

The Sage That Speaks through the I Ching

Several hexagrams define the Teacher whom we contact when we consult the *I Ching*. The fourth hexagram, *Youthful Folly*, calls this entity “the Sage,” one who is capable of teaching us the workings of the hidden world. It specifies that it is we who must seek the Sage, and not the Sage who seeks us. This teacher is also referred to in *The Well* (Hex. 48), as a well whose clear, refreshing water is available to all who come, and who are willing to drink its water (put its counsel into action).

The water of the well also symbolizes the inner truth that resides in our innermost reaches of consciousness, and in our unconscious mind. It is implied, therefore, that in accessing our inner truth, we draw upon the wisdom of the Sage. Going to the well is symbolic of ‘going within’, as in contemplation and meditation. The depths of the well symbolize a ‘place’ where we may perceive the ‘hidden world’ where the Sage resides.⁵ The image of the well as a place where wisdom and insight may be accessed is also a figurative reference to the hidden world that exists all around us, and which is visible to us only by being inwardly attuned and aware.

It is also said that to draw water from the well we must put our rope down far enough. This means that we are wholly sincere in our approach to the Sage. With a testing, indifferent, or doubtful attitude, “our rope does not go down far enough.” It is also important that the jug for drawing up the water not be “cracked,” otherwise all the water drains out. This means that if we doubt the value of the wisdom, it remains inaccessible to us, and we are deprived of its nourishing qualities. If, in approaching the Sage we seek only to confirm our fixed views, or to support ideas the *I Ching* regards as incorrect, or decadent, or if we are preoccupied with the trivia of external form, we drink “the mud of the well.” If we seek help to further selfish aims, we “catch fishes.” When it is not time to know the answers, or to achieve our goals, we are told, “the well (our well) is being lined.” While the well is being lined, it cannot be used, but the work on refurbishing it will make it all the more useful later on.

The water of the well is also symbolic of our intuitive knowledge

⁵ A number of famous fairytales in the Grimm Brothers’ collection have the well as a place through which the hidden world may be accessed.

of all things. In some way or another the Sage and inner truth are one and the same thing. The treasure-chest of inner truth given us at birth is the great gift that we bring with us into this world from the Cosmic source. In the beginning we are consciously connected with it, but through conditioning this conscious connection becomes obscured. When we choose (usually at mid-life) to work on our self-development, it is necessary to re-establish and develop this connection. A person who undertakes this work no longer needs to look for the Sage without, because he restores the Sage within.

The well also symbolizes the universality of truth that lies, like a water-table, under all the wells of a community. Just as we can access nourishing water from the well if we approach it in the right way, we can likewise count on people to recognize and respond to what is universally true and just, if we approach them correctly. Truth, we soon find, is always refreshing and light. If an idea about human behavior is not universally applicable, for instance, it is not truth. If, on hearing something grim and dark we think, 'that can't be truth', it is not, for the perspective is as yet incomplete. A complete perspective always lifts off the burdens of doubt and fear. Both great and small perceptions have this quality.

The Sage who speaks through the *I Ching* defines itself in other hexagrams as "an expert in directing affairs," "a man of influence who has special abilities," "a guest who knows the secrets by which the kingdom may be made to flourish," "a ruler," "a prince who seeks able helpers," and "a helpful friend," in many other hexagram lines. The Sage is also referred to in the plural in some hexagram lines as "persons in retirement who may be sought for help in difficult matters, if we approach them modestly," but this may also refer to the suppressed and forgotten inner truth that lies dormant in others, that can be called on to help, through modesty, trust, and patience.

The Cosmology of the I Ching

Book II of the *I Ching* says that the source of all things is *T'ai Chi*, meaning 'oneness' and 'primal unity'. This primal source is also called the *Void*, or Container of the Universe. It is seen as changeless, timeless, and universal. It works in ways analogous to the way the human mind works, and the implication is there that the primal source of