

Sweetness & Light

What Laozi is Really Saying in the Daodejing

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Note to the Reader

The following article explores the thought of Laozi as collected in the eighty-one chapters of the Daodejing. It should be pointed out that, though the manner of presenting the material in the article is my own – looking at the work from the perspective of the first chapter – the insights and emphases culled from the Daodejing are those of my teacher, Li Xikun. In the Daoist classics one often finds the admonition that the reader must find *ming shi zhi dian*, a knowing teacher to describe exactly what is being discussed, or the text will remain a hopeless jumble. This is even more true of the Daodejing for its thought is locked in formulations impossible to piece together, no matter how diligent one's study.

For some years now, I have studied the Daodejing with Master Li Xikun, at his courtyard home in Beijing, China. Not only is his explication of the Daodejing extraordinarily detailed and complete, brilliant and illuminating, but it carries the authority of his living example. Once very ill and near death at age fifty-five, he began cultivation under the tutelage of a Daoist master and saved his life through diligent meditation practice using Laozi's teaching. Now age ninety-three, he is an extraordinary presence. Unencumbered by any illness or debilitation, spry and alive to each moment, he passes his days in the serene enjoyment of energy that the classics describe. He has left old age behind. This is because he has *jie dan*, that is, attained the dan that is the special source of limitless energy that a cultivator earns through meditation. Spiritual teachings usually promise much, but deliver little. By the time one reaches old age, they can only point to the next life. But Chinese cultivation focuses on this life, and Master Li's accomplishment certifies the profundity of the teachings.

Thus my article contains the insights that Master Li and Chinese tradition give to the seminal concepts and principles of cultivation. These insights insist that one's personal reality and destiny can be shaped by conscious, skillful cultivation of energy. Eshewing idle speculation, the focus is on results of a most practical nature.

*The dao which can be spoken of is not the eternal dao.
The name which can be given word to is not the eternal name.
The origin of the universe is found in that without name.
What has name is the mother of the myriad things.
Thus without intention one experiences its profundity.
With intention one cultivates its energy center.
These two, though having different names, manifest from the same source.
They are both profound.
How profound are they!
They are the gate by which the inexhaustible mysteries are revealed.*

So Laozi begins the first chapter of the Daodejing, presenting in terse formula his vision of life and the universe. The simple subject-verb-object grammar of the classical Chinese along with its homey expressiveness leads us to believe that some highly naturalistic thought is being set forth. This is perhaps one reason so many Westerners try their hand at translation, whether they know the language or not. It is also a reason why the enigmatic nature of English translations makes it seem as if the words appear as within a fog. It seems that whatever Laozi had in mind he encoded in the quaint idiom of his day. Thus our retrieval of it must bear the stamp of his time, for his opaque language resists easy understanding. We can imagine that if Laozi were to write today, he would drop the Warring States style and find an idiom closer to Robert Frost's, one characterized by clear, rustic directness. For we must believe that however Laozi conveys his thought, beyond the limitations of language his ideas remain simple: live life in harmony with nature; avoid the moral taint of society; be true to one's self.

But this is not the case. The work is not simple. In fact, the Daodejing for eighty-one chapters presents line after line in a style short of clear narrative or argumentative thread. Lines are distinct from each other, like rocks in the bed of a retreating glacier. Occasionally one can trace the train of thought for two or four lines. Then the next chapter starts off on another tack and its relation to the previous chapter is held more by imaginative suggestion than by the clarity of the text itself. Nevertheless, when such obscurity occurs, we assume the text is expressing something of the spirit of nature mysticism. We learn to forego exact meaning, for we understand nature and mysticism must transcend language. If anything, we are told understanding is had through *feeling* or by a leap of intuitive comprehension. Thus, by a retreat from the exact meaning of the text, as it were, the Daodejing does not fail to inspire us.

This approach to reading the Daodejing, which we can call impressionistic at best, unfortunately misses the insights that ultimately tie the entire work together. Laozi has not collected his musings on spiritual topics or codified the moral observations of his time. Laozi, as person, does not really enter the text, nor does the period of its composition or the social ambience of the time. Each chapter in the Daodejing stands alone, seemingly devoid of any comprehensive strategy that aims to convince the reader. For the work's primary concern is in describing the principles by which one achieves success in inner cultivation. This subject is so rare that it was only found outside China in ancient India. But Laozi's reader would know that the issue at hand is meditation practice. The eighty-one chapters describe how meditative work achieves its aim, which is to return to the source and attain the dao. Laozi assumes the reader knows beforehand what the source is and how the effort to return to it concerns the highest aspiration possible for a human being.

It is important to point out here that source (*yuan*) does not mean the natural world. Often our understanding of Daoist thought contains a default mechanism whereby any opaque Daoist expression is invariably assumed to mean harmony with nature. Even the concept *dao* itself has become a variant reading for nature. *Follow the dao* equals following the way of nature. It is assumed these are the same thing. But the intent of return to the source (*huan yuan*) refers not to nature, or the world, or the universe. Rather it posits a return to the energy that produces the universe. Chinese tradition has given this energy many names, one of which is *xiantian qi*, the *qi* prior(*xian*) to the universe (*tian*) -- the *qi* that creates the universe. To know how to attain *xiantian qi* by virtue of one's skill in meditation is the subject of the *Daodejing*. When one understands that the *Daodejing* is really a presentation of principles that aim to illuminate inner cultivation, then the work appears in an entirely different light.

However, even when provided this context and perspective, Laozi's thought still remains difficult to penetrate. Why? I think the primary reason for this difficulty is that Laozi's words are in the form of principles and we are unprepared to deal with this kind of formulation. He is intent on formulating his principles in as economical a fashion as language allows, that concentrates the core of his experience. He does not explicate, he promulgates. But we the reader expect thought to be set forth as explanation. We want to be instructed, to follow the progression of an argument. The very least we expect is to be told how to act in the world. But this is not the manner of expression found in the *Daodejing*.

An illustration may help. Rather than assume Laozi is a textbook writer and his work one of China's ultimate textbooks, see him rather as a sage among sages, in an illustrious company of experienced cultivators. At an appointed time this wise band decides to compare notes on their meditative experiences. The sages, possessing a remarkable range of spiritual attainment, nevertheless discover there is a common experience that produces great illumination. They decide to eliminate the byways, the special but wasteful peak experiences, the deadends. After much work, they find the core that all agree is the ultimate experience. This experience is attained in a certain way, by a certain method of meditation and this method, discovered in the course of critical analysis, can be repeated without limit. The sages decide to write down their insights. They favor terse yet comprehensive statements. They delight like poets when they express the most meaning with the fewest words. Over months and years of collaboration, their thoughts and insights become refined into statements of lapidary brilliance. They exult in how subtle insight can be reduced to a six character phrase. They marvel how a few words sum up a thousand implications. Over the years they put together a work that is really a compilation of principles by which one produces states of inner cultivation. It sums up the way this experience is achieved. In this way, the *Daodejing* presents its thought to the world.

Thus, if this illustration bears any truth, an encounter with the *Daodejing* is a meeting with thought of unimaginable density. It is not thought conveying naturalistic platitudes. The principles of cultivation direct to intense inner experience not poetic enchantment. As a result, reading the *Daodejing* is difficult not because the meaning is unclear, but because our experience has yet to reach the level expressed in the text. The text postulates insight into the reality of existence. Laozi's language does not pose a problem to us, reality does. For if we have experienced the insights set forth by the principles, the text would be very clear indeed. It stands to reason that the *Daodejing* would never have survived the century of its creation if it were only a work preaching harmony with nature or other commonplaces. But because its insights reveal how the energy of the universe can be experienced in our mundane world, the work has been held in the highest regard by China's greatest minds for twenty-five hundred years. Chinese tradition acknowledges that the *Daodejing* is a difficult text, but insists, at the same time, its preeminence in describing how to engage and master reality. What is obscure and distant is nevertheless within reach if one understands the principles as developed in the

Daodejing.

In this essay, I want to focus on the first chapter of the Daodejing and describe its essential ideas. Interestingly enough, Chapter 1 can be seen as a summary for the entire work. The lines encompass the major ideas that later chapters develop. I want to limit the focus to one chapter to see if we can isolate the Daodejing's true intent instead of hastily jumping over the words as if they were folk sayings. We must go slow – *what does this really mean?* My approach will develop the first nine lines by means of quotations from other chapters in the work, tying the work together, to some degree, by its own threads. With the themes and evidence of other chapters, I hope to provide a sense of the dimension of the work which is often overlooked. If we read the work yet fail to intuit its essential meaning, what a tragedy! The Daodejing aims to reveal the nature of reality itself, and to offer the principles by which one can engage reality. This is of extraordinary importance to the individual ambitious enough to want to penetrate life to the core.

The First Line of the Daodejing

The first line of the first chapter begins,

(1) 道 可 道 非 常 道
dao ke dao fei chang dao.

The dao that can be spoken of is not the eternal dao.

To read this line accurately, pause after the second dao and focus on the phrase, *dao ke dao*. Then we find Laozi saying: the dao indeed can be talked about. The second dao carries the meaning of talk, discuss. Here Laozi acknowledges that men will speculate about the ultimate meaning of life; that such speculation is unavoidable given the human condition whereby men possessed thought. Men think and assume that the result of their thinking has bearing upon their existential condition. They assume there is necessarily a leap from creativity in thought to consequence in reality. The sixth century BCE era in which Laozi lived was rife with speculation about the place of man in the family, in society, in the universe. The concepts that others proposed to argue their system were represented as Truth. So Laozi, in the very first phrase of his work, recognizes the human need for conceptualization. But then he states in no uncertain terms, *fei chang dao*, this conceptualization is not the eternal dao. Thus, one of the bedrock characteristics of Chinese civilization finds its expression with emphasis: the penetration of reality lies beyond the activity of the thinking mind. This is not to posit an anti-rational orientation. In fact, rationalism is not being critiqued here; the human need to set up absolutes in language is.

The second line says:

(2) 名 可 名 非 常 名
ming ke ming fei chang ming.

The name which can be articulated is not the eternal name.

As with the first line, we can give names as we please but they do not end up signifying the ultimate reality. The effect of these two lines is to act as a check against man's passion for absolute concepts and visions of life achieved through language. The lines also mitigate against notions of deities, personal saviors, mythological beings, heavens and hells, and the like. With twelve words, two of which, *dao* and *ming*, are repeated six times, and with a total of five characters in all, Laozi moves the spiritual pursuit from the external and linguistic to the internal and real. These few words effectively act as a negation of religion and ritual, prayer and faith. A realm is pointed to where religion cannot go because the latter by its very institutional nature requires experience by symbols and beliefs. These understandable human products of life experience nevertheless

will not bring one to the ultimate experience of reality. It goes without saying that when deities and language have been put out of bounds for acquiring spiritual experience, which effectively handcuffs man's speculative, verbose, and imaginative faculties, one is readied for another effort. How to proceed in this effort is the subject of the rest of the Daodejing. Laozi has opened a portal; all who wish to pass through must understand the limitation of the thinking, imaging mind. If this requirement is not fulfilled, nothing can be discovered.

The Dao

Well, then, what is the dao? In Chapter 42 Laozi says,

道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物

Chapter 42 dao sheng yi, yi sheng er, er sheng san, san sheng wanwu.

The dao creates the one,
the one creates the two,
the two creates the three,
the three creates the myriad things.

The dao which we cannot know by name is nevertheless found to create a pattern or a causal relation of certain elements. Our world of myriad things is connected by means of a causality of one, two, and three to the dao. While Laozi in the first line of his work states that any thing which can be regarded as the dao is certainly not the eternal dao, here he says that the dao produces our world and presumably does so in a very real as opposed to speculative way.

The orthodox interpretation of the causation declared in this text is as follows: dao creates the one or *taiji*, which is usually translated as the "great ultimate," a close translation of its two characters. Taiji creates the two, *yin and yang*, the forces of polarity and harmony in the world. Yinyang creates the three, *jingqishen*, the triad of human energies that account for human sentience, namely jing, sexual energy; qi, the electric vitality of the human organism; and shen, the consciousness of the human mind. Jingqishen in turn creates the myriad things of this world, a statement which, at this point, is best understood as referring to the sentience or energy of living things.

While this statement is interesting as a description of how the world came into existence, its real value lies in clarifying the steps by which a cultivator achieves the experience of the dao. Here the pattern by which the dao manifests in the world is made clear. Thus we can attain the dao by reversing the course by which it manifests, returning via the three, the two, and the one to the dao. This is called returning to the source. The process by which this is done is called cultivation.

In Chapter 40, Laozi says:

天下万物生于有，有生于无

Chapter 40 tianxia wanwu sheng yu you. you sheng yu wu.

The myriad things in this world are created by existence.
Existence is created by wu.

All the things in life are created by existence, *you*, which in turn is created by *wu*. Wu is the Chinese character that is always paired with you in classical texts. As the word is also used in classical Chinese as a negative adverb (not, without, etc.), Western scholars are prone to translate it as non-existence. Such a translation, while following the logic of its primary linguistic meanings, borders on absurdity in light of the context of the usage and the overall aims of the work. Wu here is clearly a creative force. It produces something. What? Existence. Another formulation of this same principle is *wu sheng you*, wu creates existence. Scholars are often attached to the words in which they have

invested professional zeal. Thus, in the literature of Chinese spirituality, one encounters discussions of how non-existence creates existence, how nothingness creates our existential condition, how death gives birth to life, and the like. This is like saying dark gives birth to light, an impossibility. Without understanding the basic intent of the Daodejing, confusion is an ever-present likelihood.

On Wu

Let's look at the idea of *wu* a little more closely. *Wu* in the Daodejing is clearly used to represent a creative force and is equivalent in usage to the *dao*. *Wu* creates existence in exactly the same way the *dao* creates existence. It is an invisible energy that in Daoist tradition assumes a host of names: *zhenqi*, real qi; *zhengqi*, the true manifesting qi; *xiantianqi*, the qi prior to the existence of the universe; *neiyangqi*, qi of the inner yang (inside the body); *danqi*, qi of the dan. All these formulations point to the experience that the cultivator has when manifesting the energy from *wu* or the *dao*. That is, when one returns to the source and attains the *dao*, the experience of attainment is unlimited energy. This is one of the foremost themes of the Daodejing that we will elaborate below.

The principle *wu sheng you* has another implication which is useful to bring out here, especially when the terminology of the Chinese spiritual tradition can overwhelm one by its apparent abstraction. When the Chinese sage says *wu* produces existence, he means right now, in our moment to moment existence. In other words, our lives are a function of *wu* and if we are cut off from *wu*, our existence ends. The principle *wuxing sheng youxing*, the invisible creates the visible, which is an elaboration of *wu sheng you*, clarifies this causal relationship. *Wuxing* points to the invisible energies that create our life, that is, *jingqishen*. We may easily agree with the principle that the spiritual in life takes precedence over the physical – "we are spiritual beings" – but the principle *wuxing sheng youxing* is quite specific. It means that the *jingqishen* triad of energies create our physical existence.

Imagine our bodies are a hologram created by an energy field. That is, our body is a manifestation of some invisible source. This field creates and maintains the body by virtue of its continuous circulation of energy. Chinese medicine documents how this energy moves. The point here is that maintenance of the physical is by something invisible, not as a secondary cause, but as the primary cause of our existence. This is certainly not the common understanding of the layman or the American medical community. It is also not widely understood outside the community of cultivators even in China today.

The body expires because this invisible force field is depleted, not because one reaches a certain chronological age or the body is overwhelmed by disease. The truth of this assertion is evident when we think of the body as it loses its proprietary force field at death. It decays and decomposes within a few days. With no invisible energies to sustain it, the body is reabsorbed into nature within a few months. If, however, the force field is strengthened, long life and buoyant health are assured. The invisible determines the visible. Long life, which along with buoyant health is the first goal of cultivation, is secured by the understanding of how *wuxing*, the invisible, is cultivated.

Thus a cultivator does not cultivate his or her body, but rather, the field which sustains it. The Western focus on the body and the worship of youthful appearance fails to understand how an invisible energy field maintains the body. From the point of view of cultivation, all attempts to prevent the aging process or to enhance health by external means (exercise, drugs, diet, etc.) cannot succeed, no matter what the effort or how much the zeal. Unless one actively cultivates the field of energy, it will decrease, which ordains the arrival of illness and aging. In terms of principle, one must cultivate the *wuxing* that produces *youxing*. Of course, this is easier said than done, but Chinese tradition illustrates in the historical record how generations of Chinese practitioners

achieved this goal. The Daodejing was the source book for their work.

The Third and Fourth Lines of Chapter One

Let's look at the third and fourth lines of Chapter 1:

Chapter 1 无 名 天 地 之 始
 wu ming, tiandi zhi shi.
Line 3 The origin of the universe is found in wuming, that without name.

Wuming, that which is beyond name, is the source of the universe. The Daoist patriarch Lu Dongbin in his commentary on the Daodejing, says: "The beginning of the universe was an undifferentiated state called *hunyuan* (usually translated as chaos) and one possessed of ultimate purity. The creation of the universe and the separation of yinyang emanate from this source." In the third line we find Laozi, as so often in the Daodejing, making an ontological statement about the source of the world. *Wuming* is equivalent to *dao*, *wu*, *xiantian* already discussed above. It is beyond thought or words.

The next line says:

Chapter 1 有 名 万 物 之 母
 you ming, wanwu zhi mu.
Line 4 What has name is the mother of the myriad things.

All things in this world come from a name. Things mean this world; and they have a source, which Laozi calls the mother. Lu Dongbin says: "The common interpretation of this statement is that it refers to the transformations of nature or the relations between wife/husband, father/son, prince/minister, and friends. The inner interpretation is that it refers to someone who wishes to realize the *dao*, who attains the root within, that manifests like light or a jewel or a precious stone. Here the meaning of mother is seen: it gives birth to something precious." The emphasis is on seeking *xu*, emptiness, in the midst of our ordinary reality. Like the *dao* that can be traced via the causality of one, two, and three, the mother of all things can have its emanation retraced. Lu says: "If one wants to attain the *dao* and attain this *ming*, name, then one will know the mysteries of the mother. This is precisely the mother of ordinary conditioned things, which, nevertheless, possesses luminescence. It is the ordinary things with names that, nevertheless, emanate from the mother."

Existence and Human Beings

Human beings, given the nature of existence, must expend much if not most of their time on procuring the necessities of life. Thus the natural curiosity about the unexplained phenomenon of their lives is given too little time. As a part of the socialization process of participating in the community they were born in, they will take on the values and symbols of the dominant religious tradition. And these are primarily a matter of belief. There is consequently a twofold grip on the mind of man: the struggle for existence, by which one is mesmerized if not terrified by the seen world, by its objects and ways, and how one is to make one's way through it; and the belief in an unseen world, composed largely of deities or malevolent forces which call for unquestioning obedience. These two attitudes present a powerful impediment to understanding any of the insights presented in the Daodejing. Laozi emphasizes throughout his work that there is something that creates this world, that manifests our existence in this very moment. It is that which we need to seek. It is not found by belief or supplication; it has no qualities, yet produces the force field that maintains our existence. In Chapter 70, Laozi says, "My words are easy to understand and to practice. But no one in the world knows them or practices them, primarily because the words point to a source and to the practices that

have a method. Because they do not know these, they cannot know me."

Modern man has to a large degree been released from the grip of unseen religious forces, but is still locked into the forceful grip of necessary materialism. Survival requires an unremitting material life. Many traditions both western and eastern, propose a spirituality that is largely a release from the ways of material life. The emphasis is on renunciation of the world and its things and a corresponding emphasis on simplicity and naturalness. But release from material life does not equal spiritual life in Laozi's formulation. There must be cultivation and attainment of the unseen, the wuxing, the invisible force field that is life itself. When one possesses this insight, material life poses no problem whatsoever. It is just another manifestation of the energy field, a delightful one, to be sure.

The Fifth and Sixth Lines

The first four lines of Chapter 1 basically make two points: one can speculate about the ultimate nature of reality, but such speculations in no way bear any relation to reality, not even as a bridge or medium to enable us to approach reality; and secondly, reality is created by something called the dao and this creative energy is beyond articulation or formulation. These two assertions should not pose much problem to us, for, up to this point, they make no demands on us to *realize* their intent. We just understand them intellectually as best we can. But the fifth and sixth lines of Chapter 1 mark a departure from the preceding statements, for they point directly to personal spiritual cultivation. The first four lines are concerned with the intellectual realm, albeit by denying the use of the intellect, while the next two are concerned with the spiritual, that is, the whole being of an individual and his existence. It is at this point that Laozi becomes difficult to understand, for now he begins positing the various principles by which one attains the dao. And these principles are so distant from our ordinary understanding of life and the world that we cannot, even with sincere and patient application, intuit their formulation.

Earlier we noted the principle that the dao creates the one, the one creates the two, and so on. In the rest of his work, Laozi describes how we reverse this causality so that the ten thousand things return to the three, the three to the two, and the two to the one. This process occurs in our inner experience, and it is a realm beyond intellection, for the first lines of the Daodejing warn that no thought can apprehend the experience one engages in. The thinking faculty must be put on the back burner.

In considering the fifth and sixth lines, it is best to look first at line 6, then at line 5. This is because, in the process of cultivation, one proceeds first by the experience that line 6 describes, arriving at an inner state that then leads to the great illuminations of the dao described in line 5. Laozi reverses the order of this process in the text, for reasons that are not clear to me.

The two lines are:

Chapter One 故 常 无 欲 以 观 其 妙
Line 5 gu chang wu yu yi guan qi miao.
Therefore, without desire one experiences its profundity.

Chapter One 常 有 欲 以 观 其 徼
Line 6 chang you yu yi guan qi qiao.
With intention one cultivates its energy center (qiao).

First, in looking at line 6, we have an direct statement about how one seeks the dao: With intention one cultivates its energy center (qiao). One proceeds through a

process whereby one cultivates an energy center in the body. This is a most important statement. Without a clear understanding of what it means, subsequent statements and principles lose coherence and cogency. The sixth line opens the door to what the Daodejing endeavors to communicate, that is, the insight into how the problem of existence is solved by attainment of the dao, an attainment available only by the inner work with energy centers, through a meditation process focusing on energy centers. Laozi has already laid some ground rules: it is not by deities; it is not by thoughts or words. So how does one do it? By *guan qi qiao*, by cultivating the energy center. Given this insight, other seeming enigmatic statements in the Daodejing begin to make sense.

Thus we find in Chapter 6:

Chapter 6

谷神不死是谓玄牝
gu shen bu si, shi wei xuan pin.

玄牝之门是谓天地根
xuan pin zhi men, shi wei tiandi gen.

The energy of the *gushen* is unlimited;
it is called the *xuan pin*.

The gate of the *xuanpin* is the root of heaven and earth (reality).

Gu shen literally means the valley spirit, and is often so translated. Such a translation, however, is just a guess of scholars who have no idea of what is really being talked about. It gets off on needless tangents about nature spirits and the like which clearly have no place in the context of the work. Here *gushen* refers to the energy center on the perineum called the *xuanpin* (literally the ineffable pin). This is an energy center known to all traditions of meditation practice. In Chinese tradition it has many names, including *huiyin*, *yingqiao*, and *pinmen*. Chapter 6 further points out that this center is actually the place where a human being connects to the universe, it is the gate of heaven and earth. While most religions emphasize the heart as the seat of human nature, the Daodejing says that a human being, whose ultimate being is a manifestation of energy tracable to the dao, connects to the dao via the *xuanpin* center.

Now here is a tangible statement that the reader can use to appraise his or her own experience. Have I experienced anything like an energy center on the perineum? A little reflection reveals that, yes, indeed, this area is quite unusual in our human experience for it is the center of human sexuality. When we talk of "being horny," we refer to energy manifesting in this center. Indeed, the *xuanpin* center is the energy center that feeds human sexuality, for sexual energy finds its source in the *xuanpin*.

Daoist classics often talk about the *dimen*, the earth gate. This name is just another way of talking about the sexual organs. Daoists say this is the primary place where one loses one's *yuanqi*, the original qi energy given at birth. One loses it by sexual orgasm and its loss, and, for women, by menstruation. The emphasis in the classics is that one must close the *dimen*. Once it is closed, the *xuanpin* center will come alive. In doing so, one begins the process of cultivation.

So when Laozi says, "With intention one cultivates its energy center," he refers to the *xuanpin* or *pinmen* energy center. Intention here means leading the consciousness to the *pinmen* and holding it there as a means of gathering energy in the center.

When one understands the implications of what Laozi is talking about in this line, subsequent statements in the Daodejing reveal their significance. Let's look at some of them.

Principles of Energy Cultivation

In Chapter 12, it says:

Chapter 61

大國者下流

da guo zhe xia liu,

天下之交天下之牝

tianxia zhi jiao, tianxia zhi pin.

牝常以靜勝牡

pin chang yi jing sheng mu.

以靜為下

yi jing wei xia.

In the body (literally *guo*, the great country), one moves downward to connect with reality at the pinmen center.

The energy is held constant in the pin center by the principle, "stillness produces the yang energy."

Thus the process of moving downward is accomplished by stillness.

Laozi frequently uses metaphors such as *guo*, country, *wang*, king, *chen*, minister, *min*, people, and the like. Both Chinese and Western scholars have misunderstood these metaphors, reading them literally and thus creating a tradition which sees the Daodejing as a system of political and social ideas. Their interpretations become quite convoluted and abstruse as they must for Laozi's thinking has nothing to do with external reality. In the above chapter, the great country refers to the body. To deal with the great existential problem of the body, Laozi says, one must move downward, *xia liu* in the text. Religious texts around the world, beseech the follower to look to heaven, or to one's heart, or to the afterlife. But the Daodejing says, move downward to the place where reality (*tianxia*) intersects with the body, which is the pin center.

But why "move" to the pinmen? The text answers: "stillness produces yang energy in the pin." If one meditates and holds one's mind in the pinmen, one achieves a still state and energy manifests there. This is the actual invisible (*wuxing*) energy of life, the energy we have lost in a thousand ways, and, save through a meditation process as herein described, an energy difficult to restore. But through this process, energy can be restored and increased to such an extent that it overflows. Thus we see the critical importance of the process and why the text says *yi jing wei xia*, use stillness to move downward. This is a common theme in the Daodejing, as we find in other chapters:

虛其心實其腹

Chapter 3

xu qi xin, shi qi fu.

Empty the mind and fill the abdomen (inner organs).

聖人為腹不為目

Chapter 12

sheng ren wei fu bu wei mu

The sage works to cultivate his abdomen (inner organs), not entertain his eyes.

One moves out of the mind and sensory impressions, cultivating the *fu*, the abdomen, by which is meant the five inner organs (kidneys, heart, liver, lungs, spleen). The organs are where energy is stored and are directly connected to the pinmen center. Medical science sees the organs in their functioning for the maintenance of life. However, it fails to understand that organs store energy even though the evidence for this fact is ever before them in the phenomena of the human sexual orgasm (suitably named) which releases a tremendous burst of energy from the organs themselves. To employ a gross

analogy, the organs are the rocket booster for the flying projectile. Without that boost, sexual orgasm loses intensity. It is because the organs store energy and because nature ordains an absolute limit on the amount of energy given to each individual, that sexual pleasure declines over time. The high of sex diminishes in proportion to the depletion of energy in the organs. A cultivator is someone who is conscious of sexual energy and its actual manifestation in the body. When he cultivates and energy manifests in the pinmen, it will naturally store in the five organs for these organs are connected to the pinmen and each other. Because our biological system has as its foundation an energy system, serious if not fatal illnesses can be cured by meditative practice. This is of profound consequence to human culture as Chinese tradition bears witness.

Elsewhere Laozi says:

Chapter 56 塞其兌閉其門
sai qi duì, bi qi men.

Close the duì, shut the door.

Close the dimen (earth gate) where one's energy inheritance leaks out.

Chapter 10 天門開闔能為雌
tian men kai bi, neng wei ci?

When the gate of heaven (xuanpin) opens and closes, can you gather the ci (yang energy)?

When energy manifests in the xuanpin/pinmen, can you gather it and store it in your body? This is the spiritual process in the Daodejing – one manifests energy by stillness and stores it in one's body. For those who store energy skillfully, they develop an inner "bank" or "reservoir" or qi. Chinese call this gongfu. It is the primary indication of spiritual attainment. However, Laozi warns,

Chapter 24 自伐者無功
zi fa zhe wu gong.

Whoever cuts down their own existence (by outflows and loss) has no gongfu, spiritual attainment.

If one exhausts one's energy, if one cannot close off the outflows, if one cannot reach solid meditative states whereby energy manifests, one will not enjoy any attainment. The proof is in the pudding. If one engages in spiritual life and yet acquires no attainment, no gongfu, the reason is certainly because one does not know how to cultivate the pinmen. This is the critical matter:

Chapter 28 知其雄守其雌為天下谷
zhi qi xiong, shou qi ci, wei tianxia xi.

Whoever can cultivate his sexual energy, by holding one's awareness (shou) in the pinmen, enjoys an overflowing source of energy.

One's sexual energy manifests in the pinmen and is stored. This yields overflowing energy, or as Chapter 6 says, the "gu shen ('valley spirit') never ceases."

Laozi develops the implications of this skill:

Chapter 37 侯王若能守萬物將自化
hou wang ruo neng shou, wan wu jiang zi hua.

If one can hold one's consciousness (the prince metaphor here,) then the things of the world will transform themselves.

Not only can one generate energy in oneself and thus reverse the process of decline and aging, but one does so by a process whereby things themselves no longer attenuate one's life. The flux of existence no longer assails, for one is at the very creative heart of existence and experiences no decline.

Stillness in Cultivation

Continuing our exploration of line 6 of the first chapter, Laozi says that one holds one's consciousness at the pinmen center, an effort which will eventually culminate in a state of stillness. The idea of stillness permeates the Daodejing, and is, in fact, its unifying concept. However, stillness is not the absence of movement as logic would imply (if one is not moving, one is still). Rather it is the source of energy, the invisible spring by which energy manifests in our life. Thus Laozi says,

Chapter 16 歸 根 曰 靜 靜 曰 復 命
gui gen yue jing. jing yue fu ming.

Returning to the root is called stillness.
The attainment of stillness restores the springs of life.

The restoration of energy is none other than the primary purpose of the principles of cultivation. Because our lives necessarily diminish as we grow older – the apparently unavoidable aging process -- decline is the unavoidable fact of our existence and the one to which we eventually pay a most aggrieved attention. Stillness is the means by which we reverse this decline.

Chapter 45 distinguishes two modes of existence and their results:

Chapter 45 躁 勝 寒 靜 勝 熱
zao sheng han, jing sheng re.

Hurry and stress produce coldness;
stillness produces heat.

The distracted hurried life produces a coldness that signifies serious depletion of energy, which is the prime cause of illness and death; the life that cultivates stillness produces a heat that is the manifestation of energy itself. When this heat manifests in the process of meditation one is actually arresting and reversing the process of decline in one's life. An inner heat may seem like a small thing, but Laozi says,

Chapter 52 見 小 曰 明 守 柔 曰 強
jian xiao yue ming, shou rou yue chang.

To cultivate the small results in luminescence.
To nurture an inner softness results in permanence.

The luminescence that results in storing heat in daily meditation is like the light that goes on when the electric current reaches a sufficient voltage. This process of storing heat and energy is one characterized by a softness and suppleness of body and mind:

Chapter 78 弱 之 勝 強 柔 之 勝 剛
ruo zhi sheng qiang, rou zhi sheng gang.

The pliant surpasses the strong;
the soft outlasts the hard.

人之生也柔弱其死也堅剛
ren zhi sheng ye rou ruo. qi si jian gang.

At birth a human being is soft and flexible;
at death, stiff and hard.

乃物草木之生也柔脆其死也枯槁
wanwu cao mu zhi sheng ye rou fei, qi si kugao.

When growing, grasses and trees are soft and pliant;
at death, dry and withered.

故堅強者死之徒柔弱者生
gu jian qiang zhe si zhi tu, rou ruo zhe sheng
之徒
zhi tu.

Thus hardness and force are the way to death,
while the soft and pliant are the way to life.

External strength wears down the body and results in dessication. The soft, pliant body is the result, not of success at stretching and limber exercises, but of the overflow of inner energy. Softness results only from stillness, for the requisite energies that can counter the process of decline are only created in still meditation.

所以有大患者為吾有身及吾
suoyi you da huan zhe, wei wu you shen. ji wu

無身吾有何患故貴以身為
wu shen, wu you he huan? gu gui yi shen wei

天下者則可以寄天下愛以身為
tianxia zhe, ze ke yi ji tianxia ai yi shen wei

天下者乃可以託天下
tianxia zhe nai ke yi tuo tianxia.

The reason I fear a great clamity is because I have a body.

If I did not have a body, what clamity would there be?

Thus for one who values his body as if it were the universe, he can transform the universe.

For one who cherishes his body as if it were the universe, he can transcend the universe.

Our fears in the world can be reduced ^{to} the problem of having a body which is always on the verge of decline. But if we can arrest and reverse that decline, what problem would there be? But how can we escape the body, other than by death? Laozi answers that we control our life (a little universe) by controlling the energy that manifests our life. This control is called transformation, that is, the concentration of jingqishen into a state of oneness, what the Daoist classics call "one thought returns to no-thought" (*yinian gui wunian*). One then transcends the body and the universe. This is stillness and samadhi. The body no longer is an object of fear.

Thus the cultivator concerns him- or herself with moving inner energy, concentrating energies to the point where existence drops away. Chinese described this as *wang wo*, forgetting the self, but the phrase really signifies the cessation of individual existence. One no longer processes thoughts or sensations as an existential center. Everything stops. Buddhists call this *nirvana*, the cessation of existence; and the use of word

cessation to describe the state makes it sound decidedly negative. But it is important to remember that cessation of existence is achieved by an overflow of energy, which can only occur if all the inner impediments to one's existence (illness, outflows, worries and mental problems) are eliminated completely. In the achievement of stillness, samadhi, cessation, one taps a true "fountain of youth:"

Chapter 22 describes this achievement:

Chapter 22 是以圣人抱一為天下式
 shi yi shengren bao yi wei tian xia shi.
 不自見故明不自是故彰
 bu zi jian, gu ming. bu zi shi, gu zhang.
 不自伐故有功不自矜故長
 bu zi fa, gu you gong. bu zi jin, gu chang.

Therefore the sage enters the state of singleness and manifests the pattern of the universe:

He does not see himself, therefore he experiences light.

He does not experience himself, therefore he is luminescent.

He does not exhaust himself, therefore he has gongfu.

He does not stop, therefore he is eternal.¹

Wuwei

The pivotal concept in the Daodejing and one more misunderstood than any other in Chinese tradition is *wuwei*. Wuwei literally means not doing, and it is, accordingly, interpreted by many if not most of its interpreters along the lines set by its semantic elements. We are told wuwei means to do nothing that is not according to the dao or in harmony with nature; that wuwei promotes a style of life where achievement and striving is frowned upon; that wuwei, along with the idea of *bao pu* (maintenance of one's original simplicity) extol the state of pristine effortless. Because the words wuwei seem to negate doing something, interpreters of the Daodejing leap to the conclusion that Laozi is describing a life-style which in modern terms would be called slack. Even if we grant some validity to the popular conception that Daoism promotes harmony with nature (it does, but not in the way people imagine), still the idea of wuwei is not one to encourage harmonious naturalism. Wuwei has other purposes.

The Daodejing faces squarely man's existential plight regarding the use and misuse of his intention. In Chapter 55, it says:

Chapter 55 心使氣曰強物壯則老
 xin shi qi yue qiang. wu zhuang ze lao.
 是謂不道不道早已
 shi wei bu dao. bu dao zao yi.

If the mind tries to move the qi, this is using strength.

If someone tries to build up his strength, this results in aging.

These both destroy the basis for the dao.

If the basis for the dao is lost, death quickly follows.

Man lives but does not understand how life works. He naturally assumes optimum life is characterized by a feeling of robustness, of joyous exuberance. This is his experience of youth and one that he carries in his being as the standard for what life should be. Then, he begins to depart from the standard: he becomes confused, he grows sick, he diminishes through the aging process. Death intrudes its ragged face. In America, the

medical establishment says that the problem is ^{that} ~~because~~ you have not exercised enough, ate well and nutritiously, or maintained a healthy frame of mind. In other words, they say, return to the pattern of youth. The Chinese would fiercely debate these recommendations for they display no insight into life in its immaterial basis. Chinese say the problem is not with your body, but with your qi, namely, you have lost too much of it. Their advice (should you wish to know – they are not pushy) is that you must restore it.

But how to do so? If one uses the mind to move the qi, this is called using strength and is a mistake. If one tries to build up the qi through physical strength (which is the pursuit of the Chinese martial arts), this is called an activity leading to premature aging. Both these approaches undermine the energy (jingqishen) still present in one's body. Thus Laozi says, *zao yi*, early death results.

Thus a conundrum appears. If physical training (exercise, martial arts, the active life) and energy training (taiji, qigong, yoga) do not work and can even prove counter-productive, what is one to do? Laozi answers, one must learn sitting meditation in which one employs the idea of wuwei in stillness. He says:

吾是以知無為之有益

Chapter 43 wu shi yi zhi wuwei zhi you yi.

Thus I know of the increase that comes from the cultivation of wuwei.

This increase is the increase of qi (and thus jingqishen). Remember the primary problem of existence is the loss of qi, (how remarkable that so few people have heard of this seminal idea!). Thus the solution to the problem must involve reversing the loss and beginning a new period of increase. This is the heart of the inner work in Chinese tradition:

為學日益 為道日損

Chapter 48 wei xue ri yi, wei dao ri sun.

Study is a matter of daily accumulation of knowledge.

But the cultivation of the dao is a matter of daily elimination of outflows.

損之又損 以至於無為

sun zhi you sun, yi zhi yu wuwei.

With all the outflows eliminated, one attains wuwei.

When the outflows are eliminated, one arrives in a state of fullness, called wuwei. This is a state that is arrived at by storing energy in such a way that the energy accumulates in the body (in the abdomen and inner organs), where the energy itself seeks out the losses found in the organs. Energy moves of itself to heal the organs, which are in a state of decay even though an illness has not yet manifested. Energy must lead this process of restoration. This is one meaning of wuwei. If we try to do it ourselves, if we try to bring about a certain result by intending it, we only make the situation worse. The body is so complex and has stored so many energy and physical injuries over the years, no doctor or medical authority, to say nothing of one's own feeble understanding, can ascertain what the actual condition of the body is. That must be done through a process of wuwei.

However, this is not just another way of saying, let nature take its course. Nature has been taking its course for some time, a course which results in loss, aging, disease, and death. Wuwei seeks to reverse this process. Laozi says:

我無為而民自化 我好靜而民

Chapter 57 wo wuwei er min zi hua. wo hao jing er min

自正 我无事 而民自富 我无欲 而
zi zheng. wo wushi er min zi fu. wo wuyu er

民自樸
min zi pu.

I am in a state of wuwei, and the qi (*min*, people metaphor) transforms itself.

I love stillness, and the qi finds its own pattern and flow.

I am unmoved and the qi increases of itself.

I am without any consciousness and the qi manifests great purity.
(*desires*)

Here states of energy are built up without any conscious manipulation by the cultivator. But we ask, how is this possible? how can one build up states by wuwei, which, as far as we can tell, still seems to mean, doing nothing? This sounds like getting something for nothing or a perpetual motion machine. It cannot be found in reality.

This is a most reasonable response to the instructions given to a cultivator -- it can't be done! But the problem is that these ideas are useful only insofar as one has trained the mind in a state of one-pointedness, where one can concentrate with skill. Only then will Laozi point out that this effort is a mistake; that one must proceed by "refraining from manipulating the field" that one is developing; that one does so by storing the energy in the abdomen; and that, after a period of time, sufficient energy will be stored such that it moves itself. This movement is the flow of cultivated energy. It is energy that has been created by one's own efforts, and the beginning of its movement is precisely the indication that one is stopping one's decline and reversing the loss of health that had for decades proceeded without apparent cause. This stage is also the beginning of insight into reality, and as that insight deepens, one cannot but notice in other people a complete if not wanton disregard for their energy and how unwise behavior consumes their energy.

The use of wuwei to cultivate still states has two aspects: it marks both the beginning of cultivation and its success. It needs emphasis here that human beings are inveterate doers, in the sense that they always need to move and do things with their bodies, but also in the more critical sense that their minds are always moving. Most people think they are in control of their lives; but how little they realize they are not in control of their mind for even a second. The mind is one vast floodgate that never closes and cannot be closed (save through teaching and discipline). Thoughts, emotions, dreams, sensations never stop for one's entire life. The mind is sometimes compared to a rambunctious monkey which needs to be brought under control. But it is better thought of as a massive forest fire which consumes vast tracts of land by the hour. This blighted land is our invisible *jingqishen*. When Chinese speak of *hao shen*, exhausting one's consciousness, they speak to this ultimate fact of human existence: life is being consumed by the human mind! My teacher, Old Li, often says that no physicist ever lives to age one hundred, for the simple reason that they of all people consume their energy so totally in their work.

Thus when someone begins to practice a spiritual training, even when he tries to develop a serene experience in the world, his mind still overflows with thoughts and sensations. And, paradoxically enough, with practice, the floodgate opens even wider! When the practitioner is told to follow his breath in meditation, his approach to reality is so manipulative that he cannot but control the breath, move it, deepen it, shape it into various patterns, and do everything but refrain from doing. The important point here is that when the mind is instinctually doing, it cannot store energy. Its busy doing is using up energy, so how can it store energy? (As the poet said, "A person not busy being born is busy dying.") It is to this stage of practice that Laozi directs the idea of wuwei. Again, it is not the idea of "letting go" (an idea that is very popular in some

meditative traditions), but one of storing energy. Instead of sitting in a state of naturalness where anything that happens is ok, one actively brings the mind to an energy center, bringing it back when it wanders, and in such a manner, concentrates and stores the jingqishen. Given diligence over time, and the elimination of outflows and restoration of loss, the creation of new energy creates an energy field within. That field will counterbalance the incessant workings of the mind, bringing it, in effect, to stillness. Meditative work is actually one of producing inner intensity, not of finding inner peace. When one eliminates the center of mental functioning altogether (as awful as that may sound), one finds inner peace. On the crest of a wave, one feels no pain.²

The Fifth Line of Chapter 1

We have just looked at the sixth line of Chapter 1 of the Daodejing, a line that includes many of the subjects of the subsequent chapters. Unfortunately, there is a mistake in the presentation I have just made. Line 6 says, "With intention one cultivates its energy center (qiao)." and this intention is the holding of the mind in the center as discussed above. But though this way of using the mind is an aspect of wuwei, the text says this is *you yu*, having the desire (to do something), which I translate as, having the intention. Clearly Laozi is not recommending we use desire to cultivate an energy center, for his teaching is entirely dependent on detaching the motive power of desire from desire itself and storing it in the body in such a way that, as it accumulates, it moves of its own volition. This line is consequently directed to the aspirant who is well short of the stage where energy moves itself, for he is still in the habitual and sluggish frame of mind of ever-doing.

When I first began to learn the practice of cultivation, my teacher would say over and over, don't use force! don't use force! Of course I could not help but use an inner heavy-handedness, even given my best effort. Yet here was the beginning of the teaching of wuwei, which only later I understood as the great foundation of samadhi and the cultivation of energy. The point is wuwei contains a continuum of meaning, and what it means in a particular teaching depends on the stage at which one finds oneself in training. Laozi speaks of *youyu*, practicing with intention, but this intention is so fine that it is really the beginning of wuwei practice.

When we come to line 5, we find the idea of wuwei as the endpoint of this continuum:

Chapter One 故 常 無 欲 以 觀 其 妙
 gu chang wu yu yi guan qi miao.
 Line 5 Thus without intention one experiences its profundity.

Wuyu, without intention (literally, without desire) is a concept equivalent to wuwei. Both concepts state that while one does nothing to manipulate a state of meditation there will nevertheless be a result. In this line Laozi specifies the result – *miao*, something profound, something ineffable. This is the *xiantian qi* that is experienced as an overflow of energy. This is the *dao*, the *wu*, which is the entire focus of the Daodejing. An experience is aimed at in line 6, to cultivate the energy center (pin men) through intention, and achieves success in line 5, to experience it profundity.

In the Chinese spiritual world, cultivation is described as a process where one begins with a practice, *lian*, which evolves into a cultivation, *xiu*, and ends in *zheng guo*, the fruits of cultivation. The three steps

練	修	証果
lian	xiu	zheng guo
practice	cultivation	experience of attainment

are more accurately seen as two steps: *lian* and *xiu-zheng guo*. To speak of cultivation implies a result, while practice only produces effects which never build up over time and are easily dissipated. The *guo* here mean spiritual achievements that are never lost, that are beyond the vicissitudes of time. Practice produces great effects, but because they are produced by intention and technique, they will not last. Here we find the reason why one ultimately grows bored by even the most energetic or exotic practices, for the effort to produce an effect increases over time while the quality of the effect diminishes. There is a law of diminishing returns with *youwei* (conditioned) practices, which the practitioner discovers after five or ten years of practice. Cultivation, on the other hand, avoids the downside of diminishing returns because its effort is not based on intention but on *wuwei*. The difference between the two is so subtle that most people engaged in spiritual practice never discover that there is such a thing as cultivation, which is a way of saying that while one can learn a practice, one cannot achieve *samadhi* through that practice. *Samadhi* is only achieved through cultivation and has as its necessary concomitant, the spiritual *guo* whose non-transitory nature means one's effort has produced real lasting results.

Laozi talks about this *guo* as a *wu*, a thing: 物

Chapter 21

道之為惟恍惟惚
 dao zhi wei wu. wei huang wei hu,
 惚兮恍兮其中有象
 hu xi huang xi, qi zhong you xiang.
 恍兮惚兮其中有物
 huang xi hu xi, qi zhong you wu.

The dao produces a thing.
 In the fog-like mist of meditation,
 a sign of it appears.
 In the cloud-like state of *samadhi*,
 a thing manifests.

This *wu*, thing, is the manifestation of *xiantian*, of the *dao*, of *wu* – the creative force of the universe. Not much can be said about it, for anything we say will only have reference to this world and if, by analogy, we give some feature to the experience, it will only mislead. Thus Laozi states that it cannot be talked about with any accuracy. Be that as it may, there is something there that is real. In meditation an experience occurs that can be repeated as one pleases, and this experience is characterized by a manifestation of great energy. Laozi says it is a *wu*, a thing. This is also the name that the Sixth Patriarch, Hui Neng, gives to it. Daoist tradition has other names for it, including *dan* (the "elixir"); the *dao zhu*, jewel of the *dao*; and *xuan guan*, mysterious gate. Buddhists call it the *sheli*; *fo zhu*, jewel of the buddha; *mani*, jewel in the lotus, and the like.

In Chapter 25, Laozi talks more about this *wu*:

Chapter 25

有物混成先天地生
 you wu hun cheng. xian tian di sheng.
 寂兮寥兮獨立而不改
 ji xi liao xi. du li er bu gai.
 周行而不殆可以為天下母
 zhou xing er bu dai. ke yi wei tian xia mu.

There is a thing that arises in the serene state of *samadhi*.

It manifests from a state prior to heaven and earth.
 It is attained in a state of stillness.
 It establishes itself of its own accord and never changes.
 It is an energy that flows without ceasing.
 This is the mother of the universe.

Its key characteristic is that it flows without ceasing, *zhou liu er bu dai*. The entire effort of the cultivator is summed up in this phrase, for within it we find the great attainment that makes the hardships of cultivation worthwhile. As prize, one enjoys ceaseless energy. The harsh afflictions of disease, aging, and infirmity retreat before such energy. One has *huan tong*, returned to the state of a child, where one's energy is replete and pure. It overflows like a spring that has its unlimited source within the mountains.

The two characters *zhou liu*, circulating flow, also point to the Daoist principles of *xiao zhoutian* and *da zhoutian*, the lesser and greater heavenly circulations (the word *zhou*, circulation, is the same in both phrases). These circulations actually describe the circuit that qi follows when it overflows; the *xiao zhoutian* is the route between the kidneys and heart while the *da zhoutian* is the route up the spine and down the front of the body. This flow of energy is greatest in stillness when all outflows are closed, the mind is focused, and a state of concentration is achieved. One enters a state where the *xiantian* energy moves and some thing, the *wu*, manifests. It is described as a pellet or jewel or tiny rice kernel out of which the qi manifests. This is the *jin dan*, the golden dan, and it is located in the lower abdomen in the *dantian*, the field of the dan.

In Chapter 46, Laozi points out the importance of this overflowing energy:

Chapter 46

罪莫大於所欲
 zui mo da yu ke yu.

禍莫大於不知足
 huo mo da yu bu zhi zu.

咎莫大於欲得
 qiu mo da yu yu de.

故知足知足常足
 gu zhi zu, zhi zu chang zu.

The greatest mistake is in the act of desiring.

The greatest disaster is not knowing how to overflow (with energy).

The greatest qi is in attaining energy.

Thus to experience energy overflowing is to enjoy the endless delight of energy flowing.

Once one eliminates the loss sustain to one's life by desire, one begins to reverse the condition of depletion one finds oneself in. One restores one's qi. When it reaches a certain level, it is *zu*, full. It then begins to move and overflow along the *zhoutian* circuits. This state is extraordinary and thus Laozi says in the last line: *zhi zu chang zu*, to know this overflowing energy is to *always* experience endless delight (he plays on the word *zu*, which means both full and content).

Lines Seven, Eight, Nine

The five thousand words of the Daodejing are, in a sense, all pointing to this condition of *chang zu*, eternal fullness, eternal delight. Laozi concludes Chapter 1 giving emphasis to the attainment the cultivator achieves. He says:

Chapter 1
Lines 7-8

此兩者同出而異名
si liang zhe, tong chu er yi ming.

同謂之玄
tong wei zhi xuan.

玄之又玄，眾妙之門
xuan zhi you xuan, zhong miao zhi men.

These two, though having different names, manifest from the same source.

They are both profound.

How profound are they!

They are the gate by which the myriad mysteries are revealed.

The two stages of cultivation described in the preceding lines 5 and 6, the cultivation of the energy center and the experience in stillness of the *miao*, mystery, come from the same place, that is, from the *dao*. They lead to ^{so} a sublime experience, it must be called *xuan*, profound. And even more! they open to countless mysteries that make up this universe that we live in. These mysteries are reality seen in its actuality, beyond illusion. One is beyond illusion for one is beyond words and thoughts; indeed, one is beyond consciousness itself. One is just *zu*, overflowing. In the *Huangting Classic* it says: "The Daoist immortal does not possess consciousness. He merely gathers his *jing* and builds up his *qi* and penetrates reality."⁹

In Chapter 15, Laozi sums up the state of the cultivator's being (having transcended thought and cognition):

Chapter 15

古之善為士者
gu zhi shan wei shi zhe,

微妙玄通
wei miao xuan tong.

The ancient sages who were skilled at cultivation possessed four characteristics:

subtlety; access to the mysteries; experience of the profundity; and penetration of reality.

These four characteristics describe the realm someone who enters stillness moves in. It goes without saying, that such a person has achieved mastery of existence. In the language of the *Daodejing*, he has *de dao*, attained the *dao*.

Sweetness and Light

The comedian Jackie Gleason used to end his television show with his signature line, "How sweet it is!" His burly body would hop with delight. How SWEET it is! The audience roared in approval. This buoyant humorous surprising yes to the moment is precisely what the cultivator feels after each meditation practice. It is what Laozi talks about: *zhou liu er bu dai*, the unceasing flow of energy. It is the source of the gentle smile of the Buddha on the altar sculpture throughout Asia. When energy moves of itself, one feels an inner delight. It is precisely the experience of youth. This is why the cultivator's first goal is to *fan lao huan tong*, to reverse the aging process and return to the energy of youth.

His second goal is to attain *xiantianqi*, the *qi* of the universe. This is experienced as light. When the *Daodejing* talks about stillness and *wuwei*, it means that no presid-

ing consciousness or awareness is there. Both Daoists and Buddhists emphasize there is nothing, nothing, nothing. What's there? Light.

Thus we can say sweetness and light comprise the spiritual realm of the cultivator. Within this realm something happens which he does not create nor has control over. It is *zi ran*, coming of itself, which is, interestingly enough, also the Chinese word for nature. More importantly, it is always coming.

* * *

Notes

¹The following are additional quotations from chapters from the Daodejing on the idea of stillness:

- Chapter 16 zhi xu ji, shou jing du.
To arrive at ultimate emptiness
requires the cultivation of stillness.
- Chapter 26 zhong wei qing gen, jing wei cao jun.
The heavy can be said to be the root of the light.
Just so stillness is the master of the rash mind.
- Chapter 28 zhi qi xiong, shou qi ci, wei tianxia xi.
wei tianxia xi, chang de bu li.
fu gui yu yinger.
Know the source of the yang,
hold the mind in the pinmen,
become a receiver for the universe.
As a receiver of the universe,
one is never separate from the qi.
Thus one returns to the exuberance of a child.
- Chapter 32 fu yi jiang zhi zhi, zhi zhi suo yi bu dai.
pi dao zhi zai tianxia, you chuan gu zhi yu jiang hai ye.
Thus one must come to a state of stopping (cessation, fixity).
This state of stopping is what produces the unceasing movement of qi.
If we look for an analogy of this dao in the world,
it would be the unceasing movement of water
from streams and valleys to rivers and oceans.
- Chapter 44 zhi zhi bu dai, ke yi chang jiu.
If one knows how to come to a state of cessation of existence
where energy flows unimpeded, one will live to a great age.

²The following are additional quotations from chapters from the Daodejing on the idea of wuwei:

- Chapter 3 chang shi min wu zhi wu yu,
shi fu zhi zhe bu gan wei,
wei wu wei, ze wu bu zhi.
Continuously cause the qi (*min*, people) to be beyond knowing
and desire.
Cause the one accustomed to knowing to not do anything.
By thus doing wuwei, there is nothing that is not done.
- Chapter 29 jiang yu qu tianxia, er wei zhi,
wu jian qi bu de yi.
tianxia shen qi bu ke wei ye.
wei zhe bai zhe, zhi zhe shi zhi.
I notice that for those who seek to possess the universe by

some means or other.
Things do not turn out well at all.
The wondrous energy of the universe cannot be had by getting.
Those who try to get it by doing end up destroying it.
Those who try to control it end up losing it.

Chapter 37

dao chang wuwei er wu bu wei.
hou wang ruo neng shou, wanwu jiang zi hua.
hua er yu zuo, wu jiang zhen zhi yi wu ming zhi pu.
wu ming zhi pu, yi jiang bu yu.
bu yu yi jing.
tianxia zi zheng.

The dao always manifests by wuwei and there is nothing that it does not accomplish.
If the mind (literally *houwang*, the king) can understand the process of *shou*, gathering energy, then the myriad things will transform themselves.
But if things are transformed through intention or desire, I must be cautious and absorbed in the simplicity of wuwei.
But I shall not even desire this simplicity.
To realize this desireless I employ stillness.
Then the world rights itself.

Chapter 38

shang de wuwei, er wu yi wei.
xia de wei zhi, er you yi wei.

The highest energy (literally *de*, virtue) manifests wuwei, and is not manifested by doing.
The most ordinary energy is always doing, and is bounded by doing.

Chapter 47

shi yi sheng ren bu xing er zhi,
bu jian er ming,
bu wei er cheng.

Thus the sage knows without making an effort;
sees without using words;
accomplishes his task without effort.

Chapter 69

yong bing you yan:
wu bu gan wei zhu er wei ke.
bu gan jing cun er tui chi.
? shi wei xing wu xing, gun? wu ge?, reng wu di.
zhi wu bing, huo mo da yu qing di.
qing di ji sang uw bao.
gu kang bing xiang jia, shuai zhe sheng yi.

There is a saying in using soldiers (soldiers symbolize energy).

"I dare not be the host. I prefer being the guest."
"I dare not move forward an inch. I prefer retreating a foot."
This is called employing a method that does nothing.
? That moves? without a ge trace?
All while one recognizes no enemy and keeps no soldiers.
There is no disaster greater than underestimating one's enemy.
Underestimating one's enemy winds up as a funeral for my precious things (*jingqishen*).

Therefore, to resist the soldiers (energy) is to add to them?
The loser prevails. ?

Chapter 73

yong yu gan ze sha.
yong yu bu gan ze huo.

Those courageous in acts of doing wind up dead.
Those courageous in not doing benefit their lives.

Chapter 75

min zhi ji, yi qi shang shi shui zhi duo. shi yi ji.
min zhi nan zhi, yi qi shang zhi wuwei. shi yi nan zhi.
min zhi qing si, yi qi qiu sheng zhi qie. shi yi qing si.
fu wei wu yi sheng wei zhe, shi gui yu chang sheng.

The cause of the loss of energy (literally the famine of the people)
is that the head (literally, *shang*, upper area) consumes too much.
Thus there is loss (famine).

The reason energy (literally, *min*, people) is hard to control is
that such control requires the head (*shang*) to employ wuwei.
Thus there is difficulty in control.

The reason some use energy in so reckless a manner is that
they seek the highs of life.

Thus there is reckless behavior.

Therefore, only a person who does not bound himself by doing
enjoys the blessings of a long life.

³ Chapter 18, Outer Classic. Xian ren dao shi fei you shen, ji jing lei qi yi cheng zhen.