Example: Dealing with a Downturn

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At last, let's get stuck in to another example. The four hexagrams of interest form a unit square in, or a single facet of, the Boolean lattice.[1] These are the most numerous substructures within the lattice. This particular example was not generated "randomly", it is a constructed example showing how the language of change (易文) can be applied descriptively to conceived situations. We could say that these four hexagrams form a sentence.

The Basic Structure

So, the example involves (using traditional names) The Cauldron ䷱, Corruption ䷑, Before Completion ䷿, and Inexperience ䷃. The structure these hexagrams form as a facet is shown in Figure 1.
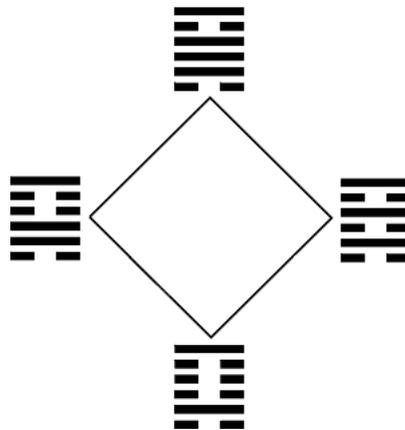

Figure 1: The Unit Square

It is important to realize that this facet encodes four separate possible readings. These are:

- i) 876687
- ii) 876987
- iii) 879687
- iv) 879987

Individual readings impose a particular direction of flow through a structure. For example, 876687 would start in the bottom hexagram and finish in the top; 876987 would start in the right middle hexagram and finish in the left middle. In this example, I am not concerned with any of the individual readings. Instead, I wish to explore the meaning of the structure as a whole.

This is the gist of the interpretation: Embedded in a downturn, for what ever reason, what are the available options?

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[1] Unit squares in the Boolean lattice represent four hexagrams, each with the same four lines fixed and the other two allowed to vary. Such a square is considered to be governed by the difference hexagram representing the two changing lines. See Schöter 2005 for an overview of these structures.

The structure of the story is derived by splitting the hexagram into its three bigrams to get three domains of interpretation, or dimensions of experience: from the top down these are Pattern, Consciousness and Matter. At all the transition points in this story, both Pattern and Matter, the top and bottom pairs of lines, have an energy which is generalized as reaching the zenith and turning back down, this is the moment the breath turns out. For Pattern, a theme of ill-luck, manifesting in Matter as a down turn in material circumstance. The individual is caught between these two flows, one sucking from beneath and the other pressing down from above.

The facet shown is governed by the hexagram ䷽, Barely Exceeding. In this case, it is showing that the domain of the situation subject to change is in the centre pair, Consciousness. The governing hexagram itself speaks of small action being enough in this circumstance. Being careful, and eschewing great, far reaching plans in favour of responding to the immediate concerns of the moment is the correct way to proceed.

The Components of the Square

First of all, you have to realize that's the situation you are really in. Realize it intellectually and recognize it in your heart too. So, in that situation, with a strong heart and an active mind, we have ䷱. Called The Cauldron, traditionally, we have the alchemical ideas of transformation and refinement. In this facet, this symbol now acquires a layer of meaning emphasizing the idea that the energy of the context tends downward, and managing transformation in that context. When we consider the two central lines of this hexagram, we find that they both have their pros and cons.[2] The third line (the bottom line of Consciousness, the Heart) is correct in its place, it is the only line correct in its place, but it does not resonate with its corresponding line. Further, it is part of the only pair that is not resonant. The fourth line (the top line of Consciousness, the Mind) is not correct in its place, but it does resonate with its corresponding line. In algebraic terms: $c(䷱) = ䷟$, and $r(䷱) = ䷠$.

Whilst it is good to hold that state of abstract understanding, it is important to develop concrete acceptance of the situation; keeping full and energized in the midst of the downturn is what drives the transformation. Recognizing that transformation is necessary, and with the manifestations of Pattern and Matter fixed by circumstance, the only possibility for change is in yourself. One quantum of change away, one layer down in the lattice, are ䷾ and ䷿.

To reach the first of these, ䷾, the third line changes. In changing, although the third line becomes incorrect in its place, t now resonates and, in so doing, also brings resonance to the sixth line. Thus, the result of such a change is that all the lines are incorrect and all the lines resonate: $c(䷾) = ䷟$, $r(䷾)=䷠$. In ䷾, you go with the flow of the downturn, the direction of energy of Consciousness is in accord with the direction of the energies in Pattern and Matter. But this is not quite like a cork in the torrent — this boat has a rudder, the energy has a definite direction, which must actively find the way. This is traditionally called Before Completion, everything is resonating nicely, but everything is in the wrong place. There isn't really anything to do except wait for the situation to unfold of its own accord and hope that in breath follows out breath a few more times at least.

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[2] See Schöter 1999 for the technical description of correctness and correspondence.

If the fourth line changes instead of the second, then things are not so good: ䷑. This is not a great change to undertake because although the fourth line takes on the correct character by changing, it was previously resonating, and in changing, this resonance ceases and thus, the resonance of the first line with it. The result of the change is ䷑, and the algebra of correctness and resonance says that: c(䷑) = ䷗, r(䷑) = ䷖. Here in ䷑, the energy of Consciousness flows against the direction of energy in the context; the central bigram is starting, whilst the other two bigrams are ending. Call this a burst of enthusiasm, a desperate attempt to turn back the tide by force of will, swimming upstream like the noble salmon. However you view the effort, however strong your heart, you're not thinking clearly if you don't realize that you're going to get tired if you try and sustain the pace in this place. Traditionally called Corruption, this indicates a need to work on the roots of the decay that have brought you to this position.

If you have exhausted yourself in ䷑, you must open your heart and allow the drop to ䷃. Although it leaves you feeling empty inside, you have to be open and accepting. This change leaves only the fourth line correct and brings the third line into resonance with the sixth: c(䷃) = ䷗, r(䷃) = ䷑. Traditionally, this is called Inexperience, and indicates the need for guidance. We could describe it in terms of your flow being bound. Here, it is the base energy of the facet. Once you are rested, you can try again, push yourself back up into ䷑, but you know, if nothing else changes, you'll be back at the bottom, in ䷃ again, soon enough. And every time you're up and down that link in the lattice, you're a little more tired. Instead, still your consciousness and bring it to a halt, use ䷗ to accord with the energy of the moment.

So, to summarize, once you realize that you are embroiled in a general downturn, you must decide how you can best expend your energy in managing the inevitable changes. If you try and swim against the current you will exhaust yourself to no effect, ending feeling empty, having to recuperate and start again. If you understand that you can do nothing to change the downward trend, then you must go with it and navigate the flow as best you can, using the opportunities for transformation.

Algebraic Notes

In the maximal energy of the facet, c(䷗) = ䷗, and r(䷗) = ䷖. These are the overturnings of the corresponding base energies: if B is the bottom and T is the top, then $c(T) = o(c(B))$ and $r(T) = o(r(B))$. But also notice that $T = o(\sim B)$. It is a general theorem of the algebra that: $T = o(\sim B)$ entails $c(T) = o(c(B))$ and $r(T) = o(r(B))$. Finally, there are only 12 facets (out of 240) that satisfy the equation $T = o(\sim B)$.

References

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