

A STORY ABOUT HOW TO GAIN A READING FROM THE I CHING

(in part, from The Holistic I Ching and its Handbook)



Just for fun, let's imagine a highly improbable scenario, whereby in June of 1812 Napoleon consults the I Ching about a planned invasion of Russia, in order to teach Czar Alexander a lesson about 'not interfering in European politics'.

One of his Generals informs Napoleon that an Oracle from the Orient could help him to plan the attack, as the General is beginning to have doubts about the venture. He has used this Oracle before and knows the method for obtaining **the Yang or Yin lines to gain a six line diagram which reveals a reading from the book.** However, the others say that Napoleon could easily force the Russian Army into a great battle within three months and that he would be victorious. But they decide to consult the Oracle anyway, just to see how quickly it could be done. Napoleon is told that he needs to set aside three coins. When the coins are thrown it shows that:

THREE HEADS	represent a YIN Moving Line	--- X ---
THREE TAILS	symbolize a YANG Moving Line	----0----
ONE TAIL & TWO HEADS	stand for a YANG Line with no movement	-----
TWO TAILS & ONE HEAD	signify a YIN Line with no movement	--- ----

He concentrates on his question (after all he has thought of nothing else for months) and is told that he has to **throw the coins six times starting with the Bottom Line first.** The coins reveal (below) that his first throw is a plain Yin line, the next one is a Yin moving line (with an X) and the remaining four lines are all plain Yang lines.

	No. 33
Question: Will the Russians be defeated in three months?	-----

Answer: Hexagram/Section No. 33 - with the only moving line being the Second Yin line, shown here.	-----

	--- X ---
	--- ----

The X and the 0 in the middle of the lines is just to make clear whether it is a Yin or Yang moving line, which indicates that after reading the Main Hexagram, then you read the text for the moving lines, in this case the Second Line.

His General sees that **the bottom three lines form the trigram** (or three line diagram) **of Mountain** and **the top three lines form the trigram of Heaven.** He takes his finger to where these two trigrams meet on the Chart and sees that it forms Hexagram No. 33. They turn to this hexagram in the Oracle and Napoleon is puzzled by its name which is Retreat.

The chart is shown on the next page.

HEXAGRAM NUMBERS

	Upper Tri- grams:	Heaven -----	Earth -- --	Thunder -- --	Water -- --	Mountain -----	Wood -----	Fire -----	Lake -- --
Lower Trigrams ↓	-----								
Heaven (Ch'ien)	----- ----- -----	1	11	34	5	26	9	14	43
Earth (K'un)	-- -- -- -- -- --	12	2	16	8	23	20	35	45
Thunder (Ch ê n)	-- -- -- -- -----	25	24	51	3	27	42	21	17
Water (K'an)	-- -- ----- -- --	6	7	40	29	4	59	64	47
Mountain (K ê n)	----- -- -- -- --	33	15	62	39	52	53	56	31
Wood/Wind (Sūn)	----- ----- -- --	44	46	32	48	18	57	50	28
Fire (Li)	----- -- -- -----	13	36	55	63	22	37	30	49
Lake (Tui)	-- -- ----- -----	10	19	54	60	41	61	38	58

Napoleon's assistant tentatively reads the text for Hexagram No. 33 - Retreat but as he continues, he fears the wrath of his revered leader, as the text indicates that the overall situation (the main hexagram) will involve unforeseen obstacles.

The Image for No. 33 from *The Holistic I Ching*: Heaven moves away from The Mountain – symbolizing *movement away* from blockages. A major obstacle will thwart progress, yet despite this, *a forward attack or a last stand* may be planned. It refers to a situation where doubts or problems have already surfaced. Yet there is often denial about how much damage could occur by continuing in the same way. This is not surprising, as the real issues are now hidden, buried or concealed. **[For example, the poor road system in Russia due**

to the depth of ice in Winter.] Hence one is advised to look beyond the obvious.

The structure of the hexagram denotes a desire to remain firm, thinking that one is still in control. [They had a vastly superior military force. It was also thought that food and resources could be gained readily, not expecting the scorched earth policy of the Russian farmers.] Nevertheless, the best path is a withdrawal (*like a wise military manoeuvre*) away from troubled situations, to safe, peaceful areas or better arrangements – signs of which are now appearing. Beware of resentment, arguments or hostility [towards Czar Alexander], as this would prolong a negative attachment. To ensure protection from harm, withdraw, not in anger but with reserve, by distancing oneself from difficult persons or conditions.

**Keynotes
for No. 33.**

Moving away from an obstacle. (Upper Trigram of Heaven.)
 Remaining calm and reserved. (Lower Trigram of Mountain.)
 Retreat from harm already encountered or hidden deterioration.
 Any embarrassment now, is nothing compared to the defeat or injury possible, from a *last stand* or continued engagement.
 Withdrawal is not cowardice, but is the intelligent choice.
 For there is a much less-involved and protected way to interact.
The lower moving lines use the symbol of a retreating army under attack [this includes the Second Line moving line].

By this time in our imaginary scenario, the doubtful General is feeling desperate, as the I Ching is confirming his doubts, which the others consider to be laughable. (The upper trigram of Heaven stands for over-confidence.) Yet he struggles on and reads the text for the Second Moving Line.

The Image for the Second Line: *There is a determination not to retreat, as if bound to a cause by leather bindings.*

(The moving lines reveal the personal angle within the overall situation.) “It may be felt that it is not possible to abandon a cause, a person, an opinion, with honour. A promise or a pledge might have been made – a duty is upheld – pride is involved – or an engagement was arranged. Be assured that an underlying aim may be worthy, or a general principle is correct. Not wanting to give in could be *theoretically right*, or a valuable lesson can be learnt. An ideal may be noble. [Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.] Yet it would be very wise to heed the advice of others to retreat. For a complete victory is impossible *at this stage or with these contacts*. It may take some time to acknowledge this, or to withdraw. There is a determination to maintain a resolute attitude or fixed ideas. This is based on the false presumption that the present position is powerful, but this is a deceptive view.

There is also a willingness to make a great sacrifice. Nevertheless, in this case it would be in vain. This is due to the superior strength of influences that are now secret or hidden, but which will emerge when least expected. Someone trustworthy could suggest a sensitive, tactful solution, e.g. how to arrange a postponement – set a time for a reappraisal – or greatly modify an

arrangement. Good progress can be made in a much safer manner. **The greatest deception is a feeling of being at the height of power or influence and able to control all coming events. Yet one would not be in command of future developments and power or influence could diminish far more easily than realized. For the other party would quickly gain control.**

At this point, Napoleon is red in the face and about to explode. “What nonsense” he exclaims. “What would that ancient Oracle be able to tell me? Our culture has passed beyond such drivel. We are in an Age of Enlightenment. Logic rules us now. Fancy you General, even reading such a book.” And he throws it onto his desk with a thud. “Why would they not welcome us with open arms? They will be happy to be free of that dictator. And besides, our religion is intellectually superior to theirs? We have advanced thinking and culture to offer them. They will submit to us readily.” And he storms off.

Nevertheless, that night he has a disturbing dream. *He sees soldiers dying in the snow, reaching out to him and pleading for help.* He wakes up and shrugs it off as a nightmare borne of anxiety. After all, it is the height of summer. Yet all that day, the image remains in his mind. Thus despite himself, he asks his General to consult the Oracle again, as perhaps this time he will get a more positive text. “That last reading was so negative.”



The General says that you can consult the I Ching using a different method, for example by using stones. He has **a small silk bag which contains Eleven Coloured Gemstones.** He explains that to ask your question, you need to **withdraw one stone at a time (then place it back in the bag each time).** The silk bag contains 1 Green stone, 2 Red, 3 White and 5 Black stones and this small chart is placed in the bag.

a Green/Blue Bead symbolizes:	a YIN Moving Line	--- X ---
a Red Bead:	a YANG Moving Line	----0----
a White Bead:	a YANG Line	-----
a Black Bead:	a YIN Line	--- —

They start by writing down their question. This time Napoleon asks about his victory over Russia, even it takes longer than expected. He chooses six stones, one at a time, then places it back in the bag each time — starting with the Bottom Line first. The hexagram that emerges is:

	No. 7	
	--- ----	Upper trigram of
Hexagram No. 7 - The Army	--- ----	Earth
	--- ----	
	--- ----	Lower trigram of
	-----	Water
- the Bottom Line moving	---X--	

The Image for No. 7: Trigrams: Water and Earth – *the deep, mysterious and subconscious (Water) flows beneath the Earth.* This metaphor denotes that the energies controlling current events are *beneath the surface*, or not consciously recognized as a prime factor. **[In this case, the Winter conditions in Russia.]** Just like water flowing into streams and collecting in underground pools, collective forces are at work. This can refer to personal inner turmoil, a hidden undercurrent, or even social and political upheaval. A society, group or personal space is being invaded or swayed by collective conditioning or mass manipulation. The traditional image is of *an army*. This symbolizes that **if conditions cannot be controlled and kept within their correct boundaries, chaos will follow.**All those affected could be swept along by negative group thinking or uncontrolled feelings. **[Idealism, revolutionary zeal etc.]** Perhaps the false belief-patterns of a family, a clan, or a whole community are involved. Much clearer thinking can guide all concerned to right action.

Keynotes for No. 7: A group (*like an army*) or an alliance. (Upper Trigram of Earth.) Emotional undercurrents or turmoil. (Lower Trigram of Water.) Armed forces, police-forces, emergency services or swift action. Disorder beneath the surface, yet order can be reinstated. **Those who react in an unthinking way could be swept away by religious fervour, political intrigue, herd consciousness or panic.** Thus think carefully about which people to rely upon, or whom to believe, or how to participate. Proper discipline may be lacking. Yet those who can take control in a firm clear way will benefit.

At this point Napoleon is most interested, having received the hexagram The Army. Yet he dismisses the point about the energies controlling events being *beneath the surface*. For wasn't he in control of most of his previous battles?

The Image for the Bottom Moving Line of No. 7: ***If an army goes forth in a state of disorder from the start, misfortune is inevitable. [The majority of his Grand Army never left Russia.]***

"The above metaphor depicts those who wish to make inroads – to promote their cause – to increase their influence – gain further resources – or extend their *territory*. **The motive or underlying ideal may be worthy. Yet hidden currents of emotion need to be brought to the surface, acknowledged, or expressed in a more balanced way.** For instead of setting out with a clear purpose and a rational idea of the real prospects to be faced, confused thinking exists. With some persons, there may even be a slightly fanatical mood, due to an out-of-balance **devotion to a cause**, a crusade, or an idea that has taken over. Rampant feelings may swamp objectivity. This could lead to *a rushing into the unknown*, without proper thought or analysis. Because of such poor planning and judgement, conditions will turn out to be very different to those expected! Someone would then be at a disadvantage.

Initially, short-term gains could be made or a victory experienced. (*This would be like an army rushing forward, or a strong Spring tide.*) But when *Winter* inevitably follows, those concerned could be *surrounded* in a hostile environment, or completely out of their depth. Needless anxiety would follow.

(In extreme cases or with military campaigns, mass suffering could be experienced.) Thus it is imperative to remain on friendly territory until a total reassessment is made. Plans need to be revised and resources redirected. Think again: How would another party, or other groups have a distinct advantage, later? What else would need to be investigated, organized or done first? Lasting progress could be made, from a *home-base*, in a more clever way. For example, make occasional visits – gain further knowledge – participate via indirect links – promote close cultural, political or business ties [which happened to be one of Napoleon’s aims]. This could ensure against a backlash.”

What was Napoleon’s reaction? He protested (in our imaginary story) “What is the meaning of this. Another negative text! My dear General, are you trying to trick me? Do you think that this book could dissuade us from our glorious quest? I am not a coward. The Russians cannot avoid fighting us and we must have courage and be fearless in our resolve. I do not believe in Oracles. I am master of my own destiny.” And he walks out of the tent and goes to sleep soundly. Unfortunately, we all know what the final outcome was. In Taoist terms, the Russians used a more Yin indirect tactic, a path of least resistance, not directly confronting Napoleon’s troops until near Moscow and undermining their resources, at great cost to themselves.

The basic wording for the I Ching was commenced in 1,150 B.C. E. and it has been expanded and commented upon ever since. The above wording comes from my work on *The Holistic I Ching - Oracle of Wholeness*. You may be thinking: *how is it that the texts accurately describe the situation Napoleon experienced?* It can be explained readily. The I Ching is based on **recurring themes**, both within Nature and reflected in human behaviour. The above embellished scenario could apply to hundreds of battles throughout history. I am sure you can think of examples. Yet we always hear of the phrase *learning from history*, or as I like to say, *thinking about what happened last time?* Yet how many people do (including myself at times).

The wording for the Lines has a lot to do with the structure of the system, e.g. which hexagram a moving line is linked to and so on (as explained in the Handbook). For example, the Bottom Line of No. 7 - The Army links to No. 19 which stands for a situation that at first expands like Spring growth, then deteriorates when Winter arrives. Thus it is easy to see that this is a hexagram Napoleon *could* have received. Likewise No. 33 - Retreat - 2nd Line was fitting, as this line is linked to Hexagram No. 44 - Temptation, where you feel at the height of your power as with mid-Summer, but Autumn is bound to follow, symbolizing an undermining of power.

The I Ching simply portrays **archetypal human patterns or conditions** (chosen at random via the subconscious and not the ego). You can see from the above scenario the difference between our ego-responses and a deeper layer of wisdom, often ignored. However if you have a good memory, or keep records of readings, you can learn from precedence, or in other words **what happened before?** I hope you enjoyed this make-believe, yet informative story, with two means of consultation. You may wish to record the method for using gemstones.

Consulting the I Ching is not always as straight-forwarded as described above. Such readings could be received well before a major venture was about to take place (regardless of the question asked), making it challenging to interpret.

This is because the inner conditions and the initial plans were already present, prior to being implemented. Consulting the oracle nearly always results in the deeper issues being shown in the texts. To give a mundane example, I consulted the I Ching about buying a reasonably expensive product to use on a vacation in Sydney. Yet I received a reply about a health issue. My deeper self was directing me to an underlying health problem in the family which lasted longer than expected. Thus the reading was talking about *not going on the vacation at all*, which turned to be true. The purchase was of lesser significance. When this happens, consult the I Ching again about the first question.

From the above scenario about an invasion of a country (or any major imbalance in your life) you can see quite clearly that **books like the I Ching can suggest ways to rectify imbalances, but the real power to change hearts and minds comes from direct experience of harmony with the unifying power of the Tao.** An awakening to the Great Light (which transcends yet includes all Life) can take us beyond arrogance, pride, ignorance and the suffering it creates, to a state of review and the ability not only to make amends, but to create joy and peace.