Wise up on the I Ching: I imagine we’ve all heard of the I Ching (yi jing) – at least I hope so. I’ve put this article together because I really want you to consider and explore this wonderful resource as a means of changing your life.

This is particularly so where religion and, or other systems may have failed you in helping you to accept we live in a ‘meaningful’ world.

I first came across the I Ching many years ago now when reading Carl Jung’s semi-autobiography, Memories, Dreams, Reflections1 – a great book by the way. Jung was talking about the oracle in deference to Richard Wilhelm who he met and even had him give a talk on the matter. Wilhelm wrote one of the most respected books on the subject – the I Ching or Book of Changes, with a foreword by Jung.

Anyhow, ever since, I have been interested in the I Ching2 and have used it a great number of times to get advice and make important life decisions. I have literally made decisions on moving house, changing jobs, business deals, partnerships and a host of other matters, on the advice given.

I use it for insight on other matters too. For example, during my time in archaeology and supervising on one particular prehistoric burial site (near Peterborough in the UK), I found it a great adventure seeking the I Ching’s wisdom on some of what was being uncovered. In other respects I see it as a real companion to draw on for spiritual nourishment – like having a direct line communication to one’s soul.

The I Ching has been around in its current form for over three thousand years. King Wen, founder of the Zhou Dynasty (1150-249 BC) and his son, Wu, are attributed with writing the ‘judgement’ commentaries on the hexagrams. Confucius (551-479 BC) is attributed to have written further commentaries on the behaviour of the ‘Superior Man’ and the Ten Wings treatise. All aiding our understanding of how the oracle is constructed and is intended to be used.
What the I Ching is

The I Ching is both an oracle and a guide to wisdom – particularly useful for moral and spiritual guidance. It is steeped in Taoist philosophy but yet it is much earlier than Lao Tzu. Lao Tzu is considered the father of Taoism. He was a contemporary of Confucius. Although the book carries Taoist, Confucianist and Buddhist philosophies it is not aligned to any one religion but indeed is built on the observations of the ebb, flow and periodicity of Nature. Probably in its development it stretches back into Neolithic times or even earlier. The point is, it is indeed without gods or demons and therefore pure, unsullied – and one might say the simplicity and integrity of the lines ensures that it remains so.

Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don’t resist them – that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like.

Lao Tzu

The ‘I’ in I Ching represents ‘change’ – the only movement that is unchanging or permanent is ‘change’ itself. But change also moves in cycles and the end returns to the beginning.

Yin and Yang

The I Ching is based on a binary system – just like our modern computers. The binary system we use today (using the characters of 1 and 0) was developed by the mathematician Gottfried Leibniz in 1679. Liebniz discovered the numbering of the hexagrams in the I Ching also followed a binary system, the same system he had developed. This naturally leads onto describing Yin (0) and Yang (1).

In Yin and Yang we have duality and polarity combined, with each carrying the seed of the other. The feminine (dark) Yin carries the seed of the masculine (light) Yang, and vice versa. And in this there is the powerful attraction of opposites – which are never completely opposite. In day there is the seed of night, in winter the seed of summer, in life the seed of death, and in death the seed of life.

Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.

Lao Tzu

Courtesy The I Ching Workbook – RL Wing
These are the two principles in one from which the All comes forth.

*The Tao begets the One,*
*The One begets the two,*
*The two begets the three and*
*The three begets the ten thousand things.*

Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Jing*

Yin is represented by a broken horizontal line and Yang by an unbroken line. Placing these over each other or one another one arrives at four possible combinations. Adding a third line, forming a trinity, which can be a Yin or Yang line we have what amounts to 8 possible combinations – these are known as the trigrams. Give 8 of these to Heaven, and 8 to Earth, and we have the 64 possible combinations of 6 stacked lines or hexagrams – with the human soul, asking the question, effectively in the middle.

**Part 1 Notes and References**

1. This book provided a catalyst for a major turning point in my life.
2. The first book I bought on the subject was the Alfred Douglas (1971) *The Oracle of Change/How to Consult the I Ching*. Penguin Books – I still use the same copy.
Part Two – Consulting the I Ching

How does one consult the I Ching?

It is easy to consult the I Ching. But the first answer is, ‘with respect’. The oracle is a source for divine wisdom so needs to be treated with respect. I’d also suggest storing the reference book/s (or cards) in an orderly situation – definitely off the floor – perhaps with other personal and precious things.

Also only consult the I Ching if you intend to study and learn from, or act upon, the answer. It’s not a game in other words.

Tools needed

A copy of the book or online reference to refer back to.

Something to write on: I always write my question down on a notepad and leave space for building the resulting hexagram.

Means of consultation: The traditional way of consulting the I Ching is with 50 yarrow stalks. There is also a 6 wands method, but most of us, in the West at least, use the 3 coins method and that’s what I will focus on here.

These need to be of the same denomination, and, I’d suggest, coins with a bit of weight to them, that are kept aside for this purpose only. I use three British half-crowns. You need to decide upon which side of the coin will represent the value 2 and which represents 3. Usually the ‘head’ side is deemed to represent 3. These numbers will make more sense shortly.

Allow time and consider your question

Allow a moment or two to get into a receptive frame of mind, in a peaceful environment, where you will not be disturbed. You may meditate or use some kind of preparation ritual to get to the state you wish to be in, but you’ll in any case know when ready.

About the Question

If you consider the I Ching is like a close friend capable of having insight into your situation, then the type of question that works best is one that draws advice and clarity on something you are trying to make a decision about – it is still you who makes the decision.

Avoid the ‘and/or’ type question as you will probably have difficulty deciding which is implied from the answer. Sounds obvious but it is also important that you phrase the question so that you will also be able to make sense of the answer given.

The I Ching is not going to tell you the winning lottery numbers or which make of car to buy but it will advise you on whether, for example, it is a good idea to go ahead and buy the car you’re considering or whether to sign a deal on that house that you’re contemplating buying.

A question might be along the lines of:

- What is the best course of action to take over this so and so situation?
- What will be the outcome if I still go forward with this action or plan?
- If I do so and so at this time, will this be beneficial to me?
• What is holding up progress on this/that project?
• What is the advice now this/that has happened?
• What’s the advice regarding the nature of this so and so relationship?

If you are contemplating alternatives – let’s say, a career move to a post in Manchester or to a post in Leeds is on offer – divide it up into two clear questions and consider the advice given for each.

**Reading between the lines**

I find it pays to take a while to be clear about the structure of a question and remove as many grey areas as possible. And remember too that you will be drawing upon the interpretation (of your answer) from a translation that an author has fixed on the page, in referring to a given hexagram. You may literally be reading between the lines at times to understand the response and make your decision.

Also consider that, in the answer you get, the I Ching may pick up on undercurrents or hidden components that are not even obvious to yourself at the time of asking your question. It is a case of being open (intuitive) to such depth of insight.

**Running the consultation**

You might want to get into a seated or kneeling position – a bit closer to the floor.

Keeping the question in mind throughout, shake the coins in clasped hands and then drop them onto, preferably, a nice wide smooth surface. Consider that if a coin wants to roll before it stops it should be able to do so.

The result creates the first (and bottom) line. Add up the value of the three coins. If they total 6, that equals a changing Yin (broken) line; 7 a Yang (unbroken) line; 8 a yin (broken) line, and 9 a changing Yang (unbroken) line.

I place a bullet point to identify any changing 6 or 9 line. This obviously helps me to keep tabs, but also helps should I wish to return to study the result again at any later time – which I often do.

Continue to build the six lines of your hexagram while keeping the question in mind throughout.

**Reading the answer**

If you have a hexagram with no changing lines, the commentary/judgement will be your answer – you ignore reading the lines. If you have changing lines (there can be any up to six), read the commentary/judgement of the hexagram plus the changing line/s. A changing line/s will also produce a second hexagram. A yin line will become a yang line in the second hexagram, and vice versa. So here you read the commentary/judgement in the first hexagram, then the appropriate lines, and then the commentary/judgement of the second resulting hexagram.

Often, with a changing line/s, the first hexagram will flag up the current situation with the line/s acting as a bridge, a step or series of steps, to the second hexagram – which provides advice on the outcome of the situation. From personal experience however, sometimes the two hexagrams are equal in their advice going forward – and the changing line/s less so – while sometimes it is the line/s that provides the answer – and the hexagrams seemingly have less importance.
Acting on the answer

Decide what to do from the answer given. It is not a good idea to consult the oracle again on the same question – looking for a different answer. If the situation is still troubling you, you can pose a new question (from a different or better angle) on the same situation. This is not so much about being disrespectful to the oracle but about being respectful to yourself – and living by the answers you receive.

Good source books

If finding difficulty understanding an answer to a question it can help to have access to more than one interpretation – more than one book or online source to refer to. I have a number of books on the I Ching. By far my favourite is: The I Ching Workbook by R L Wing. But I do also refer to I Ching or Book of Changes by Richard Wilhelm; I Ching: The Book of Change by John Blofeld; The Oracle of Change: How to Consult the I Ching by Alfred Douglas.

All success with your adventure into the world of ‘meaning’ using the I Ching.

Life and Death Making Sense of It

This book offers a thought-provoking perspective on life and death. It explores our situation, and the nature of soul, through a range of topics that include the paranormal, near-death experience, past lives, evolution, karma, reincarnation, and the Other Side. It raises demanding questions and offers answers regarding why we are here, and where we are heading. Order online or from your local bookstore.

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