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XIÈ

GETTING FREE

Getting free.

It is favorable to retreat.

Not going forward

but drawing back will bring good fortune.

One extricates oneself from difficulties by retreating from them, not by trying to meet them head-on.¹

Lines

first line/6 — — Going forward,
 it is auspicious to go early.
 No harm.

Although the hexagram as a whole counsels against advancing, in this first line there is still time to get through before the bar has fallen. In fact, going forward now will bring good fortune and will not cause one any harm.²

line two/9 ——— He catches three foxes on the hunt
 And gets an arrowhead of yellow bronze.
 Keeping on brings good fortune.

By attacking his problems directly, he gains distinction. The bronze arrowhead symbolizes wealth and rank. He finds it imbedded in the flesh of one of the foxes. See SHÍ HÈ (21) BITING THROUGH. The fact that line two is the place of the subject suggests that he takes action as someone's subordinate. It may be this that makes direct

action possible. Compare XÙN (57) KNEELING IN SUBMISSION, line four. In any case, the solid middle line of the trigram Kǎn ䷇ Pit often symbolizes safety in the midst of danger.

line three/6 — — The bearer who rides in a carriage
Draws attack.
Keeping on will lead to trouble.

Line three frequently describes the misfortunes that descend upon someone of low rank who dares to transgress the bounds of his station.

line four/9 ——— He gets a toe free.
Friends come and put their faith in him.

By extricating himself from his difficulties to only the slightest extent, he attracts others to him who can help him extricate himself completely. In line four, one breaks out into the outer trigram. "Friends" can also be read "a friend."

line five/6 — — The lord gets himself free.
Auspicious.
Gives the little people faith in him.

Someone who is strong enough to extricate himself from his difficulties inspires confidence. Line five is the place of the ruler.

top line/6 — — The duke shoots at a hawk on a high wall
And gets it.
Favorable to anything.

Even the greatest ambitions are not beyond his reach. The hawk may symbolize a rapacious ruler. The top line of a hexagram is often associated with conflict.

STRUCTURE ䷲ 震 Zhèn Thunderbolt (rush forward, a burst of motion)

䷇ 坎 Kǎn Pit (difficulties)

He bursts free (upper trigram ䷲) from his difficulties (lower trigram ䷇). The idea that this is accomplished by withdrawing is not evident from the hexagram's structure.

SEQUENCE Having stumbled against difficulties in the previous hexagram JIǎN (39) STUMBLING, he now extricates himself from them by withdrawal in this inverse hexagram.

Notes

1. “retreat” (opening text) — See JIǎN (39) STUMBLING, note 1.

2. “Going forward, it is auspicious to go early.” (first line) — In the transmitted text, this comes at the end of the opening text and the first line reads simply, “No harm.” See DÀ QIÁNG (34) BIG USES FORCE, note 2.