

Hexagram 24 Return



Return.

Growing sacredness.

Emerging, entering into, without harm.

Others of like spirit coming, without fault.

Retrace: returning to sacredness.

The light of sacredness returns upon harming vanquishing it.

Benefit from furthering life on Earth.

Ideogram: Step and go back over a path in reverse in the way you came. Meanings of ideogram: return, turn back, retrace; reappear, come again; restore, recover, renew; return to an earlier time or place.

Structure: A strong first line below five yielding lines.

The hexagram marks the 11th month in the Chinese calendar (December – January) and the northern winter solstice. After a time of increasing darkness comes the turning point, the return of the light. The sunlight comes back just when it seems the night has the power to vanquish it.

Sacred cyclic and enduring movements cause, nurture, ripen, and further the sacredness of life on Earth. We experience these repetitive cycles as waxing and waning, increasing and decreasing, emptying and filling, contraction and expansion. One extreme endlessly and naturally turns into its apparent opposite. Through these cyclic changes, life on Earth preserves what it has recovered in past cycles and furthers living sacredness within new cycles.

In the previous hexagram (23), the forces that harm vanquish the sacredness of life. Yet, like the seed of a decayed fruit that falls to the Earth and sprouts new life, the forces of sacredness emerge from the seed left by the previous cycle, a return imaged by the return of the sun at winter solstice. The past cycle concentrated what we had learned on the sacred path into a seed, which germinates and grows in the new cycle. This enduring cyclic course of sacred change occurs within sacred time within every fractal level – from moment to moment, from life to life, from eon to eon.

The sacred path of return offers us the means to retrace the sacred movements to dismantle our harmful views and ways at the beginning of a new cycle. Doing so prepares the ground before the seed from the past germinates. We remove what would obstruct and hinder new growth in living sacredness.

Undoing what harms in this way assumes that we have the capacity to recognize when a harmful view or way first arises but know we lack the capacities to respond to the difficulties and dangers in the ways of sacredness.¹ The path of return that dismantles emerging harmful views and ways consists of four movements: humbly surrendering ourselves to the sacred to overcome our ignorance, beseeching the sacred for protection from our harmful ways and direction to overcome them, joy for the sacred knowing of how to respond to experience in the ways of sacredness, and acting upon that knowing. By acting in the ways of sacredness, we return to living sacredness.

¹ **Ways of sacredness to further life on Earth:** Yielding to the sacred and ways of sacredness; awaking to the sacred moving our lives to further life on Earth; knowing how to further life on Earth within the ways of sacredness, harmonious and respectful interactions with all beings; centering on the sacred for refuge and guidance; responding with care to the needs of others and the moment; enduring the adversities of disciplining our harmful views and ways; keeping our will still when ignorant; centering on the sacred for refuge and guidance to fulfill the sacred command of all life to further life on Earth .

Upon recognizing that our self-centered views and willingness to harm others for self-benefit threaten to overwhelm us, we pause. Within that pause we humbly admit our ignorance in not knowing how to overcome what obstructs us in living sacredness. We pray for sacred direction in what we must do to overcome our wrong views and harmful behaviors to further life on Earth. Suddenly, we have an insight and know how to correct our wrong views that obstruct living sacredness and return us to sacredness.

Knowing what to do fills us with a joyful gratitude. Joy gives us the power to act upon knowing how to respond to danger. We offer the sacred the changing of ourselves to further life on Earth. The ways of sacredness ascend and harming life on Earth wanes.

Those who practice living sacredness come to know the sacred cycle of the return of sacredness. We no longer perceive our lives as a linear series of random events but as a life with a direction and purpose to further life on Earth. On the path, we struggle to overcome our reluctance to surrender what benefits us personally for the greater benefit of furthering all life on Earth. On the cyclical sacred path, we must make the effort to do the harder but right thing to do again and again until we have it right.

Life is not a race with winners and losers but a quest to deepen our sacredness and capacities to further life on Earth from one turn on the cycle to the next. Although all life has the common responsibility to recover living sacredness, we each have the responsibility to do so within the cycle of our own lives.

This hexagram clearly points to the great annual waxing and waning of growth on Earth and the pause of rest before we embark on the next cycle. The wintertime of rest calls us to honor the sacred by reviewing what we have learned in the past cycle, the seeds for new growth. We prepare the ground of our lives for new growth by our efforts to pull out by their roots our harmful ways and views. Our sacred path returns as a new cycle of devotedly tending the sacred garden of our lives. We yield to the sacred will to grow our sacredness to further life on Earth and pray and wait for sacred blessings to fall upon our garden like rain.

Line 1: As soon as the line becomes aware of the rising of a harmful reaction, it easily and calmly repels it. We cannot avoid slight digressions from sacredness but experience no harm if we immediately return to centering on the sacred before harmful thoughts and feelings have the chance to root.

Line 2: The line seeks and receives sacred guidance on how to overcome harmful urges and views in the ways of sacredness.

Line 3: The line wants to live in the ways of sacredness but urges to have its way causes its resolve to waver. It repeatedly loses its way. Yet because it persistently returns to centering on the sacred, the stability of its will to live sacredness gradually strengthens with the support of sacred guidance.

Line 4: Inner and outer harmful influences surround the line, tempting it to act in harmful ways. However, the line persists in returning to sacredness without the support of others. It distances itself from what harms as it remains centered on the sacred and adheres to the ways of sacredness.

Line 5: The line faces its harmful ways and views rather than avoiding them as it knows that it has the sole responsibility to overcome its willingness to harm for self-benefit and to live sacredness within its own life.

Line 6: This line misses its return to sacredness as it has stubbornly locked itself into self-centeredness, ignorance, and harmful views. It must go through another cycle of learning from the consequences of the harms it causes itself and others before the opportunity to return to its sacredness comes again.