

One hypnagogic dream and the I Ching: a plausible interpretation

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Summary. In this brief report I give an account of one very simple but deeply intriguing hypnagogic dream which potential meanings were subsequently unfolded and analysed by means of the I Ching, an instrument that has been reputed to have the capacity to disclose hidden meanings in the situations that are scrutinized with its help. The brief report concludes for the possibility of amplifying the hermeneutics of one dream through the I Ching.

Keywords: Dream, I Ching, interpretation, hermeneutics, metaphor

1. Introduction

The I Ching is an old book of oracles. It was devised three thousand years ago in China. Modernly, the I Ching can be faced as a database of ancient wisdom. The oracular material is organized in sixty-four records named hexagrams. These sixty-four hexagrams of the I Ching are very abstract symbols that depict the same number of archetypal situations. The abstract symbols have a high level of generalization and integration of any information probed with the oracle. The sixty-four hexagrams consist of specific six lines figures and their particularly associated sections of text. The lines referred to are either opened or whole, and eventually also with the possibility of changing into their opposites. This last pair is the pair of moving lines. So, there are four species of lines to constitute the hexagrams. Throughout the book the sections of oracular text are distributed in fields that are constant. For example, The Judgment, The Commentary on the Decision, The Image, The Lines, and so on, are regular fields throughout. These fields or sections compose the oracular material and contain specific lines of text that differ from hexagram to hexagram. The text under the title The Lines pertains to each of the six independent lines that make up the different hexagrams. To access the oracular information from the I Ching a ritual must be performed. This ritual consists of the operation of a random event generator, namely, the tossing at random six times of three identical coins and taking note of the tails and heads upward, or, alternatively, the laborious and chance division of forty-nine yarrow stalks (*Achillea millefolium*). The outcome of these rituals can be a single, closed hexagram, or a

set of hexagrams that are chained by their so called moving lines. In this piece of work I will discuss two oracles drawn from the I Ching, the first composed of a closed hexagram and the second composed of two hexagrams connected by one moving line.

The contents of this brief report consists in the analysis of one rare psychic experience that I underwent in the form of an hypnagogic dream, and the correlated oracles that were obtained with the aid of the I Ching, revealing the unconscious side of the experience. After Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) discovered the personal unconscious (Freud, 1915/1925) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) found out the collective unconscious and its archetypes (Jung, 1959/1991) we can reasonably assume that the I Ching is an effective way of exploring the unconscious side from real life situations. This applies to the fact that the unconscious is revealed by the I Ching, whenever it has been pushing towards an amplified experience of the meaningfulness of each specific situation enlightened by the oracle. Also, in their own terms, the fields of oracular material will fill a gap in the knowledge of the consultant's consciousness. Both aspects lead the way to an increase in the appreciation of the meaningfulness of the real life situations that the oracle helps to analyze, bringing to light information that otherwise would be oversight. I have relied on the Richard Wilhelm (1951/1989) translation of the I Ching into German, rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes, to interpret the sayings from the oracle. In the foreword to this German edition of the I Ching, written by Carl Gustav Jung, he involves his original principle of synchronicity (and hence the unconscious and the archetypes) in the foundations of the function of the oracle (Jung, 1952/1985) (pp. 49-53).

I, the dreamer and writer of this brief report, am a single male Caucasian that, at the time the hypnagogic dream happened, was dwelling with my three siblings and my parents in a semi-detached house in the capital city of Portugal. I have held a professorial post in a public university for the last 26 years. I was brought up as a catholic but I quit church in adolescence and since then I have had no religious convictions. I have never assumed any public political attitude whatsoever, but have observed my legal rights at

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the polls for the elections of the parliament and the presidency of the republic. By the time the hypnagogic dream occurred I had been keen on synchronicity for a couple of years, and interested in the interpretation of spontaneous significant coincidences and the I Ching. Right from the start I have faced the I Ching as an amazing source of experimentally produced significant coincidences. In this brief report I involved the I Ching with one peculiar dream I had, but there is no discussion dealing with the phenomenon of synchronicity in general terms. Instead, there will be the execution of an eidetic variation proper to Hermeneutic Phenomenology in order to unfold a range of meanings based on the contents of the hypnagogic dream (meaning is the crux of synchronicity as stated by Jung, 1952/1985). The I Ching unfolded these meanings and it was used by me not as a traditional divinatory tool to guess at the future, but as a means to explore the hidden depths of the psyche independently of any moment in time.

In this brief report I put forward a couple of hypothesis for interpreting the oracle, too. As far as the first interpretative hypothesis has been concerned it consists of assigning the contents of the different fields or sections of the oracle book to three levels of reality, namely, considering that The Judgement and The Commentary on the Decision pertain to an archetypal level of meaning that is diverse from hexagram to hexagram, that The Image constantly pertains to the microcosm representing Man and his Soul (giving advice personally to anyone looking for guidance from the I Ching), and, finally, that The Lines are related to the evolution of the situation that confronts the oracle at the level of the macrocosm, that is, outside the human personality (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 301). The second hypothesis has been related to the interpretation of closed hexagrams. According to my interpretative hypothesis a closed hexagram also concerns the macrocosm level of reality. Consequently, The Lines from the hexagram must be taken into account. Following some I Ching users the lines that are supposed to be considered in one closed hexagram are the ruling lines of the hexagram, that is, those that are in direct agreement with the meaning extracted from The Commentary on the Decision (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 364). I propose here an alternative interpretation that consists in taking into account the first and the last lines of the hexagram. The first and the top lines in each hexagram stand in a relation like one of a cause (first line) to an effect (top line) (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, pp. 349, 360) in the macrocosm. This productive relation has been more pertinent in closed hexagrams in my opinion. A comparative discussion of these divergent ways of interpreting The Lines from a closed hexagram will ensue in the section named the accompanying oracles and their discussion contained in this brief report. Additionally, following many I Ching users' opinion, when more than one hexagram is the result of the tentative ritual The Lines to be thought over are the moving lines (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 291).

2. The hypnagogic dream

In 1991 I was the subject of an odd psychic experience in the form of an hypnagogic dream. I went to my bedroom to take a nap after lunch. When I was laying in bed, but not asleep, I perceived directly into my mind, and not by means of my ears, someone calling my Christian name from one of the corners of the bedroom. I immediately sat on the bed and mentally asked who was there in the bedroom calling for me. I did not get an answer but my mind was overwhelmed

by a feeling of an intense and absolute beauty. I estimate that the dream experience lasted only for a few seconds. This unique psychic experience has never recurred again since I was its subject in the Summer of 1991. Shortly after, on September 17, 1991, I analyzed a couple of times the psychic experience by means of the I Ching oracle. Firstly, I confronted the oracle with the question: “- Did I hear Her call [The Blessed Virgin Mary]?” and got for an answer hexagram 27, with the title “The Corners of the Mouth or Providing Nourishment” (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 519-524). Secondly, I used the oracle again but instead of asking one new question I confronted it with the psychological aspects of the experience, namely I evoked the feeling of absolute beauty that had invaded my mind. The outcomes of the ritual were hexagram number 58, with the title “The Joyous or The Lake” (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, pp. 685-688). that changed into hexagram number 10, named “Treading or Conduct” (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, pp. 435-440) because of the moving or mobile last line in the hexagram, the sixth. The oracles were obtained by means of the ritual of the coins. The hexagrams are associated with specific lines of text composed as metaphors that always result in experimental significant coincidences or synchronicities (Jung, 1952/1985) within the frame of the matters submitted to the oracle.

3. The accompanying oracles and their discussion

I now follow up the sayings from the oracles obtained. The Miscellaneous Notes belonging to hexagram 27 read: “The corners of the mouth means providing nourishment for what is right.” (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 540). Next, in the section named The Judgment, one can read : “The corners of the mouth. Perseverance brings good fortune. Pay heed to the providing of nourishment and to what a man seeks to fill his own mouth with.” Furthermore, in The Commentary on the Decision one can read an amplification of the foregoing oracular sayings: “The corners of the mouth. Perseverance brings good fortune. If one provides nourishment for what is right, good fortune comes. “Pay heed to the providing of nourishment”, that is, pay heed to what a man provides nourishment for. “to what he seeks to fill his own mouth with”, that is, pay heed to what a man nourishes himself with. Heaven and earth provide nourishment for all beings. The holy man provides nourishment for men of worth and thus reaches the whole people. Truly great is the time of providing nourishment.” (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, pp. 520-521). These pronouncements are metaphors but they do not give a clear “yes” or “no” response to the question formulated. The metaphorical meaning I can extract from these pieces of text is that something really substantial and wondrous entered my mind coming from the exterior, causing a unique feeling, and this has certainly been food for thought. But the oracular sayings are also cautionary and indicate that one should not inflate the matter, jumping into conclusions. The Image pertaining to hexagram 27 contains the following words: “At the foot of the mountain thunder: the image of providing nourishment. Thus the superior man is careful of his words and temperate in eating and drinking.” (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 521). This section of the book always consists of counsel directed to the human personality and reinforces here the previous cautionary tone. The hexagram from the tentative ritual was a closed one, without moving lines. Thus, we must consider two lines and their associated

sayings following my interpretative hypothesis set out above in second place in the introduction. The Lines to be considered are the first and the sixth, the last one. The words for the first line are: "You let your magic tortoise go, and look at me with the corners of the mouth drooping. Misfortune. "You let...drooping": this is really not to be respected." The words associated with the sixth line are: "The source of nourishment. Awareness of danger brings good fortune. It furthers one to cross the great water." "The source of nourishment. Awareness of danger brings good fortune. It has great blessing." (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, pp. 521, 524). The meaning of these lines can be tentatively interpreted as follows: the way the question was put to the oracle casts one doubt on the reality of the odd psychic experience, of the peculiar hypnagogic dream, and this is a loss of value in the meaningfulness of the experience, following the first line. But on the other hand (and according to the text belonging to the sixth line) because the I Ching was consulted, it indeed reinforces the notion that something impinged on my mind coming from an exterior source of input, namely the wondrous feeling and the instance of telepathy that consisted in the voice calling my Christian name. Following the oracle's own pronouncements I was blessed by the psychic experience. The cautionary tone is also present in the text in the sixth line as it is only the awareness of prejudice and its avoidance in reasoning that can bring the good fortune into the interpretation of the oracle. The alternative hypothesis to my own stated above in second place in the brief report's introduction considers that in a closed hexagram the lines to be taken into account are the ruling lines of the hexagram. In this case, for hexagram number 27, the ruling lines are the fifth and the sixth. The text for the top line has already been discussed. Now, it remains to be discussed the text from the fifth line. The terms associated with the fifth line are: "Turning away from the path. To remain persevering brings good fortune. One should not cross the great water." "The good fortune in remaining persevering comes from following the one above devotedly." (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 523). These affirmations are an apparent contradiction to what is stated in the sixth regarding the crossing of the great water (a symbol of navigating the unconscious). According to the sixth line it furthers one (one becomes according to his/hers proper nature or being) if one crosses the great water, but in the fifth there is counsel not to cross the great water. Nevertheless, the good fortune associated with the fifth line only comes up if the consultant of the oracle follows the meaning contained in the sixth line, the one above, devotedly, persistently and sincerely. This is the sense of the sentence "The good fortune in remaining persevering comes from following the one above devotedly" corroborated by the interpretation of both lines by Wilhelm himself (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 524).

The pair of hexagrams I got after the second consultation to the I Ching is correlated with the evocation of the wondrous emotion I felt. In the first hexagram (number 58) with the title "The Joyous or The Lake" (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 685-688) its section named The Sequence reads: "When one has penetrated something, one rejoices. Hence there follows the hexagram of the joyous. The joyous means to rejoice." (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 685). This is in perfect agreement with the nature of the emotion that pervaded my mind. This line of reasoning, underlying the ineffable character of my psychic dream experience, also applies to the text belonging to The Commentary on the Decision that

reads as follows: "The joyous means pleasure. The firm is in the middle, the yielding is without. To be joyous – and with this to have perseverance – furthers, thus does one submit to heaven and accord with men. When one leads the way for the people joyously they forget their drudgery; when one confronts difficulty joyously, the people forget death. The greatest thing in making the people joyous is that they keep one another in order." (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 686). These sentences, besides confirming my ineffable feeling, unfold new metaphors that point out to a religious challenge that every individual might, or not, assume. The image of the hexagram (counsel personally directed to the consultant of the oracle) is as follows: "Lakes resting one on the other. The image of the joyous. Thus the superior man joins with his friends for discussion and practice." (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 686). This is an expectation I hold for my readers. The moving line in this hexagram, dictated by the outcome of the ritual, was the sixth. The text associated with this line reads: "Seductive joyousness. The reason why the sixth at the top seduces to pleasure is that it is not bright." (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 688). Once more, the ineffable psychic experience I underwent is highlighted in the oracle. As regards this it has been curious to consider the comment Richard Wilhelm (1951/1989) produced for the line. He wrote that "Seductive joyousness does not pertain to the person consulting the oracle but shows a situation confronting him. It rests with him whether he will let himself be seduced." (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 688). These additional exegesis corroborate previous oracular information in this brief report, namely that the source of the psychic experience lays outside the subject, and a cautionary tone is also reintroduced, supporting the previous careful interpretation issuing from The Corners of the Mouth. The hexagram suffers a transformation in the top line and thus yields hexagram number 10, which title is "Treading or Conduct." (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, pp. 435-440). In The Commentary on the Decision one finds the following text: "Treading: the yielding treads upon the firm. Joyous, and in the relationship of correspondence to the Creative; hence, "Treading upon the tail of the tiger. It does not bite the man. Success. "Strong, central and correct, he treads into the place of the ruler and remains without blame: his light shines bright." (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 436). This has been an argumentation at the archetypal level of meaning, reinforcing the transcendental character of the dream. The Creative has been the highest yang power revealed in the oracle as a whole and to be in joyous correspondence with him certainly makes one's consciousness a light that shines bright. The Image, on its turn, carries the advice to the human personality as usual: "Heaven above. The lake below: the image of treading. Thus the superior man discriminates between high and low, and thereby fortifies the thinking of the people." (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 437). This can be faced as chained with the anterior interpretation in a coherent way. Finally, the moving line exhibits the following pronouncement: "Look to your conduct and weigh the favorable signs. When everything is fulfilled, supreme good fortune comes. "Supreme good fortune" in the top most place carries great blessing." (Wilhelm, 1951/1989, p. 439). Once again the oracle reiterates my subjective and peculiar dream as a blessing and a singular good fortune in its own terms. This good fortune starts inside one's soul and afterwards it becomes reality in the macrocosm as suggested by the oracles.

4. Conclusion

It is possible to powerfully amplify the hermeneutics of one simple, brief, but thoroughly perplexing hypnagogic dream, by means of an instrumental method suitable for the exploration of meanings. The instrumental method in this case was the I Ching. Its functions correspond to a sort of eidetic variation employed in Hermeneutic Phenomenology. The contents of this brief report show clearly how the potential hermeneutics or diverse meanings associated with the particular dream were revealed. Metaphor is at the essence of hermeneutics. The dream reported can be considered one metaphor; the I Ching unfolded many other metaphors connected coherently with the former metaphor contained in the dream. All metaphors were thought over against the same referential or context in order to mutually potentiate the sense of each metaphor.

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