

HEXAGRAM 18

KU DECAY



Component trigrams:

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

Above: KÊN, a mountain, hard, obstinate, perverse.

TEXT Decay augurs sublime success and the advantage of crossing the great river (or sea).¹ What has happened once will surely happen again (literally, 'three days before the commencement; three days after the commencement').²

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT Here, the firm trigram is above the yielding, the gentleness is conjoined with the immovable.³ This implies sublime success⁴ and the right ordering of the world. The passage about crossing the great river suggests that there are good reasons for going forward. The rest of the text means that heaven's activities are such that every end is followed by a new beginning.

SYMBOL This hexagram symbolizes wind blowing at the foot of a mountain.⁵ The Superior Man, by stimulating people's hearts, nourishes their virtue.

The Lines

6 FOR THE BOTTOM PLACE Children exist to rectify the mistakes

wrought by their fathers; hence the departed are made free from blame—trouble ending in good fortune! **COMMENTARY** This implies assuming responsibility for their mistakes.

9 FOR THE SECOND PLACE Assuming responsibility for the mistakes of our mothers cannot be too serious. **COMMENTARY** At best a middle course is advisable.

9 FOR THE THIRD PLACE Making ourselves responsible for the mistakes of our fathers may involve some regret but not much blame. **COMMENTARY** This means that, in the end, we shall be free from blame.

6 FOR THE FOURTH PLACE Tolerating the mistakes of our fathers would occasion us regret in the course of time. **COMMENTARY** For, in that case, we should fail to rectify them.

6 FOR THE FIFTH PLACE Assuming responsibility for the mistakes of our fathers will win us praise. **COMMENTARY** Because to take them upon ourselves is a virtue.

9 FOR THE TOP PLACE He does not serve the King or the nobles—what he does is even loftier than that.⁶ **COMMENTARY** This indicates that our own will can be our law.⁷

NOTES (1) I.e. of going on a journey or of going forward with one's plans. (2) It would have been hard to make sense of these words, were it not that the Confucian Commentary on the Text clearly explains them; hence the liberty I have taken with the Text. (3) A reference to the component trigrams. (4) Sublime success in that once decay is removed, a new strength is born. (5) Wind blowing at the base of a mountain is suggested by the component trigrams; in the analogy, the first is the activity of the Superior Man, the second is the normally inert man of the people. (6) In other words, if we directly serve the will of heaven; by doing so, we act as sages who may safely do whatever they feel is worth doing. (7) Provided we are acting from the loftiest motives.