

Rites of Passage

I Ching as an Entrance to the Symbolic Life

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The deep structure of the I Ching (*Yijing*) or *Classic of Change* was consciously crafted to embody the rites and rituals that have shaped East Asian culture from Neolithic times, the deep sources of the wisdom of the East. The basic unit in this crafting of ritual meaning is the *xiang* or Symbol.

Jung maintained that a symbol is the best possible expression for something unknown. It states or signifies something more and other than itself which eludes our present knowledge, expressing an as yet unknown and incomprehensible fact of a mystical or transcendent, i.e., psychological, nature. Jung's primary interest in symbols lay in their ability to transform and redirect instinctive energy. Psychic development cannot be accomplished by intention and will alone; it needs the attraction of the symbol, whose value quantum exceeds that of the cause.

In abstract form, symbols are religious ideas; in the form of action, they are rites or ceremonies, stepping-stones to new activities which must be called cultural. Whether something is interpreted as a symbol or a sign depends mainly on the attitude of the observer. The symbolic attitude is at bottom constructive, in that it gives priority to understanding the meaning or purpose of psychological phenomena, rather than seeking a reductive explanation. The formation of symbols is going on all the time within the psyche, appearing in fantasies and dreams. Their aim is to make instinctive energy available for meaningful work and a productive life.

(*Jung Lexicon*, entry Symbol, 131-2).

In *Change*, as I Ching is usually called, a symbol is a *xiang*, an assemblage in which, at some mysterious point, the whole becomes more than the sum of its individual parts. These *xiang*/symbols combine linear diagrams, rich and allusive omen words (pictograms or ideograms) and an iterating chain of mythic associations that extends outwards in all directions like the ripples from a stone

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tossed into a pool of still water. Scholars have called the *xiang*/symbol an “image-concept” that unites the two halves of the brain by participating simultaneously in their opposing forms of activity (Helmut Wilhelm, Eranos lecture). The chains of association, the ripples in the pond, set this image-concept moving through a whole set of polarities, deconstructing oppositions like subject and object, psyche and world, inside and outside, male and female, presence and absence, life and death. Something can indeed *be* a *xiang* but we must also continually *make* it into a *xiang* by “*xiang-ing*” it. This points at the reciprocal dance of imaginal induction at its center, an ongoing process of understanding and being understood by the gods in our dis-ease.



Xiang/symbol means: to imagine, represent, figure, image, resemble, model, paint, depict, imitate, take something as a rule or model. It suggests interpreters, the act of interpreting or mediating and a special ritual site – the Pheasant Gate dedicated to exposition of rites and rules. *Xiang*/symbol is used to describe all the various figures of I Ching as models for the possible modes of manifestation. *Da xiang*, the Great Symbol, is the Way or Dao itself; a *xiang-lung* or elephant-dragon is a Buddha or Bodhisattva. The character *xiang* (classical form above and old form below) literally refers to the elephant and the Elephant Mind as an inner thesaurus of all possible symbols and modes of symbolizing activity.

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A *xiang*/symbol is an emblem or metaphor, a bright omen or intermediary at the frontier between the visible and the invisible. It is the self-presentation or self display of all beings, a spontaneous expression of their inner form as a signifying evocation of the on-going process of the real or Way that constellates synchronistic fields as it enters psychic awareness.

Jung felt that the symbols from I Ching, symbols that “traced the course of the valley spirit, the *tao*, winding like a dragon or a river” (CW14, §636n), were an answer to the West's spiritual needs and a sign that we are finally beginning to relate to the alien elements in ourselves (CW13, §72). Thus he insisted that “psychology in the stricter sense is bound up with the *whole practical use* of the *I Ching*” (C.G. Jung, *Briefe*, Erste Band, 1906-1945, pp. 182-83).

This passage from *Dazhuan: the Great Treatise* describes how we can use the figures of Change and their power of storing and discharging spirit. It links the power of the Great Symbols to transform awareness with the ability to respond to life spontaneously and joyously.

2.8 Open Your Heart to Change

Change is a book you cannot push away.
Its way is always shifting.
Transforming and moving, never resting,
it circles and flows through the six empty places.
Rising and falling,
like the messengers of life and death,
strong and supple transform each other.
Rules cannot confine this, for it follows only Change.

It issues forth and re-enters in a stately dance,
teaching caution within and without,
illuminating the causes of trouble.
It is not an army to protect you
but a beloved parent who draws near.

First follow the words and feel their place in your heart.
Then you will have charge of the omens and their symbols.
If you are unwilling to do this, the Way cannot open to you.

The Drama of Divinatory Healing

These symbolic accumulators act as fish-traps for Dao, doubling and re-doubling in an endless dance that is a reflection of the holographic modeling capacity of the mythological mind. When empowered by a ritual divination they offer the ghosts and spirits (*guishen*) that people our psyche – what Jung called the *daimones* that are the architects of our dreams and symptoms - a language through which they can speak with us.

The performative linguistic act of ritual divination is an enacted reality that synthesizes multiple sources of information to de-center normal identity and its logical connections. It compensates what is over or under-developed and suggesting new ways of standing in the world that can lead to the direct experience of meaning. The inspiration that ritual divination can provide is based in a willingness to accept information from sources beyond the direct control of rational process. It induces a particular kind of awareness like dreaming that links rational thought with internal primary processes, effecting a shift out of habitual behavior and a heightening of physical perception.

Diviners in traditional cultures call this kind of activity “talking with spirits.” It is an animism that connects us with autonomous operations in brain and mind that *animate* the world with identity and intentionality. It allows us to experience ways of knowing that are otherwise unconscious, establishing behavioral, nonverbal and emotional communication with the symbolic functions that are “architects of dreams and symptoms” by accessing nonverbal information channels of the limbic brain and lower brain centers. This close engagement of ego-identity with the operational systems of the unconscious gives us access to an unconscious personality, a sort of Dream Ego that can be managed and healed through ritual enactment.

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Jung remarked that the symbols that constitute the divine drama of our symbolic existence are religious ideas expressed in action as rites or ceremonies. The performance of these rites acts as a stepping-stone to new cultural activities; their aim is to make instinctive energy available for meaningful work and a productive life. In eastern terms, they help us accumulate *de*, the inner power and virtue to actualize the Way or *Dao* in and through our individual being and become who we are meant to be.

Traditional cultures all over the world provided models of the various stages of life we pass through and, even more important, offered the rites or ceremonies that formally ended one stage and opened the gates to the new. We lack these Rites of Passage, the ritual experience of death, re-organization and re-birth that prepares us to enter a new path or way of life. Without this experience of death and contact with the land of the dead we cannot enter the new stage of life but remain fixed in past experiences and an outmoded, dysfunctional identity; we are not living up to what we are meant to be.

In the system of the Decades the Change uses to model the course of the Symbolic Life the stage of ritual education we are particularly concerned with is the crucial liminal zone between the *Mission* of one Decade and the *Gates of Change* that open the new stage of life. A ritual divination enacted here shows you what passages and processes you must confront to re-enter the Symbolic Life on a higher level and be truly present in the situations you encounter. It lets you locate where you are held in a fixated past experience and what you can do to release the trapped energy.

Transition/Liminal Zone: 9:10 Position

The 9:10 Position in each Decade is a liminal zone, a passage between stages, a night-sea or underworld journey through the death realms. Here the hidden spirit operators dissolve the old identity after it has served its purpose and release the unformed yet numinous potential of the new, which is then released into the Gates of the next stage or Decade.

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Traditionally, the Rite of Passage takes place at the Outskirts Altar, a liminal place between the civilized and the wilderness, day and night, inner and outer that links events in the body and psyche with events in the natural and spiritual worlds. The passage from one state of being to another traditionally has three stages or steps. Throughout the performance there are ritual actions powered by spoken words, acts of tying and untying, binding and loosening, blocking and casting off.

Phase I: Separation

In the phase of separation, we are severed from the familiar and fall into the fertile darkness. This phase is opened by a Water Ritual that cleanses perception and opens the heart-mind, empowering the healing or locating divination.



Washing the Tokens portrays the opening of a secret place where the River-Mountain initiation begins and calling on its spirit forces.

As the separation proceeds, the underworld forms of things present themselves. The symbols become strange attractors, inner whirlpools that draw our experience down into the turbulent and fertile chaos. Here hidden spirit operators begin to dissolve the old identity, releasing the numinous potential of the new.

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The **Ghost River**, the dark river of fate that dissolves all structures carries the heroic **identity** that carried out the Mission of the stage of life that is ending to the threshold of the liminal zone.



The **Queen Mother of the West**, Lady of the Beasts and Queen of the Dead appears between the Twin Dragons that embody the Powers of **Heaven** and **Earth**.

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The **inner fire** is kindled and the **Loom of Change** appears, presided over by the realizing power of **Earth and the Dark Animal Goddess**. This is where the locating divinations that reveal the steps of the passage take place.



The **Lady of Fates** who finds the hidden sickness and couples the beings with the new fate appears. The old identity is laid on the **Earth Bed** and dissolves, realizing the fixated forms of the past, the hidden drives, pain and rage.



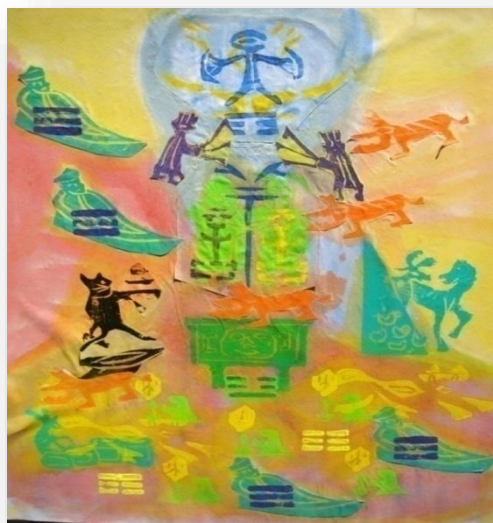
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As the **dark dreams** emerge, the penetrating power of **the Lady of Fates** releases the **creative spirit** energy trapped in each complex. New stories and images arise and circle, freeing the spirit from the old stories that have turned to prisons.



Phase II: Transition

In the transition phase our identity is opened to the inner field of actors and the hidden spirit operators prepare us to be charged with a higher level of energy. We are deep in the subtle body here; the **Mountain or Sacrificer** stops the flow of time, focusing reflective power (**moon rays**) into the two energy channels, **yang** and **yin**, that run along the spine. This begins the process of **stripping away** the demons of the mind that trap us in past fixations.



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The process is grounded in a **Sacred Vessel** that is the sign of a human sacrifice. Beneath it, the **Rousing Thunder** that will begin the new cycle links with the **Mountain** above to open the **Tiger's Mouth**.



With the opening of the **Tiger's Mouth** we are deep into the ritual education at the heart of Change. This is where the **Ghost River**, the dark stream of painful memories within each of us, our heritage of pain and rage, emerges from the depths and is purified.

In the tradition of Change the inner corruption the Tiger eats away is represented by a particular hexagram.



18 Corruption and Pestilence/Renovating



Let **Corruption/Renovating** show you ways to realize things. Confront the evil deeds done by parents that are manifested in their children. Search out the source of new growth within. Let the ongoing process of change release your hidden potential. It will turn the shock of inner enlightenment into an awareness of the patterns that mark real ends and beginnings.

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Circle of Meanings

Perversion, decay, plague, pestilence; rotten, poisonous, defiled; corruption in inner Parental and Ancestral images, negative effects of parents on children; sexual infatuation, rage, pain, hallucination, mania; renew, renovate; name of the first day of a ritual period when decay is removed to support new growth. The old character shows insects or worms in rotting meat or grain, a sacrificial vessel and the Sacred Meal within it spoiled.

Gu suggests hallucination, loss of reality, sexual debauch, the insects that appear in rotting or fermenting grain, miasma, sorcery and, most of all, the curse of the Ancestors, the false dreams and delusions they send when they are neglected or offended. It is the poisonous acts done by fathers and mothers that become manifest in their children, the negative and destructive emotions that cluster around our inner experience of whatever Father and Mother have been for us. This emotional corruption colors our experience of things and can flash out in poisonous bursts of anger and despair, tying us in nets of helplessness, inadequacy and confusion.

In this phase we become postulants, taking things in rather than acting them out in order to truly learn the lessons of the past. The **Lady of Fates** guides the **creative spark** trapped in each fixation into an **ancestral image**, activating the **animal powers** of the psyche. The **Dream Fox** moves among them, re-collecting the scattered parts of the soul. New stories and images emerge, carrying the numinous potential of the new.

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As the **Tiger** reaches the **center of the subtle body** – symbolized as the sign for **harmonizing** – spirit flows freely, beginning an inner re-balancing of the **yang** and **yin** energies that, like **two long separated brothers**, reach out to embrace each other.



This balancing and re-connection activates the underworld power of an animal power called the **Great Grey Rat** who creates hidden channels through which the animal powers of the soul – the **Dream Animals**- can emerge into awareness.



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The hidden **creative spirit** or **Dragon power** that has been released from the dark dreams and connected to **ancestral images** follows these **Dream Animals** as they emerge from the still center of the **Mountain**.



Phase III: Incorporation

In incorporation we are oriented to the new stage of life. The hidden spirit operators release the numinous potential of the new into the **Elephant Mind** that holds all the great symbols, sign of a self that is coextensive with all creation.



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Here in the **Elephant Mind** we contact the **Source**, the point where thought emerges, and experience the **direct perception of the heart-mind**. The Two Powers, **Dragon** and **Dark Animal Goddess** join in the mystery that Jung called *synchronicity*. We enter the Symbolic Life.



This is the place where all points in space-time are in touch with all other points. It links us to an **invisible community** and a **line of Ancestors** stretching back to the primal images.



This inner center gives symbolic ground to the endless round dance of the Dream Animals. It points at the change of heart that can occur as we entertain them and let them begin to educate us.

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As we circle around the **ancestral center** the joyous **anima or soul connection** to the new life is released.



We enter the new stage of life **mounted and revitalized** by the **perception of the heart**, led to the Gates of the new Decade or stage of life by the **Joyous Dancer** and her capacity to give the spirit a voice in the human community.



Riding the Elephant

There is a particular figure or *xiang*/symbol in Change that describes how this new symbolizing activity carried by the Rites of Passage works in us over time.

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16 Providing for/Riding the Elephant Yu



Let **Providing for** give you ways to realize things. Accumulate resources so you can respond joyously and spontaneously to life when the real call comes. Let go of lonely striving and prepare the decisive new move. It will turn self restraint into a liberating awareness of the whole.

Circle of Meanings

Arrange for, make ready, collect what you need to meet the future; enthusiasm, a spontaneous and direct response to a call; enjoy, take pleasure in; connection to the Elephant, an Animal Ancestor that opens the mind of the Great Symbols that shape and transform our experience.

The name of this figure, *yu*/providing, evokes the culture founder Yu the Great. It centers on building up the ability to respond directly, joyously, spontaneously and effectively to any situation, gathering reserves of energy and grace into a store of power and virtue (*de*) from which you can respond without thought. This sort of training is used in the martial arts and many performing arts, a kind of sub-cortical patterning whereby a corrected or straightened response becomes simultaneous with stimulus, bypassing cerebral systems of rational choice. This ability to respond directly and correctly allows you to enjoy the moment, to take pleasure in life. It suggests the sets of great bronze bells that were used to wake the earth in spring and harmonize the reviving forces. The process is imaged as a child riding on an Elephant, combining spontaneity with great power and grace in an emblem of the paradise state prior to the restrictions of culture. The elephant was an omen animal used to mean “symbol” (*xian*). As an emblem of the Shang Dynasty, it also shows how we can make use of the past, turning it into a symbol. The figure is part of the Secret Sickness pathways that link personal and cultural disorders, circulating our suffering through a long term healing process.

The character *yu*/providing-for is made up of the graph for elephant (right) with a child riding on top and the graph for the spindle/shuttle of a loom (left) whose endless “going and coming” (*wanglai*) evokes and weaves together the passages between life and death, dark and light, male and female. The spindle graph is in

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turn made up of the sign for wood, thus spring, the east and rousing new growth and a sign for a frontier place where things are exchanged between the center and all that is “outside”, foreign, barbarian or excluded.



The endless shuttling of the spindle, the mind moving back and forth between the polarized opposites of our usual lives, accumulates symbolic awareness, drawing it out of normal experience and feeding it to the hidden creative spirit of the Elephant Mind. This is a surrender or deconstruction of the drive toward rational meaning and heroic striving. It opens a space where the heart meanings of the symbols and their transformative energy can arise freely and spontaneously.

In the words of *Dazhuan*: The Great Treatise:

By using the symbols
Sage People saw all the spirit forces in the world we live in.
The symbols determine form and appearances
and connect all things.
That is why they are called symbols.

One yin, one yang, this is the Way.

These words call out to you.
The underlying mysteries, the numinous situations
that run through everything in the world we live in
are completely presented in these symbols.

One yin, one yang, this is the Way.

To follow this tells you what is good.
To identify with it shows you what is essential.

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If you want to be benevolent, call it benevolence.
If you want to be wise, call it wisdom.
People use this every day without knowing it.
Using it to realize yourself is what is rare.
It is the gift of life.

One yin, one yang, this is the Way.

As the birth of all births, this Way is called Change.
Change is made of symbols.

The light of the spirits exists in the Sage People
who set out the Change and in the Change they used
to silently complete the Way of Heaven.

One yin, one yang, this is the Way.

This unspoken trust carries and supports us
As we strive for the power and virtue
To become who we are meant to be.

Dazhuan: the Great Treatise, 1.5, 1.12 (my translation)