

# The Best of Times and the Worst of Times

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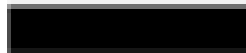





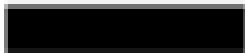














Charles Dickens' opening line to *A Tale Of Two Cities* is still accurate: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Some of us are living and breathing the best. We are witnessing the expansion of our practices and our profession. Acupuncture is increasingly in the media, our national patient base is growing in percentages and numbers, hospitals are opening their doors to us, time is improving our skills and government is more supportive. For some, business moves are innovative, with out-of-the-box ideas reaching more people and generating more revenue.

Others see patient loads dwindling with the difficult economic trends, increased unemployment and hard times. They are living in survival mode, with every effort proving fruitless to draw in patients. Some, tragically, are leaving the profession behind for something more financially stable. This is the case for newbies and seasoned practitioners alike. One colleague, a brilliant practitioner for more than 30 years, has repeatedly called me with fear in his voice. "How do I generate new patients when the marketing techniques that I have always used aren't working? This is the worst slowing my practice has ever seen."

The essential balance of *yin* and *yang* is always there. Those of us who are coasting or growing now have dealt with pitfalls yesterday and may again tomorrow. Those who are struggling have felt, or will soon feel, the joy of ease and success. It is the nature of our practices and lives to experience the swing of the *yin/yang* pendulum, to feel life's inherent destructive and creative processes in cyclical fashion.

To understand the nature of life, and thus how one can move forward professionally with success during hard times, it is wise to refer to the *I Ching*. Otherwise known as the *Book of Changes*, it is a foundational text containing concepts that have guided our professional ancestors, and in fact, much of Asian life and culture, for more than 4,000 years. It is, in part, a pre-scientific explanation of natural events and was used as a divining oracle as well as a philosophical foundation for Taoist and Confucian philosophies. Today, you can find its influence all over Asia including the Korean and Vietnamese flags.

It is thought that Fu Xi, the first of the Three Sovereigns of ancient China, received the nature of the eight trigrams through supernatural means. They were "revealed" to him in 2800 BCE as three-line expressions of life's essence expressed through *yin* and *yang*. The *yin* lines are broken and the *yang* lines are solid. Each trigram represents a different combination of *yin* and *yang*. The trigrams are:

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|--|--|--|---|
| <p>坤</p> <p>Kūn (Earth)</p>       | <p>艮</p> <p>Gèn (Mountain)</p>    | <p>坎</p> <p>Kan (Water)</p>    | <p>巽</p> <p>Xùn (Wind)</p>       |
|    <p>震</p> <p>Zhèn (Thunder)</p> |    <p>離</p> <p>Lí (Fire)</p>      |    <p>兌</p> <p>Duì (Lake)</p>  |    <p>乾</p> <p>Qián (Heaven)</p> |

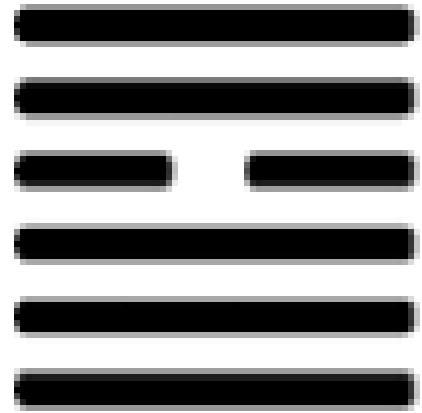
By 2200 BCE, the 64 hexigrams, the combining of two trigrams into all possibilities of six line figures, had been defined. It was not until the [Zhou Dynasty](#) (1122 BCE-256 BCE) that a comprehensive concept of the *I Ching* was formulated. From that point on, its philosophy heavily influenced the literature and government administration of that and all dynasties following. While there has been evolution in the writings and format of the *I Ching*, its core messages have remained a consistent, strong force in Asian philosophy, government, culture, religion and medicine.

In the past 50 years, a historical view, has begun to emerge. Rather than being considered the work of one or several legendary or historical figures, the *I Ching* is now thought to be an accumulation of Western Zhou divining concepts. Modern scholars are dating many of the commentaries on the hexigrams to the late [Warring States](#) period (403 or 475 BCE-256 or 221 BCE), with some sections being as late as the [Western Han](#) period (206 BCE-220 AD).

I utilize this great book often in my life. When I am in need of answers, I throw coins, a traditional means of accessing the divining nature of the *I Ching* since the Han Dynasty, to determine which hexigram might address my concerns. Then I read about that hexigram and use it to reflect upon my specific concern. While historically, it is the illiterate peasant who, with the help of fortune tellers, took advantage of the *I Ching* as an oracle, I have found great benefit, as have many of my patients and students. I strongly urge you to purchase one. It can become a valuable tool for yourself and your patients.

One of my favorite hexagrams that I consider applicable to all of us is #9, Hsiao Ch'u, The Taming Power of the Small. Formed by The Trigrams: Wind over Heaven.

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I quote from the Richard Wilhelm translation, originally published in 1950. He was one of the great Western sineologists and orators on the subject: "This hexagram means the force of the small. The image is...the wind blowing across the sky. The wind restrains the clouds...and makes them grow dense, but as yet, is not strong enough to turn them to rain. ... The strong element is temporarily held in leash by a weak element. ... The time has not yet come for sweeping measures. It is only through gentleness that this can have a successful outcome. ... Only through small means...can we exert any influence. ... To carry out our purpose we need firm determination within and gentleness and adaptability in external relations."

While you may enjoy the poetic nature of these words, their relevance to your life and practice is what matters. Practicing attention to detail, patience and inner refinement while waiting for circumstances to change, can make that change more possible. Gently supporting movement in a positive direction without pushing forward and the dispelling of haste are not elevated qualities in our culture. They are not, unless we are diligent in our inner work, naturally part of our lifestyles. We are not taught in school to respect the power of detail, or see retreat and waiting as assets of character. Nor do many of our parents touch upon these teachings. The moment during which a seed germinates is as powerful as the moment when the fruit becomes perfectly ripe. The small, unseen change is as powerful as the more dramatic, apparent one.

Winter is coming. The body's *qi* dives inward. Needles must penetrate deeper to access it. Although we might want to force our way into better circumstances, perhaps utilizing the "Taming Power of the Small" would be advantageous at this time of year. The beginnings of change can be small. Perhaps it is time to think quietly, or rest your mind so that future thoughts are more powerful. Can small things be done in your practice or in other areas of life that prepare for larger movement later? Will you give yourself permission to allow thoughts to gestate, to build upon one another such that a little movement becomes possible rather than going for substantive change quickly?

There is wisdom in taking tiny steps and in recognizing their value. It is easier to revert away from them should they not prove fruitful. The ramifications are more easily monitored. There is less disruption to the flow of one's life or practice when small changes, rather than large ones, are implemented. It is easier for self, staff or family to adjust and you are more likely to get positive implementation support. The results, good or bad, are also smaller and easier to metabolize and adjust.

No matter where you are on the *yin/yang* spectrum, you will soon be elsewhere. If you are in great expansion, joy and success, it is true. If you are in survival mode, pulling inward and feeling the sting of life's trials, it is also true. By recognizing the "Taming Power of the Small" and taking appropriate action, you allow the pendulum to swing slowly, gently and freely, such that the true nature of things may transform unhindered and you can bring yourself into the light.

NOVEMBER 2010