

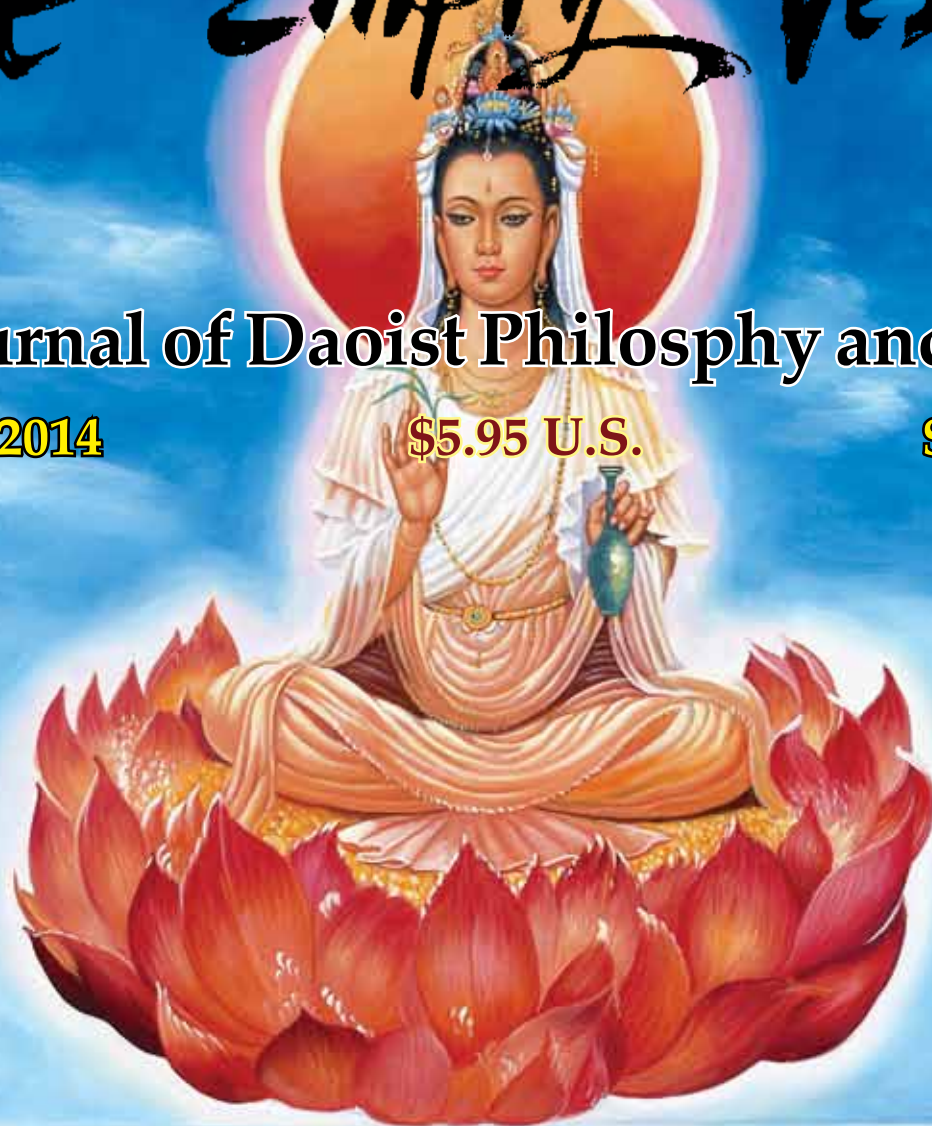
# The Empty Vessel

The Journal of Daoist Philosophy and Practice

Summer 2014

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The Daoist Arts of  
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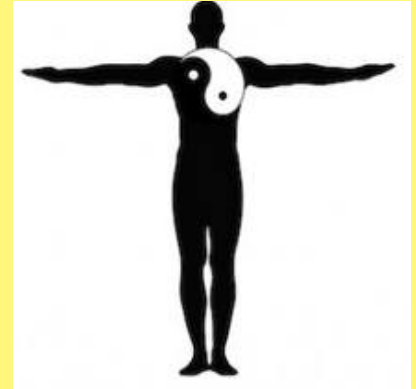
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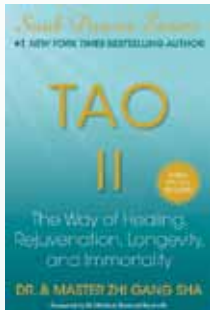
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### Our cover

This is another absolutely gorgeous painting by our good friend Paul Heussenstamm. He is truly one of the most gifted painters we know. Please check out his website at [mandalas.com](http://mandalas.com) to view his amazing work. Thank you Paul!

### Photos

Also many thanks to Cher Mikkola for her wonderful nature photographs sprinkled throughout this issue! Cher and I have known each other for over 30 years and her beautiful spirit is so present in her photos. Thank you Cher!

# 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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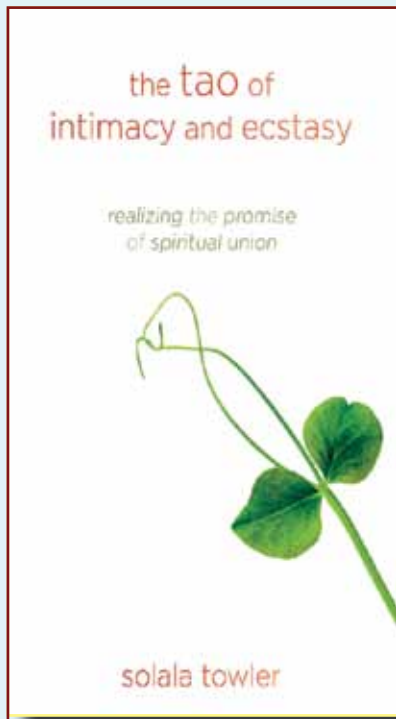
**Statement of Purpose**  
The Empty Vessel is dedicated to the exploration and dissemination of Daoist philosophy and practice. It is open to sharing the various traditional and contemporary teachings in a nondiscriminatory manner. We at The Empty Vessel believe that it is in using these practices and 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

I've just returned from a trip to Boulder and Denver. In Boulder I did a short presentation to some of the good folks at Sounds True, my new publisher. It was great to meet some of the people I have been speaking with and emailing with in the year-long process it took to produce the book. In person, everyone was nicer even than on the phone! It is very exciting to be able to work with such a high-level company, one who really works to make things as smooth as possible during the publishing process and then goes to such lengths to promote the book!

Here is a link to the podcast I did with the Sounds True founder, Tammi Simon. <http://bit.ly/1dtEwUT>. The link will take you to a whole list of free podcasts that have been done with other very interesting Sounds True authors. (Look for mine under Tao of Intimacy and Ecstasy).

Then I went to Denver where my host was Debra Lin Allen, a very gifted qigong healer and mother of an amazing school. While I was there she had a celebration for her graduating class and it was truly touching hearing to hear the stories about their healing journey. (It was a three-tissue event for me.)

Everyone in my class but one were Debra's students, some of whom have been studying with her for many years, so there was a beautiful cohesiveness in the group, unlike any other class I have taught. I even got to teach a little of Zhuangzi!

One of my friends from our last China Tour, Sarah Freese, joined us, which was a real treat. Not only that but she brought her two dogs! These were not little fluffy things but good sized dogs. I was a bit unsure at first, but I figured if it was alright with Debra it could be all right with me.

Well, the dogs proved to be a really nice addition to the group. They were amazingly well behaved and rolled around in the center of the circle, chewing on their stuffed toys. Then, when we got up to do the movement, they immediately lay down on the floor and didn't move through our whole form! This is with folks stepping between their legs and over their tails! Doggie Gong!



*The black girl dog is Lili -- short for Lilikoi (Passionfruit) -- and the brown boy dog who always smiles and saved Lili's life when she had kidney troubles as a pup is Koa (like the Hawaiian hardwood).*

*Continued on page 17*

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# The Path

*Jennifer Hedrick*

*Photo by Cher Mikkola*



It is not in the nature of the souls of men to sit idle and stagnate in one place. From our beginning we have been wanderers, pulled by the stars as the tide is by the moon to

discover what lay beyond our line of earthly vision. For the few who have a fixed destination in mind it often comes as a surprise, when they are where they envisioned, to be called once more to the road and to the next adventure.

Lao Tzu says that a good traveler has no fixed plans, and is not intent on arriving. It is this that I think of as my plane once more finds the ground in the bone-melting warmth of Palm Springs, unfamiliar to my Rocky Mountain blood. This is not my destination, it is merely a stepping stone in the path I have suddenly thrown myself on, a path that leads to I know not where.

*At noon in desert heat,  
unearthly silence,  
even birds dream of dusk.*

No inch of skin is free of sweat when I stop and check the address on the map I hold. I glance at the street sign down the road to be sure. I have been walking, carrying the weight of a bag filled with books, for nearly an hour. My calves cramp and remind me that I got off the bus far too soon. The address on the gate matches my map, but I am looking for a school and this is a residence. With a bolstering breath I open the gate and take the stone path inside.

I am greeted by the sound of running water and the quiet song of the breeze in bamboo. Incense curls into the air from a stone altar and a towering man with a thick Czech accent practices Tai Ji Quan in bare feet. I put my bag inside the cool house and stretch out on a sparse pallet, imagining myself a monk in his



monastery cell. Stress falls from my body in rolling waves, and peace quiets my too active mind.

*Smoke in bamboo  
from ashes of Qing chen mountain  
whispers of the ancients*

He is not what I expected, this man I am to call teacher. He has the mischievous eyes of a child, and his tongue can be sharp in its teasing. He holds the lineage of the Long Men Pei and burns his incense in ashes from Qing Chen Shan. He will teach me to feel levels of the body and soul I have not yet realized exist. In a playful moment, I watch him duplicate his energetic signature and separate from it, inviting his unknowing teaching assistant to stand where he has vacated. I smile as I watch him form the second body, and at her shock in stepping within it; she is unsure of what has happened. He is watching me, and is pleased that I have shared in his joke.

At night, with the hum of distant traffic lulling me to sleep, I meditate on my decision to leave my school, my home, my plan. It's not so far a leap, I reflect, to leave what I have left and find myself here. After all, this is just another branch of the medicine I have been studying. If it is unaccredited, unregulated and delves into the esoteric so be it. I tell myself what I have told everyone else, that I can practice this in a medical clinic too. I haven't told them that I don't know if I want to, that I am lost. I am seeking Dao, and myself. They don't need to know the truth; I can justify this decision to the ends of the earth.

*Before sunrise  
Tiger form honors my master,  
my feet wet with dew.*

Having put myself through the discipline of my martial art in the gray light of dawn, I sit in the guan, my feet in half-lotus, sipping an oolong tea dipped in ginseng. Others have begun to arrive, from not all over the country but the world. I am, as usual, the youngest, which earns me a certain amount of curiosity. Who is this girl, they wonder, pursuing the wisdom of old men?

Introductions are given. We are all, in some form or another, seeking to answer the age-old question: who am I? There is much variation in form as we follow along through the beginning of what will become our morning exercise for the rest of the year. Some are sharp and stiff, either from bodily pain or from the influence of the Japanese or Korean martial arts. Others are like pudding, their bodies soft and unable to hold posture. I sink into every stance, my mind quiet, fluid in my movement controlled by muscle memory. My soul sighs, I am home.

*Standing like a mountain  
Dan Tians aligned  
Enlightenment begins in horse stance.*

The Czech, my new friend, lies face-up on the treatment

table. I lean back with an inhale, pulling on the ankles of my patient. With an exhale I lean forward and push my consciousness up the yin meridians, using qi like sonar to find imbalances in the landscape of his body. I dance through the routine that is the treatment protocol, purging the wei qi and moving through the five organs.

I slip my left hand beneath his back, between the shoulder blades at Shen Dao and hover my right hand above his heart. It drops easily in my hand and I stop. Something feels heavy, the qi does not flow free. I bring it to the attention of the teaching assistant. She tells me not to worry, but to be gentle. I move on, but I know something is not right.

Later, I end my purging in the garden, near the waterfall. In my mind, I cease to see the colors associated with the organs. Everything becomes pure, crystalline light, reflective and multi-faceted. There is no emotion, no tension, no pain. There is only quiet, and light. I am clean.

I walk back to the house in silence where my TA stops me. She was watching, and tells me it was beautiful. She also tells me that my teacher treated the Czech, and found a blockage in one of the arteries of his heart. He will go for imaging when he gets home.

*Old man splashes in water  
seeking the moon  
filled with divine white light*

I will stay the night, and leave in the morning. Alone, I sit beneath the bamboo, my toes touching the water of the pool. My mind does not chatter, my ears are filled with silence. I do not know where this path will lead me, I only know that it is the path I am on.

*Through the Dragon's Gate,  
on the path of Dao,  
cultivating the way of Heaven and Earth.*

Jennifer Hedrick is a life-long practitioner of internal alchemy. Her studies in Chinese martial arts, medicine and philosophy shaped her views on life and spirituality at a young age and continue to drive her to seek and to learn. Her passion for reading and writing carried her from childhood scholar into the world of academia, and has continued on to publications of her own. Jennifer subscribes to the theory that the best way to learn is to teach, and deepens her own practice of Qi Gong by teaching in the interior of Alaska, as well as working with patients seeking health, wellness and spiritual progression. She also enjoys the practice of Cha Dao, and is always willing to share a pot of good tea.



# Laozi's Great Code

## Emptiness and the Clue of the Dao

Robert James Coons

*"Empty the mind, fill the belly, neglect the outer, strengthen the bones."*

Laozi, the greatest of the Chinese philosophers, left behind five thousand characters of his wisdom for us to contemplate and benefit from. His arcane, obscure, and witty text is clouded in mystery and argument.

Within the Daoist compendium (*Dao Tsang*, Daoist canon) there are over five hundred annotations of Laozi's *Dao De Jing*. Inside of Chinese modern literary culture, there are even more, and the *Dao De Jing* has been translated and commented on in almost every major language. It is such an important book that a religion with multiple branches has even grown up around it. And yet its real meaning remains a mystery, indeed the greatest of mysteries, and the door to the myriad understandings of the world.

Laozi wrote his book according to a holistic philosophy in which he does not espouse any rules, or strictures, required beliefs, gods, devils, or iconography. Anything which can be considered in life can be considered through the lens of the *Dao De Jing*. In fact, anything in the *Dao De Jing* can be treated in many different ways, and each *Dao De Jing* interpretation and translation is extremely different. *Dao De Jing* is translated as a book for government officials to use in ruling a country, for individuals to improve themselves, for religious people who aspire to become saints, as a text on the natural phenomena of the world, and almost every thing else under the sun. One thing that Laozi always seems to urge, though, is that we use emptiness to guide us in our lives.

In Chapter Three he advises us that: "the rules of the saint are to empty the mind, fill the belly, focus on softness, and strengthen the bones. People who do not seek knowledge will never desire. If the modern man knew this, he would not be brave. Acting without action, there is no need for control."

In Chapter Eleven he speaks of the use of emptiness in material items such as a room, a vessel, and a wheel, urging us to "consider taking benefit from the use of emptiness in one's own existence"

...and so on... There are many more examples in the *Dao De Jing*.

Laozi also expounds on many other topics, such as the non-existence of a universal morality, and how the



king should comport himself in order to hold his country together, and yet it would seem his basic premise is always emptiness, non-action, and non-desire.

Daoist thought has always been written obscurely, and within the context of Daoist religious practice, there are many guides to meditation, but almost all, with the exception of the book *Dao De Jing* and the *Chan Wei* do not talk about meditation in relation to the *Dao De Jing*. The *Chan Wei* does discuss meditation, but this book is so obscure that it has yet to be translated into English, and most fans of Daoism in China also have not heard of it.

It is, however, my opinion, that the *Dao De Jing* is a treatise first and foremost on meditation practice. Why do I say this? Again, let's look at another passage from Chapter Six:

"The valley spirit never dies, this is because of the energy of the darkness. The mystery of feminine energy is the root from which all things spring, occurring gradually, it never seems forced."

To explain this passage, we first need to review classical Chinese a bit:

In this case, the phrase valley spirit is composed of the characters *gu* and *shen*. *Gu* means a mountain with a hollow centre through which water runs. Alternatively it means a valley with a river. *Shen* means spirit, god, or vitality. So a good translation is, the spirit of a mountain spring will never die.

Now the energy of the darkness: this part I have chosen to interpret loosely. Its exact translation is the mystery female, or mystery goddess. Mystery and darkness in the time of Laozi were represented by one character, which is called *xuan*. Laozi uses darkness and mystery interchangeably. Darkness is something we can't see or feel, and yet, in the dark, there is still a presence and there are still things. As such, the darkness contains mystery.

Next, consider the phrase "the mystery of feminine energy is the door from which all things spring." This phrase means that from a mysterious and non-tangible source, all of existence emerges.

The next idea in this passage is "Its presence being continuous, it never feels forced". This can be more clearly stated as, "the darkness and mystery of creation is always present in the background and never goes away. It is always there and as such can never be made to do anything or controlled in any way."

So now, using this as a guide for meditation on stillness, we can extrapolate that: the hollowness of the mountain is what allows a river to continue running through it. This is because of the empty space in which nothing is happening. Emptiness and mystery are the root of existence and as such, of consciousness; emptiness is always with us and cannot be changed.

As such, when we meditate, we should be aware that our vitality comes from the source of stillness. When we meditate, we ought to focus on emptiness, not knowing, not acting, and simply allowing our bodies to regulate themselves, as opposed to undertaking complex measures to actively improve our situation. We should know that in order to understand the root of our being, we should understand

what it feels like to be surrounded by our own not knowing. Without giving ourselves answers to life's questions, we enable ourselves to better observe life and learn from it.

When we meditate, we should constantly observe non action, without feeling forced or uneasy. Any time a tension is created in body and mind, it is a result of a desire to do something other than sit in stillness.

Compared against the section in chapter three about emptying the mind, filling the belly and so on, we can now see a pattern emerging in Laozi's thought. To elucidate: in Chapter Three, Laozi is saying that when we practice, we should do it without objectives. We ought to simply allow the mind to be calm, let the breath enter the abdomen, don't focus on using power to achieve goals, and keep our minds on the structure and root of our being, rather than on the external aspect of the body and branch of the thought.

Combining these sections from Chapter Three and Six, we can see that even here, there is a very good code for meditation that we can take with us into our practice and daily lives.

The entirety of *Dao De Jing* is written in this way and it appears to be a major treatise on the practice of the mind above the desire to achieve goals.

However, in no place does Laozi say that we should sit for hours in meditation as do the Buddhists and Hindus. Laozi works according to the principle of endlessly observing the nature of things and as such, if we practice seated meditation, this is only a small part of our daily practice. Every undertaking should be observed as a way to cultivate the way in ourselves. We ought to always observe how we may take benefit from the essential emptiness of things in order to still our hearts and cultivate the softness of a growing child. We also ought to suspend our knowledge and understanding of things, even things which we have mastered. If we approach all things as unknown and mysterious, we give ourselves a gate to understanding the principle from which all things rise. We thus allow ourselves entry into knowing the beauty of the Dao.

**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.**





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# the poetry of passion

*Solala Towler*

*Photos by Cher Mikkola*



*The Taoists, being practical, propose that a man can begin with the most accessible energy at hand, namely the sexual attraction between men and women, and use that as a springboard to more subtle realms.*

Mantak Chia and Michael Winn

*Taoist Secrets of Love: Cultivating Male Sexual Energy*

**T**he poetry of passion begins with the premise that sexuality is as much a part of spirituality as meditation is. As we have seen, Taoists view sexuality as both sacred and healthy, if expressed in a sacred and healthy manner. Central to this view is the concept that the feminine is stronger than the masculine. The ancient Taoist ideal of the feminine nature of the earth was of paramount importance in the development of Taoist thought.

To Taoists, sex is a form of energy, and, as such, it can

be used or abused. As energy, it can be used for pleasure, for communion, for communication, and for health benefits.

To the ancient Chinese, sex was an art form, as subtle and illuminating as a fine painting. As mentioned in the last chapter, the terms ancient Taoists used for sexual intercourse, sexual positions, and sexual organs are different than the ones we are used to. They are poetic and descriptive, even playful. The idea that sex was something shameful or immoral was unheard of to the ancient Chinese. It is interesting that among the extremely widespread erotic literature of ancient China (much of which was suppressed in later times by Buddhists and Confucians), we find almost no mention of sadism or masochism. Instead, much of it is spent on elaborate descriptions of varied and often highly intricate and imaginative lovers' trysts.

As for masturbation, Taoist thought is a little different than many current ideas. While Taoists would never judge

masturbation from a moral standpoint, energetically it was regarded as a waste. Like orgasms during two-person sex, orgasms from masturbation are regarded as a bit different for the man than for the woman. Since the man ejaculates his essence outside his body, the idea of expelling his seed into an empty void is a waste of valuable energy. But since the woman injaculates, she doesn't lose her precious energy. Hence, masturbation to orgasm is not seen as a problem for the woman.

Oddly enough, a lot of the old wives' tales about excessive masturbation leading to blindness, memory loss, and other mental problems are upheld in Chinese medicine. The same rules apply here as with a man ejaculating too often during sex. Another problem Taoists have with masturbation is that no exchange occurs—there is no sharing, no communion with another.

On the subject of same-gender sex, Taoists would never judge homosexual practices from a moral standpoint but are more concerned about an imbalance of energy. Two yins or two yangs together make it harder to attain a proper yin/yang balance. Fortunately, there are practices that one can do to remedy potential imbalances. Both partners in a male same-sex couple need to make sure they are getting yin energy from somewhere else in their lives, such as from contact with women friends, practices that evoke the earth or yin nature in themselves, and certain yin-building herbs.

Likewise, partners in a female same-sex couple need to make sure they are receiving enough yang essence. This subject is beyond the scope of this work, but suffice it to say, there are ways of achieving balance, though it does take a little extra effort.

Ancient China had a much different social structure than today's world. It was a polygamous culture in which men (who could afford it) had multiple wives and concubines. The sexual act itself often involved several partners. Indeed, some postures even require three or more participants just to perform them!

In today's culture, the idea of multiple partners complicates things not only emotionally but energetically as well. For most people, just being open and honest and energetically in tune with one other person is a big challenge; to then open the relationship to others can end up compromising

everyone involved. This is not to say that it is impossible, but it would be very important to be very clear what the motives are for each party in the polygamous relationship.

Although there are currently many books and workshops available on sexual healing, some don't stress enough the responsibility that this path requires. Too often sexuality is used as power, usually over someone else. But this two-edged sword can easily be turned on one's self. This is not the way of Tao. It is not the way of spiritual integrity and

unity. It only leads to disaster. The energies and powers accrued through any spiritual practice, especially sexual ones, are never to be used to dominate another or simply to benefit one's self at the expense of someone else.

Remember, sexual energy is just that, energy. It is part of the kidney system, where jing is stored and reproductive energy is produced. When we have built up lots of sexual energy without dissipating it, we are healthy, juicier, and more dynamic human beings. People around us notice this. We are more magnetic and desirable sexually but also personally and even professionally.

This great energy we have built up can be used for many things besides the sexual act itself. It can be channeled into all sorts of creative and business endeavors. We

can use it to open up spiritual and psychic centers. It is up to us to use this energy in whatever way we wish.

Because it is an extremely potent form of energy, sexual energy can also be for spiritual cultivation. Many people think of spirituality as something rarified and not of this earth. They think that we are being spiritual only when we are doing "spiritual" activities, such as meditation, prayer, or ritual of some kind. Many religions discriminate against anything sexual or even sensual, as if sexuality or sensuality takes us away from our divine nature. Yet there are ancient traditions in India and China that not only honor our sexuality but also give us ways to access and experience our higher nature. To the Taoists, anything that enhances our sense of connectedness to the source, Tao, can be thought of and experienced as spiritual, including sex and relationship.

The notion that one has to be celibate in order to lead a spiritual life was not given any credence by Taoists until





the later Buddhist influence crept into religious Taoism. The true natural philosophy of Tao has never felt a need to cut itself off from such a primal source of energy and delight. Hua-Ching Ni, a modern Taoist master and practitioner of Traditional Chinese Medicine, says,

“Harmony between man and woman and the parallel harmony within oneself is the practical goal of Taoist spiritual learning.”

Enforced celibacy disregards a particular function of the body, which in turn creates problems for the system as a whole. Medical autopsies on over a thousand Catholic priests have shown that one-third of them died of prostate complications or prostate cancer. Also, the practice of celibacy in women causes long-term congestion in the ovaries and breasts, which brings on eventual deterioration of the sexual organs and, in turn, affects other internal organs.

Another way we can use sexual energy is for self-healing. We can circulate this energy throughout our bodies, using it to heal and strengthen organs, tissue, blood, and energy pathways. The energy or chi in our body travels in very specific pathways, the two largest being up the spine and down the front of the body (du mo and ren mo). This sexual energy can be circulated not only within your own body but also between your partner and you. In this way, both partners become a living tai chi symbol, embodying the eternal dance of yin and yang in all its beauty and glory.

The most important point to remember in learning this circulation practice is to not force anything. That can lead to all kinds of energetic and health problems. In the Way of Tao we never force anything, whether it is an energetic practice or a relationship. To try to force something to happen will usually backfire on us, and the person we are so interested in relating to will be repulsed and back (or run) away!

This kind of energy circulation, besides having both health and spiritual benefits, can also affect the aging process itself.

## Becoming a Master or Realized Lover

Lao Tzu describes the ancient masters like this:

The ancient achieved ones  
were masters at penetrating the subtle and profound Tao.  
They were so deep that we cannot describe them.  
They were cautious, like someone fording a frozen river  
They were vigilant, like someone who is surrounded  
by enemies.  
They were courteous, like dignified guests.  
They were ephemeral, like melting ice.  
They were simple, like the uncarved block.  
They were open and wide, like a valley.  
They were deep, like swirling water.  
(Chapter 15)

These same lines describe what we might call “the real-

ized lover.” This kind of lover does not crash their way into someone else’s life, emotionally, physically, or even energetically. They move forward cautiously, as someone who is fording a frozen river and cannot always be sure of their footing. This does not mean that they are in an uptight or paranoid state; instead, all their sensory faculties are acute, and they are paying close attention to every step.

At the same time they are vigilant, like someone surrounded by enemies. Again, this does not mean being paranoid but rather in a wide-awake state; their sight, both inner and outer, is wide open, and they are aware of their surroundings.

So many romantic movies and stories talk about falling in love, as if that is the only way we can open ourselves to another. Perhaps walking forward in love would be a better image and a better practice. This is not to say that we cannot be excited, entranced, and inspired by someone for whom we have deep and ecstatic feelings. We can, but at the same time, we can go into a new relationship with our eyes open and all our energetic feelers out. In this way, we can often avoid a relationship that would be unhealthy or even injurious to us.

Being courteous, like dignified guests, is next. Thoughtfulness, respect, and kindness are all wonderful qualities to bring to a relationship. Often it only takes a minimum of time and energy to employ these qualities, yet doing so can make a huge difference. Simple things can mean a lot to the one we love, allowing them to feel that they are special and beloved in our eyes and heart.

The next line is a little more difficult on the surface. What does being ephemeral, like melting ice, mean exactly, and what does it mean for the realized lover? Perhaps it could mean someone is comfortable being in the moment rather than future-tripping all the time. Cultivating the ability to be fine with the present moment is a whole practice in itself. Spiritual teachers have said that the present is the point of power. If we are able to be truly present at any one moment, we can bring an enormous amount of energy and potency into that moment.

Ephemeral could also mean not holding onto a fixed image of ourselves or our partner. It is being ready to dissolve any preconceptions of self in the light of each new moment arising. Each new moment, therefore, is an opportunity for growth and change, for learning new lessons and healing old patterns of pain or fear.

By being open to change in this way, in a very immediate and dynamic fashion, we are allowing both ourselves and our partner total freedom to evolve and open ever more deeply into the Tao of intimacy and ecstasy.

Lao Tzu’s next lines describe the self-realized person or sage:

They were simple, like the uncarved block.  
They were open and wide, like a valley.  
They were deep, like swirling water.

The principle of the uncarved block, or pu in Chinese, is an essential element of Taoist philosophy and practice. It is the concept of the simple, uncluttered, natural man and

woman and their way of life. This way of being in the world is at the heart of the teachings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. Lao Tzu says:

Fame or self: Which is more important?  
Life or possessions: Which is greater?  
Gain or loss: Which is more harmful?  
Those who are too extreme in their love will suffer greatly.  
Those who hoard too much will suffer heavy loss.  
Those who know when they have enough will not be disgraced.  
Those who know restraint will not be harmed.  
They will enjoy a long life.  
(Chapter 44)

The ancient Taoists were not only content to live simple, natural lives but actually felt there was a solid advantage in doing so. It isn't necessary to drop out of society and live in the mountains, away from the world, in order to live a simple, natural life. What we're actually talking about is an internal state of simplicity and naturalness. We may be involved in all kinds of things, from running a large clinic to teaching a group of children or overseeing a complicated business. Yet none of our activities need stop us from having internal simplicity and naturalness.

It is when we allow outside pressures and complications to take up residence within us that we run into trouble and lose our sense of safety and spontaneity, which to Taoists is very serious indeed.

Tao does not judge. It does not punish, it does not condemn. We do that ourselves. As we judge, so also can we forgive ourselves and others who have wronged us through their own mistaken sense of reality. And we find in that forgiveness an even greater sense of freedom and unlimited potential—for growth, exploration, and an enlarged sense of Tao and our place in it.

Many of us read these kinds of passages from ancient texts like the Tao Te Ching and think, "That is all well and good for the ancient sages, but what about here and now?" "This world we live in is much more complicated than Lao Tzu's, yet the ideas that he shares are still so applicable. If we keep our minds and hearts open to new adventures, new understandings, new life lessons, we too can be described as masters at penetrating the subtle and profound Tao.

## The Valley Spirit

The valley is another symbol that is used a lot in Taoist teachings. In the Tao Te Ching we see the passage:

The valley spirit does not die.  
It is called "the primal mother."  
The doorway of the primal mother  
is called the root of heaven and earth.  
It seems to endure without end.  
In drawing upon it,

it is never exhausted.  
(Chapter 6)

The valley represents female energy. This valley also represents Tao, in that the valley image is depthless and endless and contains all of life. The valley is the Primal Mother, the Goddess. It is through her that we reach the gateway of heaven and earth. This means that we need to connect ourselves internally to the Great Mother, the ground of our being. If we are a man, we must learn to see our lover as the form of the Goddess in our life. If we are a woman, it means to be able to experience our self as the Goddess, the source of all life.

In either case, it is through Her that we are led through the sacred gateway to the root of heaven and earth. It is through Her that we are given the grace to follow this road of intimacy and ecstasy. It is through Her grace that we are given the tools, the experiences, and the patience to do the deep soul work that it takes to reach true sacred union. We must become as open and wide in our spirit as this depthless valley. It is only then that we will be given the sight to see what we need to do and to achieve the level of intimacy and ecstasy that we are seeking with our partner. It is in this way that we become empty vessels, waiting to become filled with grace and grit and true knowledge of what it means to be a man or woman of Tao, to be connected with our realized and authentic self, our true nature.

And lastly, we must become deep, like swirling water, as in Chuang Tzu's story of the man who not only survived plunging into the maelstrom at the bottom of the falls but also found his way back out again by becoming part of the water and following its flow. It is when we allow ourselves to move with the flow of each moment rather than against it in an egoistic, fear-based fashion that we can not only enjoy each moment but become a graceful dancer of life, exquisitely attuned to the magic and flow of each unfolding moment. When we allow ourselves to flow with each moment, our love life, our sex life, our spiritual life all align themselves together in one great, flowing dance. Then we are the dancer and the danced, the musician and the music, the witness and the one who is witnessed, the lover and the beloved, the yin and the yang, complete in ourselves yet elegantly and gracefully in tune with our partner. This is intimacy and ecstasy in their highest forms.

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# Li Shi Fu and Lindsey Wei

## *The Daoist Arts of Wudang Mountain*

Alex Kozma



*Li Shi Fu teaches his disciple Lindsey Wei on Wudangshan*

In China the two most famous birthplaces of martial arts are the Daoist site of Wudangshan (Wudang Mountain) and the Buddhist Monastery of Shaolin-Ssu. Both have a long history as places of inner cultivation stretching back hundreds or even thousands of years. Towards the beginning of the Japanese invasion in the early twentieth century Wudangshan was closed down, and all the temples were used as staging posts for the military or were destroyed

by the Japanese. All the monks and books disappeared. In the early 1980s the government slowly allowed them back. During these dark periods there were individuals living secretly in some of the sites by themselves, at a time when it was illegal to be a monk, some of them wandering to other sacred mountains and gathering what knowledge they could. Lay people would sweep the altar, no matter the risk which such actions involved. Many of the deities were



destroyed but others survived, including the giant turtles in Yushugong, which were saved somewhat miraculously by being underwater due to a flood.

The Daoist priest Guo Gao Yi was appointed head of martial arts when the monks came back, his students studying with him for five years before being sent to teachers in other parts of China whose systems were directly connected to Wudangshan. When he died in his nineties the people said that he had been there since the early part of the century, so obviously, despite all the suppression, cultivation had continued on the mountain. Long Hu Shan, Dragon Tiger Mountain, home of Zhang I Pai, is not far from Wudang.

Five Dragon Temple (Wu Long Gong) is perhaps the oldest temple there, several hours' walk from the central peak; from there it is clear to see how the central peak is surrounded by the other peaks which lean towards it. Legend has it that an ancient Chinese emperor visited Five Dragon Temple, and there were five wells said to contain five dragons which, according to local people, could bring the rain. As it was a time of drought the emperor requested them to call the dragons, which they did, and rain indeed fell. From then on much money and support was sent to the temple, and Wudang began to flourish and grow. Whereas Dishaogong is the centre of administration and tourism in Wudang, temples such as Wu Long Gong are the places where real inner work is done.

In the late 1990s I visited Wudangshan and met some of the monks, both young and old, who were enjoying the new-found atmosphere of religious tolerance in China to once again be able to practise openly.

This was a few years before the building of a huge commercial martial arts school and the commercialisation of the mountain, which began drawing in large numbers of foreign students who would come to learn dozens of different 'traditional' forms from a new wave of priestly robed 'Daoist masters'. When I was there it was still a calm, unspoiled place where one could meet real cultivators and learn interesting things. With the coming of foreign money many of these folk simply left the area, moving deeper into the mountains or going to other sacred sites.

Some years later I was back in England when I received a letter from a young man who said that my written accounts of training in Wudangshan had inspired him to travel there and find a teacher. It seemed he had had quite an adventure over the past few years. A very sincere and softly spoken man his mid-twenties, Jon came to visit me a short time later, and as soon as I met him I knew he had been with a real teacher. I felt a strong link both with him and with the lineage he was involved in. He began telling me about his training with a

certain Li Shi Fu, a Daoist monk who lived in an obscure temple on Wudangshan, and what he said had the ring of authenticity. The stories about Li Shi Fu were marvellous. He was apparently a very traditional teacher who naturally drew respect from everyone who met him due to his presence, and his martial arts and healing skills were superlative.

Through Jon's introduction I became friends with a Chinese-American woman named Lindsey Wei, another disciple of Li Shi Fu who has spent several years in China cultivating the Dao. She had begun her training on Wudangshan at the commercial martial arts school and later, feeling there was

more depth to be found in the practice than was available there, she was fortuitously introduced to her teacher by Jon. What follows in this chapter is a recent conversation with Lindsey in which she describes some of her experiences with her special Daoist teacher.

### Interview with Lindsey Wei

*'Lindsey, how did you come to study Daoist practices at Wudangshan?'*

'When I was fifteen I went on a school trip to China with my language class. I had never practised martial arts before. Daoism and Buddhism were just names of religions I'd heard of. My Chinese heritage had not yet been awoken and I was quite an American girl at the time, rebellious and disrespectful, in ignorance of the humility and servitude that I would be taught in the years to come. However, my whole life I had felt deep chasms and divides in my personality and relations in America. I would later understand that this paradox inside me was rooted in my mixed blood and a torrential affinity with the Dao.'

'After high school I spent my first year in China at a Sports University in Beijing studying Chinese Language and Modern Wushu. I recognised that I could learn the language with great ease, which I attribute to my genes. A new voice came out of me, a new person really, another side that had not yet had place or culture to come forth. I found that I felt a kinship with the Chinese around me and they showed me the same affection and acceptance that they show to those they consider Chinese. I recognised that aspects of my nature that had always conflicted with American culture made perfect sense in the culture of China.'

'My second year was spent in Wudang, which I had heard about through the circle of foreigners studying martial arts. As soon as the taxi began its ascent up the mountain, I felt like I had come home. Though I had never set foot here in this lifetime, I felt the entity held in the mountain had been my home before, and I was returning.'

'After three years in China I finally found my true teacher, whose birth name is Du Song Feng. His Daoist name is Li

Feng and his generation name Xin De. Li Shi Fu quickly became like a father to me, as well as the single most important person in my life and a mentor who has dramatically shaped who I am. Though I recognise that he is still only human, my trust and belief in him is profound.

This trust and unconditional faith must be present between master and disciple of spiritual teachings, for the master is leading you down an invisible path which you have never walked before. He will tell you where the cliff hangs over an abyss, what you must ignore, and what you must grasp.'

*'Can you explain about Li Shi Fu's background?'*

'Li Shi Fu's family lived in an ancient ruined temple. Three days before he was born, there many crows came to live in the trees around their home. They stayed until he came of age. Many people thought it was surely a bad omen. However, in Wudang, the crow is the spirit of the mountain. One day in the market, when Li was seven, he met a wandering Daoist on the street. The Daoist looked at him, felt his bones, and told him that he had destiny with the Dao. The young boy thought nothing of it at the time... Li Shi Fu grew up in a generation that can hardly be compared to my own. Since he was thirteen he has been training day in and day out in a variety of fighting skills, boxing, as well as meditation, all in the traditional manner of extreme discipline, dull repetition and bitter lengths. The most interesting, or perhaps rare, of these practices and according to him the bitterest of them all, was what is commonly known as "Qing Gong" or light Gongfu. He says that even by the time he encountered it, the style was already falling into extinction. No parent was willing to subject their son or daughter to such hardship. Traditionally the practice of Qing Gong must begin before the age of nine, while one is still in the pure Yang or pre-pubescent phase of life, or at the very least before the bones have fully grown.

'Li Shi Fu was already seventeen by the time he met a master who knew the method. His master said that it was too late for him and to learn it would be of no use. However, Li Shi Fu was determined to try. They would wake at midnight to practise so that no one would see them. What exactly they did has never been disclosed to me, but at that time, if one practised the authentic method he could jump ten metres (33 feet) straight upwards, run onto the back of a moving car at forty mph (64 km/h), and jump as far as eight leaps in mid-air. These statistics far surpass anything that Olympic athletes can do today.

'I, myself, though I have spent three years on a mountain training mostly alone every day, am completely laughable in the face of everything I imagine he has endured. An example

comes to mind. The Pure Yang Sect of Wudang has a type of hard Qigong known as "Da Gong". Through the use of a breathing method, the skin, muscles, fascia and organs can be strengthened to withstand hard blows to the abdomen and other vital target points. Every day we would do many repetitions of the movements, which include being punched, slapped, ramming yourself into trees and hurling your body onto the ground. As a woman I had a lot of trouble with this practice in particular. I would cry when my master whipped me on the bare skin with the bundle of bamboo sticks. It was like a knee jerk reaction, not necessarily due to the pain. For me it was emotional, as illogical as that seems. To be hit as a

woman I think must be worlds apart from what it is to be hit as a man.

'One day, my master proceeded to punch me in the gut for two hours until I was black and blue. All kinds of thoughts passed through my head, anger towards him, fear that I would be internally damaged, doubt, mistrust, frustration, sadness. Then I reached a point where none of those emotional reactions were streaming through

me any longer and there was a kind of bliss and surrender...a trust in him knowing how far to push me. And finally, oddly enough, after being beaten for two hours, I was left with only a profound admiration for the experience I'd just been put through, the lesson he had given me on physical and emotional pain. He said, "Do not be afraid to eat bitter."

*'Having heard many stories about Li Shi Fu's healing abilities, I am curious as to what powerful healings you may have seen him do...?'*

'Coincidentally, the most miraculous healing I have witnessed Li Shi Fu perform was on the first night I ever met him. A woman he had known from his hometown, named Xue Mei, had fallen ill with cancer. Daoists read a lifeline from all aspects of a person's image, including their palms, face and name. A woman with the name of Xue Mei, or "Plum Blossom", a flower which blooms in winter, is destined to develop in conditions of hardship, though there is beauty expressed in her endurance.

'By this time Li Shi Fu had already been a renunciate at the Five Immortal Temple in Wudang's White Horse Mountain for ten years. He rarely heals people, even those who seek him out, due to the strict precepts he has sworn to. At most he tells them he is just a poor old Daoist who knows some herbs, picking one at random and telling them to go home and drink it as tea. He says it is as simple as that when one empowers from the spirit.

'He ran into Xue Mei by chance on a trip to the south to settle an issue with his passport and for one reason or another was moved to help her. The hospitals all said that there was nothing more they could do for her, that she had forty-five days left to live and she'd be better off spending it at home



*Li Shi Fu balances above the Wudang Mountains on the Turtle Rock next to the Snake Tree, depicting the sacred symbol of Xuan Wu (The Mystery)*



with her family. Tumours had spread throughout her entire body. She had two in the liver the size of a grape and one in the pelvis the size of a small yam, nearly ten centimetres (4 inches). She could not sleep at night for more than a few hours due to her pain, and could not walk more than twenty metres (22 yards) without rest.

‘Li Shi Fu says, “It cannot be said that all illnesses can be healed. Though likewise there is no disease so severe that it may not be healed. As long as the patient is alive, there is a way.”

‘It is not the body which is hard to heal; it is a person’s thoughts and the things they have done. The precepts which Li Shi Fu has sworn to follow are his promise to the power of his lineage, both his physical teachers and the eternal ones, for without their allowance, the gates of miraculous healing cannot be opened. First the patient or, if they are unconscious, a representative, be it friend or family, must be in a state of begging. Only in this state of plea are they receptive enough to the healer’s magnetic field and willing to change who they have been.

‘Second, therefore, the patient must be resigned to use their newfound health or even new chance at life to pursue good deeds rather than crime. And, last, the healer must feel a divine affinity with the patient, or be driven to heal them by a higher beckoning. These precepts are what the Daoist healers call “the promise”.

‘He told Xue Mei that if she was willing she could come back to the temple with him. She and her husband boarded the train with him that same day and began their journey and last hope for her life. Li Shi Fu performed a small healing on the train and she fell asleep for thirteen hours. She awoke renewed, unlike anything she had felt for months. Previously not being able to walk even twenty metres [22 yards] without rest, she proceeded to walk up the mountain in under two hours [the average person walking it in one hour].

‘For the first week, Li Shi Fu arranged all of her daily activities. Despite her bald head and the shadow under her eyes, she appeared to me to be a woman in average health. She swept the temple floor and lit incense twice a day. He had taken her out of her previous environment, changed her diet and changed her way of thinking.

On the seventh day he performed her healing. ‘We were all sitting in the small dimly lit TV room when he suddenly rose and told her to lie down on the couch. He put an old CD into a portable disc-player that was connected to the TV speakers and a very strange and ethereal music began to play. It is known as healing music and it was being played by one of Li Shi Fu’s Masters. I was sort of dumbstruck, having just arrived myself at this temple. He stood above her, with his back to me, and raised his hand in a symbol. I could hear him murmuring words under his breath. Then, as if something had just entered his hand, he moved it with a quickness over her body, writing symbols in the space above her. Then, with a sweeping motion of his palm from her head to toe, it was over. He told her to stay in the room, rest and listen to the music. We were all dismissed and went to bed.

‘A few days later he told her to go down into town and get a CAT scan to see how her health was progressing. She

came back with the X-rays proving the tumours in her liver to be gone and the one in her pelvis to have decreased by half in size.’

*‘That is an incredible healing. What about Daoist Alchemy, can you explain what this involves? How does Li Shi Fu teach this?’*

‘I asked Li Shi Fu what happened to him when he retreated to the cave and almost died. He said he could not tell me because he could only speak to me of the things I am ready to hear.

‘Daoist Alchemy is much different than “Dao Yin”, or what is often called Daoist Yoga. That is to say there is a vast divide between alchemy and common energy work or even most meditation, and most people never cross it. It is a life work and it is virtually impossible, impossible not just to the many practitioners and adepts but also to the great sages who have come before us, whom we fall infinitely short of. Li Shi Fu says, “Alchemy is to capture life.” It is to create another body. He tells me not to pursue it, that I am still in the realm of desire, that I still have a life to live, children to birth.

To open too deep a knowledge now, would only make it hard for me to live a normal life, that a lot of trouble would begin to find me out. “If you truly want to know where do we come from and where do we go...then sit and be silent. But if there are still things you want...children, husband, family, love, happiness, even life itself – then don’t do it. Because everything you want, they will give it to you, and you will follow them away from your goal.”

“Who?” I asked him.

“The Gate Keepers,” he replied.

‘My experiences in meditation can only be called preliminary sensations at best, in light of what is possible. If we are seeking the deeper aspects of the spirit we should really stop and ask ourselves how much time we have devoted to it. Because unless it is at least three hours a day for one year without skipping a single day, then it is relative to say that we have not experienced even a percentage of what lies beyond our daily awareness. Throughout all of my practice it was when I sat for one hour every night for one hundred days straight that I truly built something. There were many sensations, and the realisations that come along with them, which seemed profound to me at the time. Sensations such as an inner glow, or light radiating out of my fingertips, the purple universe between the eyebrows... However, when I reported them to my master, he simply told me to ignore them, lest I gain another desire in this world, to use this power that I’d found. “Pay no attention to those feelings. Don’t be so curious, just continue, undistracted, else you will become stuck there, intrigued by those flashing lights.”

‘So as you can see, the way of the alchemist is very strict. They say that the physical method of transformation is very straightforward, however, it is our thoughts and our nature that take a lifetime of toil to prepare.’

*‘Is there a difference between Daoist cultivation methods for women and for men?’*



*Lindsey Wei practises Taijiquan on Wudangshan*

'From a very high perspective there is really no difference between them. From the perspective of the average person, however, who defines themselves by their identity and sexuality in all aspects of their being, the two paths could seem to be very different indeed. That is why it is sometimes said that a woman must first become a man before she can enter the gates of Heaven. She must reverse the wheel of reproduction and return to her childlike state, no breasts, no menstruation. It is the same for men, their testicles shrink back into their body and they cease to emit semen. However, we certainly do not say that a man must become a woman before he can become a luminous body. It is better rather to say that both a woman must first forget that she is a woman, and a man forget that he is a man, before one may become a luminous body, which is no longer in the realm of division between male and female.

'The Daoists say that men are Yang on the outside and Yin inside. Women are Yin without and Yang within. What does this mean? Women are more readily peaceful due to this inner Yang or "light" principle. In fact it is said by Daoists that alchemical cultivation takes one third the amount of time for a woman as it does for a man due to this. Men are easily angered and quick to act, like fire; whereas the woman is contemplative and soft. Men are firm in body, whereas women are yielding, like water. And, like water, she is easily

lured this way and that. This is perhaps where the feminine Yin principle can be associated with a negative aspect of darkness. She is seduced. So both men and woman equally have their challenges along the path of alchemical cultivation. Albeit that the end goal is to become a pure Yang body, it is a modern misnomer – or perhaps ancient cryptic saying – to say that a woman must therefore "become a man".

'What would it feel like to disassociate with our sexuality? What kind of thought-level, let alone physical transformation, would it take to truly be neither man nor woman? These questions are very simple, when looked at in purity and at the same time extremely complex when we take into context culture, history and human nature. So until we find ourselves on that higher vantage point, we must continue to take into consideration the natural differences between male and female cultivation.'

#### **Note**

**1. Long Men Pai (dragon gate sect) has always been the majority sect in China.**

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Continued from page 1

I have been practicing and teaching the Primordial (Wuji) Qigong form for over 15 years now and it never gets old. The many circling movements just set up such a nice qi field that we are all caught up in the beautiful dance of wuji. I love to travel and teach so if there are any of my readers out there who would like to sponsor a workshop in your area please let me know at [solala@abodetao.com](mailto:solala@abodetao.com).

I have also made a new tea friend, Arron Fisher (Wu De) whose book *The Way of Tea* is a favorite of ours. He lives in Taiwan and publishes an absolutely beautiful journal called Global Tea Hut, which comes each month with a rare tea! See their website at [globeateahut.org](http://globeateahut.org). He also runs a tea ashram called Tea Sage Hut, a school of Dao and Tea. Look for information how you can visit this Tea and Dao center

at their site at [teasagehut.org](http://teasagehut.org).

Wu De is a beautiful soul who really understands the deep teachings of Dao and Tea. I highly recommend anyone interested in the Way of Tea to look him up!

At my class in Denver I performed a tea ceremony and offered three kinds of tea, including an amazing one I got from my friend Wu Zhongxian called Golden Horse Eyebrow, truly a wonderful brew. Thank you Master Wu!

And thank you to all our readers for all the years we have been publishing. It is so much fun to do the journal in color now! I am having such a good time making it as beautiful as I can!

Solala Towler, editor



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# The Tao of Krazy Kat

## Zen in the Art of George Herriman

Heinz Insu Fenkl

George Herriman holds a legendary status in the comics community, and many of the great American cartoonists, from Bill Watterson to Art Spiegelman (just to name two ends of the spectrum) acknowledge him as a major influence. Some would even say that Herriman was the greatest cartoonist in the history of American comics, so it is rather ironic that, given his status, his major work has been relegated to a series of specialized reprints and remains relatively unknown to the general public.

My first exposure to *Krazy Kat* was shortly after I had started elementary school back in the late 1960s in Korea. I used to sit at the Quonset hut library on the U.S. Army base called ASCOM and read American comics for hours at a time, especially during the winter months when it was bitter cold outside. I can still feel the heat radiating from the diesel stoves and hear the roaring sound of the flames and the ticking of the hot metal. There was a time-bomb-like quality to those stoves that lent a certain urgency as I turned pages to discover the surprises on the other side.

I have to admit—I did not understand *Krazy Kat* at that time. It was totally baffling to me, though I found it more accessible than Walt Kelly's *Pogo* (probably because I could at least follow the trajectory of the bricks). *Krazy Kat* was a mystery to me. I saw only reprints in the "big" books in the cartooning section of the library, and I read it much the same way I had looked at Korean comic books before I could actually read the text. I "watched" the pages, especially those that mixed the traditional strip format with the innovative graphic layouts of the Sunday pages. The force of the recurring elements in those constructs was not slapstick or sight gag comedy for me—it was more like the repetition of a mantra about the nature of life.

I lived in a house where, nearly every morning, the grey-robed monks from the Zen temple in the nearby hills would come by with their begging bowls. For our offerings of food, they thanked us with a chant invoking the Amita Buddha and the Boddhisatva Kwan Seum (Kwan Yin): *Kwan-seum Bosal, Nami Amitabul*. In *Krazy Kat*, the mantra was mouse-brick-cat-bonk!-pup-jail. I think I must have sensed the karmic tangle of the Crime & Punishment plot with the multilayered unrequited love plot even at that young age, but I could not have described *Krazy Kat* in those terms. What I felt from it was a simultaneous energy and sadness, a kind of emotional density that charged every page with extra mystery.

Fast forward about half a century to just a few years ago when I approached *Krazy Kat* once again, this time through Patrick McDonnell's eyes (via his wonderful biography of Herriman and then by exploring Herriman's influence on McDonnell's own *Mutts* strip). The proverbial scales fell from my eyes. One thing I learned this time around, much to my surprise, was that the introduction I had skipped as a child—noting only the weird typography of the byline—was written by none other than the great e. e. cummings! I also realized that *Krazy Kat* was a perfect illustration of what Buddhists and Taoists call "Crazy Wisdom."

*Krazy Kat*, as more than one critic observed, is the longest single sight gag in the history of comics. It is also one long Zen koan, a phenomenon beyond the power of words or pictures to describe, and when you "get" it, it gently alters your engagement with the world. It allows you to understand George Herriman's heart, and if you let it, it will subtly change you so that you, too, become a little more like the virtuous man he was. George Herriman had the qualities of a Taoist sage. A quiet and gentle one. It wasn't just his comics that did it—his life, especially in his later years, reflected all of the primary underlying values of Taoism and Zen. He is a prime illustration of the "Three Jewels" of Taoism: kindness, simplicity, and modesty. From his deep appreciation of the Navajo culture to his engagement with the almost-surreal landscape of the Monument Valley area, to his love of animals, he embodied the heart of Taoist and Zen teachings and his cartooning was clearly his form of daily practice.

When a sage passes on, sometimes he comes back as emanations that reincarnate in multiple bodies. When a comic strip passes on, it tends to disappear into musty newspaper archives or scratchy microfilm and microfiche. For *Krazy Kat*, fortunately, the strips were reincarnated, and they were given an extra vitality by going from the interzone of archival limbo into the public domain, where they were "liberated," in a sense, to do their magical work once again in the world of the living.

So, what does the *Krazy Kat* strip itself have to do with Taoism or Zen? What I discovered as I reexamined Herriman's strips in my middle age was that many of them were essentially "wisdom" or "teaching" tales of the kind one finds in Chuang Tzu or in the Zen canon among anecdotes about great masters. Many of the daily strips needed only a slight conceptual nudge to fit, unchanged, into the culture

## THE 'BUTTERFLY' DREAM

ONCE ZHUANGZI DREAMT HE WAS A BUTTERFLY...

YOU MEAN  
A FLIBBERTY  
L'IL AINGIL...



...HAPPILY FLITTING AND FLUTTERING ABOUT, FREE AS THE AIR. HE DID NOT KNOW HE WAS ZHUANGZI.



SUDDENLY, HE WOKE UP! AND THERE HE WAS - ZHUANGZI - AS REAL AS COULD BE!



BUT HE COULDN'T TELL IF HE WAS ZHUANGZI, WHO HAD DREAMT HE WAS A BUTTERFLY, OR A BUTTERFLY DREAMING HE WAS ZHUANGZI!



of Taoism and Buddhism. I also discovered that many of the illustrations were imbued with a quality that made them well-suited to serve other dramatizations of Taoist and Buddhist anecdotes. Inspired partially by Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh* and by the surrealist collage techniques of Max Ernst, I tried collaging elements from various *Krazy Kat* strips (those between 1916-1922) that had lapsed into the public domain. The results were so remarkable that I began to assemble a whole book of them, being careful to maintain the original spirit of George Herriman's humor.

One of my first collages was made by taking several panels from an old Sunday strip and manipulating them in Photoshop to recast them as the famous "Butterfly Dream" of Chuang Tzu.

But my favorite sequence came about when I took on the challenge of reimagining the classic "Oxherding Pictures" in the *Krazy Kat* universe with Officer Pup as the seeker and Krazy as the ox.

This particular take on the Buddhist Oxherding cycle is based on the version attributed to the 12th-century Sung dynasty Chan Buddhist master, Kuo-an Shih-yuan (廓庵師遠), better known to the West as Kakuan Zenji. The Taoist origins of the Oxherding pictures is suggested in the numerous variants by the presence of Taoist alchemical and cosmological elements and the original ending of the sequence with the empty circle (i.e., the Wuji). Many parallel variants must have been in circulation in both Taoist and Buddhist circles over the ages, as the Oxherding theme is one of the most popular upon which the masters make commentary. The Theravada tradition of Buddhism, with its goal of individual Arhatship, resonates more strongly with the empty circle in the final 10th panel, whereas the Mahayana (both Zen and Tibetan) tradition, with its Bodhisattva path, resonates more strongly with the empty circle at panel 8 (to correspond to the 8-Fold Path) and then a return to the world at the conclusion of the sequence.

The version of the Oxherding Pictures best known in America is the one made popular in the slim volume, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*, published in 1957 by Paul Reys and Nyogen Senzaki. The accompanying woodblock illustrations by Kyoto-born Tokuriki Tomikichiro have become the iconic images for the Oxherding sequence and so those are the ones I used as the model for my "Katherding" collages.





## 2. FINDING THE FOOTPRINTS



DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS,  
UNDER THE TREES  
BY THE RIVER,  
IN THE FRESH GRASS,  
I FIND FOOTPRINTS!

THEY CANNOT BE HIDDEN  
ANY MORE THAN ONE'S NOSE  
LOOKING AT THE SKY.



## 4. CATCHING THE 'KAT'



I SEIZE HIM -  
WHAT A STRUGGLE!  
HIS WILL AND STRENGTH  
SEEM INEXHAUSTIBLE.

HE RUNS TO THE MESA,  
HIGH ABOVE THE CLOUD-MISTS,  
OR IN A RAVINE,  
HE MAKES HIS STAND.



## 3. SEEING THE 'KAT'



I HEAR SONGBIRDS.

ON THE RIVER BANK  
IN THE WARM SUN,  
IN THE GENTLE BREEZE  
UNDER THE GREEN WILLOWS -  
THE 'KAT' CANNOT HIDE!

WHAT ARTIST COULD DRAW  
THAT REGAL HEAD,  
THOSE SPRITELY EARS?



# 5. TAWING THE "KAT"



AT FIRST,  
WITHOUT STICK AND ROPE,  
HE WOULD STRAY OFF  
DOWN SOME DUSTY ROAD.

BUT I TAME HIM,  
AND NOW  
EVEN UNFETTERED,  
HE DOES NOT RUN.



# 6. RIDING THE "KAT" HOME



SLOWLY, I RIDE HOME  
ON THE "KAT."

THE SOUND OF MY FLUTE  
RESONATES  
THROUGH THE NIGHT.

COUNTING THE BEATS  
OF OUR HARMONY,  
THE ENDLESS RHYTHM,  
(LISTEN, AND JOIN IN.)



# 7. THE "KAT" TRANSCENDED



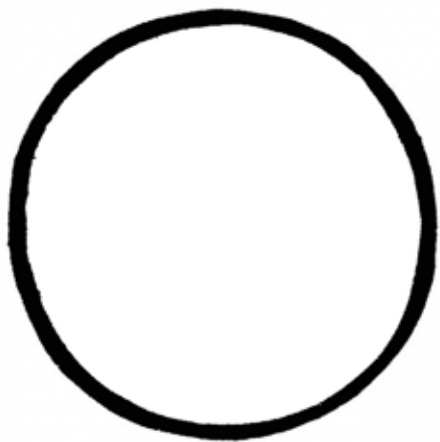
I HAVE REACHED MY HOME.

I AM IN PEACE, AND NOW  
THE "KAT," TOO, CAN REST.

DAWN IS BREAKING -  
IN CALM REPOSE,  
AT MY HUT,  
I HAVE NO NEED  
FOR MY TOOLS.



8. BOTH 'KAT' & SELF TRANSCENDED



ROPE, STICK, SELF, 'KAT' -  
ALL MERGE INTO NOTHING.  
THIS PLACE IS SO VAST,  
NO WORDS CAN MAR IT.

HOW CAN A SNOWFLAKE EXIST  
IN A ROARING FLAME?  
THIS IS THE PATH  
OF THE ANCIENT MASTERS.



吾人  
道牛

9. RETURN TO THE SOURCE



TOO MANY STEPS  
RETURNING TO THE SOURCE!

BETTER TO BE  
BLIND AND DEAF  
FROM THE START,

IN ONE'S TRUE DUELLING,  
UNCONCERNED  
WITH THE OUTSIDE -

THE CALM RIVER,  
THE RED BLOSSOMS.



道牛  
道牛

10. BACK IN THE WORLD



BAREFOOT,  
BARE OF BELLY,  
I MINGLE WITH THE PEOPLE  
OF THE WORLD.

THOUGH I MAY BE  
HOT AND DUSTY,  
I AM ALWAYS HAPPY.

I NEED NO MAGIC  
TO EXTEND MY LIFE;  
BEFORE ME,  
THE JOSHUA TREES  
COME ALIVE.



吾人  
道牛

Heinz Insu Fenkl is a writer, editor, translator, and folklorist. His first novel, *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, was a Barnes and Noble "Great New Writer" selection and a PEN/Hemingway finalist. He serves on the editorial board of *AZALEA: the Journal of Korean Literature & Culture*, published by Harvard's Korea Institute and as a consulting editor to the internet translation journal, *Words Without Borders*. He teaches a comics course, "Visual/Verbal Storytelling," as well as "Great Books of Asia," which focuses on Asian religious texts, at the State University of New York at New Paltz. In 2010, after receiving a koan, he began intensive neigong practice while translating the poetry of Korean Zen Master Cho Oh-hyun. His most recent translation of contemporary work, Yi Mun-yol's short story, "An Anonymous Island," was published in the September 12, 2011 issue of *The New Yorker*. He is currently completing a new translation of the 17-century Korean Buddhist classic, *The Nine Cloud Dream* by Kim Man-jung.



Photo by Peter Leuders ©2010







# Zhuangzi's Perfect Happiness in the Light of Contemporary Western Psychology

Livia Kohn

Photos by Cher Mikkola

The core issue in the *Zhuangzi* is happiness, personal ease and fulfillment, individual freedom—the way to live the best and most perfect life on this earth. He uses two key terms to describe this ideal that both also form chapter titles: *Zhile* 至樂 (Perfect Happiness; ch. 18) and *Xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊 (Free and Easy Wandering; ch. 1).

Chapter 18 formulates the central questions right up front:

In this world, is there such a thing as perfect happiness? Is it possible to live to the fullest in this body? If so, what should we do? What can we rely on? What should we avoid, what support? What is best to pursue and what had better be abandoned? What should we delight in, what detest?

What then, are we to do? And, first of all, what *not* to do?

## Ordinary Happiness

The things people in today's world consider most valuable are wealth, position, vigor, and a sense of being good at something. The things that make them happy are physical comfort, rich tastes, beautiful clothes, lovely colors, and great music. On the other hand, they uniformly detest poverty, low status, early death, and crime. (ch. 18)

In another passage on ordinary happiness, the *Zhuangzi* lists eight personal characteristics and six virtues commonly believed to make people feel good about themselves and bring them happiness. These include “a beautiful face, great hair, tall stature, good muscle tone, vigor, style, courage, and skill” as well as “wisdom and insight, courage and enterprise, benevolence and righteousness” (ch. 32).

However, none of these really brings happiness, since they each have serious drawbacks. One is that many of them depend on satisfaction of the senses:

Their greatest suffering occurs when their bodies cannot get comfortable, their mouths cannot feed on rich tastes, their physical form cannot fit into beautiful clothes, their eyes cannot look upon lovely colors, and their ears do not have a chance to listen to great music. When they do not get these things, they are deeply

frustrated and develop tremendous anxiety. (ch. 18; Kohn 2011, 3)

This means that, echoing *Daode jing* 13, as long as people have a personal body and are dependent on sensory satisfaction for personal happiness, it will elude them. As the *Zhuangzi* continues: “When people are born, whatever they do, frustration is born along with them. Thus, even to attain long life, people make themselves ignorant and dull. Still, they spend all their time worrying about not dying” (ch. 18), thus continuing the vicious cycle of strife and frustration, labor and dissatisfaction.

So, let us say, we do have a beautiful, healthy body, vigor, and style, and manage to satisfy our physical needs and sensory demands to the fullest. Does that bring happiness? Yes, it does so within limits, but if we enhance and show off our attributes to have more of them than others, “they bring nothing but trouble.” This is because they create immense social pressure to perform as well as jealousy and envy in our surroundings (ch. 32).

Even without good looks and great vigor, just cultivating the various social and moral virtues will not guarantee happiness, since they too lead to increased social pressure and situations of envy: “Wisdom and insight lead to outside involvement; courage and enterprise lead to numerous resentments; benevolence and righteousness lead to piles of responsibility” (ch. 32). Neither a good physique nor a great moral rectitude thus creates anything but trouble.

Another major drawback of this way to happiness is that any procurement of property and social status requires hard work and continued sacrifices. Thus “to attain wealth, people submit to great suffering and make themselves sick, . . . to attain position, people slave day and night without stopping” (ch. 18). In addition, once they have reached their goal and are wealthy and in high regard, “they accumulate so much stuff that they cannot even use it, . . . and they keep worrying constantly whether they come across as being good at their job” (ch. 18). In either dimension, people seek happiness by looking, moving away from their inner core, from who they truly are. As Zhuangzi says: “However dedicated they are to their life, it is yet entirely separate from them, entirely outside of themselves.”

Material goods, in particular, are a great problem, since they overwhelm the senses, tie up mind and thinking, and take us ever farther away from inner peace. They specifically lead to “confusion, suffering, sickness, addiction, trouble, and fear: the greatest evils in the world.”

Look at the wealthy: their ears are overwhelmed by the sounds of pipes and drums, winds and strings; their mouths are filled with meat and wine. These rouse their intention for more of the same so they completely forget their real position in the greater scheme of things: this is confusion.

Drowning in surging energies and passions, they are like laborers lugging an uphill burden: this is suffering. Amassing material goods, they try to find comfort; amassing power and influence, they try to find fulfillment. Resting quietly for a moment, they sink into depression; engaging themselves physically, they turn into maniacs—this is sickness.

Pursuing wealth and running after profit, they fill their houses to overflowing and do not know how to escape. Still, they lust for more and cannot resist—this is addiction. More stuff piled up than they could ever use, grasping for more than they could ever hold, their mind is full of care and close to exhaustion, yet they still keep going after projects and things, not knowing when to stop—this is trouble.

At home suspicious of theft by deceitful servants, in town terrified of attacks by robbers and con-artists, they surround themselves with alarm systems in their houses and dare not walk around by themselves outside—this is fear. (ch. 29)

In other words, whatever we cultivate and pursue on the outside—physical, material, social—cannot and will not lead to a sense of true happiness, of inner joy, of real lasting contentment. As the *Zhuangzi* says, “Do not be an embodiment of fame. Do not be a storehouse of schemes. Do not be an undertaker of projects. Do not be a proprietor of wisdom” (ch. 7; W 97).

## Nonaction

How, then, are we to act in the world, if we cannot pursue fame and position, material goods and sensory satisfaction? Resolving the issue, the *Zhuangzi* points to nonaction (*wuwei* 無為)—action “without artifice” (Coutinho 2004, 33) or “non-interference with natural processes” (Coleman 2002, 389)—as the source of true happiness. Nonaction is a “state of personal harmony in which actions flow freely from one’s spontaneous inclinations without the need for extended deliberation or inner struggle” (Slingerland 2000, 300), a “paradoxical *active* letting-be of everything in the world, without the all-too-human will to control things according to one’s desires” (Goh 2011, 121), a way of being that is just as it is, in perfect naturalness or spontaneity (*ziran* 自然) (Callahan 1989; Billeter 1996; Fox 1996; 2003). It is the method to reach alignment with naturalness, defined as “a state in which things unfold and develop of their own accord” (Liu 1999, 214).

Nonaction means doing nothing in the sense of leaving, life, the universe, and “the body free to make its complex coordinations, . . . to do the work our mind wants—and this is not the same as relaxation” (Wormhoudt 2001, 41) but a

paradigm for meditative felicity (Burneko 1986, 400). As the *Zhuangzi* has it, “Perfect happiness is being free from the need to be happy. Perfect accomplishment is being free from having to accomplish anything. Perfect happiness and living to the fullest can only be realized in a state of complete nonaction.” (ch. 18).

The concept plays a role in various ancient texts, referring to human attitude to action on several different levels—political, personal, and spiritual (Slingerland 2000; 2003). Among Daoist materials, the first to use *wuwei* as a technical term, both the *Daode jing* and the *Huainanzi* come down mostly on the political side. Here nonaction is “designed for the ruler, not for the common people” and means “not to make use of the sovereign position to do anything” (Liu 1991, 55; 1999; Ames 1981; 1983). Rather than setting rules, limitations, and taboos, according to the *Daode jing*, the sage ruler should “take no action, and the people transform naturally” (ch. 57), “acts with nonaction and has no ruin, lets go of grasping and has no loss” (ch. 64). Matching the patterns of natural development, carefully observing the patterns and closely aware of the interchange of opposites (contraction-expansion, weakness-strength; ch. 36), the sage ruler channels the energies of Heaven and Earth, thereby allowing the world to unfold perfectly (Goodfield 2011, 59).

On a more personal level, nonaction is interpreted variously: it can mean simply doing nothing; it can be a form of action that does not force but works by yielding; it is a way of action in accordance with nature; or it can be nondual action, without conscious deliberation and in full spontaneity (Loy 1985, 74-77). It neither means being completely passive nor totally spontaneous without any planning whatsoever. Rather, as expressed in the thought of Yang Zhu, it means letting go of limiting concerns, imposed plans, and outside values in favor of finding a strong inner sense of where life is headed. To act in nonaction is to abstain from forceful and interfering measures that cause tensions and disruption in favor of gentleness, adaptation, and ease (Liu 1991, 46). A concrete example would be a farmer in the process of modernization—he moves along with the times and makes best use of available methods as his means permit, avoiding all forceful actions that go against the natural flow (Liu 1998, 223).

The spiritual dimension of nonaction includes these but, as expressed most clearly in the *Zhuangzi*, takes it one step further into transcending ordinary consciousness, letting Heaven take over and moving about the world and the universe in cosmic freedom (Liu 1991, 49). There is a certain level of paradox in its practice: one cannot intentionally act without intention; nor can one go with Heaven’s flow unless one is already internally connected to it (Slingerland 2003, 8-9; Ivanhoe 2007, 281). This is resolved by understanding nonaction as the quality of action rather than as a state of mind—as one is free from intention yet connected to Heaven, action flows naturally (Ivanhoe 2007, 284).

The *Zhuangzi* illustrates this point in a variety of stories: rather than creating a complex system or giving specific guidance, it creates a “systematic” within life. Nonaction here is beyond systematization, a “system of no system,” a state of inner spaciousness and personal realization (Wu





2002, 75). Living life from this position allows the realization of each person's perfect potentiality in authentic action: "Authentic action not only realizes the potential to do or be but also the potential to not do or be" (Møllgaard 2007, 55). It is perfect action, "because it is act without activity, action not carried out independently of Heaven and Earth, in perfect harmony with the whole" (Merton 1969, 28).

Another take on nonaction is simply "do nothing." As Siroj Sorajjakool describes it in a personal journal, this means taking a huge step back from defining self and success through outside validation, from constantly trying to be better and bigger and bolder, from all the oughts and shoulds of life. Instead, just stop and sit:

As we sit silently in our own anxiety and our discomfort, we

learn to integrate the natural flow of life. We learn to listen to life instead of trying to tell life how to live. Life has a life of its own. . . Only in the space of nothingness can the soul find its place, its calling. (2009, 67-78)

Seeing nonaction as a fundamental way of being in the world, as a nothingness that allows letting go of constructs and mental tensions, Sorajjakool links it with Christian notions of love and Western ethical concepts, yet continues to come back to the core vision of the *Zhuangzi* which is "about aligning oneself with nature, with what is . . . with change itself" (2009, 95). Ultimately, nonaction comes back to the old adage: "Let go and let God." We need to get ourselves out of the way so that the natural power of the universe can be ever present and participate and share with us, flow

with the changes and transformations of life in “free and easy wandering.”

### Free and Easy Wandering

This is the title and central focus of the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, which overall uses the term almost a hundred times (Lo 2002, 81). Its stories connect with an inner logic and, without setting out a clear system, provide insights by mysterious resonance (Lin 2003, 284; Wu 1982, 108), focusing on issues of perspective, freedom, and uniqueness. Each being has its own unique character, abilities, and nature—it does what it does within its own frame of being, following its naturalness in nonaction. This is freedom: not a general attitude or state but a personalized pattern, to do what one does best with perfect joy (Fung 1952, 1:226). But it also limits perspective: the small cannot comprehend what the big is doing; the ordinary cannot understand what it means to be extraordinary; the practical cannot see the potential of apparently useless items.

Zhuangzi’s “wandering,” aside from physically traveling and being at ease, thus means following one’s own natural patterns while adapting to the changes (Lo 2002, 82). The word *yao* in *xiaoyao* is “related to terms meaning ‘to cross over’ or ‘to go beyond,’ and to other words indicating pleasure, agreeableness, and lack of depth. *You* means “swim” or “float” (Yang 2003, 112) and “evokes the image of a waving flag” (Robinet 1993, 171; Wu 1990, 85). Wandering means being in naturalness; it implies essentially “a laid-back attitude towards life in which one takes things as they come and flows along with Dao” (Mair 1994, 385). Sometimes also rendered “distant excursion,” it may be more ecstatic, a “trip” beyond the boundaries of ordinary life (Graham 1981, 8; Lo 2002, 84); or it may be more spiritual and profound, a surrender “to the chaos of self-emerging life” (Møllgaard 2007, 22; Fukunaga 1946). “It is a self-satisfying movement that fulfills itself” (Wu 1990, 85), a way of being in the world that is “completely open, versatile, and ready to become whatever the hand you are dealt requires” (Levinovitz 2012, 395).

Wandering can occur on two levels: within the boundaries of the world, between the constraints of society and nature (Cook 1997, 540); and beyond common boundaries, between Heaven and Earth, beyond the four seas, in the infinite (Jiang 2011, 470-71; Höchsmann and Yang 2006, 37-38; Lo 2002, 86). “Wandering,” moreover, is often used as a transitive verb in the sense of “let something move” in leisure (*xiao* 逍) and without regard for distance (*yao* 遙). An example is *chengwu youxin* 乘物遊心: let the mind move by striding on things, let things carry the mind along in free flow. This means that one no longer has deliberate goals and is instead centered completely in the transforming processes of Heaven and Earth (Graham 2001, 69).

Like nonaction, free and easy wandering has been read in a variety of ways and on different levels, connecting and comparing it to visions of freedom in the West. Liang Qichao 梁啟超, for example, sees it as an early expression of “free will.” Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 finds in it the release from governmental authority. Yan Fu 嚴復 reads it as anticipating “freedom and equality in the Western sense,” emphasizing not only the ability but the right to self-determination. Li

Zehou 李澤厚 finds that Zhuangzi in this concept gives prominence to the individual for the first time. Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢 acknowledges Zhuangzi’s pursuit of freedom but sees it as different from the modern Western concept of political and individual liberty (Deng 2010, 316-19).

Others are more critical. Hou Wailu 侯外廬 interprets “wandering” as an escape from life, a denial of social responsibility, an advocacy of hermetic philosophy while Guo Moruo 郭沫若 sees pessimism and opportunism in Zhuangzi’s position (Deng 2010, 320-21). Deng Lianhe 鄧聯合 himself roots it in the particular age of writing: “The ‘happy excursion’ is a forced decision by individuals in a dark age, but not a way of existence and the ideal of life in a normal society” (2010, 222). It was because people at the time could not fulfill themselves within their society, torn apart by wars and strife, that they turned inward and “produced an unexpected positive effect: the awakening of human consciousness” (2010, 223).

A more subtle analysis of free and easy wandering shows that it has five features: it transcends contingency and is not dependent on circumstances or good fortune; it implies no fixed norms or direction but focuses on adaptation to change; it is grounded in an understanding of the potential range of alternative forms of life; it implies a readiness to transcend limits or boundaries associated with mainstream values and norms; and it is associated with an essentially carefree attitude (Fraser 2011a; see also Pas 1981).

Freedom in the *Zhuangzi* is experienced not as political liberty but as intrapsychic harmony (*he* 和) and inner peace (*an* 安); there is a sense of flowing along (*shun* 順) with the natural processes. There is no goal—unlike happiness in the West which is the “ultimate goal” of life in a teleologically oriented philosophy of finality (Jullien 2007, 102-07), wandering has no end other than itself, no fixed path (Fraser 2011a). It is everywhere (Merton 1969, 27). Yet, since it requires a constant response to change, it involves cognitive flexibility, the ability to look at things from multiple perspectives, and the capacity to play: discover, explore, wonder at the world (Fraser 2011a; Wu 1982, 19). It is “being in phase,” a form of “free evolution, proceeding in comfort, at will, without a designated port and without anxiety over the outcome.” Like fish in water, people are in Dao: they “swim in this milieu of endless movement,” letting “life itself decide how it will go” (Jullien 2007, 109).

Happiness (*le*), moreover, is the intrinsic quality of the ongoing process of wandering (*you*) in an attitude of nonaction (*wuwei*). It is not *eudamonia*, the ancient Greek concept of the good share or good spirit (*daimon*) given by the gods nor its expansion, the ultimate fulfillment of human endeavor, the universal end of life, what the American founding fathers implied when they put the “pursuit of happiness” into the Constitution (Jullien 2007, 110). The trick to realizing it fully is to “bring some heaven into myself,” i.e., “to make contact with that part of myself which is pure process (natural and spontaneous) through the liberation from everything superimposed by the ‘induced point of view’ or bias of an individual ego” (Jullien 2007, 43).

This means to align with the heavenly rather than the human, the cosmic rather than the social, to “adequately



respond to and satisfy the vital injunction that comes to me directly from the immense source of reactivity that lies in the great world process as a whole rather than from the narrow orb of my desires and repulsions" (2007, 44). The most important question for the *Zhuangzi* is accordingly how to distinguish one from the other: the heavenly from the human, the deep-source impulses from extraneous conceptions and desires. The bulk of the book, then, focuses on understanding the workings of mind and body and on learning how best to work with life in all different modes and levels to not only attain the experience of wandering in perfect happiness and nonaction but maintain it at all times and through all the ups and downs of life.

## Flow

The closest equivalent to Zhuangzi's ideal state in Western psychology is the concept of "flow" as studied and defined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990). A deep sense of enjoyment and feeling of exhilaration—seemingly effortless movement (1990, 53)—flow is "a state in which people are so deeply involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (1990, 4). A state of "optimal experience," it occurs every time when an experience is so enjoyable that it is pursued for its own sake: a goal in itself, it is "autotelic" (1990, 67). Typically an experience of this sort has eight characteristics: 1) a chance of successful completion; 2) the ability to concentrate fully; 3) clearly delimited goals; 4) immediate feedback; 5) oblivion of everyday life; 6) sense of control; 7) no concern for self; and 8) an altered sense of time (1990, 49; Jochim 1998, 63).

Activities that favor the flow state are first of all games, sports, dance, music, art, and leisure, but the state can easily be expanded to include all kinds of other tasks, including work, housework, and daily tasks (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 59). No matter what the content of the activity, the individual is deeply absorbed and tends to transcend his or her limited self. He feels fully engaged—neither bored nor anxious—and fully authentic: "In flow, there is no room for self-scrutiny" (1990, 63). While far away from the drudgery and mental self-castigation that often accompanies ordinary life, "there is nothing mysterious or mystical about these experiences. They are just as real [and as natural] as being hungry or as concrete as bumping into a wall" (1990, 65). Offering new horizons of achievement and complexity, the autotelic or optimal experience is universal: regardless of geography, culture, age, or social standing, people all have and report it (1990, 4).

They even had it 2,300 years ago, as the *Zhuangzi* documents. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi himself links his vision of flow to free and easy wandering, noting that *you* is translated often as "flowing" and that it clearly describes the proper way to live: without concern for external rewards, in spontaneity and with total commitment to the activity at hand (1990, 150). He argues that while Westerners tend to reach it by consciously setting goals and mastering challenges, the ancient Chinese preferred to relax on conscious mastery and enter meditative oblivion; while Westerners often aim to change objective conditions, eastern thinkers tend to disregard them in favor of an overall spiritual playfulness.

Still, even in *Zhuangzi* people train and master certain skills, thereby reaching flow (1990, 150-51).

The ultimate goal in both Csikszentmihalyi and the *Zhuangzi* is to "turn *all life* into a unified flow experience" where one's actions and feelings are in harmony at all times. To do so, people have to have a coherent overall meaning that goes beyond the playing of a game or the completion of a task (1990, 214). Traditional cultures offered such a meaning in their religions, and Muslims often still have it today, remaining calm and in flow even under strong pressure. "There is nothing to it," the engineers say, "we don't get upset because we believe that our life is in God's hands, and whatever he decides will be fine with us" (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 215).

The *Zhuangzi* uses Dao, Heaven, transformations, and destiny to describe the underlying pattern of life that we have no control over, that we need to accept and relax into while maintaining inner peace—in nonaction and perfect happiness. Modern people, on the other hand, no longer steeped in religion and with innumerable opportunities and goals competing for prominence (1990, 224), have to work hard to find such a coherent meaning that can give integrated purpose to their lives. Only by finding the one overarching thing can they truly dedicate themselves to achieving harmony, a dynamic order in the contents of consciousness. This, then, allows them to "go with the flow," interpreting obstacles as challenges and opportunities for growth.

## Stress reduction

Another psychological reading of the *Zhuangzi* focuses on the concept of stress, which comes in three forms: eustress, distress, and chronic stress.

Eustress is a term coined by the endocrinologist Hans Selye (1974). It is a sense of challenge and heightened awareness that enhances a positive sense of being alive. It means being in a cognitive and emotional state that perfectly balances boredom and anxiety: there is enough interesting work, family life, or fun activity to deal with so that we are not bored, but neither are we overwhelmed by any of them to the point of producing anxiety (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). Eustress as a positive response to the challenges of life may include feelings of control, desirability, location, and timing, and usually involves an overall sense of meaning, hope, and vigor. It leads to a positive attitude and a life of satisfaction and well-being.

Distress, second, on the other hand, is the "flight or fight" response, a built-in biological reaction to severe outside threat. In the early stages of human evolution, it served to put the body on high alert when primitive man was confronted with a saber-tooth tiger or similar life-threatening situation. It enabled him to marshal all the body's powers into one focus, to become stronger than usual, more alert, and with higher endurance. Running for his life or getting ready to fight to the death, he was using every part of the nervous system, increasing the force of the heart-beat and the overall heart-rate, looking with pupils wide open, quieting the bladder and the digestive system, and focusing all thoughts on escape or ways of attack. Distress is thus an elementary reaction to threats in the world necessary for survival and essential for continued well-being (see Jones





and Bright 2001; Buss 2008).

However, it is not meant to be a continuous state of the human organism. The problem today is that people react to quite ordinary situations as if facing a saber-tooth tiger. The mind perceives threats as more dangerous than they are and people go into high alert. Worse than that, they get used to being in high alert, with its increased adrenaline rush and intense mental capabilities. The moment the high lets off, they find themselves slackening and either search out a new crisis to fight in or reach for caffeine or some similar stimulant to artificially prolong the stressful state (see Rice 2012). This is chronic stress, which the body is not set up to handle. It creates all sorts of difficulties and leads to severe disease: "In 2010, the American Institute of Stress has estimated that 75 to 90 percent of all primary care office visits to medical doctors are stress-related" (Santee 2011, 40; [www.stress.org](http://www.stress.org)).

Several factors characterize the stress response. For ex-

ample, every time one perceives a situation as threatening, breathing becomes shallow and short, and rather than correcting this with conscious effort, people habituate to this pattern and accept it as the normal state of affairs (see Loehr and Migdow 1986). Another factor is a type of thinking that keeps us free from distractions and focused upon the perceived threat. "This type of thinking is self-centered, absolute, biased, black and white, dichotomous (win or lose; die or survive; right or wrong; good or bad; etc.), inflexible, mechanical, and automatic. . . It is called primal thinking" (Santee 2008, 99; Beck and Weishaar 2005). Primal thinking together with shallow breathing and the caffeine habit serve to continue the vicious cycle of stress in body and mind, leading to a permanent state of hyper-vigilance, hyper-arousal, and intense anxiety.

The *Zhuangzi* offers several approaches to the resolution of the problem, leading people away from chronic stress and into an engaged, playful state that can be described as eustress. The

text speaks of stress variously, using the term *you* 憂, usually translated “mournful,” “sad,” “anxious.” It says that people experience *you* because they cannot get the things most valued in the world, such as wealth, position, long life, and approval (ch. 18) and that the perfected “sleeps without dreaming, is awake without *you*” (ch. 6; Santee 2011, 43, 45). It then offers both cognitive and somatic techniques to release this state and find wholeness in self and world.

Cognitively, the *Zhuangzi* teaches how to restructure human thinking in a global approach—going beyond the release of irrational thoughts and cognitive distortions that form the focus of cognitive therapy. It restructures how the individual thinks about existence at the very foundation of thinking while clearly noting that society with its contrived dichotomies and standards is the primary source of dysfunctional thinking (Santee 2008, 107; 2011, 47). Numerous discourses and stories in the text—philosophical discussions of right and wrong as much as tales involving death and dreams—focus on what scholars have called “perspectivism,” the realization that we cannot know for sure that we know and that each individual person and being on the planet has his or her very own way of seeing things and reacting to them. Often seen as a drawback of *Zhuangzi*’s thought, in the practical, psychological application this is a definite plus, a method that offers a way out of stress-based primal thinking.

Another dimension of the same feature is *Zhuangzi*’s rejection of office and position. He asserts that people “slave day and night without stopping” to attain high status, then, when they have it, “they keep worrying constantly whether they come across as being good at their job.” Either way, they pursue things on the outside, creating stress and alienating themselves from their life (ch. 18; Kohn 2011, 5). On the other hand, “once you understand that the value of the self is higher than any career, you can give up position and income like shaking off mud, . . . flow along with the myriad transformations without end. Then, what could possibly cause you any distress?” (ch. 21)

Yet, this does not mean that we should never accept any position or avoid serving in society. It means that we need to remain clear about who we are and not identify with any position. As Sunshu Ao says, “I have no clue whether the honor resides in the position or in myself. If it is in the position, I have nothing to do with it; if it is in myself, the position is irrelevant.” And goes off to take a leisurely walk to enjoy himself, parting with the words: “I really have no time to worry whether people honor or despise me” (ch. 21; Kohn 2011, 203).

On the more somatic level, the *Zhuangzi* provides several methods to still the mind and come back to a sense of openness and emptiness within. One has to do with breathing. Deep, abdominal, diaphragmatic breathing is natural and stress-free (Loehr and Migdow 1986; Cohen 1997; Santee 2007). Ordinary people breathe rapidly and shallowly, a clear sign of stress, manifest in symptoms like the “inability to catch one’s breath, choking sensation, feeling of suffocation, frequent sighing, chest heaving, lump in the throat” (Fried 1993, 310; Santee 2008, 117). The *Zhuangzi* similarly notes: “Ordinary people breathe from their throats. Being restricted, their words are like retching” (ch. 6). The advice is to learn to breathe more deeply, like the perfected who “breathes all the way to his heels,” allowing the *qi* of the universe to flow freely through the entire body.

Opening to *qi* is also the subject of another key method in the *Zhuangzi*, the “fasting of the mind” (*xinzhai* 心齋):

Unify your will and don’t listen with your ears but listen with your mind. No, don’t listen with your mind, but listen with your *qi*. Listening stops with the ears, the mind stops with matching [perception], but *qi* is empty and waits on all things. Dao gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind. (ch. 4; Kohn 2010, 25)

Moving attention away from outside things and the cognitive mode of being, this encourages practitioners to reach for the inner emptiness that allows Dao to flow freely. Letting the mind rest, withdrawing the senses inward, one becomes aware of the *qi* vibrating within. Thus one can settle into one’s physical existence and open a space of emptiness and no-mind. The same process is also extolled in the classic passage on “sitting in oblivion” (*zuowang* 坐忘) that involves letting go completely of body and mind, releasing all outside knowledge and conceptual perception (ch. 6; Kohn 2010, 7; see also Watson 1968, 90; Graham 1981, 92; Mair 1994, 64; Roth 1997, 310; 2010, 198).

The goal is to evoke the direct, holistic experience of the individual, undistorted by thoughts of gain and loss, praise and blame, society and world. As we get more deeply in touch with the energies within, we come to realize what really nourishes us the most: “worries about social status, absolute distinctions, dysfunctional thinking, and cognitive distortions simply dissolve” (Santee 2008, 111). We derive our identity no longer from outside sources and the validation of others but from deep within: from Dao, Heaven, the universe. As Robert Santee says,

Any sense of an absolute self vanishes as the practitioner realizes his/her identity with the continual process of change. This identity or sameness is not a denial of change, a validation of eternity, or a conformation of freedom from death! It is a realization of the commonality of all things.

Both sitting in oblivion and the fasting of the mind are approaches to fully and functionally engage the natural, continually changing process of existence. They are ways of eliminating any sense of an absolute, separate, and distinct self. These methods not only integrate mind and body, but they also integrate mind, body, and environment. (2008, 111)

Ultimately the practice leads to living life as a perfected, in free and easy wandering, in nonaction and perfect happiness. “Perfect happiness,” the *Zhuangzi* say, “is being free from the need to be happy. Perfect accomplishment is being free from having to accomplish anything” (ch. 18). This describes a way of being in the world that is free from deficiency and strife, a feeling of completeness wherever we are and whatever we do (see also Wu 1990). Happiness is so full in itself that it does not see itself as happy. The ultimate state is so just being of itself that it cannot be conceived as a separate entity or phenomenon. Any attempt to think about it or describe it necessitates its being separate, external, not just so. Similarly, accomplishment is fully realized when there is no more need for praise, reward, and completion. You just do what you do as you do it, and that is all. Chronic stress and primal thinking have no place in this way of being, which is playful and joyous, free and at ease. The *Zhuangzi* thus offers a cognitive and somatic solution for



the problems of chronic stress and the various physical and psychological issues it causes.

## Energy Psychology

Yet another take on the state of life perfection as outlined in the *Zhuangzi* is found in Gary Zukav who describes it in terms of “authentic power.” He says,

Authentic power feels good. It is doing what you are supposed to be doing. It is fulfilling. Your life is filled with meaning and purpose. You have no doubts. You have no fears. You are happy to be alive. You have a reason to be alive. Everything you do is joyful. Everything is exciting. You are not worried about doing something wrong, making a mistake, or failing. You do not compare yourself with others. You do not compare what you do with what others do. (2002, 105-06)

Power is also a key concept in the thought of David Hawkins, psychiatrist and master of behavioral kinesiology. Echoing Csikszentmihalyi’s emphasis on the importance of meaning, he says:

Power arises from *meaning*. It has to do with motive, and with principle. Power is always associated with that which supports the significance of life itself. It appeals to that part of human nature that we call *noble*. . . , to what uplifts, dignifies, and ennobles. . . .

Power is total and complete in itself and requires nothing from outside. It makes no demands; it has no needs. It energizes, gives forth, supplies, and supports. . . . Only power brings joy. (2002, 132, 136)

As we integrate fully with our power, Hawkins emphasizes, we increasingly focus our attention away from the limited goals and perspectives of humanity and allow the universe to play a dominant role in our lives. To this end, he outlines a set of eight basic truths that serve as the foundation for becoming fully open to universal flow:

Everything in the human domain is temporary, transient, and evolutionary.

Nothing can be really owned; all relationships are temporary and arbitrary.

Everything belongs to God/the universe.

Sentient beings live solely by faith, then by experience.

Ownerships and relationships are stewardships only.

Focus on alignment rather than attachment or involvement.

Cling to principles rather than people, objects, conditions, or situations.

Resolve to live with courage and dignity, summoning forth unseen Power. (2006, 100-101)

Everyone has this authentic power naturally within themselves. Not only that, but we can experience it at any time in Perfect Moment, the key to an energy expansion practice called Core Health that integrates Western science with Eastern cultivation and forms part of the growing movement of energy psychology (see Feinstein et al. 2005). Perfect Moment is “a reclaimed sense of wholeness and

harmony, of being connected to everything, the certainty that life is good and that we are an integral part of that goodness” (Carlson and Kohn 2012, 116). We can find it by mentally going back to a time when we felt good and connected, were part of everything—rolling in the grass, looking at the clouds, playing, swinging, riding, baking, etc. We all have it; it is intrinsically and uniquely ours. No one taught it to us or gave it to us; no one can take it away. By placing ourselves into our Perfect Moment, we connect to the heavenly source within and are immediately part of the flow of universal energy. We are intrinsically happy: there is no need to be anyone or do anything. We can float along with the currents of life in complete ease.

As do traditional Daoists, so Core Health and energy psychology practitioners acknowledge that vital energy (*qi*) flows in a constant rhythm, described traditionally in terms of yin and yang: to and fro, forward and back, in and out, rising and falling, giving and receiving. This natural rhythm is present in all things, in our breath and in the beating of our hearts, as much as in night and day, summer and winter, and so on. It is predictable, measurable motion that follows the law of circulation. All things, ideas, and people keep on changing, ever moving along their course. Any effort to stop or reverse circulation is doomed to fail: the law of circulation always prevails (Carlson and Kohn 2012, 37).

Human beings, as much as all existence, are nothing but cosmic vital energy. They share in the cosmic purity of Dao and have a pure core (the root of primordial *qi*) that remains with them no matter what and manifests in Perfect Moment. However, through their will and intention (*zhiyi* 志意) human beings have the tendency to block the cosmic flow and obstruct their own full potential, consciously or subconsciously. The human body in this vision—unlike any earlier forms of Western medicine or psychology but closely matching traditional Chinese medicine—consists of major energy centers and energy lines that connect the centers and also link organs to extremities. The centers, like the Daoist elixir fields (*dantian* 丹田), are located in the head (brain), chest (heart/ thymus gland), and abdomen (center of gravity/ abdominal brain). They are connected through major meridians that run up and down as well as around the torso (see Diamond 1979). The major organs in the body are particularly prone to store emotional baggage blocking energy flow.

Their functioning, moreover, as much as the working of every cell in the body, depends entirely on the conscious and subconscious input people provide upon reaction to environmental stimuli, a fact shown conclusively in recent research on cell biology and explored in the new field of epigenetics. As Bruce Lipton has shown in detail (2008), cells (like computer chips) receive signals through their membranes (which are like semiconductors) and then act on them. They have receptor and effector proteins that function like sense organs or antennas, on the one hand, and provide life-sustaining responses, on the other. Receptors known as Integral Membrane Proteins can be chemicals (hormones), energetic vibrations (light, sound), or mental activities (thoughts, imagination). Effectors can be sodium-potassium





connections that generate energy, cytoskeletal proteins that regulate the shape and motility of cells, or enzymes that synthesize or break down molecules.

Brain impulses sent to the cells come in three types: instinctual patterns hardwired into the reptilian part and thus largely unconscious; repeated, habituated patterns originally learned then automatized and made subconscious in the mammalian part; and conscious, higher-level commands from the prefrontal cortex. The conscious mind picks up only one in 200 million impulses perceived and processed by the subconscious, making the latter dramatically more powerful.

Dis-eases of body, mind, and emotion, rather than being genetically inborn or the inevitable results of natural processes like aging are only to 7 percent physical: 93 percent are due to emotional, mental, and spiritual reasons. Also, 95 percent of our reactions are learned patterns of behavior. They can be unlearned by making them conscious and using

the prefrontal cortex to first override, then reprogram them (Lipton 2008; see also Hanna 1988). Dysfunctions, though caused by miscommunication in one single part, create a cascade of reactions. Thus a single conscious change may result in tremendous deformation or transformation.

Cell responses come in two major forms: protection and growth. Protection means shutting down certain functions in favor of those essential for survival: it works along the hypothalamus—pituitary—adrenal axis and is best known as the “fight or flight” response, aka stress. Cells in growth, on the other hand, enhance life and work toward the continuous renewal of the bodymind, growing new cells continuously and maintaining close cooperation within their community. Unlike chemicals that move about half an inch per second, energy is instantaneous, so that impulses given to the complex cell system of the body affect it instantly. These impulses can be conscious but are for the most part subconscious

and habituated through past behaviors and energy decisions. Once cells are in protection for a long period, symptoms of disease arise. Energy signals to a cell are a hundred times more powerful than those of chemicals or drugs. Thus working with energy, and especially reprogramming previous energy decisions, is vastly more powerful than traditional drug-based therapy (Lipton 2008).

In Chinese terms, the impulses given to the cells are emotions (*qing* 情), will and intention (*zhi/yi*), and spirit (*shen* 神)—key terms in the *Zhuangzi*, which emphasizes the importance of being free from emotions, controlling the will, and opening the mind to spirit. In energy psychology terms, letting go of the pursuit of outside goals and stress, the conscious mind is no longer at odds with the emotions, nor does the subconscious grapple with physical demands. All the different aspects of the person come to be on the same team: synergistic, integrated, the whole greater than the sum of its parts. Closely echoing the perfect happiness of the *Zhuangzi*, its goal is to live in full authentic power as part of universal flow, to be whole in Dao. Health is union, oneness, wholeness. The main thrust of the various related practices (breathing, meditation) is to get ourselves out of the way of the cosmic flow and reach a state of nonaction, so that the natural power of the universe can be ever present and participate and share with us. The practice makes it possible to shift into a state of permitting “yes” from the universe, to allow the universe to play in and through our lives. Universal goodness emerges fully in everyday life and we reach perfect happiness.

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Livia Kohn, Ph. D., graduated from Bonn University, Germany, in 1980. After six years at Kyoto University in Japan, she joined Boston University as Professor of Religion and East Asian Studies. She has also worked variously as visiting professor and adjunct faculty at Eötvös Lorand University in Budapest, the Stanford Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto, Union Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio, and San Francisco State University. Her specialty is the study of the Daoist religion and Chinese long life practices. She has written and edited thirty books, as well as numerous articles and reviews. She has served on numerous committees and editorial boards, and organized a series of major international conferences on Daoism. She retired from active teaching in 2006 and now lives in Florida, from where she runs various workshops and conferences, and serves as the executive editor of the *Journal of Daoist Studies*. Her books include *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques* (1989), *Daoism Handbook* (2000), *Cosmos and Community* (2004), *Meditation Works* (2008), *Sitting in Oblivion* (2010), *A Source Book in Chinese Longevity* (2012), and—most recently—*Zhuangzi: Text and Context*. Besides English, she is fluent in German, Chinese, and Japanese. For more, see [www.threepinespress.com](http://www.threepinespress.com).







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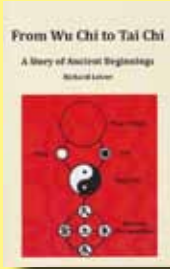
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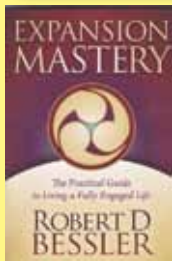


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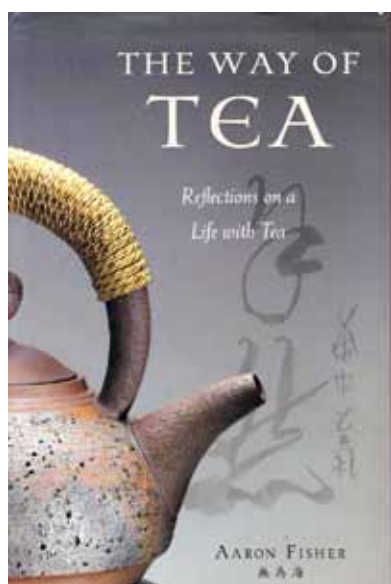
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# REVIEWS



## **The Way of Tea Reflections on a Life With Tea**

by Aaron Fisher

Tuttle Publishing, 2010

Hardcover, 190 pages, \$19.95

This is simply the best book on the Dao of Tea that we have seen. The author, who also goes by the pen name Wu De, runs a tea ashram in Taiwan called Tea Sage Hut, which brings people from all over the world to share in the teachings of Tea and Dao.

It is in that spirit that he has written this book. Written in a deeply poetic fashion, the book, with chapters on The Vision of the Leaf, Chanoyu (Japanese tea ceremony), Calm Joy, Quietude, Presence, Clarity, Ceremony and The Tea Space, leads us, one step at a time, through the deep and timeless teachings of Dao, as expressed through the practice of Tea (Cha Dao).

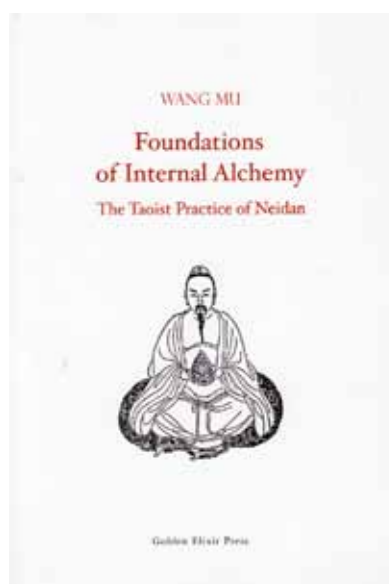
For those who are familiar with the Way of Tea and for those who are not, this will be a journey through time and inner space and is a journey well worth taking.

As the author says, "the art of tea was also born in a tradition of reverence, meditation, and as a way of celebrating life.

By sitting quietly and enjoying tea, we are learning sensitivity—learning to listen to the moment and to the sensations in our bodies—and that translates to a better, more harmonious life."

For many followers of Dao, brewing and sharing tea with others or by oneself, can be a pathway to deep reflection and renewal. It is one of the many ways the ancient masters have created as a conduit to source, to Dao. For anyone already on the path of Tea and for those who wish to delve more deeply into the history and philosophy of this wonderful art, this book is a great source of knowledge, wisdom and inspiration.

The illustrations and calligraphy throughout the book draw us more deeply into the path of Tea and Dao in a beautifully artistic manner.



## **Foundations of Internal Alchemy The Taoist Practice of Neidan**

by Wang Mu,

Translated and edited by Fabrizio Pregadio

Golden Elixir Press, 2011

Softcover, 146 pages, \$16.95 (PDF \$9.95)

[www.goldenelixirpress.com](http://www.goldenelixirpress.com)

A wonderful translation of this important Daoist neidan classic by a well-known Daoist scholar. It describes the stages of classical alchemical practice and clarifies several relevant terms and notions, including Essence, Breath and Spirit (jing, qi and shen): the Cinnabar Fields, the "Firing Times" and the Spiritual or Golden Embryo. There is a wealth of information here, along with around two hundred quotations from other original Daoist texts.

We are very fortunate to have scholars at the caliber of Fabrizio. I use his two-volume Encyclopedia of Taoism all the time. I think anyone interested in learning more about this ancient and important practice would do well studying this fascinating book.

## **The Old Man From the Hill Lessons in Qigong and Tai Chi**

Volumes 1 and 2

by Steve Zimcosky

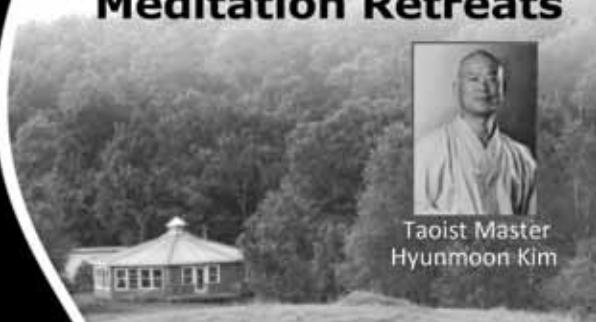
Softcover, 53 pages, \$11.45 each at Amazon.com

This is a simple story of a boy's education by a Chinese qigong/tai chi master who lives at his grandparent's farm. It is a simple yet powerful story of how the teachings of Daoism and Chinese medicine as well as qigong practices changes the boy's life in many small and large ways. It is similar to many simple but life changing stories that boys and girls and men and women have lived through for thousands of years. It is nice to see this timeless story offered from deep in the heartland of rural America. The language may be different but the story of youth to maturity, from foolishness to wisdom is a story that all who embark on the journey to oneness experience. In it's simplicity of writing, this book is a wonderful addition to the tradition of wisdom literature.





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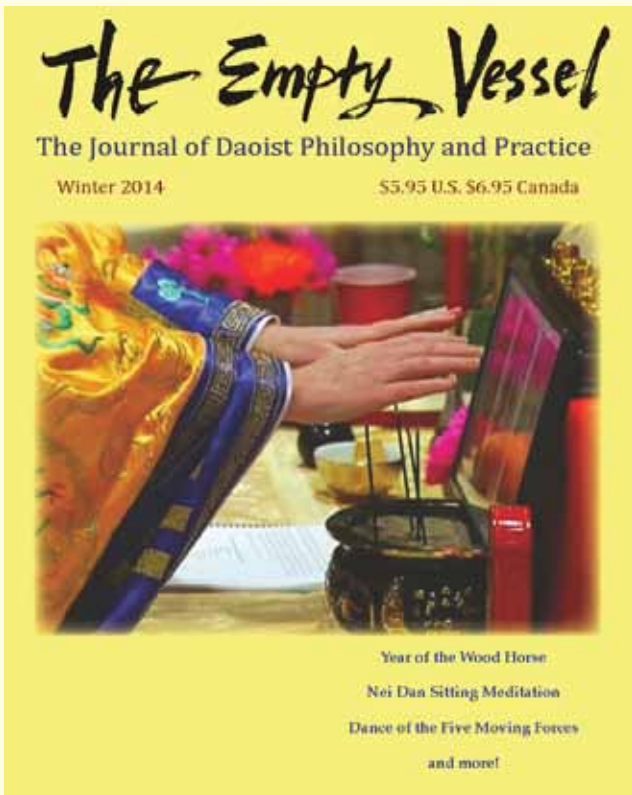
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