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I-Ching

As A Method For Enhancing Consciousness

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ABSTRACT:

"*I Ching*" – "The Book of Changes" - is one of the basic treatises of ancient China used as a divinatory oracle for thousands of years. From a psychological point of view, it's a source of inspiration to complement logical thinking and a method for enhancing awareness. Basically composed of unconnected texts attached to graphic lines arranged in rigorous binary order, provides the consultant the opportunity to exercise the intellect in a different way, beyond the usual verbal, linear and causal mode. "*I Ching*" – "The Book of Changes" - is one of the basic treatises of ancient China used as a divinatory oracle for thousands of years. From a psychological point of view, it's a source of inspiration to complement logical thinking and a method for enhancing awareness. Basically composed of unconnected texts attached to graphic lines arranged in rigorous binary order, provides the consultant the opportunity to exercise the intellect in a different way, beyond the usual verbal, linear and causal mode.

During the oracular experience, based on a random procedure, the focus of perception is projected -in terms of Gestalt theory- to the background, beyond the limits of the "figure". As a result, the subject verifies a growing awareness and the ability to find meaning and sense connected to vital energies.

On the other hand, from a theoretical standpoint, this book constitutes a challenge to Western rationality, as it proposes expanding the research field on mental life.

Keywords: I Ching, oracle, method, enhancing, awareness, randomness, figure, ground, rationality.

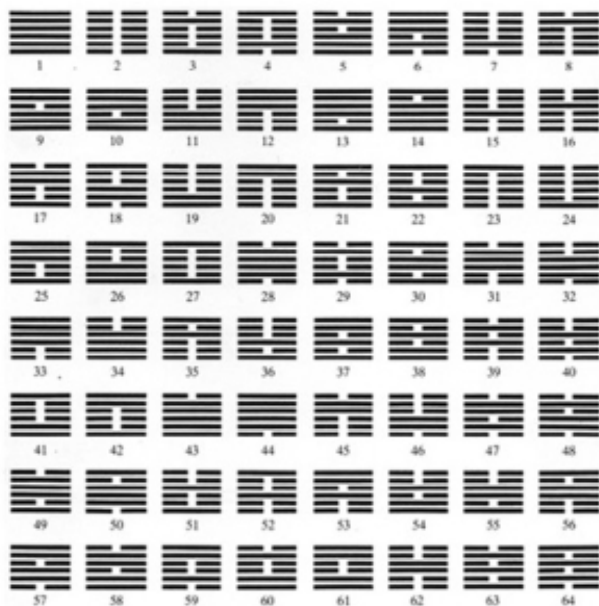
"*I Ching*" is a compound name, the translation of which into English might be roughly: "the *Book of Changes*". It is one of the basic treatises of ancient China used as a divinatory oracle for thousands of years. In the West, it's a source of inspiration to complement logical thinking and a method for enhancing awareness and self knowledge. Indeed, the comparison with Western culture reveals certain shortcomings of our current way of thinking, especially when trying to approach the intricacies of subjective phenomena. That's why it makes sense to look into it today.

Its origins lie deep in darkest antiquity and therefore we know nothing about its authors. Assumed to have been written some three thousand years ago, it is considered one of the oldest books, if not, perhaps, the oldest one ever written. What we do know is that the Chinese have employed it since the dawn of their history and has been fundamental to their society and to that of several other countries in its area of influence. Still today, four of its eight basic symbols can be seen on the flag of the Republic of South Korea.

The unknown magicians who supposedly were its authors, structured it upon the idea of change as the intimate fabric of all reality, but did not employ words to state it. Not even used ideograms. It happened at a time so remote that may even be considered prior to any form of writing. They found an ingenious way to express change using two graphic lines; one solid and the other broken coupled horizontally one upon the other, combined in mathematical order. The original body of the book, thus, was neither words nor ideograms, but only these two lines, stacked in groups and placed in succession, revealing pure and simple opposition playing between them. It is just a structure of lines, arranged similarly to the one/zero binary order, and, as a curious note, say, resembling modern electronic bar codes.

It presents a first arrangement of 8 groups of three lines each, called "*trigrams*" that results from all possible mating between a solid and a broken line among them. In a second stage, these groups were coupled together to form 64 groups

of six lines each, called "*hexagrams*", being formed, thus, the definitive body of the I Ching, as shown in the following figure.



During the course of the centuries, however, other sages, especially Confucius, gave each group a name, and in turn, each line was attached to brief narratives describing diverse everyday life situations. This is the configuration that has finally come to us and is used currently both in East and West Countries, mainly for divinatory purposes. However, the book is not a logical text that could be read fluently, as any other one. This unique feature makes it evident that it was intended to be consulted at random.

The query made to the Oracle is carried out by methods and practices that have changed over the centuries. Nowadays, we use only three coins to do it, flipping them at once in order to make appear, by chance, those basic solid and broken lines. Generally, it is performed as follows:

1. Must be used three identical coins or medals.

2. They have to be assigned the value “two” to the head and “three” to the tail, or vice versa.
3. Then, the coins must be tossed at one time, summing up the values as they come.
4. If the result is odd, it is considered that a solid line has come up, and if it is even, a broken one.

The operation is repeated six times and the emerging lines must be drawn from the bottom up, piled on each other. Thus, the hexagram containing the oracle’s answer is formed.

As we can see, the operation involves chance as a normal way to handle the mind. To understand this apparently irrational procedure we must bear in mind that I-Ching leads to a transcendent reality, and for this reason the search must be done from a sort of consciousness’s back door. That is; as far as possible from voluntary deliberation.

In fact, the Confucian text and the procedure of the query to the oracle are well known and there are numerous translations available to European languages. That happened especially after Carl Jung prefaced the first English edition of Richard Wilhelm’s classic translation from Chinese into German in the mid-fifties (Wilhelm 1997). Since then, I Ching surprises all who approaches it with an open mind, causing the impression of an entity that answers, in a personal spiritual experience.

The divinatory aspect is what had made up its reputation from its origins in the Far East. In the West, this peculiarity was publicly recognized by many intellectuals who, along with Jung, admitted having verified its divinatory virtues. However, we prefer to discuss here its transpersonal value as a tool for enhancing consciousness.

For us, the series of 64 hexagrams expresses all the varied repertoire of mental life. Each one of them symbolizes a certain inner attitude, and everything that can become conscious. All that can be thought, felt, believed, desired, imagined, etc.

Also every problem, joy, emotion, and so on. Hexagrams may be considered a screen where everyone can freely project upon it his or her concerns, questions, thoughts or feelings. Its web of lines, are not ideas to be learned but a framework deprived of contents, just meant to help the task of feeling and thinking.

Hexagram No. 1 is the act of creation and the inner attitude of giving oneself to others.

It leads to the No. 2, which means Conceiving, Embracing.

The third means Stumbling, that guides to four, devoted to Learning, and so forth (*Hexagrams 5 & 6: Expecting/Conflict, 7&8: The Army/Comradeship, 9&10: Inhibition/Freedom, 11&12: Relationship/Stagnation, 13&14: To Organize/To Possess, 15&16: Modesty/Enthusiasm, 17&18: Leading/Prisoner of the Past, 19&20: Approach/Contemplate, 21&22: Striking/Gracefulness, 23&24: Deteriorate/Rebirth, 25&26: Innocence/Self Discipline, 27&28: Feed/Excess, 29&30: Water /Fire, 31&32: Suggestion/Duration, 33&34: Escape/Confrontation, 35&36: Progress/Involution, 37&38: Family/Oppositions, 39&40: Difficulty/Liberation, 41&42: Decrease/Increase, 43&44: Overflow/Contact, 45&46: Flock/Sprout, 47&48: Exhaustion/Meditate, 49&50: Revolution/Evolution, 51&52: Thunder/Mountain, 53&54: Organize/Improvise, 55&56: The Top/Leaving, 57&58: Wind/Lake, 59&60: Spread/Restriction, 61&62: Innermost Being/Frustration, 63&64: Perform/Prepare.*)

This peculiar configuration submitting the names of the hexagrams to a mathematical order enables the consultant to associate ideas by other pathways than the ordinary verbal speech. In other words: the imagination of the subject can take one of two roads: the linear offered by verbal language or the chain of empty concepts that invites him or her to fill up. The first way provides information and culture. The second makes subjective awareness grows.

The man or woman seeking advice can project freely upon the hexagram their concerns or doubts, and then simply expect what occurs in their respective subjectivities. It may appear sensations, feelings, recalling of the past, association of ideas or sudden inspirations. Normally, a kind of lighting that reveals certain hidden aspects of the submitted question. They perceive that no experience or problem can be enclosed in words nor resumed in verbal sentences, for from the

Universe's perspective, there are many more problems and solutions that could be imagined. So, the enquirer overcomes the common concept of Destiny as a series of default or unforeseen events, and discovers a new freedom facing future.

Actually, the oracular consultation is a personal adventure full of surprises. The most important disclosure is the final encounter with something or someone who could be compared with the "*daimon*" which Socrates talk about as his personal guide. I prefer to imagine him as an "*Inner Master*" or a "*Potential Self*", but everyone can call it as he/she may deem fit. It is a sort of virtual instance that throws light on whatever be the question we submit and, to some extent, makes us inwardly stronger.

At this point, the perspective of a new way of handling the mind encourages us to reconsider the nature of knowledge itself. Naturally, knowledge is not an objective reality seen reflected in a mirror, but involves an action that performs the mind on an undifferentiated reality. The fact is that reality is "*processed*" by the mind. This phenomenon can be clearly seen in the so-called "*reversible figures*" discovered in the twenties by the Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin (Rubin 1915). When trying to know anything, mind proceeds to split it in two areas, choosing one of them, that is, "*abstracting it*" and rejecting the other in order to create contrast.



This operation recalls the attitude of God in the act of Creation. According to the Bible, The Lord divides light from darkness and land from water, and then Adam from Eve and the couple from Paradise, Cain from Abel, etc. Behind these stories, the Genesis appears as the saga of human consciousness; that is: a metaphor of the need of mind to split apart all perceived reality to raise awareness.

The act of knowing, thus, involves an essential paradox, since as can be seen; the conscious *figure* is backed up by an unconscious *ground* in a reversible process. Furthermore, awareness is supported by something that must be hidden, which means that knowledge rests on ignorance. For this reason, the nature of consciousness is one of the biggest problems posed to science. This means that the act of awareness is a task undertaken by mind extracting a portion from a whole, and hiding the rest to provide the figure -by contrast- limits and shape. The act of consciousness seems to be similar to looking at a coin: we can not simultaneously view both sides. To see one side of the coin, we ourselves must hide the other.

To put it another way, as consciousness exists only to the extent that the ground is ignored, mind has to make an effort to stay away from the ground. For example, when attending a play in the theatre: we can concentrate on the plot and eventually get moved by it, but only to the extent that we overlook all the props around the scene. If, for instance, the focus shifts to the details of the scenery, our commitment to the story tends to wane. To keep the focus on the plot, thus, requires an effort of the mind to maintain grounds away.

But the fact is that mind has to pay a high price to gain awareness, for in doing so, falls into a trap. Like a fly in the ointment, is caught in its own abstraction. This means that grounds not only must be hidden, but also will be excluded from rational framework.

At this stage we may ask ourselves: what does the mind conceal? What is excluded from rationality? There is an ancient fable, attributed to Phaedrus, a Roman author who lived at the beginning of our era, that says: "*Peras imposuit Jupiter nobis*

duas..., etc." In Latin, this means: *"Jupiter, the Roman god has imposed upon us two bags: one on the chest, containing the faults of other people, and another on the back, with our own shortcomings"*. Thereby, said the fable, we are inclined to judge others more harshly than ourselves, simply because we can not see our own shortcomings (Phaedrus 1992).

This antique story hits the nail on the head: what is hidden while knowing is the observer himself, the subject. It's me, you, all of us as we strive to know. The ground of the figure, thus, is the observer himself. In short, it comprises all subjective matter.

In turn, the act of observing means an inner attitude. It's the energy of Nature that makes us see, feel, think, believe, desire, etc. This fact is of major importance, for everything we experience in life gets the colour and meaning we ourselves provide.

The conclusion is that grounds, as such, remain unknown to the mind.

Of course, every background can be known, but only as figures; that is, not in itself. Grounds can be observed piece by piece, but in doing so, they are denaturalized while turned into figures. Indeed, they disappear, like the life of a mouse when slaughtered to be studied on the vivisection table. *This is a major weakness of Western thought: The inability to know ground in itself, that is: grounds as grounds and, ultimately, all subjective life.*

Because of that exclusion, Western culture has been built on figures, say, signs. So, trying to understand reality, Western mind is forced to build up scaffolds made of signs. Following this way of handling the intellect, the image of the universe provided by Western science resembles a "patchwork" as wide as the imagination can reach. And, truly, knowing becomes an illusion similar to the purpose to step on the horizon, or the end of the rainbow.

Instead, the Oriental mind, at least that of I Ching's authors, has been made upon figures and grounds together. This kind of mentality contributed to build a civilization which emphasizes the subjective. Submitted a problem to western

rationality, it appears as defined by words, that is: signs like traffic signals. This leads to confusing map with territory, ideas with realities, energy values, with rhetoric. Instead, I Ching express the problem in a pictural way, which frees consciousness from the burden of verbal discourse. As an alternative, submitting the problem to the Oracle, it will appear to some extent as a physical object. During the session, we are inclined to imagine and feel that the problem has different sides, a top, bottom, inside and outside, before and after, and so.

To interpret the oracle's advice is advisable to perform a display of hexagrams, comparing the meanings that are formed by changing the nature of the lines or reversing the position of the trigrams. All this helps to shed light on the question submitted. The display of hexagrams shows various possible futures that lie ahead, and Destiny appears like a sort of streams that the current of a river could follow. They are eventual situations that the subject may help to produce, depending on the inner attitude he or she are able to adopt. Quantum Physics has demonstrated that at the subatomic level, objective reality does not exist, except as a set of possibilities which the observer is capable of influence. This is a situation which, surprisingly, reflects the hexagrams when deployed.

Western mind falls into the trap of materialism because it assumes that the ground of the figure exists as an *objective reality*. Then, it supposes that everything surrounding the figure could be abstracted later to complete the picture of what actually "*is out there*". Science and technologies work this way with highly effective results, of course, because they are based on signs, and signs work as maps about material reality. But this way of handling the mind does not yield the same results when applied to feelings and values and inner lives of people.

I Ching suggests that there are two levels of consciousness: about figures and about grounds. Looked at carefully, this distinction is not entirely foreign to us because the Bible itself says in Genesis that "*Adam knew*" his wife, Eve. Thus, we can say that there is a kind of knowledge that implies not only a vision of reality, but also involves feelings and relationship.

Unfortunately, since the birth of Modern Age, awareness of grounds, that is: moral consciousness has stopped its evolution, due to a mode of reasoning that considered scientific method as the only reliable and even possible way to know, based on solely "clear and distinct ideas", as Descartes put it, excluding grounds and the energy of moral values. This way of reasoning, gave birth, of course, to a culture that stands for his material feats, but reveals powerless to cope with problems of private concern.

Then, say that knowledge as we conceive it, applies only to the physical world, but by no means is capable to learn the realities of the interior life of people. As a result, when we try to study the subjective, that is, emotional and existential issues, we are only able to talk about them. That is, using just discourse, metaphors and allegories. To the western mind, thus, ethics, values, feelings and, ultimately, all that can truly make people happy or unhappy remain in complete darkness and it is impossible to develop consciousness about feelings and emotions about life, justice or goodness.

No other conclusion can be drawn in a world where wars are increasingly sophisticated and bloody, and the planet we inhabit is subjected to a regrettable destruction. Aldous Huxley points out that when the wolves fight one another, the struggle is never to die. When one of them feels defeated, offers his neck to the rival as a sign of surrender and the winner walks away (Huxley 1980). However, statesmen and politics in general, in today's society accuse an alarming lack of values. Behind a weak coat of ideas and discourse, often hide instincts and appetites not even shared by beasts. Undoubtedly, Western civilization is craving for a new consciousness able to connect and interact with the energies of Nature. As I Ching frees consciousness from the prison of verbal signs, mind faces more ways to associate ideas and generate meaning, allowing it to grow and develop towards higher levels of awareness. Of course, this is an intimate individual operation. The responses suggested by the Oracle are not universal truths, but rather vital energy providing balance and tempering the mind as if it were a musical instrument.

Here we come to a revealing conclusion: We did not come to this world to convince anyone of any universal truth or scope, but just to express our unique voice, joining the chorus of all living beings to celebrate life and do take care for it.

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