

## Scope

“The I Ching acts primarily as a guide to making decisions. It can reformulate your awareness of your situation, open up new connections and free your imagination. The idea is that through the consultation process we interact with the hidden forces creating our situation and discover how to respond most effectively. This creates ‘bright spirit’ or ‘intuitive clarity’ (*shen ming*).” [Ref. 1]

Consultation is done by question phrased in the active voice, simple and direct.

Only ask questions to which you want to know the answer, good or bad.

Some questions should remain unasked.

Be careful what you ask.

## Reference

1. *How to Use the I Ching: A Guide to Working with the Oracle of Change* by Stephen Karcher (HarperElement, 2009).
2. *The Complete I Ching*, the definitive translation by Taoist Master Alfred Huang (Inner Traditions, 1998).

## Discussion

This guide is derived from Stephen Karcher’s book listed in reference 1. I have felt uneasy about translations of Chinese culture done by Westerners because, no matter how good, there are inevitable gaps in understanding. This is particularly true of an ancient book such as the I Ching that hinges on the interpretation of pictographs.

On discovering Alfred Huang’s book listed in reference 2, my unease dissipated. Master Huang is a Chinese scholar from before Mao’s Cultural Revolution. Huang says: “Over the past sixteen years, I have read numerous English translations of the I Ching. As a Chinese scholar, I dare to say that most English translations mention the concept of change, but they neglect its essence. The true spirit and the most authentic essence of the I Ching lies in the philosophical concept of the merging of Heaven and human life into an organic whole, which is the origin of Chinese cosmology.”

“At first, the I Ching was purely a handbook for divination. In ancient times, the Chinese related their fate directly to the spiritual power of Heaven and Earth. Before approaching any important event, they were bound to consult the will of Heaven and Earth through divination. The purpose of divination was to resolve doubt.”

“The I Ching we use today is ... not a book used merely for telling fortunes. It gives advice as to what one should do and what one should not do. All through the ages, the Chinese have never consulted the I Ching lightly. People have always been instructed to adopt a correct attitude in divination. The purpose of divination is to resolve doubt and confusion. When one already knows what one should do according to common sense and moral principles, then one should not consult the I Ching.

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Divine only for important questions and events, never for mean purposes or with selfish motivations.”

“In every divination, ask only one question. The question should be simple and clear. Avoid vague and optional questions. It is better for a beginner not to ask for a prediction; the best inquiry is for advice.”

So says Master Huang. To my mind, the I Ching is a process for elucidating doubts in one’s mind. It provides new ways of looking at one’s situation. It acts like the therapist who asks open ended questions such as: “How do you feel about this?” Even Confucius says that one should think thrice before acting on recommendations of the I Ching. Ultimately, each individual is responsible for any action taken.

I think that *The Complete I Ching* by Master Alfred Huang is the better book to use and that the term “definitive” in the title means what it says. As far as we Occidentals are concerned, there is no better book for us to use; it is the best available.

### Guide

“One can cultivate intuition to gain insight from the divination. One of the best ways to cultivate intuition is through meditation; however, the Chinese concept of meditation is opposite of the Western approach. In the West we think of meditation as deep thought about something, but when I was learning meditation, my masters always instructed me to think about nothing. Through many, many years of practicing meditation, I came to appreciate that to empty my mind is to align it with the will of the Divine. This concept, in the expression of Lao Tze, is ‘doing nothing’; to the Taoist, doing nothing is doing everything. In my experience, by emptying my mind and aligning it with the Divine, insight comes as spontaneously as floating clouds or running water. Sometimes this meditative mood lasts for several days. As time passes, insight will emerge - perhaps in mundane situations, when you are brushing your teeth or taking a bath.” [Ref. 2]

1. Formulate a clear question.
  - a) Write it down
2. Generate the answering hexagram one line at a time, from the bottom upwards, using the colored marbles method. Color assigned to each line-type is arbitrary with no significance other than to distinguish one type of line from another.
  - a) Example of marble color assignment:
    - 1 black marble = changing yin = ---x--- (6)
    - 3 white marbles = changing yang = ---o--- (9)
    - 5 red marbles = stable yang = ----- (7)
    - 7 green marbles = stable yin = --- --- (8)
  - b) Put the sixteen marbles of uniform size into an opaque bag.
    - Randomly mix the marbles by shaking the bag while thinking about the

question.

- With the question in mind and without looking into the bag, reach in, select one marble, and withdraw it from the bag.
  - Draw the line of the hexagram defined by the color of this marble.
  - Return the marble to the bag and repeat this procedure until the hexagram is complete.
- c) Use the upper and lower trigrams of the just generated hexagram to locate the relevant number of the Primary Figure in the hexagram matrix.
- The six-line diagram represents the Primary Figure as a whole and lets you access it, using the number from the matrix to reference the text of the 64 shapes of change.

### 3. Primary Figure

- a) **NAME** shows the overall theme or action of your answer, with the keywords beneath it picking out key facets. The definitions which follow give you the many different circles of meaning for the Name. Read all these to feel the basic atmosphere of your answer.
- b) **IMAGE** tells you what kinds of action and attitude are helpful in this situation and gives you the general direction of the movement. The paragraph beneath is a commentary from traditional and modern sources.
- c) **OUTER AND INNER WORLDS** shows you what the interaction of the two trigrams which make up the Primary Figure means in this situation. This describes how your inner life connects with outer events.
- The lower trigram of the Primary Figure represents the Inner World.
  - The upper trigram represents Outer events.
- d) **HIDDEN POSSIBILITY** gives you the meaning of the Nuclear Figure. It shows a potential or warning hidden in the heart of the situation.
- The Nuclear Figure is constructed by extracting the inner and outer nuclear trigrams from lines 2,3,4 and 3,4,5 of the Primary Figure.
- e) **SEQUENCE** puts the action of the Primary Figure in sequence with the one that came before it. It shows what the situation was previous to your question and what you should understand and accept in order to use the energies of the present situation.
- f) **DEFINITION** gives a concise one-word explanation of the **NAME**.
- g) **SYMBOL** puts the symbols of the two three-line figures together to show what the *realizing person*, the ideal user of the oracle, would do in this situation.
- h) **TRANSFORMING LINES** (indicated as a 6 or a 9 at any one or more of the six places) show the precise points of Change, where and how things are happening. Look to them for an indication of how to move, the stages of an unfolding action, a warning of danger or assurance of success.
- i) The **RELATING FIGURE**, generated if you have a transforming line or lines,

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shows how you are related to the basic answer. It can show a feeling, a tactic, a warning, a memory, a goal, a future development, a perspective or a deep concern.

- Create the Relating Figure by redrawing the Primary Figure and changing any transforming lines into their opposite.
  - It is the 'sea' or ground feeling in which the Primary Figure swims.
- Thus, a changing yin line becomes a stable yang line and a changing yang line becomes a stable yin line.
- Read only the NAME and IMAGE of the Relating Figure.

j) You can generate any one of the secondary figures to help you understand the basic situation. These include the OPPOSING FIGURE the STEPS OF CHANGE, and the CHANGE PATTERN.

### 4. Secondary Figures

#### a) Opposing Figure

- If the Hidden Possibility gives you a sense of what may be hidden at the centre of your Primary Figure, the Opposing Diagram tells you what it is not. It gives you an image of the complete contrary, in order to help you focus more clearly on what the quality in question really is.
- Create the Opposing Figure by substituting a yang line for every yin line, and a yin line for every yang line.
  - Transforming lines are ignored.

#### b) Steps of Change

- Another way of using the diagrams is directly associated with the *transforming lines*. It is of particular help in a complex situation, where more than one line is transforming and a series of actions is shown.
- Each diagram consists of six lines. Each time *one* of these lines changes, it generates a particular Relating Figure. That means that each figure has a family of six other figures that are *related to it by the change of one single line*.
- When you have a reading with more than one transforming line, you can generate the Relating Figures associated with the change of each particular line. This gives you an idea of the *steps* or stages the change may pass through.

#### c) Change Pattern

- The Change Pattern is formed from the Primary Figure of a reading by creating a new diagram that has a *yin line in any place that change is occurring*, whether it is a transforming yin line or a transforming yang line, and a *yang line where the line in the basic Figure is stable*.
- The yin line in the change pattern indicates a *place* of change; the yang line shows that the motion or energy flows on unchanged.