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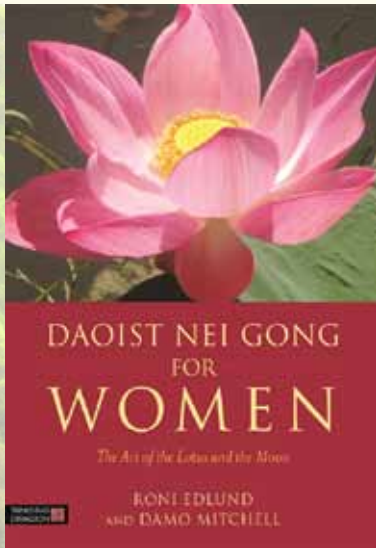
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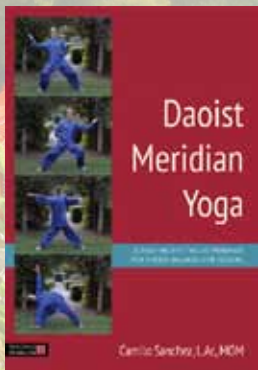
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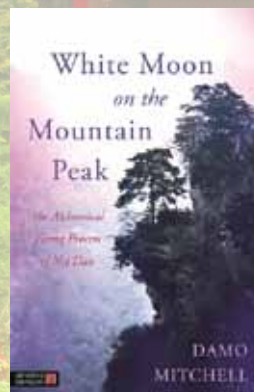
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What is Taoism (Daoism)?

"The Tao (Dao) that can be described is not the eternal Tao." So begins the *Tao Te Ching (Daodejing)* of Lao Tzu (Laozi) written some 2,500 years ago. How then, to describe the indescribable? How to fit into words that which is beyond words? The Tao 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.

Tao, then, is the Way, as in direction, as in manner, source, destination, purpose and process. In discovering and exploring Tao the process and the destination are one and the same. Lao Tzu 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.

Taoism was already long established when Lao Tzu wrote the *Tao Te Ching*. It originated in the ancient shamanic roots of Chinese civilization. Many of the practices and attitudes toward life were already established before Lao Tzu's time. For many centuries Taoism 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. Taoist 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, Taoism is often divided into two forms, *tao jiao* and *tao jia*. Or religious Taoism and philosophical Daoism. Many scholars argue that there are not two distinct forms of Taoism and in many ways they are right. There is really a great intermingling of the religious form of Taoism and its various sects and the philosophical Taoism of Lao Tzui and Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi). But many people who follow the Tao 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.

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 Taoist 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

Spring has come, bringing with it fresh colors, scents and warm breezes! We at the Abode are welcoming spring with open hearts. There's always so much to do when the long winter rains stop here in Oregon. This winter was pretty warm but very wet, which is fine because, while it has not been as bad as California, Oregon has been in a little bit of a drought. But as the ponds formed in our backyard this winter we were happy to see them come!

Springtime is associated with the element wood, as in new growing plants. It is also associated with the color green, the liver, the positive state of freeflowingness and with the power animal the Green Dragon.

It is when we are ready and able to face this direction, both inwardly as well as outwardly, that we too can become as new growth, as the pliable and flexible plants that Lao Tzu talks about.

And speaking of Lao Tzu, my new book *Practicing the Tao Te Ching: 81 Steps On the Way*, is now out with my wonderful publisher Sounds True (see excerpt on page 5.) This is my attempt at presenting the Old Boy's work as a manual for self cultivation. It was the biggest, hardest, most rewarding writing project that I have ever done, but well worth it!

Most people only know the *Tao Te Ching* as a book of philosophy but it was actually written as a manual for spiritual cultivation, with many practices written into the text, if you know how to read it. So my version has a practice for each of the 81 chapters, many of which come directly from the text and others from other Taoist traditions.

The other exciting writing project that I have been working on is a book called *The Spirit of Zen*, which will be published by my London publisher Watkins, the oldest esoteric publishing house in England. It is a collection of wild and wooly teaching stories from both Chan and Zen sources. It is similar to my book *Tales From the Tao*, as it is also heavily illustrated with beautiful nature photos printed in black and silver on glossy paper so that they have a kind of 3D effect. Not only that but this time all the photos are mine! The Spirit of Zen will be out this winter.

I will be doing a lot of traveling and teaching around the country this spring and summer, serving gongfu tea and teaching taoist philosophy and practice (called *pin ming lun dao* or "savor tea, discuss dao.") and teaching Wuji Qigong. Please refer to the listing on page 27 or check my website at www.abodetao.com for updates.

We are also taking reservations for our annual China Qi-gong Training Tour in October. We will be working with a local master in Wudang Mountain, my favorite place in China! (See ad on page 4 for more info about this or go to our website at www.abodetao.com.) We will also spend a little time in Hangzhou, my favorite Chinese city as well as a few days in the ancient capital, Beijing, at the end of the tour.

Solala Towler, editor



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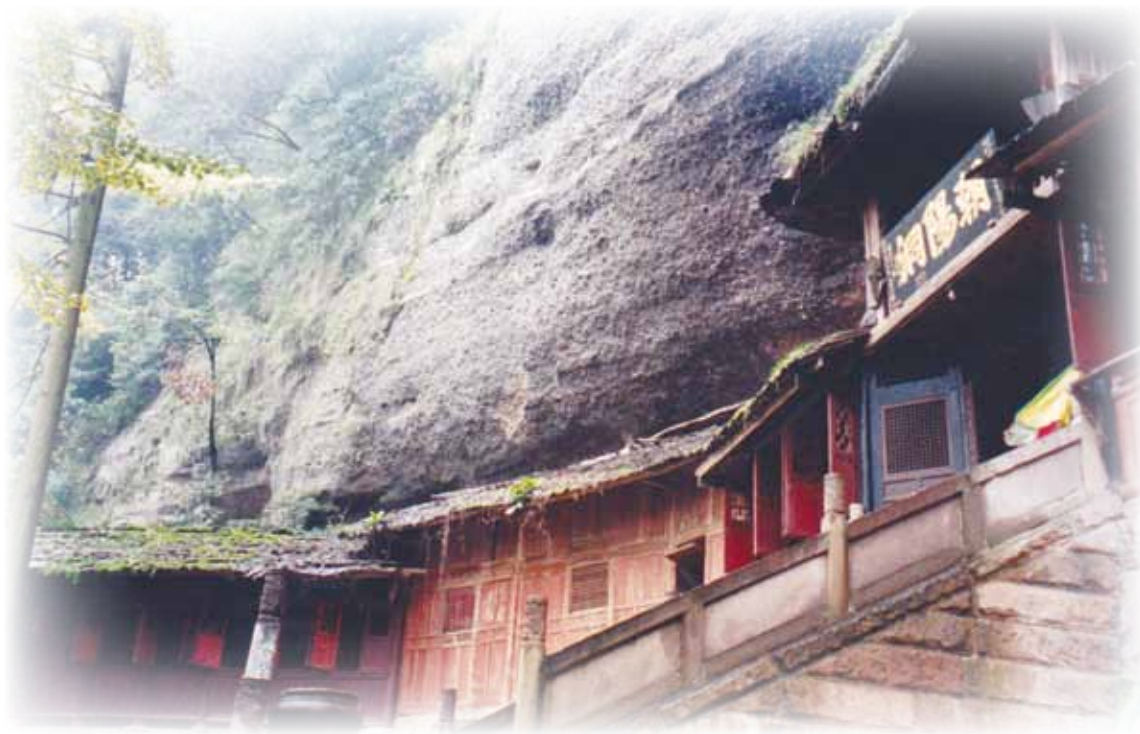
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Clarifying the Difference Between Neidan, Qi Gong, and Visualization in Daoism

Robert James Coons



“The Dao is in the centre!
Confucianism says to focus fully (on the) centre,
Daoism says to protect the centre,
Buddhism says (to) empty (the) centre.
The opening in the centre of the opening is the true opening
of the centre.”
- Zhang Sanfeng.

Daoism is an ancient practice, and since its inception roughly 2500 years ago, it has undergone many changes in idea, principle, and practice.

Ancient Daoists were interested in using research of the world to understand the self, and using understanding of self to lengthen life and cast off the mortal shell of the suffering world.

Daoism is not just one school, but many schools, each with their own ideas about how to achieve union with the universe and lasting peace and prosperity of spirit.

As such, Daoism has had many types of practice and each of them has a root in the investigation of the Dao. These practices come from different regions of China, different types of experience, and often build historically on each other in order to ultimately be passed down as completely thought out, and powerful methods of self cultivation.

In the Western discourse on Daoism, it is very common to

know about Qi Gong, Taijiquan, and Internal Alchemy (Nei Dan), but it is not so common to clearly understand their origins and relationship to each other.

Because of my unique luck in finding legitimate teachers of Daoist methods, martial arts, Qi Gong, and several other “Daoist” health cultivation disciplines in Asia and North America, and my years of working hard to research Daoist meditation in a non sectarian fashion, I have been able to come to an understanding of some important historical and cultural currents that act as anchors to our Daoist practice. Today I hope to share a little with you about the connection between Daoism, Nei Dan, Qi Gong, and Visualization based meditation here.

To begin, Daoist methods start with Laozi and Zhuangzhi, and although it is likely that Daoist communities existed before either of them wrote their books, the most important early treatises of Daoism are still by these two. Both Laozi and Zhuangzhi suggested focusing on quiet as a way to nurture life. The Theory was later explained by the Neo Confucian scholar Zhu Xi as being the use of the deepest state of Yin energy to give birth to the purest state of Yang energy. Yin and Yang, of course are the feminine and masculine energies of the universe and in our body are personified as the Po (female soul) and Hun (male soul). Laozi said that we should “protect the feminine,” and emulate the emptiness of the sky.

Laozi also said to “focus the breath on absolute softness and

become like a child,” so it must be inferred that early Daoists also understood the method by which fetuses come to develop in the womb, seemingly from nothing, and develop as a type of pure positive energy during gestation.

This type of practice was carried on by the Tianshi Daoist cult of Zhang Daoling, but by the early middle ages of the Tang and Song dynasty, Daoism also began to develop other types of practices which were different from the ancient principle of cultivating the feminine and absolutely softening the body. Ancient documents such as Huang Ting Jing (Yellow Palace Classic) instruct us how to perform various visualization techniques that can be used to develop the strength of the organs of the body and achieve “long life.” During the three kingdom period and the Tang dynasty, visualization had become the major part of Daoist meditation practice, and also accompanied external alchemy and various types of liturgy and yogas designed to help people become spiritually enlightened and join with the deities of the Dao. Visualization practice in Daoism can be very complex or very simple, but in general, visualization is done for specific purposes. Some popular visualization exercises of the time were to imagine a fetus above the head, wrapped in a purple cloud, and gradually bring the fetus in to the body through the head until it reached the abdomen, or simply to imagine a fetus developing and breathing in the abdomen (this exercise is from Ge Hong’s famous book “The Embryonic Breathing Classic”). While these exercises are very powerful, they can also lead to many problems, since visualization if not carefully taught, can lead to misunderstandings of the style and intensity of the practice. It is not enough to simply read visualization classics, they must be taught by a competent teacher.

Around the end of the Tang dynasty, there was a rift in Daoist thinking with the arrival of Lu Dongbin, a sage who encouraged the practice of Golden Elixir. This method used quiet observation and the utmost focus on yin energy and the centre of the body (the lower dantian/golden palace) to produce “qi” energy in the body. After enough time and practice, this Qi energy could convert into elixir and fortify the human spirit, allowing one to transcend mortality and become a heavenly immortal (at least in the perspective of Daoists who practiced at that time in history).

This type of practice was mastered by Zhang Boduan, the founder of the Complete Reality Sect, who even went so far as to say “bending and stretching the body, and swallowing rainbows is not the real way of the Dao.” This comment is in regards to the Daoyin yogic practices of earlier Daoism, and in fact is a total rejection of the value of stretching the body and using physical fortification to achieve immortality. Zhang also echoed Lu’s assertion that the best kind of immortality is heaven immortality. Lu Dongbin was of the opinion that there were five major types of immortality, with the heaven method being the only one that could stop people from continuing the reincarnate on the wheel of earthly suffering. Lu compared the low level practices of Daoists and Buddhists of his day to the achievement of a ghost. A ghost immortal is a person who has cultivated yin energy enough that their spirit does not die with their body, but is forever trapped on earth as a sickly, weak ghost, unable to reincarnate. Lu believed that this level of practice was very difficult to become free from and should be avoided. This type of ghost practice is still very common in the new age community all over North America and Europe and represents what Zhang Boduan called “not asking for the Dao, you will only be lost on the road.”

The rift between the practice of elixir and the earlier practices of visualization, external alchemy, and Dao yin represent the

maturation of Daoist ideas, and the return to Laozi’s concept of quiet stillness, non action, and nurturing the feminine in order to cultivate the masculine.

This practice was very effective and carried on in Northern and Western China for many centuries, while the older, more liturgical and physical practices of Daoism were maintained more in the South of China by the Zhengyi sect and earlier groups such as the Lingbao and Sanqing, among others.

Quanzhen methods went on to be combined with Buddhist and Confucian ideas, and schools such as the San Feng school and the Middle school are purely based on Nei Dan meditation, using a non sectarian approach to showing the similarities of the three big Chinese religions.

These schools went on to have great impact on 20th century Daoist scholars such as Chen Yingning and Jiang Weiqiao, who suggested that the real goal of Daoism was to cultivate health and happiness, rather than focus on the religious ideologies of earlier Daoism. Of course, religious Daoist ideas also continued to prevail as the official voice of Daoism, and the 20th century health ideology ultimately simply became part of Chinese popular culture, and is practiced by many people who would not normally classify themselves as “Daoist.”

During the 20th century period, ancient Daoist yogic exercises were revisited in order to compile exercise routines for the common people, in order to “strengthen the nation.” Ancient visualization practices were also rethought in order to formulate what we now commonly refer to as “Qi Gong.”

Although the visualization of Qi Gong is typically not as complex as the visualization practices of the southern schools of Daoism, they still retain the general idea of these techniques, and are in fact much closer to ancient “cun xiang,” visualization than they are to Nei Dan meditation.

Because the historical tangent of Daoist practice is not well understood outside of China, it has made it very easy for unethical people to market false and useless practices as Daoist. Regardless of whether someone simply rebrands their Qi Gong practice as Nei Dan, or simple stretching as Qi Gong, or if they undertake much more harmful practices such as sucking the testicles inside the body, extreme breathing accompanied by heavy visualizations, or other practices that go against Laozi’s way of gentle cultivation of the feminine, many evil teachers intentionally teach students methods that go on to injure them.

Regardless of whether we want to practice Qi Gong, visualization, or Nei Dan, we should all take our understanding from Laozi, who said “quiet the heart, fill the belly, soften the will, strengthen the bones.”

This is the real way of Daoist practice and produces the best results. Qi gong, visualization, and Nei dan, although being very different, come from the same root. The root is quiet, and then quiet, calm, and then calm, dark, and then dark, and is the gate to understanding all that is subtle and wonderful.

Robert James Coons lives in Shanghai China where he researches and writes freelance about Chinese culture and its connection to Daoist thought. Having started his training in Daoism in Canada with master Yang Hai in Montreal, he has further gone on to study tea ceremony, Chinese classical music, martial arts, dance, and Chinese incense culture. He is currently writing a book explaining the connection between the *Dao De Jing* and spiritual practice, as well as operating a small tea business based out of Toronto.

Empty Vessel China Tour 2016 with Solala Towler

Hangzhou • Wudang Shan • Beijing

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Join us in May when we travel to the sacred mountains of Daoism. We will visit 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, drinking 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 Qingcheng Shan, an ancient Daoist mountain. outside of Chengdu (home of the best food in China!). We will doing some training with an abess at a temple there plus spending time hiking the many beautiful trails up the mountain.

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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"Thanks again for organizing such an amazing trip. I had a fantastic time and will never forget it."

Practicing the Tao Te Ching

Solala Towler



This book is designed to offer the teachings of Lao Tzu as a manual for self cultivation, a journey of 81 steps to wholeness and return to Source, to Tao. In this way, each chapter of the text is offered from a Taoist perspective, along with in depth commentary followed by an actual practice, many taken directly from the text and others from other Taoist traditions. Here is a little taste of this book.....

Step 3

Not praising the talented prevents jealousy.
Not storing up riches prevents stealing.
By not displaying valuable things
people's hearts are not troubled.
This is why sages empty their heart-minds
and fill their bellies (dantian).
They weaken their ambitions
and strengthen their bodies.
They are free of knowledge and desires.
By practicing not doing (wu wei)
they live in peace and inner harmony.

The Commentary

In this step, Lao Tzu tells us how to avoid pangs of jealousy over how much other people are accomplishing, which cause us to feel inferior. This step builds on the previous description of the sage as one who accomplishes, but does not become attached to his accomplishments. Ho Shang Kung says, "Do not contend for merit and glory but return to nature."¹ In today's consumer society, we are often judged by how much we produce or by how much we consume, yet if we consume or own too much, we become paranoid that someone will take things away.

The next part is an extremely important antidote to this and is usually mistranslated: it refers to the practice of meditation or "empty mind" practice. To Taoists, our mind resides in our heart. The written character for heart is xin, which is where both our cognitive mind and our shen (spirit) live. Shen is our spiritual energy as well as our creative energy and includes our thought processes. To "empty the mind" is one goal in stillness, or meditation, practice. Lao Tzu will return to this idea in later steps. When Lao Tzu says "fill their bellies," he does not mean that the sage is constantly eating! Instead, it refers to the lower dantian. Dantian, which means "field of elixir" or "field of medicine," is where the internal alchemy practices called nei dan begin. There are three dantians: one in our lower abdomen called the Jade Pond, a little below our navel and a third of the way inside our body; the middle dantian, called Red Palace, is located in our heart center; and the upper dantian, called the Heavenly Center, is



THE PRACTICE

Filling the Jade Pond

By working with energetic practices like this one, our energy becomes increasingly subtle — ultimately leading to union with the subtle source of all life, Tao. Although our minds reside in our hearts, many thought processes leave us stuck in our heads. Energetically, we end up with gigantic heads and no bottom. In this practice, we are taking the fire of the mind and putting it under the water of the lower dantian. By putting our mind-intent here, our energy will naturally flow downward, and we will become more balanced.

found in the center of our brain, or our third eye point. The lower dantian is associated with the prostate or ovaries, while the middle dantian is associated with the thymus gland, and the upper dantian is associated with our pineal gland.

The lower dantian, referred to in this verse, is our body's energetic foundation. Just as a house needs a strong foundation, we need to build up our energy in this all-important center. The lower dantian is associated with the element water. So the "cooking" or "alchemic" practice described in this step involves putting the "fire" of the heart-mind down below the "water" of the lower dantian. The fire of the intellect, unless it is properly trained, will consume us with endless thoughts and thoughts about our thoughts and so on, leading to exhaustion, or worse. The interaction of the fire (li) of the mind and the water (kan) of the lower dantian creates steam, or new chi. This is then further cultivated until it is transformed to pure spirit, or shen. From there, the cultivation practice is to transform shen back to wuji, or the "primordial origin," and ultimately to Tao.

- Sit quietly on the edge of a chair or on a cushion. Close your eyes and breathe slowly and deeply through your nose. Your breathing should be so light that a feather held in front of your nose would not move. This will take some time, so go slowly, without worry.
- With each inhalation, feel your lower dantian expand. On each exhalation, feel your lower abdomen contract. This is the type of breathing you did in the womb, when you were breathing through your navel.
- Put your mind-intent down into your lower abdomen. Don't try to make anything happen, just let the energy flow downward naturally. Eventually, you may feel some heat or tingling in this area, though that may not happen for some time. Just stay with the practice, and things will move when they are ready.
- For a healing effect, use your mind-intent to breathe in healing light on each inhale. Feel it entering your whole body, burrowing down to the dark places in your energetic or physical body, where any disease, pain, or toxicity exists.
- On each exhale, see all the disease, pain, or toxicity leaving your body through your nose as black smoke, dissipating into the air before you.
- Continue breathing in healing light or chi and exhaling black smoke. If you are suffering from disease or pain, you can gently guide the healing light or chi to that area, or you can just relax and let it find its own way. After a while, you will see the energy coming in as healing light and the energy going out as healing light.
- To finish, bring your palms together, rub them briskly thirty-six times, and then rub them up and down your face.

1. Eduard Erkes, *Ho-Shang-Kung's Commentary on Lao-Tse* (Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1950), 17.



Step 19

Abandon sageliness,
renounce intellectual knowledge,
and people will be a hundred times better off.
Abandon “benevolence,”
reject “righteousness,”
and people will naturally
return to filial piety and compassion.
Give up cleverness and discard selfishness
and there will be no bandits and thieves.
Yet these three things are considered
outward things only.
They are not sufficient.
Take this advice:
know the plain and embrace simplicity
reduce your sense of self
and lessen your desires.
Give up intellectual learning
and you will have no worries.

The Commentary

Lao Tzu advises us to abandon our illusion that we know something about what it is to become, or be, a sage. A lot of people talk about enlightenment, but very few really know what it means. Taoists use the word *xianren* to describe it, which means “immortal” or “transcendent.”

But very few people agree on just what that term means. Chuang Tzu offers some insight through a description of this kind of person:

In the far off mountains of Ku there lives a holy woman whose skin is as white as snow, and who is as gentle as a child. She does not eat of the five grains but lives off air and dew. She flies through the air on a chariot made of clouds, drawn by dragons, and wanders where she pleases all along the four seas. Her spirit is so concentrated that she has amazing powers of healing and can help people bring in a bountiful harvest. She roams far and wide throughout the world of the ten thousand beings and brings them all into unity as one. She is beyond strife and confusion of the world and has no need to interact with it. 1

Reading such a seemingly fantastical description makes us wonder how we can ever attain such a high level of being. But the reality is, we don’t have to — in fact, we need to abandon the goal. All we need do is follow the last three precepts that Lao Tzu outlines later in this step.

First, he tells us to abandon acquired wisdom, or the knowledge gleaned secondhand from books. This thread runs all the way through the *Tao Te Ching*. Ho Shang Kung elaborates on this vital point when he says, “Throw away wisdom and sagacity and return to nonaction. Look at simplicity and hold fast to naturalness.”²

Lao Tzu is a big believer in teaching and leading by example, an influence through which people naturally overcome the deceit of cleverness and selfishness to become compassionate. They are so inspired that there can be no bandits and thieves among them.

The inner precepts, or conditions, that will achieve this are to know the plain and embrace simplicity (*pu*), reduce our sense of self (thus becoming less selfish and less self-important), and lessen our desires (even our desire to be a sage or for immortality). Step 37 offers more on the concept of *pu*, or embracing simplicity.

None of these things can be learned secondhand; instead, they need to be experienced within our very being. Book or head knowledge is very different from heart or belly knowledge, or true wisdom.

By giving up intellectual learning and instead seeking true wisdom through the proper application of *wu wei*, we will learn what is truly useful. It is only in opening our minds to understanding the profound and simple knowledge of Tao that we will attain something close to immortality.

THE PRACTICE

Head Knowledge Versus Belly Knowledge

There is a deeper kind of wisdom than head knowledge. This deeper kind of knowledge is called “belly knowledge” because it is not understood with your mind — instead it is understood with your dantian. When you live from your dantian, your experience is vastly different than living from your mind. You can rely on the energetic connection with the dantian that you established and expanded in preceding steps. Doing this may seem strange at first, but with practice, time, and effortless effort, it will become as natural as breathing. In this practice, you first set the intention to explore and experiment.

Whenever you read the wise words of Lao Tzu, do not attempt to grasp them with your mind; instead, let them float down into your lower dantian. Feel them pre-verbally, instinctually, in your gut. It is important to get out of your head and into your belly. Only then will much of what both Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu are talking about here make sense for your life. Perhaps by doing this you will get a different sense of the meaning of the words.

This journey to wholeness, to a deeper understanding of

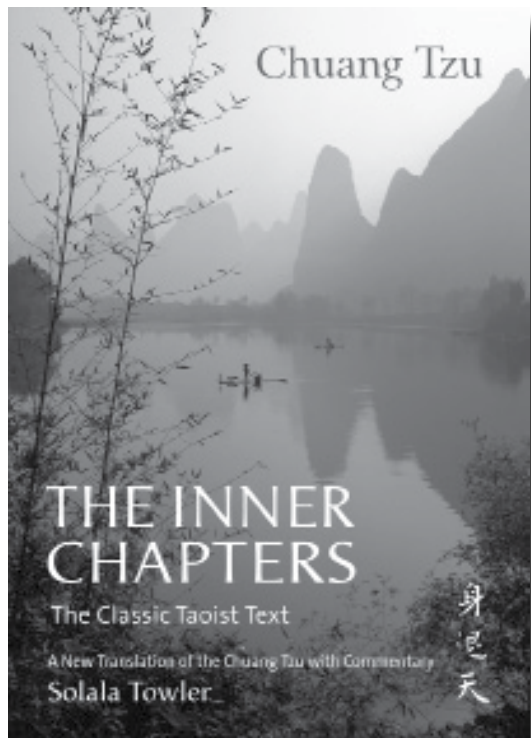
yourself and your place in Tao, is filled with unexpected areas, experiences, and lessons. Because it is filled with surprises, you must keep an open heart-mind. Just remember to embrace the simple and the natural, lessen your sense of self-importance, and reduce your desire for reward. Then you will be able, as Chung Tzu says, to “roam far and wide throughout the world of the ten thousand beings and bring them all into unity as one.”³

1. Solala Towler, *The Inner Chapters* (London: Watkins Publishing, 2010), 9.

2. Eduard Erkes, *Ho-Shang-Kung's Commentary on Lao-Tse* (Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1950), 41.

3. Towler, *The Inner Chapters*, 9.

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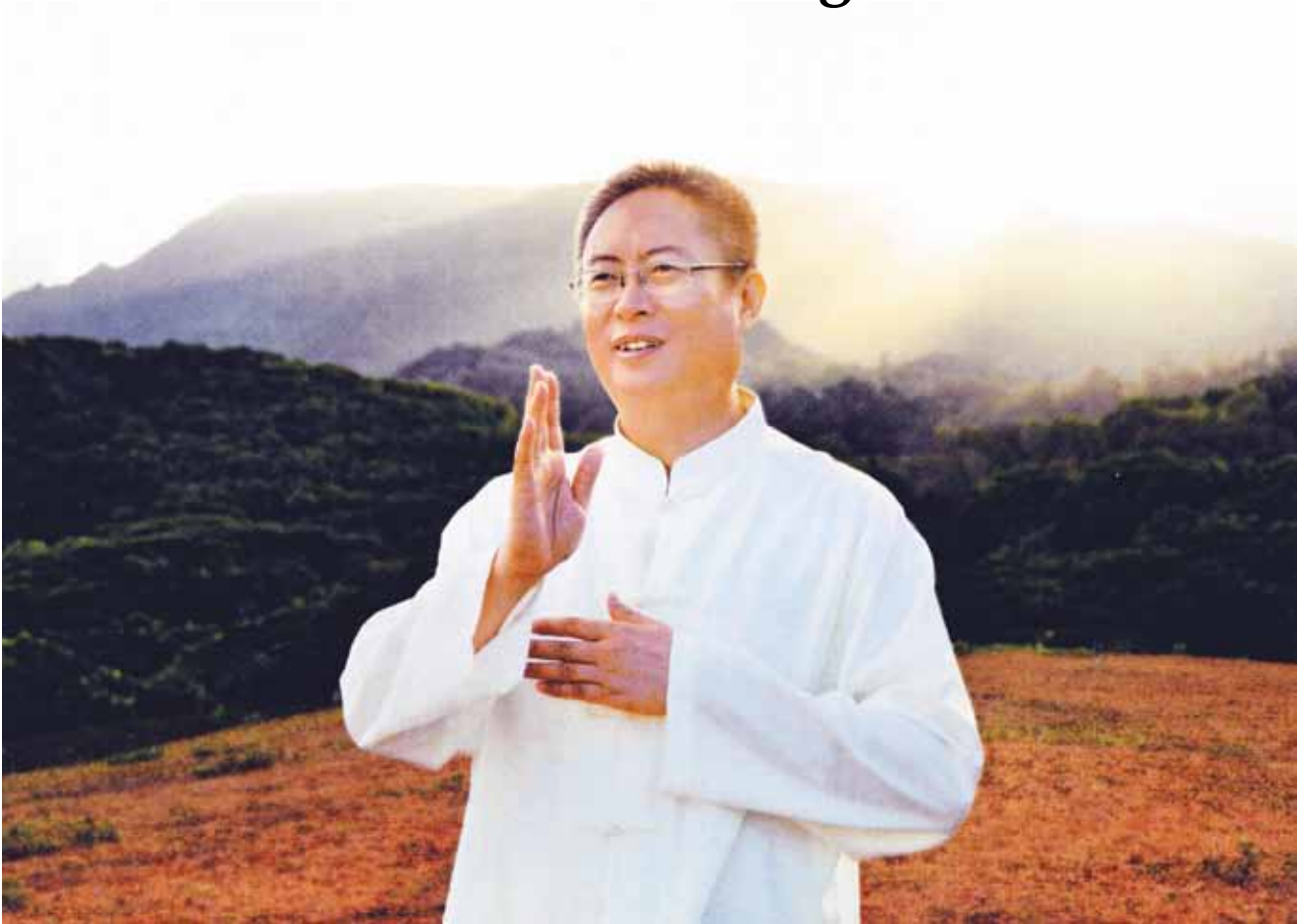
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Soul Healing

The Empty Vessel Interview

with Dr. Zhi Gang Sha



Where are you based?

In Toronto, but we have many centers worldwide—in Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, England, Austria, India, Australia, and all over the U.S. and Canada.

How long have you been doing this work?

Well, in the last twelve years I have trained more than 5,000 Divine soul healers, who are powerful spiritual healers.

When you say “soul healing,” is it similar to qigong healing?

No. Qigong is energy healing. We go beyond energy. It's Divine Healing Hands or Divine Soul Healing. We can do one-to-one healing, group healing, and distance healing.

So you get good results from it.

Oh, phenomenal results.

So does this have anything to do with Chinese medicine or Taoism?

We have the Chinese saying, “xiu xian cheng dao.” “Xiu” means purify soul, mind, heart, and body. “Xian” means saint. In Buddhism, there are Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. Taoism speaks of saints or sages. So, “xiu xian” is to purify the soul, mind, heart, and body to reach sainthood. “Cheng” means to reach.

What is Tao? Tao is the creator and Source. Lao Zi, the ancient sage who wrote the classic Dao De Jing, explained that Tao is the blurred condition. Within the blurred condition, there are images. Within the blurred condition, there is matter and energy, which carry messages. This blurred condition is deep and profound. Thousands of years ago,

beloved Lao Zi wrote that Tao cannot be seen, cannot be heard, and cannot be touched. Tao is the Wu World. "Wu" means emptiness and nothingness. Tao is emptiness and nothingness.

Tao is the universal principles and laws. Tao is The Way of all life. Tao creates One. Tao is One. I think that the highest wisdom and practice, the highest philosophy and blessing, and the highest science come from Tao Normal Creation and Tao Reverse Creation. Tao Normal Creation states, "Dao sheng yi, yi sheng er, er sheng san, san sheng wan wu," which means Tao creates One. One creates Two. Two creates Three. Three creates countless things.

One is the blurred condition. Tao is the blurred condition. Tao is One. One is Tao. Within the blurred condition, there are two kinds of energy or qi: Qing Qi and Zhuo Qi. Qing Qi is clean or light energy. Zhuo Qi is disturbed or heavy energy. Within the Hun Dun (blurred) condition, Qing Qi and Zhuo Qi are mixed. They cannot be distinguished. This condition lasts for eons, waiting and waiting for Tao transformation. When the time comes, Qing Qi, clean energy, rises to form Heaven. Zhuo Qi falls to create Mother Earth. Therefore, Tao is the Creator of Heaven and Mother Earth. Two is Heaven and Mother Earth. Heaven is yang. Mother Earth is yin. Two is yin and yang. Two creates three. Three is the Hun Dun or Oneness plus Heaven and Mother Earth. These three create Wan Wu. "Wan" means ten thousand. In Chinese, "ten thousand" represents all or every. "Wu" means things and beings. "Wan Wu" means countless planets, stars, galaxies, and universes, including human beings.

Tao creates One.
One creates Two.
Two creates Three.

Three creates countless beings and countless planets, stars, galaxies, and universes.

This process is Tao Normal Creation. In every moment, Tao is offering Normal Creation. Another profound wisdom is Tao Reverse Creation:

Wan Wu Gui San
San Gui Er
Er Gui Yi
Yi Gui Tao

"Gui" means return or go back. In every moment, Wan Wu goes back to Three. Three goes back to Two. Two goes back to One, the Hun Dun. One goes back to Tao. For example, a supernova explodes in Heaven, and then it burns out and disappears. That star has returned to Tao. The most important wisdom to know is that Tao creation happens in every moment. Tao Reverse Creation happens in every moment also. This is the circle. This is the circulation. This is reincarnation.

Tao Normal Creation and Tao Reverse Creation are the highest wisdom, the highest philosophy, and even the highest science. One hundred twenty-nine Nobel Prize recipients wrote a joint letter saying, "If science cannot study ancient

Chinese wisdom, science will find it hard to develop further."

How are Tao Normal Creation and Tao Reverse Creation the highest science? Dr. Rulin Xiu, Ph.D. from the University of California and a quantum physicist and string theorist, wrote a book with me called Soul Mind Body Science System: Grand Unification Theory and Practice for Healing, Rejuvenation, Longevity, and Immortality. Dr. Ervin Laszlo gave this new science very high praise in his foreword. Now, Dr. Xiu and I are writing Tao Science, which we hope to publish this year. We are using scientific language and mathematics to explain Tao Normal Creation and Tao Reverse Creation. For thousands of years, Lao Zi's wisdom has guided millions of people on the spiritual journey, on relationships, on finances, on politics, and on research. Many scientists have studied Dao De Jing. We are very honored to explain Lao Zi's Normal Creation and Reverse Creation in scientific language.

Can you speak a little more about the Normal and Reverse Creation cycles?

Tao Normal Creation and Tao Reverse Creation is the highest wisdom and highest practice. In Tao teaching, everyone and everything is made of jing qi shen. "Jing" means matter. "Qi" means energy. "Shen" includes soul, heart, and mind. Mind means consciousness. There are all kinds of consciousness, including superficial consciousness, deep consciousness, subconsciousness, and more. Heart is the core of life. Every system, every organ, and every cell has a heart. Mother Earth has a heart. Heaven has a heart. The ocean has a heart. Everything has a soul. Soul is spirit. In quantum science, information or message is key. Information or message and soul or spirit are the same thing, but science and spirituality cannot communicate with each other. If science and spirituality could recognize that information and soul are the same thing, then science and spirituality could not only communicate with each other, they could unite as one!

Everyone and everything is made of jing, qi, and shen. Tao is the Ultimate Creator. My soul healing is Tao healing. Tao belongs to the Wu World, the world of nothingness and emptiness. Heaven, Mother Earth, and humanity, as well as countless planets, stars, galaxies, and universes comprise the You World, which is the world of existence. Wu creates You. You returns to Wu.

When you offer healing, does energy connect with Tao?

Tao is the Ultimate Creator. Tao carries the highest jing qi shen. Therefore, when I train soul healers, I teach them to invoke jing qi shen from the Source to offer blessing and healing. That is the sacred teaching and practice. Everyone can do it.

Is the healer the channel of Tao?

Tao creates a human being, Heaven, and Mother Earth. Tao is within every one. Two sacred phrases from ancient wisdom are: Tao bu yuan ren, ren zi yuan. Tao is Source. "Bu yuan" means not far from. "Ren" means human being. "Zi"

means self. Tao bu yuan ren, ren zi yuan means Tao is not far from a human being, but a human being is far from Tao.

Why are human beings far from Tao?

If a fish lives in polluted water, the fish is either sick or dies. This is a simple fact. Human beings are living in a polluted environment on Mother Earth. The air, water, land, food, and more are polluted. I think the most important pollution is jing qi shen pollution. Mother Earth is made of jing qi shen. Mother Earth is heavily polluted. Heaven is made of jing qi shen. Heaven is polluted also. A human being has so many systems, organs, and cells. They are all made of jing qi shen. They all can be polluted also. Therefore, there are all kinds of sickness in the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual bodies. To save a fish in the polluted water, we must cleanse and purify the water. To save humanity, we must remove jing qi shen blockages. Jing qi shen blockages are the biggest pollution.

How do we fix this or purify the blockages?

I teach Five Power Techniques™ to purify jing qi shen. They are Body Power, Soul Power, Mind Power, Sound Power, and Tao Calligraphy Power. Body Power means that when you meditate, you use special hand and body position, like a mudra, for healing and purification. Soul Power is to say hello. You say hello to the inner souls of your systems, organs, cells, or parts of the body. You also say hello to outer souls, including Heaven, Mother Earth, the Divine, Tao, and all kinds of saints. Mind Power is to visualize light. Simply visualizing golden and rainbow light is a vital technique. Sound Power is to chant healing mantras for healing and purification. Tao Calligraphy Power is to apply the healing calligraphies that I write. I ask the Source to transfer Source jing qi shen to the calligraphies. See my book, *Soul Healing Miracles*. Hundreds of thousands of people have received amazing healing from these calligraphies.

Dr. and Master Zhi Gang Sha is a Tao master healer, spiritual teacher and an 11-time New York Times bestselling author of 21 books, including Soul Mind Body Science System. As a medical doctor trained in Western medicine, traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture, he is a grandmaster of ancient arts, including tai chi, qigong, kung fu, I Ching and feng shui. As the creator of Tao Calligraphy, Master Sha is the sole lineage holder of Yi Bi Zi calligraphy, a one-stroke calligraphy practice used for healing mental, emotional and physical pain.

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Why Tea

Wu De



The autumn breeze isn't quite chilling yet, and the trees still cling to their last green leaves, shaking them pleasantly in the warm wind. The forest path is dappled with flickering sun sparkles and shadows that invite us to stretch and breathe deeply. I turn to you and exclaim how grateful I am to be here, seeing agreement in your eyes...

After some time, we round a corner into a small clearing with a huge, old tree, its branches as thick as trees themselves. Beneath it, we find the crooked little hut we've been looking for. I push aside the burlap door and invite you in. It takes a while for your eyes to adjust to the gloom, but you notice right away the way the late afternoon sun slants through the window in a beam—incense smoke playing with it in curls that suggest other calligraphy and tales too distant to tell. The old man looks friendly and deep. There's a glimmer in his eyes, almost like a child who's up to something naughty. He invites us to sit down for Tea, stoking the coals and scooping some water into his old kettle. He only has one cracked bowl, so we'll have to share. He puts some aged puerh into the kettle to boil: thick, dark and Earthy. It will surely ground us, expelling whatever we've brought with us... I hear you sigh with the first sip and I smile, satisfied by your satisfaction.

After a few bowls in silence, I ask the old man to begin. I had to bring you here, you see, in order to share this next session with you. For only here in the old hermit's hut, out in the forest, and

after some wise, aged puerh, would you understand what we need to talk about today. I knew that it would only make sense out here, and after you've had some old Tea in you. I also felt that the old sage is surely the one to tell the story, as he's more practiced than I...

The old man takes a sip of the russet-stained bowl, wipes his lips and smiles at us. His eyes grow distant...

"They say..."

"That long, long ago there lived a great scholar, wiser and older than the craggy mountains he dwelled upon. Many feared him and stayed away. They said he could bring down those mountains if he wished. And when they suffered drought or rain they said it was his magic cursing their lands from above. Some went to him for advice. Some went in desperation, as it was said that with his power to bring misfortune, he also had the power to restore life. Those that returned sometimes did so with stories of miracles, while others were unable to find him. And when the people needed advice, they would elect a group of representatives to make the journey up into the mountains to seek out his advice, for whatever else he was, he was their emperor, Shen Nong.

"One young monk was said to have spent an entire season with Shen Nong on his mountain. He told the people that the emperor conversed with Nature, that he knew the names of the trees and plants, animals and birds. The people say that when the monk returned, he was crying. He had scrambled down the mountain,



tearing his robes and sullyng his face and hands everywhere but the four lines that the stream of tears had washed across his cheeks. 'What has happened?' asked the gathering crowd. Another pool of tears welled up just under the young monk's eyes, and his eyes wavered like his voice: 'Our great emperor is dead,' he whispered. Perhaps the villagers were too shocked to share his sadness. Maybe they stood in awe as he gently reached into his robe and pulled forth a single branch holding five perfect leaves and two seeds. Could the monk have then placed the branch in the hands of the new leader, gently curling his fingers over the treasure?

"The monk's story would be told again and again for the eons to come, the shadows growing that much longer with each recount. Shen Nong, at one with Nature, had spent his days walking the mountain paths near his home, meditating beneath favorite trees, or maybe stopping at some poignant landscape long enough to be the subject of many generations of painters. He taught the young monk the names of the animals and plants. He showed him what he could eat and what was for the Earth. This life was truly in harmony, they say. And that was why he was the ruler of all rulers. He had no greed. No stake in the outcomes of the world below, just the answers of the Earth, Sky, Sun and Stars.

"During the colder months, Shen Nong would boil herbal drinks for the monk, warming him through the cold watches of the night. It was maybe during one such night, possibly when the moon was full and the Sky clear, that they sat in the forest listening to the mountain and the sound of the water boiling on a nearby

fire. A breeze stirred. Imagine, just a simple breeze. Was it chance? Did destiny reach out and pluck the leaf from the tree, and in the form of wind let it fall into the boiling water below? Who can say? But Shen Nong was never one to question the gifts of Nature. The monk and he drank the broth of those leaves steeped in that water, and because of that even all these ages later, we sip our own bowls and wonder if the moon was bigger on those distant nights so long ago... And after a few bowls, the Sage exclaimed the legendary words that are carved in rock, and brushed to paper, inspiring us even today: "This is the emperor of all medicinal herbs!"

"Of course the boy and his wise companion knew at once that the liquor they drank was special. Shen Nong's meditation that night spoke with the Leaf, telling countless tales of enlightenment, courtly pride, weddings, and clipper ships from lands beyond the ends of the Earth, and countless other tales of life, death and all that comes between. This tree had a story longer and brighter than his own. Tea told Shen Nong that She actually didn't belong up here on this cold mountain. She said that this would be her final crown of leaves, and that its spirit must return home or perish on the mountain alone. It had chosen that pot of boiling water and asked him to please give it to the people that lived below and to bless her on her great journey over continents of land and spirit both. Maybe Shen Nong laughed when he heard the tree's story, and of course the young monk wouldn't have known what he was laughing about, but having drunk the same broth, and having felt the elation it brought to his own spirit, he of course would have

answered with a great guffaw of his own.

“That winter they say the young monk grew deathly ill. Shen Nong tried everything to save the boy. He had made a promise to the tree to save its leaves for the people, but the illness was too strong to be healed in a single, or even a few brews...

“One morning, possibly when the sun was shining brightly over the snow-swept mountain, Shen Nong rose and went out into the forest. He and the boy had harvested a whole canister of the tree’s leaves and dried them in the sun. Every night, Shen Nong would boil water with the leaves in it and serve it to the weakening young monk. And each night, he would tell the boy the tree’s story. He would tell him about how it would be there with and in all the emperors of the future. He repeated that the tree wasn’t meant for these isolated peaks alone. It had only come up here to meditate for some centuries, and having done so, the time for it to return to the world below had come. He told him of the weddings and meals, the friends and foes that would all drink it for ages and ages to come. And as he repeated the story each night, Shen Nong slowly—yet naturally—slipped into the first person: ‘And remember young one,’ he would say with one hand behind the young monk’s head and the other guiding the bowl of broth to his lips, ‘I will be drunk by all the monks. I will write a thousand, thousand poems. I will make friends of enemies, and enemies of friends. And I will live on in each of my many selves... in every sip.’

“That winter day, when all seemed lost, they say Shen Nong walked into the forest. No one speaks of what happened that day, and neither did the young monk. But when the sun had risen the next day, the young monk was better. He could even brew the leaves himself. Somehow, it’s better to imagine him contented; perhaps the sadness hadn’t yet sunk in. Did he know deep down that his master wasn’t coming back? Hard to say.

“When the boy was well enough, he left the hut to find out what had become of his great lord and teacher. He of course knew which direction to walk. His feet carried him to the same ancient tree, older than his teacher even, of which Shen Nong had so often talked. It was now barren of leaves. When he got closer, he found Shen Nong resting against the foot of the tree. The young monk knew that he had left this world, bound to the spirit of the tree. He began to cry. He came back later in the day and buried Shen Nong right where he had laid down with such a satisfied look on his face. He contemplated leaving the world to help carry his master’s belongings in the hereafter, but he remembered what Shen Nong had told him about the tree and its story. He decided to return to the world below and announce the passing of their lord, so that proper rights and ceremonies could be observed everywhere in the kingdom.

“Before he left, he made one final stop at the great tree—now a reliquary to his master. He bowed down and prayed for his teacher’s peace. When he looked up, we can only imagine the great surprise that came over his young countenance as he found that a single branch covered in leaves and seeds was hanging down from the otherwise barren tree, perhaps catching the sunlight just so. His master wasn’t gone after all...”

The old man finishes his story with a rustling “all”, and we can see that he’s tired, so after one last watery bowl we bow, give thanks and head off into the evening. I put my hand on your back, happy that you got to come here and share this Tea with me, and promising to explain some things on the way home...

Understanding that health is harmony with Spirit and Earth, and that we can use plant medicine as a key in keeping balanced, the next question is of course: Why Tea? Why this plant? Why not

cabbage soup? What makes Tea so special? The simplest answer is that it was made for us; it is “the emperor of all medicinal herbs.” But there’s more to it than that.

Ultimately, in connection to Spirit and Nature, we could use any object, any plant or anything we deem sacred. This doesn’t mean that some aren’t more suitable or efficacious. Of the myriad plants on this Earth there are thousands that we can eat, take medicinally, or approach as teachers. Most of them, however, have their own business, and arose in Nature for their own reasons that have little to do with us. To put it scientifically, they evolved to fill a niche in a local ecology. When we approach such plant teachers, their ‘attitude’, for lack of a better word, is apathetic. “What do you want?” They might say, bothered by our intrusion in their business. If we are reverent and ask nicely, they will agree to teach us, but it’s on their terms.

Many of the plant teachers have come to be called “entheogens,” which literally means “god plants.” When you take Ayahuasca, for example, you can learn a lot about life and death, plants and spirit. But such lessons are definitely dictated by the plant itself. We travel into the plant realm, in other words. And it will take some time and personal work to integrate the lessons back into a human life after the ‘trip’ is over. Such plant medicines are also potentially uncaring in their lessons, and will show us demons and angels both, depending on what’s good for us—doing so forcefully and without compassion. They also come at a price. They are drugs in the sense that there is a loss of consciousness, a decrease in our ability to navigate our daily lives, sobriety and clarity. They also have potentially harmful influences on our bodies. In the world of medicinal herbs, most of the plants are healing if you have a particular illness and poisonous if you don’t have that disease. It is the toxins that are often the medicine, in a way of speaking. Then there are the plants that we eat, which are benign to all animals on this planet, providing energy for us to live. They, too, can teach us if we are listening. All the ancient farming civilizations believed that the food plants were the gods, died and born again—recognizing that what we eat is the transcendent Spirit, supporting us in time. Though we’ve lost our connection to medicinal farming and eating, we can find that medicine very much alive in Tea, and through it re-establish a new relationship to the way we grow, harvest, prepare and consume our food. And such a revolution is already underway, with farming movements like Biodynamics.

Tea is the “emperor of all medicinal herbs” because it is useful on a daily basis, treating all that is human. It is “adaptogenic”, which means it helps to treat all issues of mind, body and spirit. There is a lot of hype nowadays about Tea treating cancer or other specific illnesses, especially from companies selling Tea. While some of that may be true, Tea was traditionally used as a daily, spiritual elixir for calming the mind and attuning us to an accord with Nature. All human illness is either caused by stress or at least compounded by it, and so a calm, awake state of mind is conducive to our healing. Tea isn’t medicine in the form of a Western pill, used to treat pain in the kidneys or a stomachache. It’s medicine in the sense we’ve been discussing, in that it aligns us with Spirit and Nature. And it does so on our terms. There is no herb as decidedly human as Tea.

There is a digestible and indigestible version of all this. I’ll tell you both as the sun sets over the path we walk, shading everything in orange and purple hues. You can then decide which one is a more meaningful story to you, and for your Tea journey. The



digestible version is this: Tea is a unique plant that grows high up in the mountains, ingesting nutrient rich soil and water, humidity and weather. It has a deep, complex root system. A natural Tea tree has around thirty feet of roots for every five feet it grows above ground. Ancient trees in Yunnan, like the Tea we shared with the old hermit, can have roots that extend extremely deep into the Earth. In fact, if you were to excavate an old-growth Tea tree and cut all the roots, including the small branch roots, and dry them in the sun, placing them next to each other, they would go on for thousands of kilometers, and you'd be on a global journey to see how far they went! So the distillation of Tea's medicine is this: Due to the environment and make up of this special plant, it has access to trace elements that we humans cannot get from any other Source.

If you are more scientifically disposed, with a penchant for logic and rational conclusions, you can stop with the digestible version of Tea's medicine. But the fact is that Tea encourages physical sensations and energy flows that aren't explainable in terms of its chemical constituents. The more indigestible version is deeper and opens up more doorways to the transcendent: Tea is an avatar of love! Tea is Mother Earth's love for us made manifest. And how else would She show Her love for us? Did you expect the mountain to talk? Would the lake say, "I love you"? Of course, she would show her love for us by providing the medicine we need to be in harmony with Spirit and Her.

Tea was designed by Nature to be human. It serves no other function. It didn't arise in the forest of its own accord, to the beat

of its own music, like other plants. It is the plant kingdom's message. That is the meaning of the leaf falling into Shen Nong's boiling water. The story is meant to teach that Tea was calling out to be human—the plant kingdom's cell phone call, to use a modern analogy. It didn't fall randomly, but chose that pot because it desired to be human, to enter us and experience the world through human eyes, expressed in our songs and laughter, tears and joys. And when we receive the message, pick up the call if you will, like Shen Nong, the plants' first response is: "Finally, we've been trying to get a hold of you your whole life!"

"Shen Nong" means "Divine Farmer". He was a mythic emperor who ruled China for a thousand years, teaching the people agriculture (hence the name), hygiene and medicinal herbs. He gave civilization to the nation. Shen Nong represents all the collective wisdom of the tribal chieftains and shamans of pre-civilized China, who ruled for that endless "thousand years", and of course, passed on civilization to the Chinese people. And of all the thousands of medicinal herbs, this is the one they singled out as the greatest. They chose Tea because it chose us. Tea bridges the human and plant worlds in a powerful way: plant energy becomes us as we also learn from the plants.

The plants know we are here. And of course they do. It is in their interest for us to be healthy, which also means in harmony with their destiny. They have always been in harmony with Spirit and Earth, and in connection with all life. They see us and provide for us, lovingly. Tea is an expression of their need to be in harmony with humanity. Even wild, old-growth Tea trees flourish when

humans come around them and pluck their leaves; they don't grow as vibrantly without human attention. They respond to us, and we to them.

We have in us the receptors to receive Tea, body, heart and soul. When we drink Tea, we connect easily—entering a meditative heart space that brings Nature, each other and our higher selves into focus. Some may say that we developed these receptors through generations of drinking Tea, evolving closer together. While that may explain why some people take to Tea more than others—their ancestors drank more—why sell Nature short? Why not go for the gusto and declare in a hopelessly romantic way that we were made for each other, waiting for the day we could meet? Maybe Shen Nong was as star-crossed a lover as I've been, romancing the Leaf...

Though there might be other plants like Tea, I have never found one so decidedly human. We don't have to travel to the plant kingdom to understand Tea's teachings, and there is no period of work in order to integrate them. Tea comes to us. It flows easily into a human life and begins teaching us on our terms, and the lessons are assimilated as they happen—becoming our way of life. I told you it was deeper medicine, this version... A true myth should open us up, and align us with our destiny and vision for our highest self. It should unleash Nature on our wide-open hearts, transforming how we see the world. I hope that the old man's story, the aged puerh Tea we drank and my version of what makes Tea such a special plant have all helped to inspire you in that way.

The fact is that there is no other plant as decidedly wrapped up in our destiny on this Earth as Tea. There is a saying that "Tea doesn't belong to China, China was built on Tea." Tea is civilization. And from China, Tea traveled to the world, building the British Empire, and by extension America (which later proclaimed independence by throwing away Tea, which made a point but was foolishly 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater' as they say). Tea has informed our history, politics, culture, folklore and civilization, as well as our health and medicine. It is still the second most consumed substance on the planet, after water. And Tea has embraced human karma in every way, from our despair to our joy. Even today, Tea spans the spectrum from deep greed and environmental destruction/disconnection to the highest of spiritual states, and everything in between—grandmas in kitchens and men on construction sites...

There is no other plant that has as much experience being human. An immeasurable amount of human consciousness has been devoted to Tea, and on all levels from spiritual to mundane. From the shamans to the Daoists using this medicine to facilitate an accord with Nature, Tea was handed to the Zen monks who viewed it as paramount to meditation; and then on to the kitchens of the ordinary people and the refinement of emperors and kingly courts in Asia and Europe. In Japan, there are whole towns where every father and son spent every waking moment of their lives, for many generations, carving bamboo whisks to make powdered Tea. And that has gone on for centuries! When you survey the landscape, recognizing that this is just one kind of teaware out of many, you begin to get a taste of how essentially human Tea has become, and how devoted to it we've been these thousands of years.

In Yunnan, the birthplace of Tea, all the aboriginal tribes believe they are descended from Tea; and at least one tribe I know of, the De'ang, believe that all life on Earth is descended from Tea. And so it is! One of the unhealthiest of modern trends is to discount the healing power of myth, twisting the word to mean that which is believed to be true but is actually false. Myths are metaphors, expressing deep truths that are often not communicable through

literal concepts. Of course the plant kingdom is our source, in both the larger and more daily senses. In the vaster sense, all life on this Earth arose out of the plant kingdom. It is literally where we come from. Plants are the elders here, with the deepest and most connected wisdom around. In communion with their consciousness, we find our Source, and the Foundation of all life. On a daily level, plants are also our source, as all our energy and movement comes from them. Whether you consume vegetables only, or also eat flesh, you are ultimately taking in plant energy since the animals also got theirs from the plants. We breathe the oxygen they create and are motivated by the energy they provide, so of course plants are our source—literally and mythically. And Tea, among the best of the best, is in our make-up. It was made for us, as spokesperson for the other plants.

Unlike us, plants are born with the memories and consciousness of all their ancestors, and are deeply connected to each other. Native American shamans and ancient Daoist healers often said that it was possible to access the medicine of any plant through any other, if you but knew how to travel through them. Tea helps relieve all kinds of ailments, relaxing us and putting us in harmony with our true self, Nature and each other. Translating antique prescriptions, we've found that the vast majority of them, after listing the herbs the patient is to take and in what manner, had a small note at the bottom to "drink more Tea." Tea is more than just liquid; it flows into all the crevices in our being, bringing Earth wisdom and love from our Mother.

Tea flushes us out, removing impurities from our system. In a world where we intake more pollutants in twenty-four hours than most people did in their entire lives a century ago, it is a valuable cleanse. More importantly, however, Tea flushes the heart—the true Source of our disharmony and sickness. To be healthy is to be 'whole': connected, awake and completely aligned with Truth. In terms of that, there are few plants that can help us rebalance day in and day out with little to no side effects, aiding us physically and spiritually.

It's time for us to leave the forest and head our separate ways. I'll have you over for Tea tomorrow. There's more to discuss, as not all Teas are created equal, unfortunately. Before we get to that, though, we also have a lot more to cover. The old puerh has brightened your eyes, and I see that you're going home with a new perspective on your journey. The Tea is working...

Ancient ones
Sing us your song
Tell us of life without time
Tell us of life without separation
We will listen
As you listen to the Mountain
The Mountain to the Sky
And the Sky to the Stars...

For the last decade, Wu De has been teaching the ancient practice of serving tea from a Zen and tea center in Taiwan, known as *Tea Sage Hut* (www.teasagehut.org). In the last three years, his monthly magazine and organic tea mailing, *Global Tea Hut* (www.globalteahut.org), has swelled to connect hundreds of tea lovers and spiritual seekers in over 30 countries. Meanwhile, Tea Sage Hut now houses five long-term students and hosts over 200 guests per year, sharing The Way of Tea and a more connected way of living and being with each person who joins a tea session there.

Authentic Contemplation

Wu Jyu Cherng

What is Authentic Contemplation?

Contemplation is observation, and ‘Authentic Contemplation’ is the observation of the world through an authentic and true consciousness. This is the condition of complete lucidity, which is found in a latent state in all beings and leveraged in the enlightened man.

In Daoism there are the concepts of Pure Consciousness and manifested consciousness. In its pure or latent state, the consciousness has no form and exists as if it were a light, which takes the form of the place where it is found – that is why it has the potential to create and develop all forms that exist in the Universe. This is what we call the Universal Consciousness. And in the manifested state, consciousness is revealed as physical, mental and energetic expressions, either isolated or joined, of all the beings that exist in the Universe. The practice of meditation, which in Daoism is called the Path of Enlightenment, is precisely the attempt made by the practitioner to restore the genuine and Pure Consciousness within himself, starting from the level at which his individual, or manifested, consciousness is situated. When he achieves this goal, he starts to contemplate the world with absolute lucidity and this stage is called Authentic Contemplation.

The common person, who uses con-

sciousness only at the level of the mind, sees the world as if there were a cloud of dust between his eyes and the object, distorting what he sees. With the practice of Purification of the Heart, the process begins to remove this dust, which may be an ideal, a neurosis, a limitation of life, an ideology or a trauma – depending on the personality and background of each person – until reaching Authentic Contemplation or enlightenment, when all the dust has been removed. As the practitioner progresses on the Path, he becomes more able to see, hear and fully understand all the manifestations of the Universe. He slowly but surely ceases to perceive the world through the rational and emotional pathways, and begins to assimilate manifestations through the enlightened consciousness, exempt of preconceptions. At this stage, the person understands everything he sees and hears and does not feel the need to systematize his understanding in terms of concepts, or transmit to others that which he has learned. What he sees, hears and feels are the authentic manifestations of the world: they are clear, true and transparent because his comprehension does not distort what he sees – this is the state of enlightenment. This is like attending a class in a naturally ventilated and silent venue, which is calm and harmonious, as opposed to a classroom with the windows open, facing a noisy street. In the first case, it will be easy to learn that which is being taught, whereas in the second one, it will

be difficult to pay attention to what the teacher is saying.

Recovering the Pure Consciousness brings with it full lucidity to the practitioner, but to reach such a state, one must practise the method of ‘Sitting and Forgetting’. The authentic consciousness can be aroused in all kinds of people. The practitioner does not need to be highly intellectual or extremely studious to reach this objective. Daoism understands that erudition is the result of knowledge assimilated and accumulated in each person’s memory, according to their level of education, while Pure Consciousness is found within all beings, regardless of the culture or society in which they live. However, despite the fact that academic knowledge does not determine the practitioner’s level of consciousness, study is highly valued in Daoism because it provides people with important elements for living in harmony with others in the world. It is possible to establish a relationship between intellectual knowledge and Pure Consciousness: those with a high level of consciousness use all the erudite tools they possess in the most correct and constructive manner, such as thoughts, skills, philosophical languages and others. Those who do not have a high level of consciousness will never make good use of the knowledge they acquire.

In order to cultivate Pure Consciousness, one must transform the soul, and



this is done through the method of Purification of the Heart. First, one finds inner stillness, which leads to an increasingly higher level of lucidity. As he becomes more lucid, the practitioner moves towards enlightenment, until reaching Authentic Contemplation and seeing the world without any distortion. Situations which he previously could not comprehend start to be seen as facts and attitudes which reflect human nature because he now fully tolerates and accepts the shortcomings of the world. With tolerance, he acquires the ability to manage his life and flow in destiny, without provoking any friction. If all friction is a reflection of a lack of tolerance of imperfections in the world, then he who has reached the constancy of Authentic Contemplation is capable of avoiding conflicts because he understands and accepts imperfections in the world. Therefore, the Path to Enlightenment is emphasized by Daoists: this is the only path capable of leading human beings to become naturally and harmoniously at one with each other and with the world.

It is the foresight of a Sage,...

A Sage is someone who has reached 'Authentic Contemplation', and foresight is the ability that the Sage has to foresee events in the near or distant future, drawing from the conditions he sees in the present. Foresight is not premonition; the Sage, faced with some fact of the present, analyses the situation with clarity, sees its different facets and precisely identifies the direction that the event will take in the future and to where those involved will be led, if such circumstances are maintained.

The common man also has foresight. For instance, when a child climbs up to an open window or plays with fire, any adult can see that the child is about

to fall or burn himself – it is a matter of seeing the obvious. But foresight is just that: seeing the obvious. The difference is that the common man has this vision on a smaller scale, in a sporadic manner and almost always without an extensive scope, whereas the Sage has this vision all the time, with a far-reaching scope and for all life situations. The common man sees the obvious which is seen by many; and the enlightened vision sees the obvious which only few can see. This becomes possible for the Sage because his consciousness is fully lucid.

...the perfect assessment by an able man...

To make the perfect assessment of a situation is to analyse the circumstances with full lucidity, which means Authentic Contemplation; and an able man is someone who has reached that state. Depending on the degree of consciousness, one can analyse the same set of circumstances using different levels: from analyses of the ego, riddled with predetermined concepts, to analyses based on full lucidity.

He who harbours preconceptions in his Heart makes incorrect evaluations, takes the wrong measures and transforms small problems into big disasters – this is the most elementary degree in the assessment of a situation. Another example is when someone adopts a specific method to analyse the context and avoid making mistakes in the actions he chooses. He uses readings of statistical data to study strategies, employs marketing techniques and, when he applies the results of the analysis to reality, the chosen formula processes the information, compares the probabilities and also at the end of the assessment shows the Path he should take to achieve the desired outcome. This analysis is better than the previ-

ous one, which is based on preconceptions, but, despite its range, it does not produce a complete evaluation of the situation. Depending on the data which have been collected and the techniques used, there may indeed, in such cases, be a relatively higher proportion of positive results because the method takes into account information which has already been tested. But however extensive the data collection may be, it will no doubt ignore some aspect of the matter and hence will not always indicate the most appropriate solution.

The third level, considered perfect by Master Sī Mā, is taking heed of the problem and placing oneself before the matter in a transparent manner so as to find the root of the difficulty. From there, the correct attitude will naturally arise before the person, without the need to design intentional actions. But only one whose ego is absent can act in such a way, for personal interest interferes too much in human perception. If the cravings of the ego interfere in the assessment of a situation, the analysis will result in a distorted reality. One must annul the ego in order to avoid these interruptions and see the facts with clarity. Nature constantly provides the world with direct and perfectly adequate answers to each question, but these answers are only understood by those with an emptied Heart, where Authentic Contemplation resides.

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New from Solala Towler

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Kept secret for 600 years, learn from a San Feng sect 14th generation Daoist Priest.



Creating the Eternal Elixir: The Elixir of Alchemy

By: Master Yun Xiang Tseng (Chen)

The goal of cultivating Daoist alchemy is to nurture ones spirit by conditioning the physical body and easing the mind. A student of the Dao follows the way of Daoist living by consuming an alkaline diet,

exercising the physical body with Dao Yin and Tai Chi, gathering and enriching the quantity and quality of Qi with Qi Gong, cultivating "Xing" and "Ming", balancing "fire" and "water", and harmonizing "dragon and tiger" with internal

alchemy, thus having the ability and possibility to formulate the internal elixir.

I wish all of us could be practical, taking disciplined action to unite our physical and spiritual body together going toward immortality and returning home.

Clarity & Tranquility

A Guide for Daoist Meditation

Stuart Alve Olson



(Translated from *The Supreme Exalted One's Clarity and Tranquility of the Constant Scripture*)

— 6 —

Continuously eliminate sense desires and the mind will naturally become tranquil. Clear up the mind and the Spirit will naturally have clarity. Then through the "Naturally-Just-So" the Six Sense Desires will not arise and the Three Poisons will be extinguished. The reason people are unable to bring this about is that they have no clarity of mind and sense desires have not been eliminated.

常能遣其慾，而心自靜。澄其心，而神自清，
自然六慾不生，三毒消滅。所以不能者，為心未澄，慾未
遣也。

Translator's Commentary

The Six Sense Desires are the source for the Three Poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion. The Six Sense Desires represent our attachments to beautiful and sensual experiences. We desire beautiful and sensual appearances, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and thoughts. All these create the framework for our desires to continually seek out an easy

life, a life of no bitterness and suffering. Some people might think this is a worthy goal. However, seeking beautiful and sensual experiences are what prevent us from experiencing clarity and tranquility.

The mind cannot be clear when it's filled with thoughts of desiring wonderful, easy things. Our bodies cannot be tranquil if we seek to only have pleasurable experiences.

All the sense desires eventually fade and become stained by dissatisfaction. The most beautiful appearance will become dull, the most beautiful sound will turn annoying, the most beautiful smell will grow foul, the most beautiful taste will seem tasteless, the most beautiful touch will be unwanted, and the most beautiful thoughts will cause agitation.

We can never really satisfy any of the Six Sense Desires. They are not constant, and have no end. They only breed an insatiable hunger for different and more extreme desires.

So when practicing meditation, cut off thoughts of good sitting and bad sitting. There really is nothing other than just sitting. Do not yearn for beautiful meditation experiences. Just sit and let the mind clear itself. Sit and let the body become calm. This then will bring you closer to the Naturally-Just-So.



When people achieve this elimination, they will, when inwardly contemplating the mind, see the mind as a false mind. When they outwardly contemplate their bodily form, they will see the bodily form as a false bodily form. So, too, when contemplating things apart from their self, they will see these as false things.

能達之者，內觀其心，心無其心。外觀其形，形無其形。遠觀其物，物無其物。

Translator's Commentary

Your mind, body, and everything outside of you are all false. They are false because they are not of the Constant. Although conditioned things are not infinite, they are in a state of continual change. A thought cannot last forever. Your body cannot last or remain the same forever. All things arise and then disintegrate. They are also false because everything—you, your body, and the Myriad Things—are nothing more than a perception of what we want and don't want them to be. All three falsehoods are not of the Constant because they are affected by space and time, the two main illusions of the mind.

If we do not have True Clarity and True Tranquility, then nothing we perceive is truly real. True Reality is not about what the false mind perceives. It is about what our Original Spirit awakens to, and that is Dao.

When sitting in meditation, it is always best to perceive all thoughts coming into the mind as just phantoms. They appear and disappear. All reactions in the body are just disturbances generated by the mind. All things outside yourself—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, or concepts of the mind—are nothing more than false perceptions,

When we truly turn our hearing inwards, when we return the light internally, and when we guard our Qi, then everything is contemplated internally. The Six Sense Desires cannot arise when we internally contemplate all things correctly.

To understand the three falsehoods of no-mind, no-body, and no-things, all a person need realize is that our past mind and body cannot be regained, both are gone and will never return. Our present mind and body change in an instant and can never be retained, and the future mind and body have yet to arrive and so we cannot grasp them. In other words, the mind is fleeting and like a phantom, but the Great Mind is both true and constant.

Many years ago during my stay at a Buddhist monastery I learned what these three falsehoods were really about. I hadn't really sat in meditation before going there, and neither did the monastery have any meditation classes (which struck me as odd).

Being a lay person, and with the rule that if I was going to be there then I had to do as the monks did, which meant waking up at 3:30 in the morning each day, undergoing a one-hour ceremony, and then partaking in two consecutive one-hour meditation sessions, with just a five-minute period of walking around the meditation hall in between the sitting times.

We sat on top of Chan benches, which were fashioned

with a thin layer of foam cushion and a piece of vinyl stretched over it to secure it to the bench. These were anything but comfortable and being about two feet off the ground, beginners like me feared falling asleep and falling off (which some did).

For several weeks I struggled with sitting in meditation, and when I say struggling, I mean the pain. Every day I felt like my right knee was going to rip right out of my skin, my hips were in constant pain from sitting on the bench, and my back ached from trying to stay upright so as not to fall off the bench.

One day I could take it no longer and decided I needed help. I needed to know how to sit more comfortably. This had to be possible because I would see all the monks quietly sitting, motionless, and at perfect ease. Also, when a session was over the monks would simply get up and walk. In my case, I had to stay behind and massage my legs until they woke up and I could finally stand upright.

I managed to corner a monk in the kitchen area. He was kind of a gruff person who didn't talk much, but was an exceptional meditator. So I nervously mentioned my problems to him. He very kindly asked what I would do when sitting on the bench, so I told him how I crossed my legs, how I held my hands, and so on.

He looked at me, somewhat annoyed, yet managed a faint smile, and said, "That is correct."

"No, no," I responded quickly. "I can't be sitting right because everything hurts. My knee is killing me, my back, everything hurts when I sit." So he gave me some advice.

First, he said that my pain wasn't real. It was false. He told me that the next time I sit and feel pain in my knee, I should direct my mind to it and look closely for the source of the pain. So I took his advice and followed it the next day when I sat. Amazingly, after a few minutes of examining the pain, the pain moved to my ankle, so I examined my ankle in the same way and sure enough the pain went back to my knee. After a few days the pain gave up, or as the monk told me, the mind stopped creating it.

Within his advice, he also told me that the Chan benches in old China were called "Cloud Beds." The reason for this name was not so much because sitting in meditation is considered a lofty and high practice, but because if a meditator imagines he or she is sitting on a cloud, the body will become truly relaxed and comfortable. That little piece of information, when I applied it, totally cured my aching back and sore sit bones. In the end, all this taught me about my false mind, my false body, and about the false bench, because it wasn't a bench at all, it was a cloud.

Reprinted from *Clarity & Tranquility: A Guide for Daoist Meditation* by Stuart Alve Olson. Published by Valley Spirit Arts. © 2016

Stuart Alve Olson is a teacher, translator, and writer on Daoist philosophy, health, and internal arts. Visit www.valleyspiritarts.com for information on his other publications and projects.

Study Qigong and Taoism with Solala Towler

Learn Wuji (Primordial) Qigong, a 600 year old magical form created by legendary Taoist immortal Zhang Sanfeng! As we circle around the medicine wheel (Green Dragon, Red Phoenix, White Tiger, Black Turtle, Yellow Dragon) we invoke the energetics of each direction and align ourselves with the Source of all life: Tao. Performing this ancient dance we become living mandalas, enabling our deepest selves to bring forth the healthy, holy being we all are. Rarely taught in the West, this form takes us backwards in time, to when we were one with the world around us and within us and fills us with an experience of joy, deep peace and grace. This class also includes instruction on Taoist meditation, Taoist yoga and lots of time for questions, stories, music and qigong dancing! No experience with qigong needed. We are all beginners on the path of Tao.....

May 13, 14 & 15 in Carpinteria CA (near Santa Barbara)

May 13 Tea and Tao 7-9 pm (see below for description of this event)

May 14 & 15 Wuji (Primordial Qigong)

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Hara Healing Center, 4690 Carpinteria Ave. Suite A, Carpinteria, CA.

To register for classes or to schedule an I Ching session contact Jessica Kolbe
805.705.3426 jessicakolbe26@gmail.com

May 21 & 22 Tea and Tao with Solala in Boulder CO

Saturday 2 to 5 pm at Boulder Bookstore (1107 Pearl St · (303) 447-2074)

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June 13 Tea and Tao 7-9 pm (see above for description of this event)

June 14 & 15 Wuji (Primordial Qigong)

June 14 Sound Healing 7-9

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Heavens Cloud Event Center 130 Sardis Road Asheville NC 28801

To register call (828)-225-3993.

July 29-31 National Qigong Association Conference in New Jersey (see www.nqa.org)

Tea and Tao session (see listing above)

August 5, 6 & 7 in Columbia MD

August 5 Tea and Tao 7-9 pm (see above for description of this event)

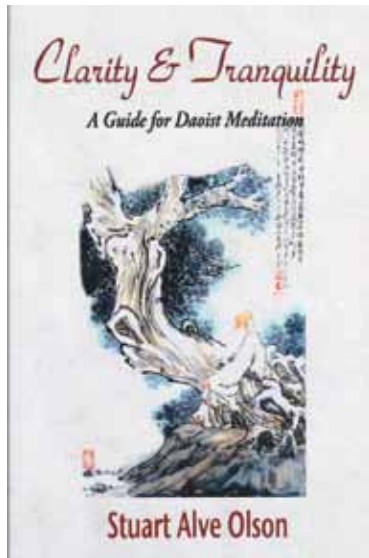
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August 6 Sound Healing 7-9

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Reviews



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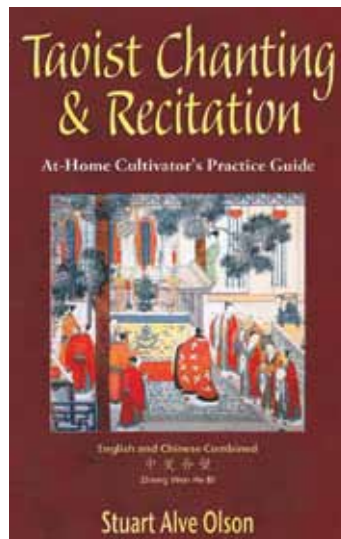
This book is a treasure for anyone interested in the traditional Taoist meditation practice of Tranquil Sitting. (See excerpt page 23 in this issue.)

The translation itself is that of *The Supreme Exalted One's Clarity and Tranquility of the Constant Scripture*, dated to the first half of the Tang Dynasty (618 to 907 CE); it is a wonderful repository of teachings on meditation.

This volume contains the translation itself (both in English and Chinese) followed by a detailed commentary by the translator. I found the commentary to be invaluable in understanding just what the original text was trying to say. Many of these old Taoist texts are written in a very special language, using symbology from nei dan or other Taoist practices and it's crucial to have a translator who understands this language and can present it in such a way as to be clear and useful for western students.

Following this is another section, a translation of Yinshizi's book on Tranquil Sitting, written in 1914. This is another invaluable text, giving physiological instructions on seated meditation.

A whole other section presents another Tang Dynasty text, the *Celestial Record*. This text covers the nine fundamentals a medita-



tion practitioner needs to follow to "truly attain clarity and realize tranquility." Several of the chapters are extensively illustrated with photographs.

This publisher has been producing a number of very useful books lately. The author has spent many years in serious cultivation and it really shows in his translations and commentaries.

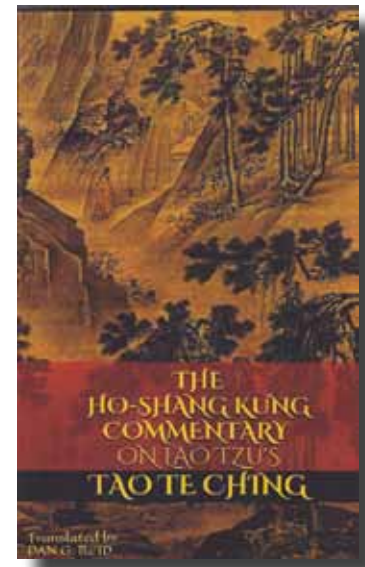
This relatively short book presents a wealth of information for anyone seriously considering or already involved in Taoist meditation practice.

Taoist Chanting & Recitation
by Stuart Alve Olson
Softcover, 201 pages, \$26.95
www.valleyspiritarts.com

Another valuable contribution by the folks at Sanctuary of Tao. Mostly taken from the classic Taoist text, *The Highest Clarity of Truth Scripture (Zhi Bao Zhen Jing)* these chants are used to aligning oneself with

As the author tells us:

Chanting is a truly incredible practice, especially for those of us who find struggles and hardships in life. Chanting is a way of bringing clarity to the mind, attracting good fortune, helping to remove obstacles and afflictions (karma), comforting our spirit, and above all al-



lowing us to feel as an integral part of the Tao. Chanting calls on our better natures...Chanting can bring about a sense of protection, a spiritual protection influencing and washing away our mundane troubles.

The chants themselves are offered in English, Chinese and Pinyin (complete with the all important tones). Not only that but you can go to the website sanctuaryoftao.org to hear what they sound like.

There is also a section of hand seals or mudras that are used with specific chants.

I also love the fact that this book contains the entire *Tao Te Ching* in Chinese, English and Pin Yin. Chanting the *Tao Te Ching* has longed been done in Taoist temples in China and is a great way to personally and energetically connect with this important text.

The Ho Shang Kung Commentary on Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching
by Dan G. Reid
Softcover, 281 pages, \$17

This volume, one of the very few that use one of the very earliest commentaries of the *Tao Te Ching* by the famed Taoist recluse Ho Shang Gong (Old Man Who

Lives by the River) is a valuable addition to our understanding of this important text.

The first part of the book is a translation into English of the 81 chapters of Lao Tzu's work. Following this is the main part of the book, which consists of each chapter in English and Chinese characters, followed by Ho Shang Gong's commentary.

I have always been amazed that there are not more versions out there of this interesting work. Fortunately we are seeing more and more valuable offerings of the wide world of Taoist thought and practice.

Lao Tzu's work is so many layered and open to interpretation in many different ways. It is always good to see how the ancients understood it. (Ho Shang Gong is traditionally said to have lived in 160 BCE though he might have lived at a later date).

The greatest spiritual teachings have a way of evolving over time as they are understood and used in different times and places. Certainly Lao Tzu's book is a good example of this.

This volume gives us a good picture of one of the ways to understand and interpret this important Taoist text.

Ho Shang Gong's commentary offers us a way of understanding and working with the principles that Lao Tzu expounded so well, so long ago. It offers us a unique and powerful way of working with what later came to be known as Nei Dan or Internal Alchemy. In this ancient work we see how the teachings of the Tao Te Ching evolved over time, as they continue to do so even today.

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Both are produced by a prolific teacher and author Jessica Kolbe (she even has her own tv show where she interviews teachers of tai chi and qigong!).

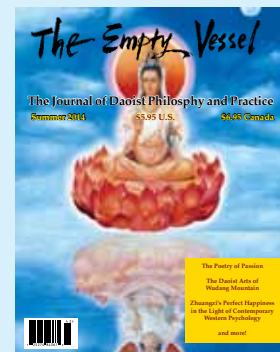
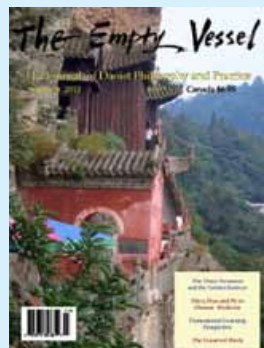
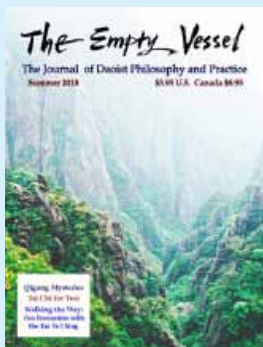
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Eva Wong, author and translator of 13 books on the Taoist arts of health, meditation, and qigong, is the 19th generation lineage carrier of Xiantianwujimen Taoism and 3rd generation student of Wang Xiangzhai, founder of the Yiquan martial arts and Zhangshuan (standing qigong).
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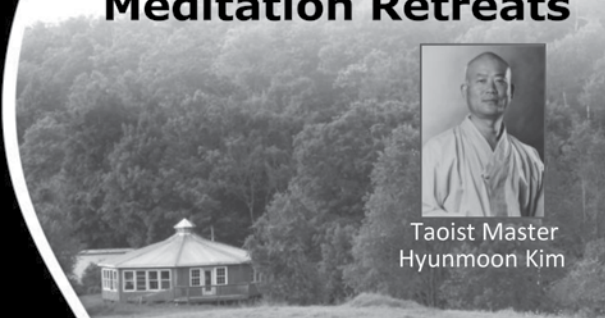
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