

Stories of the Time

Divination is a universal part of human culture, used for centuries to help us understand and connect with the living world. These procedures all involve an inquirer, a listener and a symbolic language that creates a series of stories. Uniting them all is what we call chance.

The Question of Time

Divination is about questions, so let us ask a simple question and imagine the kind of answer we might get. The question is: What time is it? In ordinary life we look at the clock for an answer to this question. The clock shows us a particular kind of time. To quote Webster's dictionary, it is a "non-spatial continuum in which events occur and a system by which such intervals are measured." The units of this time are identical and interchangeable. So we would get an answer like 13:34 GMT 11 April 2005. If two people ask the same question at the same time, they will get the same answer.

Divining Time

When we use a divination system to ask this question we learn there are other stories and other kinds of time. The answer to "What time is it?" might be: the right time, the moment of truth, time out, behind the times, making time, bedtime, doing time, keeping time. All these expressions give a quality to time that depends on the individual who asks the question. If two different people ask the question at the same time they will get different answers.

We all experience both kinds of time, but we see them as incommensurate. One goes on inside us, one goes on outside us. This difference marks the point where myth, imagination and spirit are split off from what post-enlightenment western thought has called scientific reality.

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Divination, however, puts these times back together again. It tells us into a story of the time that connects our outer and inner experience. It does not so much

answer the question “What time is it?” as “Which time is it? What is the quality of this time and how does it affect me? What kind of change is at work in this moment and how can I effectively relate to it?”

Moments and Symbols

Traditionally, divination with Change creates these stories of the time by “providing symbols (*xiang*).”

Symbol/symbolize, *xiang* means an image, to imagine, to represent something as a psycho-active symbol. It refers to images that mediate between the visible and the invisible worlds, models to which qualities and behavior are attached. A *xiang* or symbol is an imaginative display of innate nature, a figure, form, shape, or language that can be imitated, taken as a model or mask, a character to be “put on.” It suggests a ritual vessel used to question the spirits and the celestial signs and good omens they give that attract good fortune. As the Great Symbol (*da xiang*) it refers to the Way or *Dao* itself.

These symbols are felt to connect us directly with the *shi*, the basic energy configuration or efficacy of the moment.

Moment, right time, efficacy, *shi*, refers to the internal energy or intensity of a situation, a configuration, gesture, stance or attitude that guides the vital movements of beings. It is the potential, the right time or right season to discern and seize the favorable by regarding the signs of change, signs from heaven that describe the activity of the *shen* or spirits who notify and instruct us.

The Wisdom of the Time

Consulting Change is said “to provide symbols that comprehend the light of the spirits (*shen ming*).” In this view, reality is seen as a particular deployment of things in a moment of time. The symbol allows us to perceive and seize this moment, an arrangement of images and things that can be relied on and worked with. Wisdom lies in yielding to and working with the propensity that emanates from the particular configuration of the Way embodied in a symbol. This leads us back to our ground in the myth-world and the on-going process of the real by telling a new kind of story, in-forming and re-forming our imagination. It adjusts the balance between the inquirer and the moment, activating the spirit of the time and triggering a flow of transformative energy.

“God is What Crosses our Path”

The depth psychologist C. G. Jung once said that God is what crosses our path, what interferes with our conscious will and ego-drive. We usually experience this as a disturbance, unrest in the heart. Anxiety, confusion, a need to know the hidden meaning of things, a desire for validation, or the feeling we are grappling with something that cannot be dealt with through ordinary means of analysis all indicate there is an unknown force at work in the situation you are confronting. This place where our conscious will seems to be thwarted can point at an opening, an opportunity to deepen contact with the invisible world and transform awareness. The symbols of Change are meant to give this unknown spirit a voice.