMBOL This hexagram symbolizes heaven and earth cut off from each other.³ To conserve his stock of virtue, the Superior Man withdraws into himself and thus escapes from the evil influences around him. He declines all temptations of honour and riches.

The Lines

6 FOR THE BOTTOM PLACE When grass is uprooted, what is attached to it is pulled up as well.⁴ Righteous persistence brings good fortune and success.⁵ **COMMENTARY** The omen is favourable owing to continued loyalty to the ruler.⁶

6 FOR THE SECOND PLACE Because they (know how to) please the authorities, fortune now favours the mean, but the Superior Man

prefers to contend with (the causes) of stagnation (in the realm).⁷
COMMENTARY He does so by not entangling himself with the masses.

6 FOR THE THIRD PLACE He conceals his shame. **COMMENTARY** This is indicated by the unsuitable position of the line.

9 FOR THE FOURTH PLACE Whatever is done in response to a command from on high cannot be a wrong.⁸ His companions are also made illustrious and blessed.⁹ **COMMENTARY** His blamelessness is due to the fact that those carrying out commands are obeying the ruler's will.

9 FOR THE FIFTH PLACE Stagnation (obstruction) is now coming to an end and fortune favours the Superior Man, but he must not forget the situation is so dangerous that collapse may yet occur. Accordingly, he must strengthen himself as mulberry trees are strengthened by tight bindings. **COMMENTARY** That fortune now favours the Superior Man is indicated by the suitable position of this line.¹⁰

9 FOR THE TOP PLACE Stagnation (obstruction) has now been overcome and is followed by great joy. **COMMENTARY** In the end it MUST be overcome. How could it endure forever?¹¹

NOTES (1) When heaven and earth cease to co-operate, no growth is possible and stagnation results. (2) The trigram K'un, when in intercourse with heaven, has the auspicious meaning of glad acceptance; but, when separated from heaven, it represents weakness and darkness, etc. (3) To understand why the trigrams for heaven and earth arranged in what seems to be their natural positions have this un auspicious significance, see notes one and two on the preceding hexagram, T'ai. (4) See note three on the preceding trigram, T'ai. (5) Although this hexagram is ominous, the first line is auspicious. This sort of contradiction is common with bottom and top lines, which are often held to precede or follow after the main situation. (6) The ruler is now surrounded by evil men or men of mean attainments, but the Superior Man continues to help him. (7) He cares for the welfare of others more than for being in favour. (8) Yet, according to Confucius, if a ruler is wholly evil, he may be regarded as a bandit and removed. Short of that, however, obedience to authority had to be unquestioning. (9) Because they too were obedient. (10) A firm line with other firm lines to either side. (11) The process of change is continuous. This is the last line, which is held to have emerged from the evil symbolized by the hexagram as a whole.