

Yijing II  
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Good evening, everyone.

Last week I talked about the *Yijing* retreat I went to in Vallecitos. I had gone with the hunch that the *Yijing*, *The Book of Change*, which is part of the pre-Buddhist tradition of China, contained mythology, imagery, and philosophy that went into Chan (Chinese Buddhism). It's been a missing piece. We know about the influence of Indian Buddhism and Daoism, but not so much about this. My hunch was that there were things there that might enrich our practice, particularly mythological stories and images.

I talked a little bit about the ritual of the mourning hut, where you go in as someone's child and come out as an adult, and the dead person goes in as a corpse and comes out as an ancestor. And about the two brothers : one a king, one a shaman who walks around in the hinterlands, the wilds, and because he sees the Lady of Fates show up at the border, he goes out to meet her and brings her into the city, which the king would never have known about from his palace.

One of the glimmers I had during the retreat was that the *Yijing* has its own ideas about awakening. I have a few preliminary thoughts about the *Yi*'s view, and a little bit about the process of meditation, spiritual practice, and waking up.

In Chan we can have a linear idea of spiritual life and awakening — that we start here and the goal is over there, and we spend our life on this campaign toward awakening. But in the *Yi* there's a sense of cycles; it's not a straight line from here to there, but rather a series of cycles, which you might go through several times in your life.

The other thing I noticed about that approach (and I'm as guilty of this as anybody else), is that sometimes in spiritual life we can give global advice : *It's always true that you should ...* or *It's always true that you should never ...*, as if there are things that are true in every situation or circumstance. The *Yi*'s idea is much more like, *Listen to the time*. Figure out what the time is and how to respond based on listening to the time. There's very little global advice.

There's one glimmer of an image of meditation that comes from an old Chinese ceremony. When people come into a temple, probably much like this, the one big difference is that they would drink some wine together. This was meant to dissolve any disharmonies amongst the people. Then people would sit in meditation, and the image (I talked last time about elemental images like the mountain, fire, and thunder) was that people would sit like mountains. That image is common in Zen; it makes sense to us. Mountains are still and strong. In the *Yi*'s idea, they also represent the limits and boundaries of things. So not only are you sitting still and strong, but you're stopping. You're not going out and being scattered all over the landscape. You're setting a limit and boundary, and you're containing. So everybody sits around like mountains.

Then another elemental image, Radiance, the bright omen, is invoked to come in. Radiance circulates around the room, amongst everybody who are sitting like mountains. It weaves everybody together. It's something that happens initially to everybody communally, and then the radiance begins to enter each individual mountain. The image is that there's a ladder inside the mountain, and Lady Radiance climbs the ladder to the heart to illuminate it. She keeps climbing and pours out of the top of the mountain, all over everybody. Then the cycle continues. She rises up through the mountain and gets poured out again. It's a continual circulation that has an individual aspect and a communal aspect, so people are brought together as well as having their individual experiences.

In Zen we might think more of the light descending down into the *hara*, into the lower abdomen, and then spreading out from the *hara*. So whether it's going up or down, it's really the same image, which is the sense of the dynamic interplay between mountain and fire. It's an important part of the *Yi* that you always have two things mixing it up. Any situation is described as the interplay of two things — in this case, of mountains and radiance.

So you do that for awhile, and perhaps you begin to experience the process of awakening. It seems to me, right now anyway, that the *Yi*'s idea of awakening is located in hexagram sixty-one, which has two names : Connecting to the Center and The Opened Heart. Already we begin to have a sense of what the idea of awakening is. Let's go with that, playing with what the *Yi* says about this, expanding on it, and bringing in some Chan imagery, towards — as near as I can determine — a path or process of connecting to the center and the opened heart.

Parenthetically the word ‘meditation,’ which has a Latin root, literally means ‘to be moved to the center.’ It’s not ‘move *yourself* to the center.’ It’s to be moved to the center. It’s something that occurs, that happens, as we sit.

The first process of meditating and being moved to the center is emptying your heart. The *Yi*’s advice about that is contained in one of the hexagrams. It goes like this :

Make a sacrifice for the repose of the dead. Let the mourners go home.  
Wise words. The Way opens. If strangers come, do not feast them.

Let’s unpack that a bit. “Make a sacrifice for the repose of the dead.” Well, that’s kind of interesting. What’s the dead? Is the dead the past? Is the dead what we’re holding on to? It doesn’t say you have to annihilate that or cut it off, ignore it, or repress it. It says, “Make a sacrifice for the repose of the dead.” Let the dead sleep. Don’t keep waking them up! Let them have their repose. Some of you may remember from last week that after someone dies, there’s a ghost, and your job is to convince the ghost that it would be a good idea to go back to the tomb and have a restful sleep into eternity. So we have the same idea of not murdering or expunging, but allowing to sleep.

“Let the mourners go home.” Isn’t that lovely? It’s not that time anymore. They don’t have to have residence in your heart. “If strangers come, do not feast them.” Here’s one of these places where it’s not global advice. “If strangers come, do not feast them,” is probably not the right response 99% of the time. But there are times when it *is* the right response. There are times when it’s right to say no, to not be helpful. I think of Psyche’s underworld journey, which I’ve alluded to from time to time. It’s advice on how to navigate the underworld, and one of the pieces of advice is, “Don’t be helpful, and don’t revive what is already dead.” It’s exactly the same bit of advice. Lastly, the advice to Psyche is, “When you get to the palace, don’t sit on Persephone’s throne.” Don’t become the queen of the underworld. It’s the same thing as letting the mourners go home : don’t get stuck as the queen of the underworld.

So that’s the process of emptying your heart : letting things sleep; letting things go home. If strangers come, you don’t invite them in. The comment on that, which I think requires no further comment from me, is, “If you’re always worrying about other

people, you will have no peace. Do not take on their problems now.” Again, not global advice, but for this place on the journey.

Disperse your old identity and the sorrows it implies.  
Use the strength of a horse to rescue what is important.

There’s an interesting discrimination. There might be certain things to have with you at such a time, and you should exert great strength to make sure you do. Then, after you’ve gone a distance in emptying your heart :

You will encounter someone or something that will change the course of your life, and there will be deep mutual recognition.

I immediately thought of a Chan poem which talks about this same territory of awakening. A line from that poem says :

An old woman, oversleeping at dawn  
encounters the ancient mirror  
and clearly sees a face  
no other than her own.

In the words of the *Yi*, you will encounter someone or something that will change the course of your life.

The next part of the journey is to move to the still point between the opposites. We’ve been talking a lot about dualities and polarities and how to find the third thing, how to not accept the terms of the dualities and polarities; how to make the sideways move; how to find the thing that cuts through and cuts the duality into one. So here that is in the *Yi*, the third thing is a still point in the center between the two polarities.

Sometimes a koan will offer you bait. Sometimes it will set up a duality or polarity, and the bait is that you have to choose between them. That’s *always* the wrong response. I was thinking about a fun little koan question that you might get asked someday when you come in and sit down. A teacher may ask, “How many steps did it take to get to this room?” The bait is, *Oh, my god, I have no idea. I’m such a bad Buddhist. I’m not mindful. If I were mindful I’d have been paying attention. I’d know exactly how many steps. I bet the teacher knows how many steps!* That’s the bait. So I will leave you with the question : What would a response be that’s not taking the bait? Have some fun with that, see if you can be playful with it.

This is a deep idea of not taking the bait, of not thinking you have to choose. One of the earliest descriptions of the Buddha was of the deer that slipped the trap : the deer who gets out of the trap, bounds into the forest, and gets free in the wild places. It's a powerful image, an old image. It's the idea of not getting stuck in the duality, but finding that way right down the middle, right through the center, that frees you from that false dichotomy. When we slip the trap like the Buddha did, a wave of blessing pours into our heart. The nature of that blessing is that it connects our inner and outer lives, and connects both of them to the spirit.

In connecting our inner and outer lives, it connects us to what the *Yi* refers to as pigs and fishes. Guess what? Great good fortune! You get to be connected to all the pigs and fishes! Think of the pigs and fishes when you get to have an easy relationship to your own inner life and you begin to trust in the images that flow from your heart. That's something we've talked about before : when images arise in meditation, be interested in them. Trust them. They might be messages for you from a bigger place beyond the boundaries of your own heart-mind.

In the process of this blessing flowing into the heart, I mentioned that it also connects us with the spirit. There's an old Chinese saying, "Put a green bough in your heart and a singing bird will visit you." That's the sense of the blessing : if we make a green bough in our heart, the bird will come and visit us.

Some of us are thinking about rakus, since we're making them right now. In the old world of the *Yi*, the spirits come and grab you at the back of the neck. So I thought about how we sew a green pine needle on the back of the rakusu where it sits on the napes of our necks, and that maybe we're making a bough for the bird to come and sit on at the back of our necks, and the bird will eventually work its way into our hearts.

As you go along in this process, the connection between inner and outer life, and the connection to spirit, leads to a deep faith in the processes of life. One of the ways Stephen Karcher describes that is that the sense of things as random dissolves. Randomness dissolves. I like that a lot. It's not that everything gets perfect, or nothing bothers us anymore, it just doesn't feel like random stuff coming at us all the time; there's a sense of meaning to this. We have a relationship with it; it isn't all just random. So the heart begins to be at peace, and it creates its own stable points to deal with the difficulties of life.

This being a Chinese philosophy, it doesn't stop there. The goal isn't, *Okay, your heart's open so you're done*. There's a next step, and the next step is that from *that* place you can begin to

affect the world around you. You can influence things. That appears in another line of this hexagram in 'a connection that binds us together.' You can do something, you can trust that there's this connection that binds us together and use it to act energetically. You can put things right if they're not.

The last thing I want to say about the *Yi*'s idea of awakening is that it's not an idea of transcendence. It's not an idea of getting off the wheel, out of *samsara* and gone. The opened heart is seen as the moment when you recognize the subjectivity of everything else. You're inside everything else. The open heart is deeply in the world, not floating above the world or back from the world. You can feel what everything is like from inside itself. For them, the idea of spiritual transcendence was an attempt to break the Dao, which seemed like a bad idea. This open heart allowed you to stay in the Dao and continue rolling along with it. I'll give you a couple of images for that.

Here's the image of transcendence, which is *not* a good thing. This is the top line of the hexagram :

A soaring sound, wings mounting to heaven.  
Trap. The Way closes.

The idea there is that if you try to launch and achieve velocity and get out, you'll fall into the hunter's net and there will be disaster.

If you set out now your nest will be gone,  
and all your connections to life will vanish.

So it's really not a good thing to jump up like that. The advice is to stay low and also to let go of the sorrows that impel this life. That seems to me to be tremendously psychologically sophisticated. What are the sorrows that impel us to believe that the only thing we can do is fly up and out, that that's the only escape? And if we confront those sorrows we can resolve the need to fly up and out, to achieve velocity and escape.

In contrast to that image of a bird that flies out, gets in caught a hunter's net, and its nest burns, is line two. It goes like this :

A calling crane, hidden in the shade. Its offspring respond in harmony. The calling crane says, "I have a winged wine vessel. Come to me. I will simply pour it out."

So the image of awakening is a bird mother calling to her children, saying, “Come, drink. I have this endless vessel and I will pour it out for you, and you will never be thirsty.” That’s called the center of the heart’s desire in the *Yi*. The advice is : “Respond to it. It will change your life.” That made me think of another verse from the koan with the image of the old woman sleeping at dawn. It goes like this :

For whom do you bathe and make yourself beautiful?  
The voice of the cuckoo is calling you home.  
Hundreds of flowers fall, yet her voice is not stilled.  
Even deep in jumbled peaks, she is calling clearly.

A hundred flowers falling and jumbled peaks are both images in Chan for the hustle and bustle and hurly-burly of life. Even through all of the eventfulness of life, her voice is not stilled, and she’s calling clearly.

The *Yi* remarks : “This is a lesson. If you persevere your cares and sorrows will disappear.” That’s the promise of this kind of awakening. “Stay small and helpful and you will connect with what is important.”

Those are the views of awakening I’m teasing out of the *Yijing*. I welcome any questions or comments you have.

Q1 : I’m curious which hexagrams you see following this one.

JIS : Hexagrams are thought of, in Steven Karcher’s idea, in pairs, which is a revival of an old pre-Confucian idea. So this is sixty-one, which goes with sixty-two. Sixty-two is “Small crossings, the little bird.” It’s interesting, because it says that out of this tremendous experience, the last lines that reverberate — stay humble and low — emerge in sixty-two as the little bird. The idea there is, if you don’t want to go up really high and get caught in the net, you stay low and follow the coils of the dragon. That’s how you navigate. As long as you’re following the coils of the dragon, staying humble and low, it’s eternal. It goes on forever.

Q2 : Staying low and following the coils of the dragon — does that mean life-death, life-death, continually becoming?

JIS : Well, the coils of the dragon do mean life-death, life-death, but they also mean the lines of energy running through the field all the time. So you follow the coils of the dragon all the way through your life as well. There's definitely a sense in the *Yi* of reincarnation and the cycles, that you keep coming back. There's not so much an idea of progress as there is an early version of evolution. It's that you do it again and again because it's basically a good thing to do. But there isn't a whole elaborate philosophy of reincarnation like there is in early Buddhism. It's more implied.

Q3 : I'm really intrigued by the image of keeping a green bough in your heart. How does one do that?

JIS : What do you think?

Q3 : You realize you have choice in your actions. So you keep the *green* bough.

JIS : I have to say that in anything like that, I always translate it in my mind to "Notice that there is a green bough in your heart."

Q3 : Then keep it; honor it; it's there naturally.

JIS : Yeah. And it's much more about noticing that and staying aware of it than doing something to make it so.

Q3 : So water it, nurture it.

JIS : Exactly.

Q4 : In the lovely description you gave of radiance and the circulation, I've been thinking of how I've come to where I am at this point. The connection was, for me, the koans and the koan retreats and conversations. That description feels like a koan retreat to me : that circulation that's communal and comes inside and then goes back out to the world. I'm just beginning to have a sense of how that happens in sitting in meditation, and in this room, and in the bigger field. It's a beautiful image.

JIS : Thank you. That's a lovely connection to make.

Q5 : I think it would be great to talk more about the bird flying up. It's a lot to think about. I'd love to explore that more. I have to be with it more, that escaping ...

JIS : Contrast that with the Buddha as the deer that slips the trap. What's the difference between slipping the trap to bound off into the forest, and flying too high and getting caught? That's an interesting contrast.

Q6 : We were talking about how sophisticated that aspect was; is that sense of 'flying too high' what we might construe as suicidal ideation?

JIS : That's an interesting question about the connection between what I sometimes call 'spiritual anorexia' — the idea where you're just going to keep making the self smaller and smaller and smaller, pared away and sanded down until it's almost not there — and an impulse toward suicide. It's an interesting comparison. I think the *Yi* is probably speaking more to the spiritual or psychological impulse rather than a literal, bodily impulse.

Q6 : The idea of the house being destroyed, bringing ill will, it sounds so much like what happens when there's a suicide. The structure completely dissolves and all sorts of stuff goes on.

JIS : That's a great analogy, because there's the sense that if you're engaged in that kind of attempt at spiritual transcendence, things around you fall apart, people get left, abandoned.

Q7 : Can you compare that to the story about the woman whose son comes home?

JIS : You're referring to a koan in which a woman is very concentrated and focused, bearing down on her koan. She has a young son, and she stops feeding and taking care of him. The neighbors are taking care of him. Then one day he comes home from school and she asks him, "Who are you?" He says, "I'm your son." She eventually breaks through. It's an interesting story as koan to take up because you can see from the mother's perspective and you can see from the son's, and it looks really different. Which perspective are you seeing it from? It's amazing to think about being so vast that *Who are you? Who am I? Who is anything?* becomes a question. And you can also see how having your mother ask you, "Who are you?" is a disturbing view. This is another koan with the tensions between form and emptiness. The question is, how do you resolve that tension? There's an attempt to work with that impulse toward transcendence, to bring it back into relationship with the son — with the world of form. It's saying that attempted transcendence is one horn of a duality; it's not the answer. There's something else that's the answer. Which I think is an important point. That's not the

resolution, but there's a resolution that doesn't allow that to stand in duality with our ordinary lives.

*Q7*: Is the *Yijing* saying, stay in one form?

JIS : The calling crane is a subtle image and certainly grounded and located here, but she's calling them into the shade. She's saying there's a shelter you can find that isn't completely tangled and bound up in the world in that way. It's offering the shade and shelter of the calling crane's wings as being the resolution between form and emptiness.

Thank you all very much.