

HEXAGRAM 24

FU RETURN



Component trigrams:

Below: CHÊN, thunder, movement, to sprout or quicken.

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

TEXT Return. Success! All going forth and coming in is free from harm. Friends arrive and no error is involved. They return whence they came, spending seven days in all upon their coming and returning. It is favourable to have in view some goal (or destination).

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT This hexagram presages success because the firm returns (to the bottom of the hexagram from which it was absent in the previous hexagrams). Movement and willingness to move¹ are conjoined; this explains why going forth and coming in entail no harm. The next three sentences imply that this activity is in accord with the movements of heaven. It is favourable to have in view some goal (or destination) because strength is on the increase. It is in the return cycles that the very heart of the workings of heaven and earth becomes apparent.²

SYMBOL This hexagram symbolizes thunder in the bowels of the earth.³ The ancient rulers closed the passes during the solstices⁴ and the merchants were unable to travel. Even the rulers abstained from touring their territories at those times.

The Lines

9 FOR THE BOTTOM PLACE Returning from nearby—nothing much to regret and sublime good fortune! **COMMENTARY** Turning back before having gone too far is a means of self-discipline.

6 FOR THE SECOND PLACE A return blessed by heaven—good

fortune! **COMMENTARY** This good fortune results from our treating others with loving-kindness.

6 FOR THE THIRD PLACE Frequent returns—trouble, but no error! **COMMENTARY** This means that we are in no way to blame for the trouble.

6 FOR THE FOURTH PLACE Setting forth in company, but returning alone.⁵ **COMMENTARY** This solitary return is necessary if the path of righteousness is to be followed.

6 FOR THE FIFTH PLACE Returning for some high purpose—no regret! **COMMENTARY** This middle line (of the upper trigram) implies critical self-examination.

6 FOR THE TOP PLACE A confused return—misfortune! Disasters and injury threaten. Armies are set marching, but ultimately a great defeat takes place. Disaster is about to overtake the ruler and for at least ten years there can be no hope of putting things to right. **COMMENTARY** The misfortune described here is the result of deviation from the path of the Superior Man.⁶

NOTES (1) The trigram K'un, earth, often symbolizes willingness, glad acceptance and so forth. (2) For it is only when the whole series is completed that we can understand the reasons for many things (death, winter and so on) which, at the time, seemed unproductive, negative or positively evil. (3) The component trigrams in this position suggest thunder coming from under the earth; but the trigram or thunder also means to sprout or quicken; it is this concept of a quickening within the earth that makes this hexagram generally favourable. (4) The solstices were times for solemn sacrifice; it has always been the practice in China for people to return to their homes for the celebration of the great yearly festivals. Return in this sense is highly auspicious. (5) This suggests that our companions will try (or are trying) to lead us astray and that we must let them go forward alone. (6) The omen presages very serious trouble affecting many people besides ourselves as a result of deviation from the path of virtue.