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䷗ 噬嗑

SHÍ HÈ

BITING THROUGH

Biting through.

Biting through is blessed.

It is favorable to apply punishments.

By harsh and determined action, one bites through to a shining prize. The line texts speak of biting into a piece of dried game and finding a shining bronze arrowhead buried inside, broken off there after the animal was shot. The arrowhead symbolizes brilliant achievement. Punishments are favorable perhaps because they can bite through a criminal's hard exterior to the good that lies within.

Lines

first line/9 — He wears fetters that cover his feet.
This averts harm.

His fetters prevent him from rushing forward into trouble. The solid line (—) and the lower trigram Zhèn ䷲ Thunderbolt both imply a tendency to rush ahead, but in this first line it is judged too early for him to begin. The fetters referred to are made of wood.

line two/6 — — He bites into flesh so deeply
that it covers his nose.
No harm.

He uses more force than necessary to accomplish an easy task. This weak line (— —) and the weak line above it present no obstacle to the advance of the strong and active first line.

line three/6 — — He bites into dried meat
and hits poison.
A little trouble, but no harm.

Strong action encounters some minor difficulties. The poison was probably left by a poisoned arrow used to shoot the animal whose meat it is. Fortunately, there is not enough poison to do a human being any harm. Line three almost always contains an element of misfortune.¹

line four/9 — He bites into dried meat
and finds an arrowhead of bronze.
It is favorable to persevere against adversity.
Good fortune.

This is the hexagram's most auspicious line and the line whose meaning is closest to that of the hexagram as a whole. Line four is the entrance to the upper trigram Luó ䷛ Shining Light. Here he breaks through to a shining prize.^{1, 2}

line five/6 — — He bites into dried meat
and finds yellow bronze.
It is dangerous to continue.
No harm.

He achieves some success, but will crack his teeth on it if he tries to achieve more. Line five is the place of the ruler. In this hexagram, line four, the place of the officer, is more auspicious.^{1, 2}

top line/9 — He wears a cangue
that covers his ears.
Inauspicious.

He is punished for going too far. This top line often has to do with going too far and with conflict between a subject and his ruler. A cangue is a heavy wooden yoke, something like a portable version of the stocks, that was worn by convicted criminals. In this case, by covering the subject's ears, it has the bad effect of preventing him from hearing his ruler's commands.

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STRUCTURE $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{☲} \\ \text{☳} \end{smallmatrix}$ 離 Luó Shining Light (shining, within)
 $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{☳} \\ \text{☳} \end{smallmatrix}$ 震 Zhèn Thunderbolt (rush forward)

He rushes forward (lower trigram $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{☳} \\ \text{☳} \end{smallmatrix}$) and bites through to something shining (upper trigram $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{☲} \\ \text{☲} \end{smallmatrix}$). The solid lines at the top and bottom of the hexagram are like jaws and the solid fourth line is like something solid on which they bite.

SEQUENCE In the last hexagram GUĀN (20) WATCHING, the protagonist halted an advance short of trying to become a ruler. Here in BITING THROUGH, he advances again — but this time as a subject — and wins through to a shining prize.

Notes

1. “dried meat” (lines three, four, five) — The original texts of these lines speak of three different kinds of dried meat. It is no longer clear what was meant in each case. Qu (1956) suggests that the dried meat in line three is a small animal dried whole; that in line four it is meat dried on the bone, something like a dry ham; and that in line five it is dried meat with no bones in it.

2. “bronze” (lines four and five) — Bronze was both the hardest and the brightest metal known in China at the time of the *Changes*. It combined the symbolic values that we give to gold and to steel. Wealthy people held much of their portable wealth in the form of objects made of bronze.