

The Language of I Ching

by

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Introduction

Imagine for a moment that you could see exactly where you stand in the convoluted path that is your life. Imagine as well that you could clearly see where the actions you take today—the words you speak, your decisions, your hesitancy or boldness—will lead you. If you had such a clear vision of the future, how would that affect your present? What would you do differently and—even more importantly—how would you feel about the present if you could see the future?

Those are the questions the I Ching asks of us, for even though it is the Oracle from which we seek answers, the Oracle also seeks *us*: our respect, our humble questions, our fears, our hubris. We seek it; it seeks us. That mutual need is at the core of all oracles, and in many ways it is the very definition of the oracle known as the I Ching.

It has been said, many times, and by those much more eloquent than I, that all an oracle can tell us is what we already know. The problem is that what we ‘already know’ can become lost to us, hidden in the maze of logic, locked up in instincts that have grown dim in our species, lost to us, unknown. We are told to ‘follow your heart,’ but we do not know where our heart wants us to go. We are admonished to ‘be true to your inner voice,’ but our ears can longer hear what that voice is saying. Why is this? Is this the price humankind pays for our so-called superiority over all other life, this inability to access awareness that we see so many of the alleged lower species tapping into: instinct, core knowledge, common sense?

Possibly, this is so. It may be our peculiar cross to bear, this quest to rediscover what so many other species seem to access without difficulty. Or, not: it may be that the keys to unlocking the mysteries of our own inner consciousness have been given to us, and in many forms, one, perhaps, to satisfy each of us.

It is my belief that the I Ching is such a key. Oh, a human being wrote it, although it may have been inspired by something distinctly non-human. And it was first set down a very, very long time ago. Over three thousand years have passed, it may well be, since someone, somewhere, first wrote the sixty-four pieces of poetry that are the essence of the I Ching. It means, “Book of Changes,” by the way, “I Ching.” And that is its main theme: that everything, everywhere, all the time, is in the process of changing.

It is the height of summer, which means that fall cannot be far away. It is the depth of winter, and spring’s first manifestation is already palpably there, right in front of you, should you take the time to notice it.

Let’s say that you walk outside on a cold sunny morning; a cardinal calls. It’s a male; he’s singing something that sounds like, “Wheat! Wheat! Winter wheat; winter wheat!” It’s a territorial song. Snow may hide the grass and the cold may have life seemingly locked down, helpless in its icy grasp, but that

cardinal knows differently. It's way past the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, and each day the sun sets a few precious minutes later. Winter is passing; spring is coming. Listen, and you will hear its stealthy tread in a cardinal's call.

And if change is inevitable, eternal and ever present, then why can it be so hard to see it, so impossible to accept? This might well be the I Ching's ultimate question for us: why do you fight against that which is, that which surely will be and that which clearly *must* be?

But of course it isn't the I Ching's questions to you that bring you here, it's your questions to the I Ching.

The book you hold in your hands is the culmination of my three decades of work with the oracle of the I Ching. During that time, I have cast literally thousands of readings, and I have been blessed with excellent guidance, and a wealth of good, sound, practical advice. For that is the essence of I Ching: logical, practical, useful. It is, I believe, the most pragmatic of oracles. The I Ching wants you to succeed . . . or, should the situation be truly dreadful, it wants you to at least *survive*. While writing this book the thing that struck me most forcibly was the degree to which the Oracle provides the kind of simple, no-nonsense recommendations we all claim that we want, yet we seem so rarely to follow.

Faced with a highly charged dilemma, with a situation about which we feel anxiety, fear and frustration, we all too often make decisions based solely on what we *want*, on our emotional response to the matter at hand. The I Ching, however, looks at these matters from a higher elevation. Its replies to our queries emphasize the morality of the possible choices, the ways in which your actions will affect others, or the degree to which you are acting in childish, selfish, self-destructive ways. And it will tell you all that, and more, and in no uncertain terms, either! This is the Oracle that speaks its mind, without holding back. If you want sugarcoated, feel-good advice, do not trouble the I Ching with your questions! Trust me, its answers will not make you happy. But if you truly want honest, direct guidance, then this is the oracle for you.

So, how does it work, this hardheaded oracle, full of attitude and determined to take no prisoners? The method by which one can consult the Oracle of the I Ching is described in detail in Chapter 3 of this book. It's astonishingly simple. But the real 'how' of it all, the way in which I Ching interacts with your query, that's a matter for souls wiser than I.

I will go this far in explaining the 'how' of it: the I Ching is predicated on the idea that nothing is random.

We, as a species, spend endless amounts of time and energy looking for patterns in things that appears to, in fact, be random. If you ponder that for a moment, you start to see an interesting possibility. If nothing is random, and we know that is true on some instinctive level, then generating something 'random' could open the path to communication with that which we also seek on an instinctual level: the Other. And that Other has been called by many names; you may insert the name with which you are most comfortable: the Oracle, the Universe, Collective Consciousness, Deity.

Whatever you choose to call it, I am convinced that it seeks you as you seek it. The Oracle wants very much to provide guidance, and the form of the Oracle specific to I Ching wants to give you practical, hardnosed advice. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that if you do not want to hear the truth about the situation that is puzzling you at the moment, then do not ask the I Ching for help. Remember, this is an Oracle that takes no prisoners. If you read through the interpretations I have provided for the sixty-four hexagrams before you begin casting readings (a process I strongly recommend), you will quickly see what I mean.

There are lines in hexagrams that tell you that you are being selfish. There are lines warning that you need to stop, and stop right now, or else you face dire consequences. There are lines warning that no matter what you do, you need to give it up, because you are at a dead end.

But there are also lines assuring you that you are on your correct path; that your future holds great joy, that friends will soon be found, and that if you can hold on now—in the face of great sadness, loss or indecision—you will soon find happiness. This is the blessing of the I Ching. Hope.

And my personal hope is that you—yes, you, sitting there, reading this—that you will find what I have found: not merely practical advice in the I Ching, but a caring, benevolent, even loving guide. Welcome to the Oracle of the I Ching. I wish you nothing but blessings on your path!