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The Journal of Daoist Philosophy and Practice

Fall 2012

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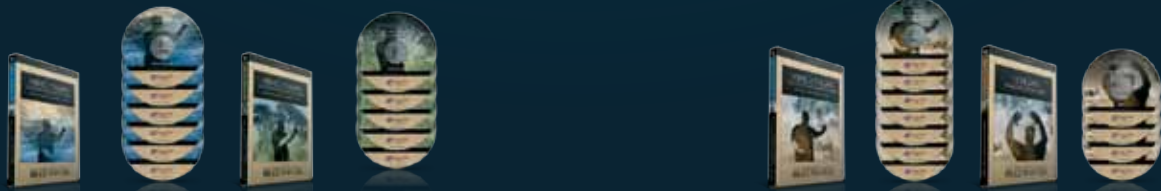
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Bruce Frantzis, Ph.D., is a Taoist Lineage Master with over 40 years of experience in Eastern healing systems. He is the first known Westerner to hold authentic lineages in tai chi, bagua, hsing-i, qigong and Taoist meditation. He has taught Taoist energy arts to more than 15,000 students. Frantzis trained for over a decade in China and also has extensive experience in Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, yoga, Kundalini, energy healing therapies and Taoist Fire and Water traditions.



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Join us in May when we travel to the sacred mountains of Daoism – Wudang Shan – home of Daoist taiji, qigong and martial arts. We will spend days hiking and visiting some of the many Daoist temples there, attend classes with a local master, drink tea in the temple teahouse and practice Wuji Qigong, a 600 hundred year old qigong form, created by the famous Wudang Daoist master Zhang San Feng. We will also be visiting Maoshan, an ancient Daoist mountain. We will visit the Qianyuan Guan, a Daoist nunnery, famed for the purity of their practice and the wonderful sounds of their orchestra. The abbess, Yin Xinhui, is one of the few heads of temples who does not take government money for rebuilding (which means fewer tourists) but works to maintain her temple through ceremonies (which, hopefully we will get to witness while we are there.)

We will also be spending time in Hangzhou, one of the most beautiful cities in China. Hangzhou, circling around West Lake, has long been revered for its beauty and culture. While there we visit a tea plantation (where the famous Dragon Well tea is grown), as well as the museum of Chinese Medicine and take in an awe inspiring lake show by Zhang Yimou, the well known Chinese film director, called *West Lake Impressions* (check it out on youtube).

The last few days will be spent in Beijing, where we will visit the White Cloud Temple, the Great Wall and the fabulous tea market as well as attend some amazing acrobat shows. All along the way we will eat amazing food, meet qigong masters, artists, musicians, tea masters, and one cave dwelling hermit.

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Our Cover
Japanese Garden

Artwork by
Paul Heussenstamm:
www.mandalas.com.
Thank you Paul!

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What Is Daoism?

"The Dao that can be described is not the eternal Dao." So begins the *Daodejing* of Laozi written some 2,500 years ago. How then, to describe the indescribable? How to fit into words that which is beyond words? The Dao can only be pointed to, or referred to, say the ancient sages. It cannot be held, only experienced. It cannot be touched, only felt. It cannot be seen, only glimpsed with the inner eye.

Dao, then, is the Way, as in direction, as in manner, source, destination, purpose and process. In discovering and exploring Dao the process and the destination are one and the same. Laozi describes a Daoist as the one who sees simplicity in the complicated and achieves greatness in little things. He or she is dedicated to discovering the dance of the cosmos in the passing of each season as well as the passing of each precious moment in our lives.

Daoism was already long established when Laozi wrote the *Daodejing*. It originated in the ancient shamanic roots of Chinese civilization. Many of the practices and attitudes toward life were already established before Laozi's time. For many centuries Daoism was an informal way of life, a way followed by peasant, farmer, gentleman philosopher and artist. It was a way of deep reflection and of learning from Nature, considered the highest teacher. Followers of the Way studied the stars in the heavens and the energy that lies deep within the earth. They meditated upon the energy flow within their own bodies and mapped out the roads and paths it traveled upon.

It is a belief in life, a belief in the glorious procession of each unfolding moment. It is a deeply spiritual life, involving introspection, balance, emotional and spiritual independence and responsibility and a deep awareness and connection to the earth and all other life forms. It requires an understanding of how energy works in the body and how to treat illness in a safe, non-invasive way while teaching practical ways of maintaining health and avoiding disease and discomfort. Daoist meditation techniques help the practitioner enter deeper or more expansive levels of wakefulness and inner strength. But most of all, it is a simple, natural, practical way of being in our bodies and our psyches and sharing that way of being with all other life forms we come into contact with.

Today in China and in the West, Daoism is often divided into two forms, *dao jiao* and *dao jia*. Or religious Daoism and philosophical Daoism. Many scholars argue that there are not two distinct forms of Daoism and in many ways they are right. There is really a great intermingling of the religious form of Daoism and its various sects and the philosophical Daoism of Laozi and Zhuangzi. But many people who follow the Dao do not consider themselves religious people and do not go to temples and are not ordained as priests. Rather these two forms exist both side by side and within each other.

As it says in the opening lines of the *Daodejing*: "Dao or Way that can be spoken of or described in words is not eternal Dao." It is up to each of us to find the way to the Way in our own way. What we try to do with *The Empty Vessel* is offer articles and information to help you, our dear readers, to do that.



The Empty Vessel

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Statement of Purpose
The Empty Vessel is dedicated to the exploration and dissemination of Daoist philosophy and practice. It is open to sharing the various traditional and contemporary teachings in a nondiscriminatory manner. We at The Empty Vessel believe that it is in using these practices and attitudes of the ancient achieved ones in a timely and contemporary manner that we can best benefit from them and in doing so, be able to effect change in the world around us.

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Along the Way

This issue begins our 20th year of publication (if I've done my math right, though I could be off). We are continuing our print version as well as expanding into new areas in the digital world, what I like to call cyberdao. More and more publications are opting to go totally with digital versions, including Newseek magazine! But many of our readers still enjoy holding an issue in their hands and being able to stack them up for further readings. One subscriber, an acupuncturist, said that he would miss being able to leave them out for his clients to read in the waiting room!

On the other hand, there are so many creative things we can do with the digital version. Check out our website at www.CommunityAwake.com (under The Abode of the Eternal Dao) to see a sample issue, in full color! We are publishing the digital version with ten extra pages as well.

I have always longed to print the magazine in color but the cost has always been prohibitive (and still is). But the digital version only costs my time and focus on the computer (which does take its toll, to be sure.)

I also want to invite you to our new facebook page at Abode of the Eternal Dao, where you can find articles, beautiful photos and video from China, including an interview with our beloved friend Jiaya, a cave-dwelling hermit in the Wudang mountains.

Speaking of Wudang, we are planning our spring trip to China next May. Not only we will be going to Wudang but we will also be traveling to Maoshan, another ancient Daoist mountain. I am really excited about this one.

Nowadays the Chinese government gives money to temples to rebuild, in the knowledge that Chinese tourists, who are just discovering religion (both Daoist and Buddhist) again, will flock there. On one side of the mountain is the brand new shiny Daoist temple with a 100-foot high statue of Laozi. But on the other side lives Abbess Yin Xinhui and her nuns. They have refused to take money from the government and are rebuilding themselves. We have arranged to spend a few days with Abbess Yin at her temple this spring. (For more info about Abbess Yin and her work see our website at communityawake.com).

Of course we will drink first-pick of the spring Dragon Well tea in Hangzhou, visit the amazing tea market in Beijing, do qigong in the sacred mountains of Daoism, see Zhang Yimou's unbelievable show on West Lake, and feast daily on the incredible cuisine of China!

I will also be offering some special full immersion qigong/Daoist lifestyle workshops around the country this winter and spring, beginning with New Jersey on March 15,16,17. Let us know if you need any additional info on this weekend. You can find further details on our website under Qigong Training with Solala. It is always wonderful to meet my readers and share qi in the present moment!

Solala Towler, editor



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Autumn/Winter Season



Throughout millions of years, human beings developed from the constant cycle of nature. By observing the hibernating insects and animals around them and the yearly cycles of vegetation, they responded naturally to all the seasons. In Spring they were lively, in Summer vivacious, in Autumn they gathered themselves, and in Winter they prepared for return. Thus mankind achieved an existence here on earth that was in harmony with the divine order of the universe.

Hua Ching Ni, *The Book of Changes and the Unchanging Truth*

When paying attention to the various seasons and their energetic influences we usually take into consideration not only the season we are currently enjoying but the next one as well. This is because each season is influenced by and influences the ones before and after it. For this issue we will look at the season we are in now, Autumn, as well as the one following, Winter.

Autumn is associated with the element usually translated as metal. But in alchemical terms the correct translation would be gold. In *wu xing* or Five Transformational Phases system (often translated as Five Elements or the Five Agents) the element of gold is associated with the

color white, the organs lung and large intestine, the direction west, the animal White Tiger and the planet Venus.

Winter is associated with the element water, the color blue/black, the organs kidneys and bladder, the direction north, the animals Turtle and Snake and the planet Mercury.

Traditionally, Autumn is seen as the season of "Bringing In the Harvest." It is a time to gather not only the fruits of our garden, but the fruits of our cultivation practice as well. Winter is the season called "Returning to the Root." It is a time to go deep within and an excellent time to do deep self-cultivation.

So what does this all mean? In ancient times China was an agrarian culture. This means that the people closely followed the seasons, the phases of the moon and the energetics of each one of these. They needed to know when to plant and when to harvest. Their lives depended on it. Today in China, many people are leaving the land to move to the cities to find new opportunities. It has been called the largest mass migration in history.

In modern urban culture people are losing these ties to the cycles and many of them are becoming unhealthy. Of course there are many other factors in their lifestyle that is producing their ill health but the disconnection with the land and the natural cycles are a big part of it.

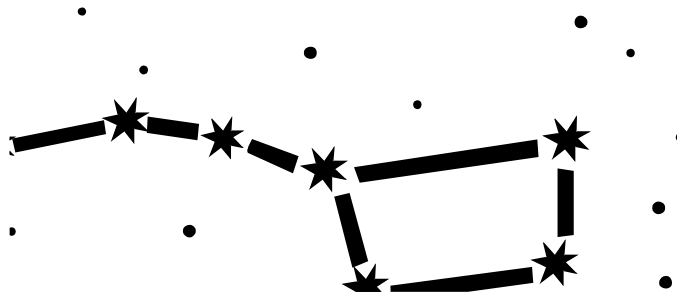
Of course in the West we are several generations removed from being farmers. Not to mention that modern farmers rely less on the cycles of nature and more on the use of chemical sprays and fertilizers.

So what can we modern, urban practitioners do to make up for this nature deficit? Actually, there are many things we can do. One of the most important things is to have a self-cultivation practice. This can include things like stillness practice as well as movement practice. It can also include eating a healthy and natural diet, not spending too much time watching tv, studying the ancient works of Daoist sages like Laozi and Zhuangzi and allowing time for reverie and meditation. We need to make sure we get enough exercise and rest. The season

Continued on page 38.

Big Dipper Meditation

Richard Leirer



First, prepare the body, mind and spirit or Jing, Qi and Shen for the Big Dipper practice by moving through a relaxation fang soong gong qigong practice. Fang Soong means to “put to relax” and is one of the basic three adjustments done in most Taoist meditations.

Begin by sitting comfortable or lying down to physically relax the body. Tell the top of the head to relax, the scalp to relax, the two parts of the brain to relax. Let the forehead become smooth and soft and feel more opened. Allow the eyes to gently close and think they are being washed with water, maybe from a cool and beautiful waterfall. Tell the cheeks to relax and allow the teeth, gums, lips and tongue relax. Tell the jaw to loosen and allow the ears and the back of the head to relax. Feel the neck relax. Allow the joints of the shoulder, elbow, wrist and fingers to relax. Feel the chest and back relax. Allow the waist and abdomen to relax. Feel the hips soften and become loose. Tell the thighs and hamstrings to relax. Allow the knees to feel open. Tell the calves to relax. Allow the ankle, toes and top and bottom of the feet to relax. Feel the whole body relax and allow all the inner and outer gates to open.

This completes the first adjustment of having the body relax. The other two adjustments are to prepare the mind for concentration and regulate the breath to be slow, long, thin, soft and even. With a relaxed body, concentrated mind and regulated breath the preparation for the Big Dipper meditation has begun. The practitioner can also move through the small heaven and the ten breaths open the 8 mai eight special channels meditation if you know how to perform them. These preliminary practices prepare the practitioner to engage with the energies of the universe in a relaxed and orderly way, step by step tuning into the cosmic energies.

With the qi freely circulating and protecting your body, begin to expand your awareness to the stars of the big dipper above your head.

Have the image that you are close to the Big Dipper and it is above your head. Clearly, with your minds eye,

see the bowl of the Big Dipper stationed above the back of your head with the handle over your forehead. The bowl of the Big Dipper is above the occipital lobe while the handle dips slightly above the third eye area.

After you have established this awareness, summon the yang and the yin essence of the three luminaries of the sun, moon and stars. These luminaries can be perceived as individuals or ministers, one yin and one yang, who guard over the three dan tians of the human body.

The upper minister, who is yang and an attendant who is yin, are dressed in scarlet robes, the color of kidney beans. They rule the essence of the brain, tongue, teeth and guard over the face, eyes, mouth, teeth, ears, and nose and head hair. They will enter into the upper dan tian.

The middle minister, who is yang and an attendant who is yin, are dressed in bright red vermillion and are the essence of the five internal organs, muscles, bones and skin. They will enter the middle dan tian.

The lower minister, who is yang and an attendant who is yin are dressed in yellow robes and are the essence



of Jing, Qi and the bodily fluids. They rule over the blood, intestines, stomach, bladder and the four limbs. They will enter the lower dan tian.

In each dan tian is a courtyard one inch square. The ministers, with their attendant will enter each courtyard as a pair.

With your mind's eye, see the three ministers and their attendants appear inside the bowl of the Big Dipper. They greet each other with solemn dignity and a bow to each other in respect.

The upper minister and the attendant move from the bowl of the Big Dipper through the stars that make up the handle of the Big Dipper. At the last star of the handle, the ministers turn and face your mouth. Now breathe in, the ministers follow your breath inside your body and ascend to the upper dan tian. They take residence inside the one-inch courtyard and survey the brain, teeth, face eyes, mouth, ears, nose and hair. All of the ministers will be the connection between these body parts and the universal qi. They are an intermediary that helps keep a connection between yourself and the energy of the universe to keep your body healthy.

The middle minister and the attendant move from the bowl of the Big Dipper through the stars that make up the handle of the Big Dipper. At the last star of the handle, the ministers turn and face your mouth. Now breathe in, the ministers follow your breath inside your body and ascend to the middle dan tian. They take residence inside the one-inch courtyard and survey the five internal organs, the muscles, bones and skin.

The lower minister and the attendant move from the bowl of the big dipper through the stars that make up the handle of the big dipper. At the last star of the handle, the ministers turn and face your mouth. Now breathe in, the ministers follow your breath inside your body and ascend to the lower dan tian. They take residence inside the one-inch courtyard and survey the jing, qi, bodily fluids, blood, intestines, stomach, bladder and the four limbs.

Hold the ministers in place with your mind's eye and allow them to rule over, guard and protect their realms.

After they are firmly in place, return your mind to the lower dan tian and look for the fire inside the dan tian.

After awhile, end the practice with a shift of awareness back to the senses and the body. Conclude with a finish the form self pat and massage.

This meditation is to be practiced only on the solstice and the equinox. Best practiced within 24 hrs of each and between the hours of 11pm and 1 am for best results.

Note: This meditation can be preceded by the Big Dipper energy shamans dance. In the shaman dance you move through a pattern that resembles the star formation of the big dipper on the ground. This dance re-creates a physical connection with the stars of the dipper and will prepare you for a greater connection during the meditation. See Richard for details. Audio cd available by contacting: www.RichardLeirer.org



Master Instructor Richard Leirer with 40 years of Qigong and T'ai Chi experience was one of the first to create programs in Qigong Tai Chi Therapy for pain management and surgery rehabilitation for the world famous Cleveland Clinic Hospital. Look for his first book *From Wu Chi to Tai Chi: A Story of Ancient Beginnings* on Amazon and other fine book stores.

Yijing (I Ching) readings with Solala Towler



Using his 23-year training in the Daoist Arts, Solala is offering long distance (phone) *Yijing (I Ching)* readings through Inner Sight.com. Guidance is offered on life decisions, career choices, spiritual goals etc, using several versions of the this ancient classic book of divination and self-cultivation, including Ni Hua Ching's, *Book of Changes and the Unchanging Truth*.

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The Dragon Turtle

Kurt Levins Sr.



My Master had often told me that I needed to find a dragon turtle because they bring good fortune and are “good Feng Shui.” I could never figure out what he meant. “Dragon Turtle;” I had never heard of such a thing, so I looked up Dragon Turtle and found statues and paintings of a large turtle with a scalloped carapace and ridges down the back like a stegosaurus. I was not familiar with any such animal.

Then many years later, while reading about turtles, I saw a picture of a turtle and it was a dragon turtle. It was a South American Snapping Turtle.

Dang, I knew snappers. They live all around me. Only my local snappers have smaller ridges down the back but the shells were rougher than the more common Painter or Boxed turtle. The edges of the shell were indeed scalloped.

About two weeks ago I was hiking in the woods with my son Alex, when I saw something moving in a pond and it was big. We closed in and I saw it was a snapper. It was on the surface and you could clearly see the shell.

The turtle’s head was huge and the neck was thick.

The turtle pulled his head back and then quickly snapped out and bit into some pond lily and ate it. The turtle did this several times. I saw the resemblance to a dragon. When that huge neck and head came out of the water it was like that famous photo of the Loch Ness monster.

Alex was afraid the turtle would get him and I explained that he could certainly outrun a turtle.

A few weeks later I was discussing this with my friend Dick Marcinko. Now Dick is a real world expert on reptiles and such. Not a professor, he has real world experience. He is what is known as a snake eater. This is a term used to describe SEALs and other Special Operations military units that live off the land. Dick did time deep in the Mekong delta in Viet Nam where he encounter numerous poisonous snakes such as cobra and the fleur-de-lis.

Dick told me he recently had a run-in with a snapping turtle. He picked up a large one and was taking it back to

the house to show his daughter. Dick said he was holding it when suddenly it stuck out an enormous head with a thick neck. (For reference, the turtle I saw had a neck as thick as my arm at the wrist.) Once the turtle had its head out and neck fully stretched, it turned its head around and came straight at him over the shell, quickly. Dick said he had never seen a turtle do such a thing.

I related to Dick that I once saw a snapper in the back of a pickup truck. An old farmer had a stick about an inch thick and was teasing the turtle. "Just wait and see what happens," he said. The turtle then slowly sat back on its hind legs and then in an instant sprang forward and grabbed the stick and snapped it in half. It was impressive.

I thought about this for a few days and the lesson finally came to me. The turtle is the perfect yin animal, staying still and only moving when necessary – the Daoist symbol of long life. Indeed, herpetologists tell us turtles do have incredibly long life spans.

Yet within its stillness, the turtle possesses a great potential power. It can move explosively when it has to. I can only compare it to the Fa Jing of internal martial arts.

I have a pond near me that me and my family often pass. On every warm day there is a turtle sitting on top of the stump of a log, just basking in the sun. I can only imagine that they are doing Sun qi gong, soaking up that qi.

As a result of these observations, I now realize how the turtle became such an auspicious animal to the Daoists. How much healthier would our lives be if we didn't

fill it with monkey chatter and monkey action? How many unnecessary actions do we bring into our lives? How many of us do qi gong regularly like the turtle?

A second lesson is how Commander Marcinko became a mentor and friend. Real simple, we met over the Internet. We started talking and that is that. Dick has helped me through some truly terrible times. Fortunately I was able to help him out with some herbal treatments. This demonstrates one of the oldest Daoist adages, "when the time is right, the teacher appears." Dick is one of my best teachers. As founder of SEAL TEAM 6, he offered me training and insight into true combat, something most martial teachers know nothing of. He has been through life as a warrior; all of his wisdom has been tempered in the fires of combat and reality.

Third lesson is one I've shared before – you never know where a lesson in the Dao will come from, so keep your eyes and mind open. ☯

A serious student of martial arts for 37 years, Kurt Levins holds the rank of Master in the Lu Shan Taoist Lineage. He holds a Masters ranking in Tai Chi Chuang in the lineage of Li I Yu and Internal Kung Fu under master Lein Cheng Chen of Taiwan. Levins has also complete studies at the Philadelphia Institute of Chinese Medicine. As Director of the Pinelands Institute for Taoist Studies he conducts training in the New Jersey Pine Barrens. Mr. Levins teaches several forms of tai ji, qigong and other Taoist arts. He can be reached at intao@hotmail.com or 856.797.5987.

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Eliminating Pitfalls in Qigong Practice

Ke Yun Lu

Harbor No Enmity

All too often in our dealings with other people we tend to judge their intelligence. We say one person is clever and another is not so clever. The truth is, one's cleverness only surfaces in one's consciousness, while our human soul – our unconscious mind – shares the same wisdom that is all-knowing. When a person has a kind heart, the slowest-witted will feel it. When a person harbors evil, an infant in his mother's arms will refuse his embrace. In our daily life, we sometimes come across one who appears to be bright and intelligent, a good actor on the stage of human drama. However, his hyper-critical character may be discerned easily by somebody who may not be intelligent but whose subconscious mind can feel it immediately.

Those who truly understand the essence of qigong must not look upon nature or other fellow human beings as enemies. This may sound odd. Indeed, who would want to antagonize nature or other people? Well, as a matter of fact, it has a much deeper meaning than it sounds.

Say for example that today is a cold day. You do not like it at all, and as soon as you step out the door you curse the weather. What is this other than antagonism to nature? Tomorrow is going to be hot, and that is not your favorite, either. You blame the heat wave. What is this if not enmity toward nature? Even such seemingly innocent reactions to natural weather changes hinder your being one with heaven, being harmonious with nature. Regardless of how diligently you practice, and how constantly you remind yourself to be one with heaven and earth, it is just not going to work.

Similarly, in your contact with other people, you dislike this one and are jealous of that one, and are vigilant against the other one. You constantly put up all kinds of masks, trying to be all but yourself, trying to be authoritative, to be solemn, to be cultivated, to be humorous. In a strict sense, this is enmity toward others because you cannot look upon others as the same as yourself. You constantly guard against and keep your distance from others and this prevents you from maintaining a tranquil mental state. Therefore, it does not matter what school of qigong you are practicing, because you are far from its practicing fundamentals.

A true qigong practitioner should, under whatever circumstance, consciously stay in a state of qi. It must be a genuine one, not one you are so often told to imagine yourself in, which brings you far short of the high level.

What is the high level? It is that genuine feeling of compassion and loving kindness toward our fellow being, that sense of connectedness with everyone, anyone. We have repeatedly said that all ways return to the root, to the origin, and all ways lead to the One. What is the origin? What is the One?

When doing various qigong routines, many practitioners experience spontaneous movements induced by the circulating qi. When this happens, oftentimes even though you may be near other objects such as trees, rocks or iron fences, your movements will intuitively guide your body in such a way that, no matter how complex and unusual your movements may be, your body will not be hit or injured.

Once you are in a truly relaxed state, your original mind will take over and take care of everything. We live in nature and we live in society. As long as we maintain harmony with heaven and earth, as long as we harbor no enmity against others and as long as our whole body and mind are in a state of tranquility and peace, we can naturally handle our relations with the environment and people. We certainly will be balanced, mentally and physically. When we genuinely feel a loving kindness toward nature and men, we are already in a natural state of relaxation. We will be free and easy. That is when enlightenment dawns. Our practicing qigong must give us more freedom in life, make us feel more at ease with ourselves and enable us to understand more of the Zen philosophy. What is the point if we practice hard twenty-four hours a day but still feel harassed by worries and enjoy not a moment of relaxation?

In China today, qigong has become widely practiced. As more and more people begin to recognize the benefits of qigong and engage in its practice, we need to broadcast the positive significance of qigong and encourage all people to enjoy healthy growth. At the same time, to promote positive and wholesome development and bring qigong research to a higher level that will benefit more practitioners, it is extremely important to avoid the pitfalls existing in our movement.

Avoiding the Pitfalls

Since qigong has been experiencing a renaissance in China it has undergone great development and the number of practitioners has increased at an amazing rate. More encouragingly, more and more scientific researchers are drawn to the field of qigong study. At the same

time, quite a number of unhealthy tendencies have been detected in the movement. First, within certain schools of qigong a form of factionalism has been growing, which has proven to be a hindrance to their reputation and development. More than just a problem of organizational structure, it tends to restrict their practitioners in their overall spiritual development and becomes a block to attaining a higher level of practice.

Second, disharmony exists between different schools of practice. One school may regard its routines to be more superior than others. Such tendencies directly affect the promotion of qigong as a unified movement, creating considerable confusion and negativity among practitioners.

Third, some qigong schools and practitioners tend to overestimate and exaggerate the healing function of qigong. Without doubt, qigong entails certain healing powers but it is not a cure-all. Also, when we are not absolutely sure of the mechanism of qigong healing, we should be allowed to speculate, investigate and offer various explanations, but we should not make false statements that are not entirely true. Dishonest practitioners overstate their power of healing and do it deliberately. They may claim to have cured a hundred cases while in reality only one has been healed. This should be stopped.

Fourth, that qigong is beneficial to mankind is beyond doubt. When it starts to grow out of a cultural trend and seek its independent status in society, it cannot help but come up against the problem of how to sustain itself economically. We should not be afraid to point out that the development of qigong depends largely on healthy economics. However, as qigong encounters the modern market economy, it should impose on itself a more rigorous moral standard while following the conventional rules of modern economy, because the fundamental nature of qigong is moral and spiritual cultivation. At the same time, how to balance qigong promotion and its economic development is a matter of practical importance. While it may seem a simple, conventional business problem, it nevertheless requires a conscious choice that may decide the future of qigong development in China and the world.

The current situation of qigong is a positive development and it is important to maintain its moral standard, which is crucial to the moral and spiritual advancement

of practitioners and people in general.

There are many schools of qigong in China, and each has its own unique characteristics. We should not challenge each other on methodology of practice, but promote each other in such a way that we make clear the strength and weakness of each and draw on each other's merits, thereby raising the level together. Different qigong methods have their uniqueness and therefore vary in effect. Generally speaking, a good practice routine that is both practical and popular tends to have the following characteristics:

(1) It is easy to follow and popularize. To use Zen terminology, it is ready-made. More complex and obscure

forms are unsuitable for large numbers of practitioners from all walks of life. (2) It is effective in readjusting one's physical health. (3) It is effective in readjusting one's psychological health. (4) It is effective in cultivating wisdom. (5) It is effective in promoting the moral civilization in society, based on individual well-being and the well-being of the practitioner's interrelationship with others and society. (6) It is harmonious with modern civilization. Qigong should not discriminate or disparage modern science and technology but should harmonize with them. At present, certain qigong schools play down the roles of modern science and regard qigong as the only cure for all. They want nothing to do with hospitals or modern medicine.

They seem to have forgotten

that if qigong does not integrate with the achievements of modern science and technology, it will lose its reliance on modern society and lose its rational standing. (7) It should enable practitioners to start at a low level but eventually achieve a higher level of attainment. (8) It should have no or few deviations. The above eight points constitute the basic standards for popular qigong routines.

Deviations in Qigong

I have observed throughout my study that there are deviations in qigong practice, and some can cause serious dysfunction. Some qigong enthusiasts and practitioners deny that qigong practice can cause deviating dysfunction. This is obviously not a scientific and objective view, nor is it realistic. It is unscientific to think that recognition of such deviations will cause qigong to lose its reputation. This is neither objective nor true.

Through the years, I have met large numbers of practitioners as well as received numerous letters from



readers of my works. To be honest, I have observed and investigated quite a few cases of mental disturbance caused by the incorrect practice of qigong. Of course, it is a very small proportion compared to the number of qigong practitioners in China. But it is not negligible considering the relatively large number of practitioners throughout the country. A single case may cause serious concern by family members as well as by other practitioners. Pressure may then follow. It is obvious that it would be wiser to study it objectively rather than to cover it up.

In my work, *Decoding Human Metaphysical Phenomena*, I analyzed a true case of qigong deviation. A man by the name of Jin Quyi, who started by consulting folk oracles, was finally controlled by the voice and image of an alien force who proclaimed itself to be Emperor Pangu, the legendary creator of the universe in Chinese mythology. While explaining to Jin the human evolution process from the time of creation, this force levied extreme control over him. As soon as he doubted the power of this force, a voice in his mind would say, "I can make you motionless this very moment." Immediately Jin felt his limbs and body stop functioning. Interestingly, this self-claimed creator force also showed Jin the wonderful future world.

Jin Quyi has written a book based on his personal experience, which won quite a large readership and gained some following. I made a careful investigation into this case and found a lot of contradictions in Jin's claims and narration. On the one hand in his confusing trance-like state, he did acquire certain psychic insight and senses, such as prediction. On the other hand, he was so painfully under the absolute control of the mysterious force and longed to be free from its dominance, that the blueprint of a beautiful new world supposedly demonstrated to him by the so-called creator force was no more than unrealistic wishful thinking on Jin's part. In the analysis of modern psychotherapy, especially in light of Freud's dream analysis, the answer to Jin's case is apparent. Since the publication of my work, quite a few readers wrote me to say that my analyses have given them a more realistic and objective measurement of Jin's claims.

Recently I received several letters from the United States of America. In one of these letters, an elderly Chinese woman told me that for many decades she had suffered from the control of a voice in her mind. She could not get rid of it, and was very agonized. She later immigrated to America, thinking that by so doing the controlling force would be left behind. That did not happen however, and she was still bothered by the mysterious force. She wrote me in the hope that I could do something to relieve her suffering.

There are similar cases among some qigong practitioners. Some are bothered, some are exulted, believing they are receiving instructions from celestial beings or from past masters such as Laozi and Buddha. These are all the result of deviation from qigong practice, and our practitioners must distinguish it under the correct guidance of qigong masters.

Why do such deviations occur in qigong practice? We all know that the basic requirement of qigong practice is relaxation. In our daily life, we must constantly put ourselves under the control of reason and intellect. When we relax we relieve ourselves from this control. In such a process, it is possible that one's potential wisdom and positive energy is awakened or released. At the same time, other elements in our unconscious mind may be let loose too, such as one's suppressed desires, worries, fears and so forth.

We may recall that in many guided qigong seminars given throughout the country by famous masters, many in the audience enter the spontaneous movement state and cry or scream. Why? They were releasing their suppressed feelings. It is normal in qigong practice to let loose one's unconscious and suppressed emotions, and doing so is, to a certain degree, beneficial to both body and mind. However there is always the danger of overdoing it and getting out of control. We must be constantly on guard against this. Our practitioners need to be alert to such deviating phenomena in qigong practice.

I have said on many occasions that it is best for those people who have a history of mental illness, who are mentally disturbed or whose family members are prone to mental diseases, to avoid practicing qigong without the close guidance of a qigong master.

When a practitioner detects deviation in his or her mental state, do the following immediately:

One, stop practicing for a period of time.

Two, study and analyze your own unconscious mind.

Three, consult medical professionals and accept psychiatric therapy.

Four, stay clear of all misguidance or temptation that may lead you deeper into error.

Five, rid yourself of all unfounded beliefs in qigong. Give yourself timely adjustment and guidance. Correct what has happened and refrain from being trapped into various illusions that may arise.

In qigong practice, some practitioners tend to be frightened by illusions of evil spirits or ghosts, but exhilarated to see those of Guan Yin Bodhisattva or Buddha, believing it to be a sure sign of high-level attainment. In truth, there is no Maya or Buddha in high-level qigong attainment. None is necessary. Buddha is in your original mind, in your enlightenment and wisdom.

Eliminate Doubts and Anxieties

In qigong practice, many experience what I term unnecessary, ill-founded doubts and anxieties. Some of these people are normal and have a healthy mind before practice. Then they begin qigong and change entirely for the worse. They become so sensitive to so-called 'ill qi' that wherever they go, the first thing they focus on is whether the qi there is good or bad. If they go to the hospital, they feel the "ill qi" everywhere. In the street, dirty qi is all around. If they happen to stand under a tree, they have to analyze the type of qi the tree may emit. When

meeting others, they will decide this one has bad qi and should be avoided while the other has good qi and may stay around more often.

In all, they are filled with insecurity and anxiety. What then is the point of practicing qigong? They will be much better off if they do not practice so at least they can be normal human beings. Otherwise what they are doing is totally contrary to the purpose of qigong practice.

I know a woman who had a very nice personality and got along well with people. After she started practicing qigong she began to distrust people around her. Every time she went to a qigong event, she would feel someone sinister was trying to hurt her. Once home she would fall ill, with urinary bleeding or foot pain. She asked me whether she should go on with her practice. I told her that first of all, it was her mind that caused all the trouble.

In psychosis, there is a syndrome called "forced illusions," and one of the illusions is that the victim constantly feels someone wants to hurt him or her. In such cases, a person may have a normal personality but with a slight tendency toward forced illusion. Once the person practices qigong and experiences the relaxation of rational control, it is possible to induce the abnormal state described above.

I told her that she must maintain an easy mind toward all things and trust in people, believing they are kind. If she could achieve these things, she would be able to continue practicing qigong. If she still felt out of control and continued to believe that others might harm her, then it would be better to stop practicing for some time.

Another man told me that after a period of qigong practice, he became afraid of going to public places to do his routines because he feared that other practitioners might steal his qi. He further elaborated on his point, saying that when practicing, a person's meridians are wide open and at such a time it would be easy for someone else to steal his qi or harm him, because in the group there was already someone who was evil. I laughed and told him to go ahead and steal qi from me if he could. He found he could not do it. Why? Because it is not easy to steal qi from a person. I would not deny that it is possible to do harm using the force of qi, but it is a very rare occurrence. To the majority of practitioners, this should not be a source of anxiety. In China we have a saying, "Evil can never prevail over good." If your mind is at peace and

aboveboard no evil will ever prevail.

Unfounded anxiety can become a psychological hindrance in one's qigong practice. It may seem to be a simple problem, yet it is crucial to one's attainment of higher levels. Without eliminating this hindrance, we may as well play a lute before a cow than preach to these practitioners the importance of achieving higher levels. Such anxiety not only affects your daily life, it also hinders your attaining the genuine state of qi. Qigong practice requires a peaceful mind without blockage, worry or desire. We must solve this problem before we can proceed further on our path of achievement. No matter how hard you force yourself, no peace of mind is possible, because your mind is not free nor at ease.

To some people, things were more normal before their practice. Now that they practice qigong, things are getting more complex and they become exhausted by overwhelming worries. Of course, for some this may pass and once they jump over the hurdle their practice leaps to a higher level. However, if you let yourself be trapped at this stage, you will have a hard time progressing. In any qigong practice, instructors

and masters must give correct guidance so practitioners are not trapped by superficial concepts. In a deeper sense, these sorts of worries and anxieties are in reality part of Maya's control, the force of negative energy. Normally, those who are suspicious of others are more prone to interference from negative forces in their qigong practice, while more normal and stable people can easily avoid the influence of Maya.

Eliminate Restrictions and Taboos

Different people tend to have different concerns and restrictions. This is normal and nothing strange. By restrictions and taboos, I am talking about those unfounded inhibitions we sometimes encounter in qigong practice.

I know of a physician who was very devoted to her profession. She started practicing qigong because of health problems. She was introduced to the concept of "sick energy" and became extremely sensitive to it. Her work at the hospital began to cause her a lot of psychological inhibitions. After a period of time her health became worse than before. She was puzzled and frustrated. She told me she was able to see patients before she took up



practicing qigong, in spite of ill health. Later every patient became a source of ill energy and she felt very exposed and vulnerable. She was afraid to go to work.

The purpose of practicing qigong is first and foremost to train our minds to reach the utmost peaceful state. Otherwise there is no use drilling ourselves in the different routines and movements. A doctor's duty is to help and heal, which should be a meritorious deed. If qigong practice does not give more peace but instead causes more worries, it is better to stop practicing.

There are quite a number of practitioners who, once they acquire the so-called "qi" concept, avoid even a garbage truck in the distance, believing it contains malevolent energy. Before practicing, they had little or no restrictions. Now that they practice, everything becomes a restriction. What is this but a lack of enlightenment? While talking with many of these practitioners, I noticed that most of them are interested in obtaining some sort of archaic mantra or secret to boost their practice.

The core of qigong is about qi, the energy that is in and around us. Does qi have any functional effects? No doubt. Otherwise, what is the purpose of practicing qigong? The rise of restrictions and taboos is a natural thing at the initial stages of practice. However, if we are trapped by various restrictions and taboos, we will not make progress.

Zen talks about enlightenment coming from a peaceful state of mind and the letting go of all worries, which also includes all restrictions. If we cannot let go of all these unhealthy and negative self-suggestions, it is difficult to continue practice and worse, it affects our normal day-to-day life, imposing strong psychological limitations. How do we expect to improve our practice?

When we encounter a certain psychological inhibition we must first try to figure out its origin. Once we know the cause then it is paramount that we free ourselves from its interference. Inhibition is another form of attachment. If we could detach ourselves from certain things, we would experience that enlightening moment and enter a higher state of being.

Since antiquity, mankind has suffered too many restrictions and inhibitions, whether in China or in other parts of the world. In our daily life, there must be millions of can-do's and can't-do's. If one was to believe every

one of these restrictions, one would not be able to live a normal life not to mention achieve high attainment of qigong. The best way is to be completely at ease with everything and anything.

In China we have a saying, "The killer who lays down his knife at once becomes a Buddha." Generally we would understand it as a moral teaching that advises wrongdoers to give up evil and achieve salvation. What we may overlook is the secret of qigong attainment embedded in this ancient saying. As soon as someone who has done something wrong realizes his wrong-doing and completely frees himself from its bondage he immediately

experiences the wisdom of life. No matter what kind of terror or frustration a practitioner has gone through, once he has set it aside he will almost certainly be able to experience the enlightenment of wisdom. If we want to reach higher levels in our qigong practice, it is important to emphasize again and again that we must free our mind from all kinds of psychological burdens. Once that is done, we will naturally understand a great deal without deliberate effort and our practice will im-

prove. We can detail all technical specifications of movements and routines, but we must know what higher levels are, and eventually reach that state of knowing without being conscious of knowing.

Prediction and Fortunetelling

The ability to know things before they happen is a form of psychic power. To a lot of people, it is both mysterious and fascinating. In China today, numerous books have been published on this subject. In my personal opinion, this archaic subject is worth our study and investigation.

Many methods of prediction used in the ancient times make a lot of sense. In the old times, there was no highly developed technology like we have today, but man was endowed with more acute intuitive powers than people today. Our ancestors evolved and expanded prediction methods from their intuitive understanding of heaven and earth, man and life. In this oracular process, ancient people not only developed their methodologies but also experienced certain mysterious cycles of all things in the universe and in the universe itself. Many sages and wise



men of the time studied and established a philosophy and moral system based on these studies.

For example, Confucius's interpretation of the *Yijing*, *The Book of Changes* and many of his other philosophical works came from such origins. The secret of prophetic prediction is all in our God power. Human beings possess all knowing power in the subconscious mind. Whether one can make accurate predictions depends on whether one can call on the omniscient God power; that is our subconscious.

In today's world many ancient prophetic methods have been materialized as modern scientific forecast technology such as those used in weather forecasting or the measurement of cosmic bodies. Nevertheless, the study of ancient prophetic techniques is still relevant today because it can supplement modern scientific forecasting. It would be unnecessary to predict the movements of the solar system or forecast weather using ancient oracles. However, when it comes to the predictions of earthquakes or airplane accidents, modern science may still be in want of accurate predictions, and it is in such matters that oracles can play a part. As to the foretelling of our life events, it may be that ancient oracles are more significant in filling in the blanks.

In addition, the study of ancient oracular techniques may help us deepen our understanding of mind-body relations and the relationship of man and the universe which, in turn, will further the development of science and technology in our world today. I can see its prolific future ahead of us. I believe our study of the ancient oracular techniques affords a vantage point and unique perspective in unraveling the many secrets of man and the universe.

As related to our everyday life, we need to guard against being trapped in the superstitions of fortune telling. Qigong practice should free us from all kinds of unnecessary worries and attachments. We want to be at ease with ourselves and others. What we need is enlightenment in all things, not warnings of things that may or may not happen. The truly Great Way should be the concern of mankind's future and our human civilization.

Formless is the Key

Elementary qigong practice usually starts with forms. These forms are routines that control the circulation of qi, enabling practitioners to open their meridians in order to be effective in strengthening the body and healing disease.

Form consists not only of body movements, but also the time and place of practice, moderate food in-take, state of mind and so forth. There are certain formatted postures, movements, and methodologies which we call forms. In the initial stage of practice, practitioners need

to pay attention to details and specifics and acquire the standard movement routines. On the other hand we should also be careful not to become too attached to the forms because it will also affect our improvement.

During practice, for example, the master says that for a certain routine the practitioner should face her palms up and lift her head slightly. The practitioner then tries to figure by exactly how many degrees she should keep her palms up or how much she should tilt her head. By

focusing attention on such so-called specifics, she would not be able to experience the qi, and consequently cannot expect very good results in practice. As a rule, it is good enough to master the general routines

without being too exact. On the other hand, we should guard against another attachment; that is, the attachment to formless practice.

A qigong master may tell you that all forms are low-level practice and he is teaching you the formless, the ultimate way of practice. In fact, his method will still be expressed through certain forms. There is no need to denigrate them, however, because they are expedient for the majority of people to practice. "Formless" refers more to a state of mind or being. If you maintain a natural state of mind, regardless of what form you are practicing, it is formless.

There are others who are so fascinated by the formless way that they ignore the routine movements and neither pay attention nor train the mind. They think this is non-action when in reality it is not.

A friend of mine visited Beijing some time ago and he wished to talk about qigong. I telephoned him one day. As soon as he picked up the phone, I asked him, "Are you sitting or standing right now?" He said, "I am sitting." So I said, "You have been asking me about the secret of qigong. Please adjust your sitting posture and make yourself more natural and more comfortable." He followed my instruction and told me he'd done that. I then asked, "Can you recall how you were sitting before I asked that made you change your posture?" He thought a long while and could remember nothing. I responded by saying, "There might be two possibilities. You rushed to pick up the phone when you heard it ringing and sat down in quite an awkward position. It may also be possible that the position you sat in was the most natural and no matter how you tried later on to adjust it, you would not be able to do the same."

Similarly, when we deal with ten thousand people and things, the initial intuition, that flash of your original nature, is what we call "do without doing." It is something we need to experience. Just like the above example, the sitting posture can embody the very secret of qigong practice.

If you maintain a natural state of mind, regardless of what form you are practicing, it is formless.

Ancient Zen masters had many methods of enlightening their disciples, and most of them were spontaneous, like the example I gave above. They used daily trivia to reveal some profound teaching. If we can return to and retain that natural state of the original self, we say we experience enlightenment. If we apply it in our qigong practice and our daily life, maintaining that state of mind is the genuine state of non-action. It is the higher level of qigong attainment, which may sound simple but is very difficult to achieve.

In qigong practice we often like to say that ten thousand ways will return to the Origin, and there is no fixed way to get to the Origin. The important thing is to go to the Origin; then no matter what way you are taking, you will achieve the ultimate level. Any qigong routine you follow will eventually lead you to the highest level.

There is no limit to practice. Experience at one level may be different from what we would experience at other levels. This is true for the majority of practitioners. At the highest level however, there would be no differences, there would be no more high or low levels; everything and all things are the same.

All forms are simply illusions. To attain this ultimate level we need to go slowly, one step at a time, just as one advances from elementary school to high school, then college, and finally earns a Ph.D. and becomes a professor, growing more and more learned in academic matters. The student may have to follow all the rules set by the grade school teachers; nonetheless the more he studies, the less he has to be bound by those rules. In spiritual practice the practitioner reaches complete freedom and ultimate liberation.

That is the state of original self, a state of nothingness. Someone asked me once, "What is our original self? What is enlightenment?" It would be difficult to define these concepts in words; we must experience it. Just like my favorite example of the taste of tea. No word can clearly define how tea tastes. Or to give another example, what is the color white? You may answer that it is the color of snow. But what is the color of snow? It is the color white. In a similar circle, we ask, what is enlightenment? It is our original self. What is our original self? It is our Buddha nature. What is our Buddha nature? It is our God power. What is our God power? It is enlightenment. We have returned to the beginning.

Returning to the Origin

Many practitioners wish to reach the secret of qigong practice. In reality, the secret is often the simplest is the most important. For example, some qigong masters heal patients by giving prescriptions. Sometimes the patient

needs only to put the prescription on his or her body and will be cured without actually taking the medication. In some cases the qigong master only needs to use certain hand movements. In others, the master may need the assistance of a certain posture or language. Some masters need the cooperation of the patient. There are all sorts of methods and all of them are just as effective in healing.

The secret is that all ways return to the Origin, which is the God power within us. If we can experience this, we will find it easy to understand the secrets of qigong.

Why is the prescription of a qigong master efficacious? An ordinary person may write a hundred prescriptions and they will be useless. A person with healing power may use a prescription or transmission of qi or incantation; all of which are external forms. By using external help the qigong master maneuvers his qi, bringing his God power into play. What method the qigong master deploys depends on his or her own intuition. He or she will use whatever is most effective in calling up the healing power.

Of course, there are higher level qigong practitioners who do not need any external help but can control their power at will. Methods are many and varied. We all go to the same place but each may take a different route. In qigong practice, the most important thing is to know and realize our God nature. It is such tremendous power. We all know it can perform miraculous healing. What if we can use it in our literary or scientific creations? We all talk

about enlightenment. It is a Zen term that means our mind is obscured. Then lights illumine and our mind is enlightened. That flash of the soul, that moment of illumination is the origin to

which all Ways return.

When we get to the origin, all secrets of qigong will become crystal clear, and we will enter the highest state of consciousness. It is written in the *Daode Jing* that "heaven, by attaining the One becomes clear; Earth, by attaining the One becomes stable; Gods, by attaining the One become divine; Valleys, by attaining the One becomes full ... The Way gives birth to the One. What is the One? It is the Qi; it is the Beginning. Those who attain the One, attain the Dao, the ultimate Truth." Why is there "One-Finger Zen" in Zen Buddhism? Let's all ponder this "One." When we reach a higher level of understanding, when we experience the "One", all is clear and there will be no more secrets.



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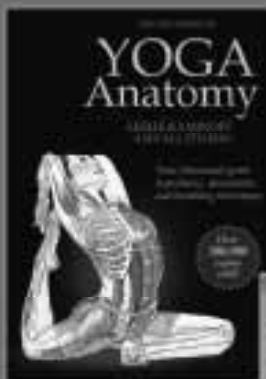
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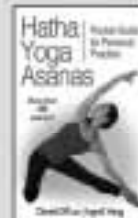
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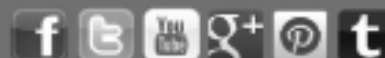
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Feng Shui Guidelines to Energy Flow Analysis

What is Qi and How Qi Flows

Elliot Jay Tanzer

Photos by Susan Glover Logan

There are many approaches to Feng Shui that have developed over the millennia, as in all indigenous cultures, all beginning with good, old-fashioned common sense – don't put your shack on a windy hilltop, it will get blown away; don't put your house in a flood plain, it will get washed away. The concept of how to live harmoniously in whichever environment you choose to live, doesn't get more basic than that. Anthropologists exploring the most distant places have written endlessly about what a particular culture would consider important, whether arranging teepees in a circle among teepee building Native American tribes, how to stay warm in an igloo in the freezing north, or building on stilts in the very wet Amazon.

However, among all the world's people, no other culture has applied such focused attention in examining the most beneficial way of siting and building a human dwelling to the degree of refinement as the Chinese. In Chinese society this same attention to detail and subtlety can be seen in all areas of life even hundreds of years before China was unified in 221 BCE. Out of this study and constant refinement comes Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), various martial art styles, and of course Feng Shui. All of these cultural achievements sharing a common diagnostic language of how qi flows, and how it can be differentiated in Yin-Qi and Yang-Qi, further dividing into the Yin and Yang Qi of the Five Elements, or Phases, which ultimately gives birth to the "ten-thousand things" as mentioned in the venerable *Dao De Jing*, referring as it does, to all of manifest existence.

As in various styles of TCM and the various martial arts styles, so too, Feng Shui has developed different styles. As mentioned, the earliest was the application of common sense passed on from gen-

eration to generation, from elders of the community to the young and inexperienced, from those familiar with how to live skillfully in a particular ecology to the newcomer who just moved into the neighborhood. This common sense approach developed into what is now called Landform Feng Shui.

Landform Feng Shui, as the name implies, and like all things Oriental, draws its wisdom from nature, starting with a description of the ideal home site – a mountain behind for support, a view of the valley below for security, a slight rise on either side for protection. In modern parlance we label this comfortable and secure arrangement the Armchair Configuration. In ancient days, it was described as the Four Celestial Animals: Tortoise behind, White Tiger and Azure Dragon on either side, and the small Red Phoenix, like a foot stool in the foreground, enabling us to see the view and to see who or what is coming our way.

It can be said that Landform Feng Shui is the foundation upon which all other styles of feng shui stand upon for their efficiency and effectiveness. Without good "forms" the later development of traditional techniques of the Compass School or the even more modern innovation of the 3-Door Bagua of the Black Sect Tantric Buddhist School, though bringing some short term results, would in the long term be little better than spitting in the wind, or in the water. And all Landform analysis is based on how the qi flows.

What Is Qi?

Qi is the Chinese word for "energy." Everything animate and inanimate, real or conceptual, has qi. Different people have different qi. Each kind of animal has its own kind of qi. A nation has its qi and a religion has its qi. There is roadway qi, rock



The Chinese words *feng* and *shui* are actually descriptions of qi flow. “Feng” means wind and “shui” means water. Feng, as wind, refers to the invisible or intangible qi that flows through a space. Shui, as water, is the visible, more tangible flow of qi. The study of feng shui encompasses all the ways that qi can have an effect on the inhabitants of any specific environment.

How Do You Know If You Have Good Feng Shui?

The answer is: Are you happy and healthy? Are you enjoying prosperity, or at least more than enough to provide for your needs? Do you have a good reputation? Do you have a committed, mutually supportive and satisfying personal relationship? Are your children thriving, respectful, and socially conscious? Are they creative and successful academically? If your answer is “yes” to each of these questions, then the answer to the original question is: “Yes, the house you are living in has good feng shui.”

If your house does not have good feng shui for wealth, you are always running to catch up. If your house does not have good feng shui for health, you are often tired and stressed. If your house does not have good feng shui for relationship harmony, you are single (which in some cases might be a life style choice), or you are in an unhappy relationship, and might as well be living alone. If you have children and they are a source of ongoing concern, grief, and melodrama, it could be yet another indicator that your home has unfavorable feng shui.

Of course, the feng shui of your house may be just good enough, so that you are doing well in some of these areas, while not doing well in others; or, not doing well in one area may be distracting you from doing even better in all the others.

The Nature of Life-Giving, or Upward Moving Energy – Sheng Qi

All beneficial qi is pleasant, uplifting, and inspiring. It is anything that is pleasant to smell, hear, or look at. Beneficial qi flow is smooth, graceful, and

qi, locational qi, and vocational qi. There is soft-yin qi and hard-yang qi. There is children qi, male and female qi. Each item of food has its unique qi. To identify the qi of anything animate or inanimate, real or conceptual, is to understand its essential nature. Qi is the *Isness* of whatever is – the essence of the thing or situation. If your goal is good health and success in all areas of your life, there is no other concept more important than the study and understanding of qi, and how qi flows.

Why Feng Shui

The study of how qi in our working and living environments affects us is called feng shui (fūng sch’way). The art and science of feng shui is based on many thousands of years of observation and application. Knowing the feng shui of how our environment affects us allows us to alter the qi flow to be more beneficial. Feng shui techniques allow us to mitigate the negative influences while enhancing the positive ones.



its movement can be described as meandering. Meandering qi is nourishing and easy to accumulate. Anything that allows us to relax and encourages us to interact with others harmoniously reflects good qi and good qi flow. Good qi enables us to maintain concentration, productivity, and enthusiasm, as well as restful sleep, intimate relationships, and moments of quiet contemplation. Good qi flow attracts opportunity, and the awareness to take advantage of a good opportunity when it comes our way. An environment that has meandering qi flow is harmonious to live in. Everything in nature – including people – that is vibrant and joyous is an example of life-giving qi. Calm, meandering, pleasant qi is the standard against which all other qi can be measured. The Chinese words for life-giving qi is *sheng qi* – literally, “upward moving energy.”

Sha Qi – Noxious Energy That Takes Life Away

When qi moves too fast, too slow, is excessive or deficient, is overbearing or distracting, or is in any

way extreme, it is an example of *sha qi*. Sha qi is noxious, stress producing, and unhealthy. Sha qi undermines our vitality, focus, enthusiasm, and emotional equanimity. Sha qi is also referred to as “killing qi.” It can be said with certainty that sha qi literally takes life away.

In evaluating a home we are currently living in, or in our search for a property and home design that supports a fulfilling life, we must be conscious of the environmental sources of unhealthy sha qi. The important goal of a feng shui diagnosis, is not only to encourage good qi to accumulate, but also to identify the presence of sha qi and then consider ways to transform it to the more desirable and beneficial life-giving sheng qi.

Hidden Arrows – A Type of Sha Qi

In contrast to life-giving, smooth flowing, meandering qi, anything in nature that moves in a straight line is a form of sha qi. Sha qi that comes from straight lines, sharp and pointy edges or angles is called a “hidden arrow.” Some call hidden arrows “poison arrows.” Hidden arrows or poison arrows “shoot” qi rapidly in the direction the “arrow” is pointing.

The sha qi from “hidden arrows” are destructive. This can be seen when we compare a gently flowing stream to a rushing river. Such a fast moving river strips the trees from its banks. Or when we compare an animal peacefully foraging in a forest compared to a panicked animal crashing through the same forest, breaking branches and trampling foliage underfoot. A straight line enables qi to flow too fast. The natural human response to a “hidden arrow,” whether a flash flooding river or an animal raging out of control, is to get out of the way as quickly as possible. The need for security and feeling safe motivates many of the suggested feng shui solutions.

The presence of “hidden arrows” in the home elicits the same response of getting out of danger’s way. For example: if you were seated in your dining room eating dinner and someone was standing in the corner pointing a bow and arrow at you, understandably you would be tense and nervous. You would ask them to put it down, or at least point it in a different direction. Even if instead of a live



inevitable impact of this “arrow,” even though in reality, it will never fly forth. To the subconscious (emotional) mind there is no differentiation between the illusion of danger, and the dangerous situation that is real. The subconscious will do whatever is necessary to avoid danger without the more consciously aware rational mind necessarily being aware of what evasive action may have been set into motion.

How “Hidden Arrows” Undermine Health

This constant tensing in anticipation of being hit and hurt keeps the adrenal glands’ ‘fight and flight’ response at high alert. Along with the adrenal glands secretion of the ‘fight and flight’ hormone adrenaline, other symptoms of a body in tension are: accelerated heart beat, high blood pressure, and rapid and shallow breathing. If this tense posturing continues unabated for prolonged periods of time, day after day, year after year, the immune system is ultimately undermined and various health problems are likely to manifest. Practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine call this Triple Warmer Meridian activation.

At the same time the immune system is weakening, the area of the body in direct line of the “hidden arrow” becomes inflamed. It eventually collapses when put under real pressure during sports or even normal everyday activities. The blame is quickly put on the activity instead of on the real culprit, the environmental presence of a “hidden arrow.” Like all sha qi, “hidden arrows” need to be removed, blocked, or deflected.

Qi Flows In Many Ways – Landform Feng Shui

The first challenge of a feng shui diagnosis is to determine how qi flows to, through, and around the home, and then to identify if it is beneficial or detrimental. Beneficial qi flow can be enhanced and energized, or enjoyed just as it is. But it is of the utmost importance to identify the problem areas that are causing unfortunate sha qi. Once you identify the problem areas, your next challenge is to find solutions, solutions that will regulate the qi flow to

person, it was a statue of the beautiful huntress Diana with her bow and arrow carved out of wood or stone, you would still feel uneasy. Without too much hesitation you would soon get up, turn the statue, and point the arrow in a different direction – a direction away from you.

Some “hidden arrows” are quite obvious, while others are very abstract. They are embedded in the environment and are not clearly perceived as an actual arrow shaft with a life-threatening, sharp-pointed arrowhead. Consequently, many “hidden arrows” are often ignored by the conscious or rational mind.

Though ignored by the conscious (rational) mind, the subconscious (emotional) mind continues to squirm in its little understood attempt to get out of the way of danger – to get out of the “line of fire.” People often sense something is wrong, but have difficulty identifying the problem. Presented with an angle of the wall, a sharp corner of furniture, or a pointy-leaf plant, the subconscious prepares for the

ensure that it flows smoothly and abundantly.

In nature, rivers, mountains, valleys, trees, meadows, pathways, and other landscape features are all channels for qi flow. In cities, this translates as roadways, alleyways, buildings, and open spaces. Inside a home, qi flows through an “internal landscape” of doors, windows, stairways, and hallways, and is assisted or blocked by furniture, appliances, design elements, and structural components of the house. As we have seen, when qi flow to, through, or around a home is obstructed, stagnant, or excessive, the health and well-being of the inhabitants are adversely affected. In contrast, smooth and abundant qi flow through the “outside and internal landscape” results in a sense of self-assurance and a more positive outlook – a sense of being in the flow.

Whether mountains or rivers outside or furniture and hallways inside, this approach is called Landform Feng Shui, and is the foundation upon which all other systems of feng shui depend for their efficiency and long-term effectiveness. As with all systems of feng shui, the goal of Landform Feng Shui is to attract, accumulate, and hold on to the good qi long enough for it to be enjoyed as a benefit, before it flows on again.

Feng Shui to the Rescue – Working Smarter, Instead of Harder

Another useful metaphor for the home is its comparison to a bucket-like container – a container that holds energy. Imagine going to a well, filling your bucket to the brim, only to discover upon arriving home, the bucket was riddled with holes of various sizes, and is empty; if you are not aware the bucket has holes, you might run around frenetically trying to replace what was lost until you collapse from exhaustion.

Instead of racing madly around trying to keep a leaky container full, you can use the Feng Shui Checklist to identify the “energy leaks”, and then cleverly “patch the holes.” In this way subsequent trips to the well will be more successful. In short, by removing, blocking, or deflecting sha qi we make the container-like home stronger. Problem solving solutions are called remedies, cures, or countermeasures. Solutions to make a good situation even better are called enhancements or energizers.

Of course, if the identified sources of sha qi cannot be removed, blocked or deflected, as some sources of sha qi are more detrimental than others, a decision has to be made as to how serious the problem is? Once the problem has been identified,

almost all situations can be easily remedied. In the worst case scenarios, the only solution is to pack up and move. The Feng Shui Checklist format is available at www.elliottanzer.com and was designed to enable you to evaluate all the possible ways sha qi can be found in and around the home.

Creating Harmonious Qi Flow

Everything felt by our senses is evaluated by both the conscious (rational) mind as well as the subconscious (feeling) mind. It is a natural inclination for living things to be attracted to that which is soft, curvy, and accommodating, and to feel rebuffed or put off by that which is hard, angular, aggressive, and uninviting. By improving the household qi, you improve your own personal qi with more calm, equanimity and joy. By applying feng shui principles and methods, you will be able to create beneficial qi flow in the home, and enjoy a happy and harmonious life.

Examples of Qi Flow: The Basis for the Questions on the Feng Shui Checklist

Life-Giving, or Upward Moving (Sheng) Qi – Qi Flow Which Can Be Enhanced

- **Meandering qi** – moves along casually and gracefully. It is qi that is the most nourishing and easiest to accumulate. It encourages focus and stability, and translates as a natural rhythm. Meandering qi leads to harmony, which expresses itself as good health, prosperity, and nurturing relationships. It is pleasant, calming, and enjoyable. Meandering qi signifies the ideal. The qi of all things can be evaluated and compared to this standard.

- **Expansive qi** – is open, light and gives a feeling of spaciousness and comfort.

- **Positive symbolic qi** – is found in images, items, or certain patterns that are psychologically uplifting, inspiring, and motivating.

Forms of Sha Qi – Qi That Needs to Be Adjusted

Sha qi is detrimental. Most feng shui solutions are designed to prevent sha qi and increase good, sheng qi. Sha qi can express itself in any of the following ways:

- **Fast moving qi** – needs to be slowed down. Fast moving qi from long hallways and heavily trafficked roadways can over-energize the adrenal glands and leads to physical fatigue.

- **Excessive qi** – needs to be diffused. Excessive qi from large windows and found in large spaces

is over-stimulating and leads to loss of focus and nervous exhaustion.

- **Obstructed qi** – needs to be unblocked. Obstructed qi from clutter, blank walls, and poorly positioned furniture causes frustration and leads to stress, anxiety, and inertia.

- **Stagnant qi** – needs to be freshened. Stagnant qi from standing water or poor ventilation is unhealthy, devitalizing, and leads to depression and poor health.

- **Compressed qi** – needs to be redirected. Compressed qi from overhead beams or slanted ceilings inflames the area of the body “under pressure,” making it vulnerable to injury and illness.

- **Chopping qi** – needs to be deflected or dif-fused. Chopping qi from overhead fans generate fear and uncertainty. Ceiling fans directly above the head disturb the heart and nervous system.

- **Split qi** – needs to be unified. Split qi from pillars and structural supports is disorienting and leads to confusion, misunderstanding, arguments, and indecisiveness.

- **Excessive yin qi** – needs to be dried out and warmed up. Excessive yin qi from too much water, lush foliage, or dark shadows encourages mold growth and poor air quality and leads to problems of the urinary tract, kidneys, and lymphatic system.

- **Excessive yang qi** – needs to be moistened and cooled down. Excessive yang qi from too much heat or bright lights leads to frantic activity, overheating, and dehydration. This can stress the heart, raises the blood pressure, dries the kidneys, and exhausts the adrenal glands.

- **Negative symbolic qi** – is found in images, items, or certain patterns which have negative associations with death, divorce, sickness, fears, painful situations or memories, and so on. Negative symbols need to be removed, as they can result in depression, anxiety, relationship disharmony, and ill-health. Only use symbolic qi that is positive and uplifting.



Elliot Jay Tanzer has offered astrological services since 1974 and feng shui services since 1995, and has presented at many astrology and feng shui conferences, whole life expos and metaphysical societies. He is also the author of *Evaluating Astro*Carto*Graphy Maps: Finding the Best Places for You to Live & Travel – A Step by Step Guide*. His books, audio and video library, *ASTROLOG: A Daily Planning Guide for ALL Sun Signs*, his *Article Archives* and the over 150 problems listed on the *Feng Shui Checklist* can be found at his website: www.ElliotTanzer.com. For more information about consultations in person, by phone or via Skype anywhere in the world you may live, contact Elliot by email: et@ElliotTanzer.com, or by phone: 310-281-6798.



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Embracing the One

Daoist Meditation

Solala Towler



Who can remain still and quiet while the mud settles?
Who can remain calm and still until it is time to move?
Laozi Chapter 15

When people hear the term meditation, they may think of an austere practice of sitting in an uncomfortable position for an interminable time, trying very hard not to think of anything as the mind races madly and the legs and back cramp up. Or they may think of sitting high in the mountains and leaving their earthly forms behind and soaring into the realm of infinity. Others may come up with the picture of rows and rows of silent bodies sitting long into the night trying mightily to transcend “normal” consciousness and attain some sort of enlightened state, which will immediately solve all their earthly problems.

The difficulty with these pictures is that meditation can contain aspects of all of this, yet it is, at its core, much more simple, more direct, and easier to learn and to make a part of one’s everyday life.

That having been said, let me also say that for many people, meditation can be the most difficult, painful, and challenging practice of their lives. It can raise issues that have been buried so deep that they have been successfully

ignored for a lifetime. It can bring one to the very brink of one’s sanity or it can bore one to tears.

On the other hand, meditation, practiced correctly and regularly in the way that is most appropriate for each individual, can open doorways into worlds that we can only imagine. It can open lines of communication to the world of helping and healing spirits and can bring one closer to whatever one’s idea of God or Dao or the Great Mystery is. It can allow one greater awareness of one’s bodily condition or energetic state as well as allow greater insight into one’s emotional terrain.

Daoist meditation is often called Embracing the One or Returning to the Source. There is much about it that is mystical and may at first seem hard to understand for the beginner. But then again, as Daniel Reid so aptly puts it:

There is nothing mysterious or magical about such meditation. It is as precise, practical and effective an exercise for the mind as push-ups are for the body and breathing is for energy.¹

Many people in the West have a very difficult time sitting still. They fidget, stretch, make noises, sway back and forth, and change posture over and over. Unfortunately, it is impossible to attain inner stillness without first attaining outer stillness. The very first prerequisite for attaining

the deep levels of inner stillness and quietude needed for doing deep meditation work is that one is able to sit with spine straight for at least twenty minutes at a time.

Because this is so difficult for many beginners, the best thing to do is start with a smaller amount of time, about five minutes. After a while you can extend that period until you can sit for twenty to thirty minutes at a stretch, without having to change posture or move around. Twenty or thirty minutes are sufficient for most people. If your goal is to heal a serious health problem or to become an immortal then much longer periods of sitting will be necessary, but for most people a shorter time will do just fine.

It is very important to keep the spine erect and straight (not as if at attention but as if there were a string pulling you up from the top of your head, from the *bai hui* point at the center of the crown) while pulling in your chin slightly. This way the energy coming up the *du mai* channel, which runs up the back of the spine, can flow evenly and smoothly.

As to the actual sitting practice – it is important that one does not slump or fidget but it is equally important that one does not hold one’s body too stiffly.

As Hua Ching Ni says;

If your attitude towards meditation is too tight and you sit solemnly and stiffly, you will nourish and increase this overly serious and unpleasant aspect of your practice and this will become the sour fruit you bear. If, on the other hand, you sit with genuine joy, the world sings to you, the pores and cells of the breeze dance for you. ²

Indeed, just the art of aligning one’s body and sitting quietly for any amount of time will have positive benefits all by itself. Whether one is able to still the monkey mind or not, you will still get great benefit from simply sitting in meditation in an aware and relaxed manner.

Daoist meditation is a little different than many other types of Eastern meditation. For one, it does not work solely with the mind, although that is a component. It is not just a relaxation practice, though it does also have that function. It is not simply a quest for a higher state of consciousness, but seeks to balance mind, body, and spirit into one unified field. It utilizes all three of these – mind, body, and spirit – as well as the life force energy that animates all living things, which the Chinese call *qi* (pronounced *chee*).

During meditation, Daoists direct *qi* to various organs and through various channels or meridians in the body in order to facilitate healing, greater vitality, and a long and healthy life. They are also dissolving areas of “stuck” *qi*, which can cause anything from pain to tumors. They are breathing deeply from the belly, thereby exercising the diaphragm muscle and massaging all the internal organs, from the lungs to the digestive tract. They also

breathe into the lower and upper back, massaging the kidneys and the heart.

From the outside it looks as though the meditator is just sitting quietly and breathing deeply. But on the inside they may be moving energy (*qi*) up the back channel (*du mai*) and then down the front channel (*ren mai*) in what is called the small heavenly orbit or they may be sending *qi* into various organ systems. They may be breathing, not just from the front, but with the back as well, feeling their whole body expanding and contracting.

The effects of a regular meditation practice are not only internal but are external as well. As the practitioner begins to relax into her practice she will not only feel

different, she will look different as well. Worry lines and wrinkles being to relax and disappear; the body, especially the spine, begins to realign itself and the meditator’s posture changes. The ability to deal with life’s challenges and pressures improves dramatically as one’s entire disposition changes accordingly. Also, a greater sense of clarity – both emotional and psychological – begins to suffuse one’s being.

Daoist meditation can also quiet the “monkey mind,” that part of the brain that never shuts off but runs and jumps from one thought to another like an excited monkey. Like a static-ridden radio, our minds are often so full of outside noise that we rarely get to hear that still, small voice within that can give us so much information and guidance from our higher selves or Dao nature. Just taking a few moments a day to tone down the static and neutralize its effects can not only bring us serenity of spirit, but open pathways of communication from the spirit world.

Meditation is sometimes referred to as insight practice. By turning our gaze inwards, we can illuminate those dark areas of sickness, pain, and emotional turmoil that often run (and ruin) our lives. By gently circulating the golden light within us we can reach that en-light-en-ment state whereby our problems do not have as much weight as they did and we can make decisions from a calm, clear, and balanced state.

Zhuangzi describes this state like this:

The mind of a sage is like a mirror – trying to achieve nothing, welcoming all, responding yet not grasping. Thus she is able to attain the Way and live her life without injury or effort.

Chapter 7

Other Daoist terms for meditation are found in ancient texts like *Tianyinzi*; namely, *cun*, “concentration of the mind by which one can see one’s own mind” and *xiang*, “closing one’s eyes to see one’s eyes.” ³ The *Neiguan Jing* tells us that if we can keep our mind empty and abide in nonaction (*wu wei*) even if we do not wish for Dao, “*Dao will come to us naturally.*”

Another major difference in Daoist-style meditation practices is that they utilize sitting, lying down, standing and even moving meditation techniques. To be able to maintain the meditative state while moving is a very valuable and powerful experience and one which can help to bring the meditative state into one's daily life. Many people are familiar with the slow moving ballet-like moves of *taiji* (also known as tai chi) or *qigong* (chee goong). This is called "stillness in movement" and is an important part of Daoist practice. It is believed that if we are able to find that point of stillness within movement it will be easier for us to bring the meditative state, and all the benefits that come from it, into the rest of our life.

The foremost concern of the Daoist to go with the flow of nature, not expending too much energy and ending up depleted, and not doing anything that is unnatural. In Chinese this is called *wu wei*, sometimes translated as "not doing." What it really means is being so sensitive to the moment that one is able to do just the right thing at the right time, which may include doing nothing! The important thing is not to overdo anything, including meditation. One of my teachers once told me that too much meditation will make your teeth fall out!

What I understood him to mean is that not moving for too long a time will make the energy or qi stagnate in the lower part of the body, causing all kinds of circulatory disturbances. We are already seeing this happen in the modern world. People sit in front of computers all day only to go home and sit in front of the television, which is causing higher rates of diabetes and heart disease. (Of course the fact that they are stuffing themselves with high calorie, low nutrition foods at the same time only makes thing worse.)

Another aspect of Daoist meditation is internal alchemy, *nei dan*. Briefly, internal alchemy is concerned with the mixing and refining of internal energies in order to allow deeper states of health and spiritual cultivation. These are referred to in ancient Daoist texts as immortality practices.

The lower *dan tian*, located in the lower abdomen, is also referred to as a cauldron. It is when we are able to put the attention of our mind (fire) down into our lower dan tian (water) that alchemy can happen. Dan tian means "field of elixir or medicine" or "cinnabar field" and it is an important energy center in your body. Actually, there are three dan tians – the lower dan tian, the middle dan tian in the center of the chest and corresponding to the heart center; and the upper dan tian, located in the center of the brain and corresponding to the middle eye.

By learning how to harmonize and strengthen the physical, mental, and energetic layers of our own bodies we can not only revitalize our systems but gain deeper spiritual awareness and understanding that will, in turn,

allow us to be examples to others. Daoists do not lecture to those uninterested, they do not sermonize, and they do not seek to convert others. As one of my teachers says, "Daoist merely suggest, they do not lecture. If people want to follow these practices, fine. If they don't, also fine."

Instead, they believe that to be a good example of a healthy, spiritually realized person is the best way to help the world. We all learn at our own pace, in our own time, and in our own fashion. That is why there are so many different types of practices in Daoism and why there is no one practice that is right for everyone.

Zhuangzi says,

Only a person who has attained inner stillness is able to still the minds of others.

Chapter 5

There are many reasons to begin a meditation practice – from cutting down the stress in your life to working with the Daoist immortality practices. Human beings have always meditated. The oldest cultures, including those from India as well as China, have utilized various meditation practices to maintain health, stamina, and vitality, as well as to commune with the source of all life. All of these reasons are valid to begin or maintain a meditation practice. The more you can erase the line between your meditation or spiritual practices and the rest of your life, the better. The more you integrate meditation into your life, the more whole, balanced, harmonious, healthy, insightful, and spiritually aware you will be.

Of course Daoists, being Chinese, were also very practical about their practice. If one is sick, unbalanced, ungrounded or emotionally confused it is very difficult to enter the deep spiritual realms of immortality practices. Thus, they developed health practices like *taiji*, *dao-in* (Daoist yoga) and *qigong* – practices to help the student of the Way stay as strong, healthy and clear as possible. In this way they were better able to keep up with life's demands as well as delve deeply into the meditation practices that were necessary for the Daoist adept.

But if one is interested in spiritually evolving or "attaining Dao," one must pay attention to the internal cultivation practices as well as the movement forms. We must remember that the *qigong* or movement forms are there to support our spiritual practice, much of which consists of stillness or meditation practice.

Laozi gives us this advice on meditation:

Can you hold the body and spirit as one?
 Can you avoid their separation?
 Concentrating your qi
 and becoming pliant,
 can you become like a
 newborn baby?
 Clearing your mind and

contemplating the profound
 can you remain unflawed?
 In understanding all things
 can you remain apart from them?
 Can you bear the fruit without taking possession of it?
 Can you do the work without taking credit?
 Can you act without taking control?
 Can you lead without dominating?
 Can you speak without speaking?
 Can you sit without moving?
 This is called the profound and secret virtue.

Chapter 10

Daoists believe in learning from nature, both external and internal. Ancient Daoists spent a lot of time simply studying nature around them. They watched how animals comport themselves when they rest by turning themselves in circles before laying down, how certain birds stand on one leg with the other leg sealing up the lower opening, and how other animals curl up to close off various openings, thereby stopping any energy leakage. They noticed which plants animals ate when they were sick or injured.

They observed the slow passing of each season, of day into night, and the interplay between light and dark. They experimented on themselves with various breathing practices, sitting, and even lying down meditation postures. Over thousands of years of experimentation, they came up with various practices that have stood the test of time. They found ways to open the doorways between worlds, to extend life, and to heal the deep layers of trauma that we as humans have accumulated through lifetimes.

As in ancient days, the best teacher is still nature, if one has the eyes to see. But even that can take training and practice. The next best teacher is life itself, but one must be able to look with a gaze of objectivity and introspection, something not all of us have been trained to do. The best teacher after that is another person, a teacher of meditation or qigong. There are some things that you can receive from another person that you can never get from a book or a video, especially if that person is a gifted teacher. After that, knowledge can come from books, tapes and videos.

After some time of doing any practice, the practice itself becomes your teacher. Then, when you are open and observant to the world around you, everyone you meet becomes your teacher.

Laozi says,

Allow yourself to become empty.
 Abide in stillness.
 The ten thousand beings rise and flourish
 while the sage watches their return.
 Though all beings exist in profusion
 they all end up returning to their source.

Returning to their source is called tranquility.
 This is called returning to their original nature.
 Original nature is called constant renewal.
 To understand constant renewal is called illumination.
 To not understand constant renewal is to invite disaster.

Chapter 16

Depending on how much you put into it, Daoist meditation can effectively change, or at the very least, enhance your life. For those with experience in other forms of meditation, it can open new areas of experience and vision. Daoist meditation can give you greater clarity, both emotionally and mentally, a stronger sense of groundedness in your energy body, and some valuable tools for exploring the “inner space” of your psyche, spirit, and energetic being.

Last of all, Daoist meditation is not necessarily connected to a religious format. In other words, it is not necessary to convert to Daoism to practice Daoist meditation. The benefits of Daoist meditation can be practiced by anyone, regardless of religious persuasion. All it takes is the willingness to relax, to be open to change, and to experience oneself as an energetic as well as a spiritual being.

Originally, most of what we know of today as qigong practices were developed as aids to meditation. The earliest form of qigong that we know of is *dao-in*, based on the Five Animal Movements, which were, in turn, based on actual animal movements.

These dao-in practices, which date back to the Han Dynasty (226 BCE to 220 CE), and which are still practiced today, were created in order to lead the qi into its proper channels by utilizing various stretching, twisting, and

self-massage movements.

The ancient Daoist sages saw our body as the storehouse of our inner nature. They taught that we must take care of our body in order for us to have a place for our spirit to dwell. In this way, our practice provides a foundation for our spiritual cultivation. It is important not to neglect our stillness practice if we are to fully enjoy the benefits of our movement practice. Like yin and yang, both movement and stillness are important to our overall cultivation.

Daoists believe that it is important to keep a balance between movement and stillness. Too much movement will exhaust one’s qi, while excessive sitting will cause stagnation in the body. The key here is to not abandon one for the other and to experiment and see what is the proper balance for your own cultivation.

Like yin within yang, or stillness within movement, that place of serene stillness within our movement gives birth to that subtle and mysterious movement within the stillness of our meditation. That movement brings us into greater harmony, greater awareness, and greater experience of the eternal and ever-evolving Dao.



How to Meditate

Sit on the floor with a cushion under your spine or else on the front part of a chair, with feet flat on the floor. Relax your whole body, part by part, beginning with the top of your head down to the bottom of your feet.

Keep your spine straight yet not stiff. Feel your head as being suspended by a silken cord. Take three deep cleansing breaths, exhaling fully. Close your eyes gently or close them half way and use an unfocused gaze. It is important not to get sleepy but to remain awake yet calm. Daoist meditation is not about going into a trance state or falling asleep.

As Deng Ming Dao says,

Meditation is not possible for the unimaginative, the stupid, or the dogmatic. Meditation requires a plunging into the creative, a suspension of the everyday logical mind that stands in the way of our efforts. It is only when we go behind this petty rationalistic mind that extraordinary experiences become possible. ³

Next, place the tip of your tongue onto the upper palate. This links up the two major energy channels in your body, the *du mai* and the *ren mai*. Then, close your mouth and begin breathing through your nose. Inhale slowly, deeply and lightly (so that if you placed a feather in front of your nose it would not move). Let your focus be on the breath, as it enters and leaves your body. An ancient text on Daoist meditation, says,

On the whole, beginners suffer from two kinds of problems: oblivion and distraction. There is a device to get rid of them, which is simply to rest the mind upon the breath. ⁴

Leave all of your worries and concerns behind as you spend some time following your breath in and out. As you breathe in feel your abdomen expand and as you exhale feel it contract. Put your focus on your lower abdomen. By focusing your mind and your breath on our lower dan tian you will begin to build an energetic foundation for our meditation/energy practice. It is like building a strong foundation before raising the walls of a building.

This kind of lower dan tian breathing is also referred to in Daoism as “embryonic breathing.” Just as an infant in the womb breathes through its umbilical cord in its navel so do we imagine ourselves breathing in and out through our own energetic umbilical cord. This is the cord that connects us to the mother of the universe, or Dao.

As you begin to breathe in this way, even if it is only when you are meditating, you will notice that you will eventually begin to breathe in this way all or most of the time. It is a very calming, nurturing and energizing form of breathing and can have great effects throughout the rest of your life.

It is when we go into a “fight or flight” mode that our breathing stops or becomes very shallow. Many people breathe this way all of the time, which means they are in that “fight or flight” mode constantly, causing great stress to their systems.

Whenever you find yourself in a place of fear or anxiety take a moment to notice what your belly is doing. More often than not it will be tight and may have the feeling of heaviness. But if you take a moment to consciously soften it you will find that your emotions will also soften.

Zhuangzi says,

The ancient sages slept without dreaming and awoke without anxiety. Their food was not fancy and their breathing was deep. The breath of the sage rises from the heels, while the breath of the common person comes only from the throat. These people, when they become upset, find their breath catches in their throat. 6

As you breathe, each inhale leads to an exhale. Then, each exhale leads to an inhale. They are not two different things but one breath. The act of filling with air and qi and the act of breathing out air and qi is one thing only. It is not two things. Your meditation life and your active life need to be experienced as one thing, not two. Your waking and dreaming life are also one thing, not two. Your "spiritual" life and your "mundane" life need to be aligned so that you experience them as one. This is a very important teaching. If you are able to balance yourself this way you are one with Dao, our source as well as our destination.

You can also imagine that on every inhale you are inhaling pure light or healing qi and when you exhale you are exhaling all the pain, stress or disease in your body. See it in your mind's eye as black smoke coming out of your nostrils, cleansing and detoxifying your whole system.

The length of your meditation is not as important as the depth of your focus. Daoists are very flexible. If you have more time one day for meditation, do it longer. If on another day you have less time, do it shorter. The important thing is not to stress about it. By putting ourselves into a stressful state about your relaxation practice you will defeating your own purpose!

The important thing is to know that when you do have the time and inclination, over time you will be able to drop into deep meditation more easily and faster than in the beginning. Try to include as many "mini meditations" during the day as you can. If you are working on a computer, take a few moments every once in a while to close your eyes, slow your breath and relax your mind muscles. If you are traveling use the time on a plane or train or other vehicle (unless you are driving of course!) to close your eyes, slow down your breathing and drop into your lower dan tian.

What we are going for here is quality over quantity. Longer sessions are not necessarily better than shorter ones. It depends on how deep you can go. For many people, even if they sit for an hour or more the time that they actually attain deep meditation may only be half that or even less.

Daoist masters also tell us not to get so caught up in our meditation that we neglect the rest of our life.

Hua Ching Ni says:

Do not allow your meditation to weaken your healthy

life actions. The high sensitivity that comes from meditation sometimes makes people who lead a meditative life scared of everything. However, all people have to stand up clearly to cope with the necessities of life. 5

Another term for meditation in Daoism is *zhuowang* or "sitting and forgetting." This kind of forgetting is very different than normal forgetting. In this case what we are forgetting are our ties to the material world, or our ever-changing emotional state.

It is also called "fasting of the mind" as described in this passage from the *Zhuangzi*,

You must center your heart/mind in perfect harmony. Do not listen with your ears but with your heart/mind. Do not listen with your heart/mind but with your vital energy (qi). Hearing stops with the ears, thoughts and ideas stop with the mind. Your qi or vital energy though, resides in stillness and is open and receptive to all things. True knowledge or Dao, resides in stillness and emptiness and to attain this emptiness one must use the fasting of the mind.

Chapter 4

It is when we sit in this way that we can "forget" our ego and our many opinions and judgments that we habitually use to give order to the world. The Daoists say let go of these opinions and judgments and let our true nature emerge.

Another very famous passage from Zhuangzi is as follows:

Yen Hui came to his master and said, "I am making progress in my cultivation."

"In what way?" asked his master.

"I have forgotten about humaneness and righteousness."

"That is good," said his master, "but it is not enough. Keep working."

A few days later Yen Hui came back and said, "I am doing even better."

"And how is that?" asked his master.

"I have forgotten the rituals and the music."

"Ah," said his master. "Very good, but still not good enough. Back to work."

Then Yen Hui came before his master once again. "This time I think I have it," he said.

His master sighed. "What is it this time?" he asked.

"I have learned how to sit and forget."

At this the master picked up his ears. "What do you mean by sitting and forgetting?" he asked.

"Well," said Yen Hui. "I have learned to let go of my body, quiet my mind, and become as one with the infinite. This is what I call sitting and forgetting."

"Ah," said the master, bowing to Yen Hui. "When you have become one with the infinite you no longer have preferences for this or that. If you are truly transformed you have moved beyond changes. I see you have indeed attained the Way. Now it is *my* duty to follow after *you*."

Chapter 6

Whether you are doing special energetic practices or just “sitting and forgetting,” when your time is up or when you feel that your sense of inner quietude is beginning to dissolve, bring your palms together in front of you and rub them briskly together thirty six times. Then place them gently over your eyes and breathe the warmth of your hands into your eyes. Then rub your palms over your face three times.

When coming out of a deep meditation it is important not to jump into the day or night too suddenly. You may be in a very sensitive state and having to deal with any kind of stress right away can undo all of the good work you just did.

Empty Vessel Meditation

In this meditation we allow ourselves to become as “empty vessels.” Laozi describes Dao like this:

Dao is an empty vessel;
it is used but never exhausted.
It is the fathomless source
of the ten thousand beings!
Chapter 4

You can do this meditation sitting or lying down. If lying down be careful you don't fall asleep. Sleeping and meditation are two different things!

You prepare for the meditation in the same way as previously mentioned. Begin by following your breath and focusing on your lower dan tian until you feel grounded and settled. Then stop focusing anywhere. Just allow your focus to soften and expand. Then just sit, with no expectations, no agenda and no fear. Calmly abide in stillness, empty and ready to receive. You may find that you are given information or guidance at this time. If you cannot remember it and need to write it down do so quickly, without pausing to think about it, then go back to the meditation.

Once you feel you have come to the end of the session, end the meditation in the same way as before. You may be surprised at what you will receive in this practice. It may come in words, it may come as a feeling or knowing or as an inspiration. Or else you may just have a feeling of being filled with something beyond words or description. It is a gift from Dao to you.

Zhuangzi says,

Dwell in the empty chamber within, which is full of light. By dwelling in this stillness great blessings will come your way. If you do not rest there, your mind will keep racing madly like a wild horse. But if you keep yourself centered and still, deep within this place, and allow your thinking mind to dwell outside, you will attract helpful spirits, and gods will come to your aid, never mind other men!

Chapter 4

Planetary Meditation

Begin meditation as before. Settle your breath and focus on your lower dan tian. Feel your abdomen expand and then contract with each breath. After a while begin to feel your sense of self become bigger. With each inhale expand your sense of self until it fills the entire room you are in.

After a while expand your sense of self even more until it grows to the size of the building you are in. Expand it further until it is the size of the entire town

you are in. Expand it even more until it is the size of the hemisphere you are in. After a while, expand it once again until it is the size of the entire

planet. Then again expand it until it reaches far out to space, taking in all the planets in our solar system. Once more expand it until it encompasses the entire galaxy. Lastly, expand it until it fills the whole universe and all that it contains. Really feel your sense of self expand far beyond your body and what you have always thought of as your “self.” Feel it mentally and energetically as your sense of self grows to contain all of life.

To end the meditation, begin drawing in your energy on the inhalation. Bring it in slowly from the universe to the galaxy to the planet to the hemisphere to the town to the building to the room. Contract it with each inhalation until it is the size of a pea in your lower dantian.

This practice is to give you a sense of expansiveness of spirit as well as energy. It may seem strange at first imagining yourself as containing the universe but there is a seed of Dao within you that does just that.

Small Heavenly Orbit Meditation

This one is a bit advanced for beginners but if you have been meditating for a while it is a great addition to your meditation practice. The thing that makes Daoist meditation different from a lot of other meditation practices is the energy aspect. Daoist meditation is not just to quiet the mind. As a matter of fact, Daoists feel that trying to use the mind to quiet the mind is the wrong way to go about it. They feel that you need to use the qi or the vital energy of the body to not only quiet the mind but also affect the organs of the body.

In this meditation we are consciously guiding our energy or qi with our intent. There is a saying that goes “qi follows yi (mind).” This means that when we use our mind intent to guide the qi it will move in whatever way we ask it to. At first it may seem that we need to use our imagination to make this happen but another saying is “imagination becomes reality.” What this means is that if we use our imagination in the beginning it will become real with regular practice.

Begin by putting your attention into your lower dan tian. Breathe slowly and deeply as you fill your lower dan



tian with qi until you feel a sense of warmth or tingling there. If this does not happen don't worry about it. For most people it will happen with time. Even if you don't have these sensations just continue to fill your lower abdomen with qi. After you feel full and stabilized, start to move the qi down from your lower abdomen to the perineum. You can picture it as a ball of energy or a cloud or just as a sensation. Gently guide the energy up through your tailbone and then up your spine to the very top of your head. This is called the *bai hui* or "thousand meeting point," (the crown chakra in the yoga tradition).

From here guide the energy down the front of your head, through your upper dan tian or third eye, down through your throat and down through the middle dan tian or the heart center. From here guide it back down into your lower dan tian, in your lower abdomen. Sit with it for a moment before beginning the process over again.

The most important thing is never to force the energy. Hua Ching Ni advises us as follows:

In learning the orbit circulation, you must follow nature. Allow the true yang energy to go through the possible obstacles, which are several joints of the spine and the bone in the back of the head. Then the yang energy will stay or fly as you choose after you have achieved the smooth transportation and transformation of your refined essence. The natural way is the true way. If you force yourself, command, demand, or wish to make things happen, the original true medicine produced by nature will be lost. Because there is no real material, this will cause only disorder or internal disharmony. ⁶

In Daoist practice we never force anything. Even if you don't feel anything, persevere with your practice. Eventually you may feel various sensations such as heat, tingling or something like that. You may find your day-

to-day energy changing as well.

I'd like to leave you with a wonderful quote from the work of John Blofeld, one of the early Western explorers into the world of Dao.

A mind fed on words such as heaven, earth, dew, essence, cinnabar, moonlight, stillness, jade, pearl, cedar, and winter-plum is likely to have a serenity not to be found in minds ringing with the vocabulary of the present age – computer, tractor, jumbo jet, speedball, pop, dollar, liquidation, napalm, overkill! Who would thrill to the prospect of rocketing to the moon in a billion-dollar spacecraft if he knows how to summon a shimmering gold and scarlet dragon at any time of the day or night and soar among the stars? And how full of wisdom is a philosophy that draws man away from the rat-race, from the tooth-and-claw struggle for status, wealth, power or fame, to live frugally and contentedly in harmony with nature, reaching effortlessly for the tranquility that flowers in a heart nurtured in stillness!⁷ ☯

¹ Reid, Daniel, *The Tao of Health, Sex & Longevity*, Fireside, 1989.

² Ni, Hua-Ching, *The Gentle Path of Spiritual Progress*, SevenStar Publications, 1987.

³ Deng Ming Dao, *Scholar Warrior*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1990.

⁴ Cleary, Thomas, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, Shambhala Publications, 1988.

⁵ Ni, Hua-Ching, *Harmony: The Art of Life*, SevenStar Publications, 1991.

⁶ Ni, Hua-Ching, *Life and Teaching of Two Immortals, Volume II: Chen Tuan*, SevenStar Publications, 1993.

⁷ Blofeld, John, *Taoism: The Road to Immortality*, Shambhala Publications, 1978.

From Solala Towler's forthcoming book, *Free and Easy Wandering: The Daoist Path to Health, Well Being and Spiritual Development*.

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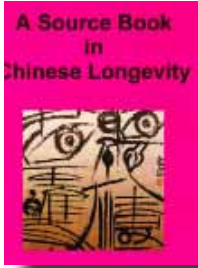
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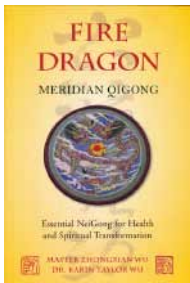
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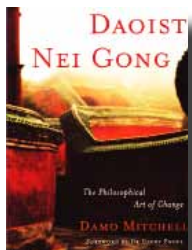
A Source Book in Chinese Longevity by Livia Kohn (Three Pines Press, 2013). The first comprehensive collection of translations from ancient medical manuscripts through medieval manuals and Daoist scriptures to late imperial works that specifically focus on women. An important and useful guide for anyone wishing to delve deeply into traditional Daoist practices for a long and healthy life. Another great contribution to the field of Daoist studies written in an accessible style with illustrations from ancient manuscripts. Soft cover, 298 pages, \$34.95 (threepinespress.com).



Fire Dragon Meridian Qigong: Essential NeiGong for Health and Spiritual Transformation by Master Zhongxian Wu & Dr. Karin Taylor Wu (Singing Dragon Press, 2012). An internal alchemy method that embodies the spirit of the rising dragon, an auspicious symbol of transformation in Chinese culture. Another offering from Zhongxian Wu from the timeless tradition of Daoist practices. Richly illustrated with photos and calligraphy, this is a dynamic and powerful qigong form, symbolizing the rising force of the dragon, which in China, unlike in the West, is seen as a beneficent creature. As more and more of these practices get introduced into the West we are able to benefit greatly in our own cultivation practices. It is especially important that we are introduced to authentic traditions and practices. This book is a welcome addition to these studies. Softcover, 195 pages \$24.95 (singingdragon.com).



Daoist Nei Gong by Damo Mitchell. (Singing Dragon Press, 2011). "Nei Gong is the attainment of real internal skill through the practice of the internal arts. It is the awakening of the energy body and cultivation of our consciousness. It is the philosophical art of change which permeates all Daoist practices." It is really



exciting to see so much good material coming out these days. Like Master Wu's book this one is full of high-level material. And while it is not ideal to learn these practices from a book, in the absence of a qualified teacher, this will do the job nicely. The exposition is clear, with many photos and illustration. The chapters cover some things I have not seen in many books, such as: instruction for rotating the dan tien, developing internal vibrations in the thrusting or central channel and converting negative emotions. Softcover, 240 pages, \$24.95. (singingdragon.com).

Elixir: Music for Moving and Still Meditation by Yang Ying. This past summer I met Yang Ying at the National Qigong Association conference in Washington. She was teaching a class on healing sounds and she and I exchanged cds. It was so wonderful to come home and discover such a beautiful and rich collection of music. Yang Ying is the master of the erhu, that haunting violin-like Chinese instrument. These tracks are wonderful for doing gentle movement or just for relaxation. When I first got this cd I played it literally over and over again, enjoying the rich sweep of lyrical music. You can reach Yang Ying at ying@yangying-music.com.



One River by Benjy Wertheimer & John De Kadt. Another collection of gorgeous music, perfect for still moments or gentle movement. Benjy plays the esraj, a stringed instrument from India, played with a bow. The music of this cd seems divinely inspired and will carry you on the wings of beautiful sound to a place free of stress. There are a lot of lovely vocals, some Indian raga type singing and devotional music. Highly recommended, it is a regular on our playlist here at the Abode!



Continued from page 8.

we are going into Winter, is an especially important one in which to make sure we get enough sleep in order to recharge our energetic batteries.

Here's a very simple practice to recharge our connection to the natural cycles.

Stand shoulder width apart with knees slightly bent, gaze straight ahead. You can close your eyes or not. Breathe deeply and slowing into the lower dan tien (field of elixir). Then, from the Bubbling Wells point on the ball of your foot, which is also the beginning of the kidney meridian (connected to the adrenals as well), use your mind to send roots down from this point deep into the earth, at least three times the length of your body. (An old saying in qigong practice is "qi follows yi" or energy follows the mind.)

Send these roots down, down into the earth, burrowing through all the layers of soil, plant, animal homes etc. This can work even if you are standing on concrete or a floor in a building. Feel your roots intertwining with the roots of all the trees in the area. Again, even if you are in the middle of a large city there are still trees somewhere you can tap into.

Now begin to draw earth energy up through your roots into your body. Fill yourself up with the good rich yin energy of the earth. Let it permeate your whole body,

making you strong and grounded.

You can do this practice whenever you feel unbalanced or ungrounded. It is a powerful way to connect with primal yin energy as well as a way to pay deep attention to your connection to the earth and its natural cycles.

Autumn is also a good time to begin wrapping up projects begun in the expansive, creative time of Summer. This does not mean that we cannot continue or even begin new projects at this time but it is good to pay attention to making sure we are enjoying the fruits of our labor.

As our energy begins to move inward so too does the whole earth (unless you are living in the tropics, but even there one can feel an energetic shift with each season). It is a good time to begin or deepen an already established meditation practice.

As our gaze shifts from outward focus to more inward focus, we can enjoy these golden days of Autumn when cooler weather chases off the hot days of Summer. It is a good idea to pay some extra attention to dressing warmly and avoiding getting chilled as the cooler nights of Autumn hold sway.

Enjoying warming soups and stews and eating the delicious squashes and sweet potatoes are also wonderful things about this season.

It is by aligning ourselves with each season that we can stay healthy, happy and in tune with both the outer as well as the inner changes of each season. ☯



Ying Yu Chinese Jade

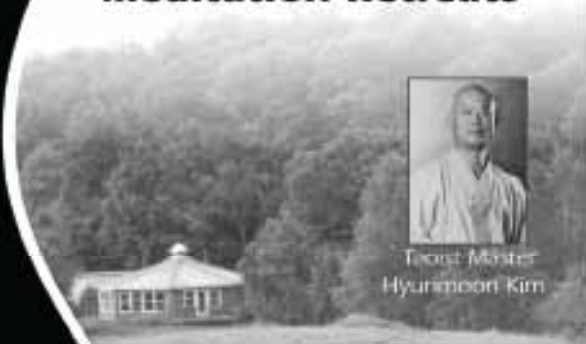
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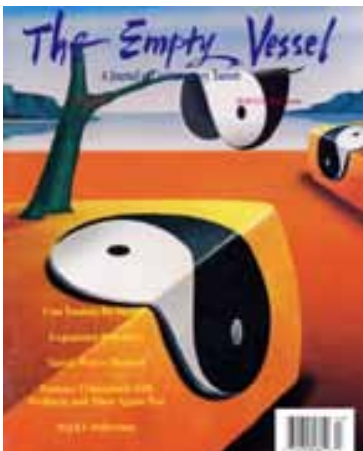
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