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## Approaching the I Ching

This article provides basic information about the use of the I Ching, for those whose curiosity has been ignited by Glenn Martin's novel, *The Ten Thousand Things: A story of the lived experience of the I Ching*, G.P. Martin, 2010

The 64 hexagrams of the I Ching were considered by their ancient authors to be a fully adequate interpretation of every human situation at any given moment during an individual's life.

**Carl Jung** said of it, "The method of the I Ching does indeed take into account the hidden individual quality in things and men, and in one's own unconscious self as well."

**Hermann Hesse** said, "I have been inspired by the wisdom of China. The I Ching can transform life."

**Carol Anthony**, author of several books on the I Ching, says the Sage, or the Cosmic Teacher, speaks to us through the I Ching. The I Ching has the "ability to reflect the unconscious". She says "it spoke to something in her that was beyond words or reason, giving her a restorative type of nourishment".

## Background to the I Ching

The name "I Ching" is generally translated as the "book of changes". Its roots lie in oral traditions going back to a sage called **Fu Hsi**, who devised the eight primary trigrams (three horizontal lines on top of each other, each of which may be yin or yang) almost five thousand years ago. The first written commentary dates from around 1100BC. It is attributed to **King Wen**, who is said to have written it while he was in prison, and who later became the first monarch of the Zhou dynasty. King Wen arranged the 64 hexagrams (all the combinations of two trigrams) and composed the judgements on the hexagrams.



*Fu Hsi*

Later contributions were made by the **Duke of Zhou**, who was King Wen's son, and a significant body of commentary, called the Ten Wings, was said to have been written by **Confucius** (although the reality is now thought to be more complex than that).

Originally the I Ching was a handbook for divination, yet it is better understood as a source of wisdom and guidance. Change is an underlying concept in Chinese thought. The present is conceived of as the constellation of all the elements of a situation, and the movement of energy, at a particular point in time. Things are always becoming and disintegrating.

Wisdom lies in tuning into the possibilities of the present. Consulting the I Ching is not to submit to fate but to work actively with the dynamics of the moment. The images in the commentary enable us to discern the inner truth of ourselves and our situation, and they trigger a flow of transformative energy, or, expressing it another way, consulting the I Ching enables us to work with the creative spirits or the cosmic helpers.

The images and words articulate the way of Tao – the way of correctness and joy. To connect with the Way is to experience meaning, joy, freedom, compassion and creativity. The superior person, or the noble one, is the person who cultivates an attunement to the inner truth of people and situations.

The **Ta Chuan**, or the **Great Treatise** (part of the Ten Wings commentary), says:

With the help of the fundamental principles of the I Ching it is possible to arrive at a complete realization of man's innate capacities. This unfolding rests on the fact that man has innate capacities that resemble heaven and earth, that he is a microcosm. Now, since the laws of heaven and earth are reproduced in the I Ching, man is provided with the means of shaping his own nature, so that his inborn potentialities for good can be taken into account: wisdom and action, or intellect and will. If intellect and will are correctly centred, the emotional life takes on harmony.

## Consulting the I Ching

The book of changes is consulted in order to explore a question or issue that is of interest to you. You consider the issue and formulate your question. You allow all your thoughts and feelings in relation to the situation to be present. Then, using one of a variety of methods, you generate the six lines of a hexagram, and read what the commentary has to say about the hexagram.



The throwing of three coins six times in succession is a common method. The use of a bundle of yarrow sticks is the traditional method; this is a longer way of carrying out the task. Using the coins method, the coins are held in cupped hands and shaken, while you think on the question; then the coins are released onto a surface. Each time the coins are thrown, a horizontal line is drawn. The lines are stacked on top of each other; the first line is at the bottom and the sixth at the top.

There are many images associated with the hexagrams, from the natural world and from society. To get a feeling for the themes in the I Ching, see the list of the 64 hexagrams further down. The I Ching provides the reader with a rich playground of ideas and ideals on how to live both powerfully and ethically. As a tool it works at a conscious level and beyond our conscious mind, at an emotional and intuitive level. You may cultivate the quality of being responsive to this aspect of yourself. The I Ching requires only that you be open and sincere.

## The lines

There are two basic types of line: yin and yang, described below.

	Unbroken/solid line	Yang, Masculine	Strong/Action	Firm, unyielding, persisting, movement
	Broken/open line	Yin, Feminine	Supple/Structuring	Flexible, adaptable, yielding, stillness

### *The moving lines*

The idea of moving lines is that the situation you are in may be changing – there are forces of change at work. If a line is moving, a second hexagram is generated by transforming the line into its opposite, that is, an unbroken line becomes a broken line, and vice versa. Both these hexagrams are relevant to your situation. An example is given further down.

	Moving yang	changes to yin	
	Moving yin	changes to yang	

One side of the coins is given the value 2 (yin) and the other side is given the value 3 (yang). This means that the possible outcomes of throwing the coins each time are 6, 7, 8 and 9, as below.

	6	Yin, Feminine	Moving line
	7	Yang, Masculine	Unmoving line
	8	Yin, Feminine	Unmoving line
	9	Yang, Masculine	Moving line

The hexagram is made up of a lower trigram (the bottom three lines) and an upper trigram (the top three lines). A table which shows all the trigrams for the upper and lower places is generally used to find the appropriate hexagram. At this stage the fact that any lines are moving is ignored, i.e. 6 is read as yin and 9 is read as yang. Most versions of the I Ching in popular use place the hexagrams in the same order from 1 to 64.

## The 8 trigrams (bagua) or spirit helpers

The eight trigrams provide the foundation for the imagery of the I Ching. In each hexagram the two trigrams interact with each other. For example, hexagram 11 is Peace, where K'un (receptive) is above Ch'ien (force), while hexagram 12 is Stagnation, where Ch'ien is above K'un.

	Ch'ien	Creative, force, dragon, heaven	Spirit awes and wars in the heavens.
	Chien	Arousing, shake, thunder	Spirit manifests in quake and thunder.
	K'an	Gorge, pit, water	Spirit rewards those suffering in the pit.
	Ken	Keeping still, bound, mountain	Spirit's words bind us, accomplishing fate.
	K'un	Receptive, field, earth	Spirit is offered service at the altar.
	Sun	Gentle, penetrating, wind, wood	Spirit works in those who lay out the offerings.
	Li	Radiance, fire	Spirit reveals itself in the bright omens.
	Tui	Joyous, open, lake	Spirit speaks and spreads joy through wu, the joyous dancer.

## The 64 hexagrams (gua)

The 64 hexagrams are all the possible combinations of the upper and lower trigrams. For example, Hexagram Ch'ien is formed when the trigram Ch'ien is doubled, as below.

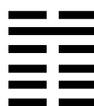


### Dealing with moving lines

If there are any moving lines, each moving line turns into its opposite (yin turns to yang and vice versa) and a new hexagram is obtained. For example, in the first hexagram below (Ts'ui, 45: Gathering together), the fourth line (counting from the bottom) is moving, so it becomes a yin line and the hexagram transforms into P'i, 8 (Joining, supporting, uniting).



**45 Ts'ui**  
Gathering together



**8 P'i**  
Joining, supporting, uniting

## Table for finding hexagrams

TRIGRAMS	Ch'ien	Chên	K'an	Kên	K'un	Sun	Li	Tui
UPPER →								
LOWER ↓								
<b>Ch'ien</b>	1	34	5	26	11	9	14	43
<b>Chên</b>	25	51	3	27	24	42	21	17
<b>K'an</b>	6	40	29	4	7	59	64	47
<b>Kên</b>	33	62	39	52	15	53	56	31
<b>K'un</b>	12	16	8	23	2	20	35	45
<b>Sun</b>	44	32	48	18	46	57	50	28
<b>Li</b>	13	55	63	22	36	37	30	49
<b>Tui</b>	10	54	60	41	19	61	38	58

## The 64 hexagrams

(as per the Richard Wilhelm translation)

1	Ch'ien	The Creative	24	Fu	Return (The Turning Point)
2	K'un	The Receptive	25	Wu Wang	Innocence (The Unexpected)
3	Chun	Difficulty at the Beginning	26	Ta Ch'u	The Taming Power of the Great
4	Mêng	Youthful Folly	27	I	The Corners of the Mouth (Providing Nourishment)
5	Hsu	Waiting (Nourishment)	28	Ta Kuo	Preponderance of the Great
6	Sung	Conflict	29	K'an	The Abysmal (Water)
7	Shih	The Army	30	Li	The Clinging, Fire
8	Pi	Holding Together [Union]	31	Hsien	Influence (Wooing)
9	Hsiao Ch'u	The Taming Power of the Small	32	Hêng	Duration
10	Lu	Treading [Conduct]	33	Tun	Retreat
11	T'ai	Peace	34	Ta Chuang	The Power of the Great
12	P'i	Standstill [Stagnation]	35	Chin	Progress
13	T'ung Jên	Fellowship with Men	36	Ming I	Darkening of the Light
14	Ta Yu	Possession in Great Measure	37	Chia Jên	The Family [The Clan]
15	Ch'ien	Modesty	38	K'uei	Opposition
16	Yu	Enthusiasm	39	Chien	Obstruction
17	Sui	Following	40	Hsieh	Deliverance
18	Ku	Work on What Has Been Spoiled [Decay]	41	Sun	Decrease
19	Lin	Approach	42	I	Increase
20	Kuan	Contemplation (View)	43	Kuai	Break-through (Resoluteness)
21	Shih Ho	Biting Through	44	Kou	Coming to Meet
22	Pi	Grace			
23	Po	Splitting Apart			

45	Ts'ui	Gathering Together [Massing]	54	Kuei Mei	The Marrying Maiden
46	Shêng	Pushing Upward	55	Fêng	Abundance [Fullness]
47	K'un	Oppression (Exhaustion)	56	Lu	The Wanderer
48	Ching	The Well	57	Sun	The Gentle (The Penetrating, Wind)
49	Ko	Revolution (Moulting)	58	Tui	The Joyous, Lake
50	Ting	The Caldron	59	Huan	Dispersion [Dissolution]
51	Chên	The Arousing (Shock, Thunder)	60	Chieh	Limitation
52	Kên	Keeping Still, Mountain	61	Chung Fu	Inner Truth
53	Chien	Development (Gradual Progress)	62	Hsiao Kuo	Preponderance of the Small
			63	Chi Chi	After Completion
			64	Wei Chi	Before Completion

## Books on the I Ching

There are many translations and interpretations of the I Ching. The following selection offers a range of styles and perspectives:

Will Adcock, 2001, *I Ching: A practical guide to interpretation and divination*, Southwater, London.

Carol Anthony, 1981, *The philosophy of the I Ching*, Anthony Publishing, Stow MA.

Carol Anthony, 1988, *A guide to the I Ching*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Anthony Publishing, Stow MA.

Carol Anthony and Hanna Moog, 2002, *I Ching: The oracle of the cosmic way*, Anthony Publishing, Stow MA.

Chan Chiu Ming, *Book of changes: An interpretation for the modern age*, 1997, Asiapac, Singapore.

Cheng Yi, 1988, *I Ching: The Tao of organization*, translated by Thomas Cleary, Shambala, Boston MA.

Sarah Dening, 1995, *The everyday I Ching: Ancient wisdom for success today*, Simon & Schuster, London.

Alfred Huang, 1998, *The complete I Ching*, Inner Traditions International, Rochester VT.

Stephen Karcher, 2003, *Total I Ching: Myths for change*, Time Warner, London.

Neil Powell, 1979, *The book of change: How to understand and use the I Ching*, Black Cat, London.

Mondo Selter, 2002, *The I Ching handbook: Decision-making with and without divination*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley CA.

Richard Wilhelm, 1975, *The I Ching or book of changes*, Richard Wilhelm translation (1950) rendered into English by C Baynes, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

Wu Wei, 2005, *The I Ching: The book of answers*, Power Press, Los Angeles CA.

## Tao Te Ching

Then there is the *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu, written in the sixth century BC, around the time of Confucius. There are many translations and interpretations. My favourite is still the beautifully illustrated one that is translated by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English. It was published in 1972 by Vintage Books.