

## HEXAGRAMS 37 AND 38: BELONGING AND STRANGENESS

The *I Ching* is unique in the world's literature. Originally a divination manual, it later acquired the status of a book of wisdom, a method of penetrating moments of the cosmic order to learn how the Tao is configured, fathom what direction it takes at any given moment, and to determine what one's own place is and should be in the scheme of things.

The *I Ching's* 2204 possible combinations of yang<sup>1</sup> and yin<sup>2</sup> lines comprise a compendium of archetypal processes. The lines are arranged into 8 primal trigrams of three lines, and these are combined to form 64 hexagrams, each consisting of six lines; any number of these lines may be 'changing' lines, which reflect the specific character of the evolution of the process described by the hexagram.

The internal structure of the *I Ching* is profoundly complex. One of its internal patterns is that each numerical pair of hexagrams (e.g. 1/2, 19/20) is closely related; they are usually the same form reversed, although in some instances, when the hexagram is symmetrical in form, each line in the paired hexagram is altered to its opposite. These pairs of hexagrams generally describe a polarized pair of archetypal processes.

One such pair is hexagrams 37 and 38, which describe the polarity of belonging as opposed to being an outsider. These archetypes are especially relevant to anyone whose agenda includes raising consciousness and resolving conflict, as the inclusion of marginalized roles is so central to the healthy functioning of both individuals and groups.

## JIA REN: THE FAMILY

Hexagram 37 is called *Jia Ren*. The character *jia* is composed of a roof over a pig. A pig under a roof, in a rural society, adds up to a home. *Ren* means 'person' or 'people'. *Jia ren*, then, are the folks at home, i.e. the family.

### The trigrams

The hexagram is composed of the trigram *sun* (Wind) over the trigram *li* (Fire).

Fire represents brightness, clarity, and ultimately spiritual illumination. It is linked with the eyes, and with vision, in the sense of being visionary.

The Fire trigram is composed of two yang lines (representing the flame) with a yin (broken) line in the middle (representing the substance giving rise to the flame). *Li* also has the meaning of 'clinging', i.e. dependence: the fire is dependent on the fuel, and the flames cling to the log – as well as the meaning of 'leaving' or 'departing': the flames *leave* the log. The form of the trigram reminds us that without the yin, the yang quickly flares and burns out; that action depends upon inaction, and fullness cannot exist without emptiness. The danger of Fire is that it may burn too brightly, neglecting the central emptiness that sustains it.

But there is also something here specifically about belonging and moving away, the tension between individuality and collectivity, and an intimation that convergence and dispersal inevitably arise together.

The Wind trigram is formed of one yin line with two yang lines above it. It describes the steady, slow process of natural growth. The power of wind is a gentle ingress, like roots penetrating the earth with a ceaseless persistence or

stamina, but flexible and adaptable, and able to change direction. The weakness of wind is that it can be *too* adaptable, going wherever the wind blows, with no real sense of self. But its positive aspect is the spreading of influence, like the wind scatters seeds.

Fire and Wind have similar and mutually amplifying natures: Fire draws Wind, Wind increases Fire. A family is a group of people with a similar nature, whose relationships are for mutual benefit. The idea of a family is that you are with your own kind.

If we reverse the trigrams, placing Fire above Wind, we get Hexagram 50, *Ding*, The Cauldron, a kind of ritual vessel used for offerings to the ancestors, particularly in the initiation of a new dynasty. The Cauldron is the only purely man-made artefact in the *I Ching*, and it points to personal, human power.

### The hexagram

Hexagram 37 describes people with a common link; it is a key hexagram of relationship. Although blood relationships in particular are implied, what is important here is proper relationships within the family, how people occupy their proper roles, and how these roles interact, all of which is very important from a Confucian perspective. In Confucian times, understanding and living out your proper position within the hierarchy of the family was of the highest cultural importance:

*If there is harmony within the family,  
there will be harmony within the community,  
and ultimately within the world.*

Taoist commentaries take a different perspective. The Chinese model of human psychology posits five different psychospiritual functional entities, each associated with a physical organ. For example:

- The *shen*, associated with the Heart, are spirits, but not in the sense of an individual spiritual entity. They are indestructible and transpersonal, and are the source of strength of spirit and clarity of consciousness.
- The Liver houses the *hun*, which bestow on a person the quality of individuality. The *hun* might be considered as that aspect of the individual which is self-aware and concerned with the identity of the self, and in a social context, with assessing situations so as to make possible harmonious and socially appropriate action.
- The Lung is associated with the *po*, which maintain and regulate bodily rhythms, respiration, metabolism, and homeostasis generally. The *po* are responsible for spontaneous vital movements, sensations, reactions, and instinctive impulses.

So the 'family', here, is a family of internal parts, different types and aspects of human consciousness, ideally working in harmony. As Cheng Yi<sup>3</sup> says: "The human body is like a home; the human vitality, spirit, soul, psyche, and intent are like the people in a home. When you refine the human mind and produce the mind of Tao, the vitality, spirit, soul, psyche, and intent each rests in its own position and each discharges its own affairs; joy, anger, sadness and happiness are all harmonious and balanced, like a family being orderly."<sup>4</sup>

But whether we take an outward or an inward view, this hexagram is about the ability to unite different parts, to bring in all aspects of the field. If this is successful, the family gives you a strong basis: Fire is within, giving you inner

clarity, and Wind is without, so you can spread your influence in the world.

The text of the hexagram is one of the shortest in the *I Ching*, saying simply: *li nu zhen*: profit from a woman's virtue. Every human culture places emphasis on the primary importance of women in the family and the family's future. But depending on the context, a 'woman' in the *I Ching* may not necessarily refer to a specific human being; 'woman' is an iconic symbol for the *quality* of yin: inward, ordinary, sustaining, nurturing and holding.

This inward, self-referential quality of families is referred to in a commentary by Wang Bi<sup>5</sup>: 'The concept underlying the Family is that each family member cultivates the Dao of his own family and that he is incapable of understanding the affairs of other people outside the family.'<sup>6</sup>

### The lines

The individual lines refer to nourishment, boundaries, and discipline, reiterating themes of familial ethics and responsibility. As we might expect, the central lines of both trigrams correspond correctly to their positions within the hexagram: Line 2 is a yin line in a yin place, and Line 5 is a yang line in a yang place. Together, Lines 2 and 5 are the 'host lines' of the hexagram, i.e. the lines which express the dominant quality of the hexagram. If these lines change, we get Hexagram 26 *Da Chu*, Great Offering (or, in Lynn's translation, 'Great Domestication'), which is about power contained and accumulated to create a reserve. The accumulation could refer to a financial inheritance, but equally to a talent or skill that is a resource one can draw on in times of need. This is exactly what a family should give you: a personal, cultural and material legacy.

## KUI: STRANGE

Hexagram 38 is a very different kettle of fish.

The character *kui* is made up of two parts: On the left, *mu*, an eye. On the right, *gui*, an astrological symbol, which relates to everything that is deep, hidden, and difficult to access.

One meaning of *kui* is a squint: both eyes are not focused on the same thing, implying not both on this world. This character can indicate 'second sight', seeing or 'just knowing' things that others can't. There's a visionary aspect to it, with all the loneliness that can entail: being misunderstood, not fitting in.

*Kui* means difference, contrariness; it often implies discord, 'not seeing eye to eye', and certainly *strangeness*, something unusual, a different perspective. It can also mean separate, someone set apart: the black sheep. Other translations include contradiction, disunity, disharmony, abandoned.

## The trigrams

In the hexagram *kui* we again find the trigram of Fire, this time paired with the trigram of *dui*, which is commonly translated as Lake. *Dui* is actually more of a marsh than a lake, something like a paddy field, a fertile place where things can be grown, giving joy. The character is composed of a mouth with words coming out, and legs beneath; thus, a person speaking, with lightness, buoyancy, and good humour. Just as the essential quality of Fire is Clarity, and that of Wind is Gentleness, the essence of the Marsh is Joy.

*Dui* represents the youngest daughter of the family of trigrams. It's childlike, carefree, chattering and innocent, and like a child it doesn't like

restriction. Its liability is the tendency toward overindulgence in the pursuit of pleasure.

While *dui* is the youngest daughter, *li* is the middle daughter, and there is some conflict between these two very different siblings. For one thing, they are moving in opposite directions (Fire, already on top, moves upward, while the watery Marsh has a downward movement), away from each other and out of contact. They just can't understand each other, can't find common ground.

The Taoist commentaries are about understanding that people *are* different, and that's just the way it is: "The Taoist looks the same (i.e. he can integrate into mainstream society) but is different within". John Richard Lynn, in a footnote to Wang Bi's commentary, says, "Just as the unity (sameness) of the *kui* hexagram consists of contrary (different) parts, so the noble man appreciates how the unity of the whole Dao incorporates individual phenomenological differences"<sup>7</sup>. Other Taoist texts speak of *zhen* – your true nature, being able to follow it and help others to do so. At its most positive, this hexagram consists of Joy within and Clarity without, being content with who you are.

Reversing the trigrams so that the Marsh is over Fire, we get Hexagram 49 *Ge*, Radical Change, which is the paired hexagram to 50, the Cauldron used at the initiation of a dynasty. The etymology of the character *Ge* carries the meaning of changing one's skin like a snake, or to skin an animal, or to wear the skin of an animal like a shamanic ritual mask – that is, being able to take on or cast off a role. It is a hexagram of explosive energy, the power to really change things at a fundamental level, including bringing about the *end* of a dynasty. It is the hexagram of violent revolution, whereas *Kui* is more about crazy wisdom. But any revolution worthy of the name springs from a new slant on the world, a crazy new

perspective.

### The hexagram

Hexagram 38 is thus about not being the same as others, not normal – and specifically about having a different kind of consciousness. Wu Jing-Nuan, a contemporary scholar and translator of the *I Ching*, comments that this hexagram “contains fantastic confrontations, unusual juxtapositions, and strange subjects. Situations appear dreamlike, without rational sequence of symbols or images. The situations appearing in the (lines) could almost be described as visions.....*Kui* provides support to the inquirer in unusual circumstances; misfortune does not occur in any line. ‘No error’ or ‘what error’ finishes four lines and substantiates a natural scheme of nature which allows for the bizarre.”<sup>8</sup>

The text of the hexagram reads: *xiao shi ji*: in small matters, good fortune. This is not a time for big action; your ability to influence is limited. You are restricted to small things precisely *because* you are different; this is the time to protect your uniqueness and not get overwhelmed by others’ views.

It is not so much about a power differential, although a person who is strange may very well find herself disempowered in any number of ways. But the central issue here is one of being understood, perhaps of being *seen at all*, and being able to resist the temptation to give up this role in order to escape the isolation that is inherent in invisibility.

### The lines

The lines refer to a return to the Tao, to a spiritual encounter, to things not being as they seem. They are all images of great potential, in which the end result

is furthered by non-action.

It should be no surprise that the central lines of both trigrams are incorrect: yin in a yang place, and vice versa. If these, the host lines, change, we get Hexagram 25 *Wu Wang*, the paired hexagram to 26 *Da Chu*. *Wu Wang* means without falseness or deceit. It is a purity without distortion, free of bias or favouritism or ulterior design. The *Mawangdui I Ching* has a different name for this hexagram: *Wu Meng*, without strain or effort, acting spontaneously, which conveys much the same idea.

### Wholeness and brokenness

A rich portrait of the polarity between these two hexagrams is found in the character of Adah, in the novel *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver. She is born brain-injured and does not develop the use of speech, or of one side of her body. Like her twin sister, she is possessed of extraordinary intelligence, but because of her one-sidedness, she also develops an unusual perceptual slant and bizarre abilities, such as a talent for palindromic poetry. She reads backwards as easily as she reads forwards, delighting in patterns of structure that are invisible to her parents and siblings. In young adulthood she undergoes a program of rehabilitation and becomes 'normal'. Years later, reflecting on her metamorphosis, she says:

“No one else misses *Ada*. Not even Mother. She seems thoroughly pleased to see the crumpled bird she delivered finally straighten up and fly right.

‘But I liked how I was’, I tell her.

‘Oh Adah, I loved you too. I never thought *less* of you, but I wanted

better for you.'

Don't we have a cheerful, simple morality here in Western Civilization: expect perfection, and revile the missed mark! Adah the Poor Thing, hemipleigious egregious besiege us. Recently it has been decided, grudgingly, that dark skin or lameness may not be entirely one's *fault*, but one still ought to show the good manners to act ashamed. When Jesus cured those crippled beggars, didn't they always get up and dance off stage, jabbing their canes sideways and wagging their top hats? Hooray, all better now, hooray!

If you are whole, you will argue: Why wouldn't they rejoice? Don't the poor miserable buggers all want to be like me?

Not necessarily, no. The arrogance of the able-bodied is staggering... How can I explain that my two unmatched halves used to add up to more than one whole?"<sup>9</sup>

Adah embodies and illustrates the polarity between The Family and The Strange One, both externally within her own family, where she is contrasted with her twin, and internally between the two sides of her own body. While The Family expresses the qualities of belonging, sameness, and mutual understanding, Strange expresses the opposing qualities of outsider, difference, and incomprehensibility. Adah's twin sister is 'whole', while Adah is 'broken'. But herein lies the crux of the matter. It is only by including the strange, the incomprehensible, that the family can truly be whole. And when Adah loses the strange and incomprehensible within herself, she no longer feels herself to be a whole person.

The particular quality of Adah's strangeness, of her unique inner world, is not recognized by her family. They cannot give her what James Hillman refers to as 'the sight that blesses'. They love her as a daughter and a sister, they admire her exceptional intelligence insofar as it expresses itself in ways they can understand, but they do not get her 'slant' on the world. It is as invisible to them as an impending earthquake to a human being. They simply don't have the perceptual equipment for it. What is worse, *they are unaware they are missing anything*. How can they possibly value something they don't know exists?

In psychotherapeutic terms, we may read *The Family* as representing consensus reality, and *Strange* as representing the incongruent, aberrant and heretical signals that lead us to marginalized dream figures. Only by going to a place deeper than both, to the level of the essence of these figures, can we truly and creatively embrace both. This requires the development of compassion, equanimity, and detachment as professional, as well as personal, skills. In addition, playfulness meets the childlike nature of the Marsh, and humour defuses the sometimes frightening nature of the radically unfamiliar.

Working with *Strange*, whether with individual clients, groups, or in our own innerwork, requires the courage to let go of what we know and enter into the absurd. "In a shamanic moment, the therapist dives into the unknown and into mysterious territory. She allows the moment, the overall situation and her impulses to guide her, i.e. she allows herself to be *dreamed up*. She lets go and becomes a magical part of the overall atmosphere, allowing the situation to use her as a channel for its expression. Don Juan would say she is entering the *nagual*. She trusts that her impulses are not wholly irrational but a meaningful aspect of the *field* trying to express itself."<sup>10</sup>

Wang Bi, in his commentary to Chapter 16 of the Tao Te Ching, wrote in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD: "It is only by this reversion (to destiny) that one can perfectly embrace the myriad folk, leaving out absolutely no one ... There is nothing that he will not embrace perfectly. Because there is nothing one does not embrace perfectly, he attains the state of oceanic impartiality. With such oceanic impartiality, he attains the state where he has universal presence."<sup>11</sup>

Making real contact with someone who is deeply immersed in a 'Strange' process calls as well for special techniques, such as those developed to work with people in coma, and those suffering dementia, psychosis, autism, and other extreme states.

Both hexagrams 37 and 38 are made with the trigram of Fire, signifying illumination and vision. In the Family, it combines with Wind, which meets obstructions not with confrontation, but with inclusion and gentle influence; here, the danger is that individuality may be sacrificed in favour of unity. In Strange it combines with the Marsh, which may be fertile ground, but also holds the danger of dissolution.

In the Family, the vision is focused on the space between the individual and the wider society. In Strange, vision is directed inward, onto a vista that is deep, mysterious, and beyond the ken of ordinary consciousness. We all need this disturbing, oddball vision, as much as we require belonging and order, both as a society and as individuals. Equally, most of us need support in unfolding the essence of our Strangeness, which is by nature incomprehensible, and can appear menacing; indeed, it *is* menacing, for it genuinely threatens our rigid and limited worldview.

I see it as one of the tasks of becoming fully human – both as individuals and communities – to be able to welcome, unfold, and understand the essential nature of our own Strangeness, in whatever form it may take, and to support its expression *within* the context of the whole, The Family. Some one, or some part of us, must be faithful to it. D. H. Lawrence, himself no stranger to Strangeness, said it beautifully, in ‘The Song of a Man Who Has Come Through<sup>12</sup>’:

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!

A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.

If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!

If only I am sensitive, subtle, oh delicate, a winged gift!

If only, most lovely of all, I yield myself and am borrowed

By the fine, fine wind that takes its course through the chaos of the world

Like a fine, an exquisite chisel, a wedge-blade inserted;

If only I am keen and hard like the sheer tip of a wedge

Driven by invisible blows,

The rock will split, we shall come at the wonder, we shall find the

Hesperides.

Oh, for the wonder that bubbles into my soul;

I would be a good fountain, a good well-head,

Would blur no whisper, spoil no expression.

What is the knocking?

What is the knocking at the door in the night?

It is somebody wants to do us harm.

No, no, it is the three strange angels.

Admit them, admit them.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>the active, expansive principle

<sup>2</sup>the passive, contractive principle

<sup>3</sup>Cheng Yi was a Chinese philosopher and scholar of the eleventh century who wrote several commentaries on the I Ching.

<sup>4</sup>*The Taoist I Ching*, translated by Thomas Cleary, Shambala 1986, p148

<sup>5</sup>Wang Bi (226-249) was the author of one of the most important classical commentaries on the *I Ching*.

<sup>6</sup>*The Classic of Changes*, translated by Richard John Lynn, Columbia

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University Press 1994, p363

<sup>7</sup> Lynn, *ibid.*, p373

<sup>8</sup> *Yi Jing*, translated by Wu Jing-Nuan, The Taoist Centre 1991, p147

<sup>9</sup> *The Poisonwood Bible*, Barbara Kingsolver, Faber and Faber Limited 2000, pp558-9

<sup>10</sup> *Metaskills: Spiritual Art of Therapy*, Amy Mindell, New Falcon Publications 1995, p131

<sup>11</sup> *The Classic of the Way and Virtue*, translated by Richard John Lynn, Columbia University Press 1999, p76

<sup>12</sup> *The Harvell Book of Twentieth-Century Poetry in English*, ed. Michael Schmidt, The Harvill Press 1999

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