

TAOIST MEDITATION

Methods for Cultivating a Healthy
Mind and Body

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Taoism, one of the most ancient of Eastern traditions, is drawing increasing attention in the modern West. Interest in Taoism is no longer confined to fringe elements, as some would prefer, but has become part of the normal mentality of conscious individuals and cosmopolitan thinkers in many areas of contemporary life.

Part of the popularity of Taoism in the West might be due to the fact that Taoism is scientific yet also humanistic and spiritual. Taoism has a capacity for subtle pervasion because it can be understood and practiced within the frameworks of other world religions, or without any religious framework at all. This selfless adaptability may be why Taoism has been able to penetrate Western cultures without the limitations of theological doctrine or religious identity.

Some of the specialized arts originating in Taoist tradition, such as bare-hand martial disciplines, acupuncture, herbal medicine, and therapeutic massage, are becoming increas-

ingly familiar in the West. Taoist social philosophy and strategic thinking have also proved to be of great interest to Western people in various walks of life. These are among the dimensions of Taoism that have attracted the attention of professionals in many areas—political and military; agricultural, industrial, and commercial; educational, medical, and scientific.

Meditation is one element of Taoism that interests a broad spectrum of people, because the state of mind is central to the well-being and efficiency of the whole organism. Taoist meditation is for enhancement of both physical and mental health, as these two facets of well-being are intimately related to one another. Modern scientific understanding of the mind-body continuum confirms traditional Taoist beliefs about the effects of mental states on physical conditions and vice versa.

This volume presents a selection of materials on Taoist meditation, touching upon a wide range of topics traditionally taken up by Taoists for the purpose of all-around human development. Having been written in China, they are couched in the customary usages of Chinese culture, particularly the unitarianism of the last millennium, in which Taoist, Confucian, and Buddhist teachings are commonly used together for nondogmatic balance in higher education.

A considerable amount of material from this tradition, in both classical and unitarian phases, is currently available in English translation. There is no fixed system of thought or practice in Taoism, and many different methods have been articulated over the centuries. Different temperaments and different times have different requirements, according to Taoist teaching, so the responses of the Tao to these varying conditions must themselves differ to be effective. This is the

main reason for the publication of a variety of materials from this tradition, to reflect the experiences of different people and thereby achieve greater balance and address a broader spectrum of human temperament than does sectarian dogmatics.

Besides true Taoist teachings, it is averred in the literature, there are many false or deteriorated forms of supposedly Taoist practice. Warnings to this effect have been circulated for many centuries. This is another reason for the presentation of a range of traditional materials, so that the public may have some basis for the understanding and evaluation of particular people or practices purporting to represent Taoism.

The first selection presented here is a work called *Anthology on the Cultivation of Realization* by an unknown author known only by the style Cultivator of Realization. Discovered in manuscript form and published in 1739, it appears to be a product of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Citing Taoist, Confucian, and Buddhist teachings, the author emphasizes balanced development of the natural, social, and spiritual elements of human life through meditations on a wide variety of topics.

The second selection is a very famous manual on meditation, *Treatise on Sitting Forgetting* by Sima Chengzhen of the Tang dynasty (618–907). The cosmopolitan culture of the Tang dynasty has often been called the golden age of Chinese civilization. The great schools of Eastern Buddhism flourished during the Tang dynasty, exerting a powerful influence on the subsequent evolution of Confucianism and Taoism. This *Treatise on Sitting Forgetting* is clearly Taoistic, yet it is generally phrased in a manner acceptable to Confu-

cians and Buddhists. It is often quoted in later works on the subject of Taoist meditation.

The third selection consists of sayings of Ma Danyang, a famous Taoist wizard of the Song dynasty (960–1279). Danyang, whose Taoist name means Cinnabar Sunlight, was one of the great disciples of Wang Chongyang, the founder of the Northern Branch of Complete Reality Taoism, a powerful neo-Taoist movement reviving both contemplative and social elements of Taoism. The austere spirituality of the Northern Branch of Complete Reality Taoism is reminiscent of Chan, or Zen, Buddhism, which many neo-Taoists studied, but it is also an organic response to the problems and hardships of a society under foreign occupation.

The fourth selection is taken from an anthology called *Secret Writings on the Mechanisms of Nature*. This is a collection of excerpts from 163 sources of Taoist tradition, including ancient classics, writings on meditation and spiritual alchemy, and the admonitions and instructions of the great luminaries of Taoist spirituality through the ages.

The fifth selection is a discourse on the mental refinement represented by the science of spiritual alchemy. It is attributed to Zhang Sanfeng, a semimythological figure of the Ming dynasty to whom, or to whose school, a great many works of this genre are attributed. Zhang Sanfeng was supposed to have been a great alchemist and is traditionally associated with the form of exercise known as Taijiquan, or Tai Chi Chuan.

Presented here is a text entitled *Zhang Sanfeng's Taiji Alchemy Secrets*. Just as martial artists, such as Shaolin boxers and Zen duelers and archers, commonly practiced meditation, the interior foundation of Tai Chi is also traditionally associated with internal meditation practice. This alchemy

too is based on awareness of the connection between mind and body, and its exercise raises the physical practice of Tai Chi now quite popular in the West, to a greater level of total fulfillment.

The sixth and final selection in this volume is taken from *Secret Records of Understanding the Way*, a rare and remarkable manuscript collection of talks by an anonymous Taoist known only by a devotional name. This appears to be a work of the late Qing dynasty (1644–1911), clearly following traditional lines yet with a candor characteristic of modern times.

ANTHOLOGY ON THE CULTIVATION OF REALIZATION

THE WAY

If people want to do the finest thing in the world, nothing compares to learning. If they want to be the best of learners, nothing compares to learning the Way. Master Zhu said, "Learning is for seeking the Way; what is the use of learning otherwise?" Even professional promotion is something extraneous; what a pity it has corrupted so many people! The *Tao Te Ching* says, "To establish an emperor and set up high officials, one may have a great jewel and drive a team of horses, but that is not as good as advancing calmly on this Way."

Talent is exploited by others and rarely reaches its end; virtue is cultivated by oneself, and it has a definition. The Way is undefined, but when used it is inexhaustible. Therefore superior people only study the Way: they look upon merit and fame, wealth and status, as floating clouds, letting

them go and come without being moved by them while in their very midst.

If superior people only study the Way, is it because they gain some benefit? Yes, it is. What is that benefit? Those who study the Way study what is in the self. The mind can be broadened, the body can be benefited; sickness can be cured, death can be avoided. No benefits are greater than these.

Do people who study the Way actually gain these benefits and pleasures? If they do, then why do people of the world all get irritated when they see people who study the Way, considering them eccentrics or phonies? The *Tao Te Ching* says, "When superior people hear of the Way, they travel it diligently. When mediocre people hear of the way, they seem aware, yet are as if oblivious. When lesser people hear of the Way, they laugh at it out loud. What they don't laugh at couldn't be the Way."

PRINCIPLE

The Way is one and only one. On the celestial level it is called destiny; on the human level it is called essential nature. On the phenomenal level it is called principle.

This principle circulates throughout the world, appearing in daily activities. Every event and every thing has a natural principle, which cannot be dispensed with. Thus there is a principle whereby things are as they are; it cannot be altered, only followed.

Superior people observe things in terms of principle—right or wrong, good or bad, they deal with them accordingly. This is called selflessness. Selflessness results in objectivity; objectivity results in clarity. Clarity results in

dealing with events accurately and comprehending the nature of things.

If you view things through your ego, then love and hatred arise uncontrollably and you cannot avoid indulging feelings. When you indulge feelings, then you are being subjective. When you are subjective, you are ignorant. When you are ignorant, you are mixed up and confused; you are only aware of yourself, not of principle.

When there is principle, there is energy; when energy is manifest, principle is hidden. When there is energy, there is form; when form is manifest, energy is hidden. Principle is always balanced, whereas energy is partial; form is even more partial. Balance is good in all respects; there is something that is not good in partiality. If you want to convert what is not good in partiality to return to the goodness of balance, you must examine yourself closely on the brink of action. Expand and fulfill what emerges from the balance of principle; cut off and eliminate what comes from the partiality of form. After a long time, principle will naturally remain, while desires will naturally disappear.

The principles of the world must be investigated, yet they cannot all be investigated completely. There is an essential point, which is to discern confusion in one's own mind. With discernment comes clarity; with clarity comes truthfulness. With truthfulness, the principles of the world are apprehended and centered poise is attained.

To know that the one good is balance and yet not to reach balance, to know all phenomena are mind and yet not to understand mind—this is confusion. To know the matter of birth and death is serious and yet not to realize birthlessness, to know impermanence is swift yet not to realize there is fundamentally no speed—this is confusion.

Principle is originally there; just call it to mind and it is there of itself. Desire is originally not there; if you can just see through it, it disappears of itself. Stopping desire and keeping to principle are basically not two things; to the extent that you have stopped desire, to that extent you keep to principle. Nothing benefits people more than principle, yet those who keep to principle are few. Nothing harms people more than desire, yet those who indulge desires are many.

When people have desires, it is like trees having insects; consumed within unknown, before long they collapse. Those who think desire is fun do not realize desire is like fire; if you do not put it out, you will burn yourself. Your spirit will suffer from irritation, alcohol and sex will wear out your vital energy, producing illness and ulcers, so you cry out in pain day and night. Buddhists who say you suffer from your sins after death do not realize you already suffer while still alive.

HEAVEN AND EARTH

The Great Way is formless; the universe is the Way with form. The universe itself does not speak; sages are a universe that can speak. I did not get to see the sages, but I have read their classic writings. By reading their classic writings, one can understand their principles; how is that different from seeing the sages?

God creates our bodies, God bestows our nature. Inside and outside are both from God; how dare we derange them? We are within God, God is in our hearts; if we see the universe and emulate its purity, this is not different from the Great Way. If we have even a little selfish intent, we experience penalties that are not trivial.

The physical body is God-given nature; if you act in accord with God-given nature, you will spontaneously be free of the burden of human desires. Daily tasks are norms; act in obedience to the laws of God and there will be no mistaken excesses.

The path of humanity is always coordinated with heaven and earth in the alternation of movement and stillness. Human energy is always in communion with heaven and earth in the alternation of exhalation and inhalation.

I have read that the sun going down into the earth is a symbol of the fire of the heart descending, and the moon reaching the center of the sky is a symbol of the water of the kidneys rising. Gazing upward, we see the North Star abiding in its place, with the other stars revolving around it; so it is called the pivot of the sky. Since even the heavens have a pivot—which is considered the root of creation—human beings also have a pivot, which is considered the source of nature and life.

Even though they are equally human, there are so-called great people who match their qualities with heaven and earth. Try examining your own mind and your own nature—how may they match heaven and earth? If they match, then be diligent; if not, then quickly reform. Do this, and attaining human greatness will not be a worry.

Heaven produces, earth develops; they are our universal father and mother. Heaven is active, earth is still; they are our universal guide and teacher. The past sages were the children of heaven and earth; the future sages are kindly descendants of heaven and earth. Those who actually love their parents are great in virtue; they will surely receive life. Those who actually respect their teachers learn from the ground up and arrive at the peak.

HUMAN LIFE

Human life is the ultimate; when the ultimate goes into action it produces positive energy as fire. Fire is spirit. When the ultimate becomes quiescent it produces negative energy as water. Water is vitality. The fire of spirit and the water of vitality combine subtly and congeal between the two kidneys to constitute the root of original energy.

Before we are born, the clarity or turbidity of our endowment of energy comes from God's bestowal—humans can have nothing to do with it. After we are born, perversity or rectitude of human character comes from our own making—God cannot oversee it.

As heaven and earth give birth to human beings, those of higher intelligence are of course few; those of basest folly are also few. It is the middling who are most numerous. Middling people can strengthen themselves until they are not different from those of higher intelligence; but if middling people neglect themselves, how are they different from the lowest fools?

People today only know they are offspring of their parents; they do not realize that they and their parents are all offspring of the Way. Therefore superior people invariably seek to attain the Way, so they will thereafter have nothing to be ashamed of before heaven and earth, no disgrace before heaven and earth.

Master Geng said, "The Way of the wise kings Wen and Wu has not yet collapsed; it is in people. It was not only in the people of the past; it is also in people of the present age. It is not only in people of the present age; it will also be in people of the future." When a person is born, a person has

one body; in each body is a real human being. The spiritual subtlety of a real human communes with heaven and earth; the clarity and calm of a real human is free from dust. The real human has never grown more or less; the real human being has never died or been born. If you can just nurture the real human being, this will be better than a pauper obtaining ten thousand pieces of gold.

Mencius said, "The difference between humans and animals is slight; common people obliterate it, superior people maintain it. Those who maintain it become sages; those who obliterate it become beasts." When they obliterate it, they turn into beasts right away, not in another life after death.

Nature has five forces—metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. They are called forces because they never cease; if they ceased for even a while, they could not be called forces. Humanity has five constants. They are called constants because they are invariable; if they varied for even a moment, they could not be called constants.

These five forces and five constants are inherent in the human body, where they constitute five organs—heart, liver, pancreas, lungs, and kidneys. The five organs are the main root giving life to people; if this main root is damaged, it cannot sustain life. Therefore when enlightened physicians treat disease, they invariably harmonize the five organs first.

When the five forces operate in the course of daily activities, they constitute the five norms. The five norms are the relationship between government and people, between parents and children, between husband and wife, between older and younger siblings, and between friends. The five norms are the path of success for people; if they neglect this way of success, they cannot be human. Therefore when ancient sages educated people, first they elucidated the principles of

the five norms; and yet there are people of the present generation who seek the way by mortifying their physical bodies and departing from human norms. They are certainly unaware that they are wrong; and when people of the world revere and worship them out of amazement, they too don't know they're wrong.

OLD AGE

People all say that after sixty you age year by year; after seventy, you age month by month; after eighty, you age day by day. I am more than eighty years old—now what? From now on, each day I live is a day lent by Heaven for the Way—how dare I waste it? Even if I attain the Way right now, it is already late—how could it be admissible to delay any further?

A long time ago three elders were talking about impermanence. One elder said, "Of those who attend this year's party, who knows who will be missing next year." Another elder said, "What you're talking about is far away. When we take off our shoes and socks tonight, we don't know whether or not we will put them on again tomorrow." The third elder said, "What you're talking about is still remote. When we exhale this breath, we don't know if we will breathe in again."

The wise do not lose time, the brave do not think twice. If you get to know the Way today, you should set to work this very day; when you know, that is when to start. If you say you do not have the leisure today and will wait for another day, I'm afraid that when you want to do it you won't be able to anymore.

Human beings have three treasures—vitality, energy, and

spirit. In old age, beware of exhausting vitality; when vitality is exhausted, you die. In old age, beware of leaking energy; if energy is drained, you die. In old age, beware of dissociation of the spirit; if the spirit is gone, you die.

How can you avoid exhausting vitality? Is it necessary to stay away from sex? How can you avoid leaking energy? Is it necessary to speak little? How can you avoid dissociation of spirit? Is it necessary to be desireless? The spirit cannot be stabilized by force; when the mind and breathing rest on each other, then the spirit naturally stabilizes. Energy is not to be drained casually; forget words and keep centered and energy is not drained. Vitality is not to be lost through leakage; recirculate vitality to replenish the brain and vitality does not leak.

Some ask, when people age and their physical energy has deteriorated, how can it be replenished? By being careful of your speech you can replenish your lungs. By moderating food and drink you can replenish your stomach. By stopping worry you can replenish your heart. By getting rid of anger you can replenish your liver. By stopping promiscuous lust, you can replenish your kidneys and generative organs.

If asked for more, I would say don't worry about not replenishing; beware of replenishing and then wasting again. I have therefore said, after a hundred days of replenishment you do not see excess; but one day of waste and you sense insufficiency.

Look at the plants and trees; their foliage flourishes, then drops in late autumn, returning to the roots, as a natural pattern. Returning to the root, it does not die but regenerates come springtime. From this principle we can see that endless regeneration is the Way of nature, while returning to their roots is the inherent pattern of beings. Those who

know the inherent pattern and do not violate the Way are real people. That is why "real people breathe from their heels"—the heels are like the root. During the three months of winter, which is the season of return to the root, you should quietly nurture this.

SICKNESS

How does sickness arise? Everyone creates psychological afflictions based on wandering thoughts. Once psychological afflictions have arisen, they injure the heart within. Once the heart is injured, it cannot nurture the stomach, so one does not enjoy food. When the stomach is debilitated, the lung energy will be deficient, thus causing a cough. Once there is a cough, water energy dries up, so wood energy is incomplete—the hair burns, the muscles are debilitated; when the weakness spreads throughout the five organs, one dies.

When wandering thoughts sprout and stir, this is when sickness originates. People today do not notice this; they invariably wait until pain affects their bodies before they consider themselves sick, not knowing it was not an overnight thing but developed gradually.

Outside the body there are six extremes—wind, cold, heat, humidity, dryness, and fire. Inside there are seven feelings—joy, anger, sadness, happiness, worry, fear, and surprise. Those who get sick because of the seven feelings are internally impaired and develop symptoms of deficiency. Those who get sick because of the six extremes are externally destabilized and develop illnesses of excess.

Deficiency calls for replenishment, excess should be drained off. Sickness resulting from injury to the temporal physical energy can be cured by herbs, minerals, acupuncture.

ture, and moxabustion; sickness resulting from internal damage to the primal immaterial vitality and spirit cannot be cured without inner gazing and quiet nurturing.

The ten great physicians cured people's physical ills; the sages of the Three Teachings cured people's mental ills. When friends are sick, everyone knows to look in on them; but when people are sick themselves, they don't know how to look after themselves.

If you know how to watch yourself, gazing inwardly you see no mind, gazing outwardly you see no body. Since mind and body are not there, who is it that suffers illness? Who is it that is not ill? If you can see clearly, you will spontaneously be unburdened.

When you always think about illness, then your materialism gradually diminishes. When you are always on guard against death, then the mindfulness of the Way naturally develops.

Once upon a time a man had a heart ailment. He met an eminent monk who told him, "Your illness originates in afflictions. Afflictions arise from errant thoughts.

"Now then, there are three kinds of errant thoughts. If you think back to the good times and bad over the decades, the favors and hostilities, the various idle emotions and feelings, this is errant thought of the past.

"When things come up, you should respond accordingly. If instead you insist on forming opinions, you hesitate indecisively. This is errant thought of the present.

"When you hope for all the wealth and status you wish someday, or you hope your children will get their degrees and be successful in their time—even though these are things that cannot necessarily be accomplished and cannot necessarily be obtained—this is errant thought of the future.

"These three kinds of errant thoughts suddenly occur and then suddenly disappear—Chan Buddhists call this the illusory mind. If you can see it is error, then it will melt away—Chan Buddhists call this the awake mind. Thus it is said, 'Don't worry about the occurrence of thoughts, only beware of being slow to notice it happening. The occurrence of thought is sickness; not continuing thoughts is medicine.' "

The eminent monk also said to the man with the heart ailment, "Your sickness is also failure of water and fire to mix.

"Generally speaking, obsession with beauties to the point of debauchery is externally stimulated lust; a wet dream caused by thinking of beauties at night is internally produced lust.

"Attachment to these two dissipates the brain vitality. If you can stop them, then the water energy associated with them will naturally be produced in abundance, so it can rise to mix with the heart.

"When you ponder writings to the point where you forget to sleep and eat, this is called abstract obstruction.

"When you pursue your business or profession without refraining from overwork, this is called concrete obstruction.

"Although these two are not human lusts, still they damage the soul. If you can relax them, then the fire of the heart will not flare upward, so it can descend to mix with the genital energy.

"Thus sense data are not objectivized and sense organs have no partners. Going against the flow to return to one, the functions of the six senses are not active."

The man with the heart ailment followed the eminent monk's advice. Staying alone in one room, he emptied his mind of all objects. When he had been sitting there for over a month, his heart ailment seemed to disappear.

When you have an illness, know it yourself. Once you know it, you should cure it as soon as possible. If you dislike the cure and avoid facing the illness, when impermanence comes upon you it will be too late for regret.

DEATH

When people are in the prime of life, there is nothing they won't do in pursuit of desires. Then their health is damaged and all sorts of ailments occur. When death is approaching, even houses full of sons and daughters cannot help them; no matter how much money they have, it cannot buy them health. Having regrets when you get to the point of death is too late.

Who does not fear death? We should beware of it *before* we are dying. If we wait until we are dying to beware of death, then death will be hard to escape. Who does not fear sickness? We should beware of it *before* we get sick. If we wait until we get sick to beware of sickness, then sickness will be hard to cure.

Observe the things in the world—is anything more important than nature and life? Think of all the events in the world—are any greater than birth and death?

Everyone likes life but not the path of long life. Everyone dislikes death but not the things conducive to death.

While people are in the world, events go on continuously, and they eventually die; on the brink of death, what means can be used to avoid it? It is better to change your attitude as soon as possible, letting go of all sorts of entanglements in sense objects, to become a long-lived person beyond the world. Wouldn't that be good?

Some may ask, we have been wrapped up in the objects

of the senses for a long, long time; won't it be hard to let go of them all at once, even if we want to? The answer to this is that you are unwilling to let go—that is why you say it's hard. Suppose you die—is there anything you don't let go of? Even though you're not dead now, suppose yourself to be already dead—when you let go of everything, what is not wondrous?

It is also asked what we let go of. The answer is that we let go of the four gross elements, the five clusters, seeds of emotionalized consciousness. Real practitioners of the Way should be as if totally dead once, and then return to life. For people who are totally dead, there is no world wrapping them up, and no mystic principle. When you reach total cessation like this, only then is it settled.

Confucius said, "If you hear the Way in the morning, you can die content that night." This saying teaches people the critical point. It seems to mean that when superior people have heard the Way, they comprehend life and death in an instant.

SUFFERING

Simply because they cannot get rid of one thing, namely craving, people crave fame and profit and become bound by fame and profit; they crave wine and flesh and become bound by wine and flesh; they crave status and prestige and become bound by status and prestige; they crave children and grandchildren and become bound by children and grandchildren. They bind up the true nature in all sorts of mixed-up ways, coming and going in the human world subject to unlimited suffering.

A fetus develops from the combination of the sperm from

the father and the ovum from the mother. The amniotic sac is like a prison, constricting the body. When the mother eats something hot, it is like boiling water is being poured on the body of the fetus; when the mother eats something cold, it is like ice is being pressed against its body. When the energy is full and the fetus is complete, it urgently wants to get out; but it must first break through the sac. It takes a few days for the water to break: people only know of the suffering of the mother's labor pains—they do not know that the infant suffers even more. Only at parturition, when it cries out, are the sufferings in the womb over.

Then there are sufferings affecting the whole body that subsequently come along. Inwardly there are hunger and thirst, outwardly there are cold and heat; fevers and rashes occur one after another. These are the sufferings of childhood.

When adulthood is reached, then one is faced with work. Those who become rulers worry about the land; those who become gentry and peasants worry about their persons and their families. Day and night they labor, uneasy even when sitting or lying down. The fires in the internal organs are all active, burning the natural harmony. Illnesses dog the body, without resistance.

People first experience the suffering of illness, wind up in the suffering of dying, and afterward have the suffering of retribution. It goes on through the ages, repeating endlessly. Buddhists speak of the suffering of separation from loved ones, the suffering of association with the hostile, the suffering of unfulfillment. The sufferings and miseries of people today are all self-made and self-experienced, personal experience of what they have created themselves. There are those who mistakenly get involved because they do not know this

is suffering; there are those who clearly know it is suffering but cannot get out.

A proverb says, "Don't talk about getting married early; after marriage it's harder. Don't say success is high attainment; after success work is greater. Don't say sowing seeds is enough; after the sowing it's more toilsome. Don't say it's better to be a monk or a priest; after becoming a monk or a priest it's mentally harder."

Some may ask, while the sufferings of worldly people are mostly physical, the sufferings of scholars are mental; they bind themselves with no rope and busy themselves with nothing. They cannot stop even if they want to—what should one do in such a case? The answer to this is that scholars suffer like this when they have not found authentic tradition. If you find authentic tradition, it is up to you yourself whether you stop or let go—what suffering is there? Indeed, learning the Way is a method of comfort; whoever talks about suffering over it is an outsider.

ESSENCE AND LIFE

To enter the gate to learning the Way, first you must understand essence and life. Essence has its source of essence, which is the mind ground. Life has its stem of life, which is the true breath. The stem of life should be solid; the source of essence should be clear. How is the source of essence clarified? When inside and outside are both forgotten, then it is clear. How is the stem of life solidified? When spirit and energy stay together, then it is solid.

Essence is spirit, life is vitality and energy. The Diagram of the Absolute says, "The reality of the infinite and the vitality of yin and yang energies subtly coalesce; the human

being originates here." Essence is the reality of the infinite; life is the vitality of yin and yang. The Master of the Changeless said, "Essence is in the mind. To the extent the mind is cleared, to that extent is essence visible. When essence is manifest, nature is fulfilled. This is how stopping thought can be used to fulfill nature. To the extent that nature is fulfilled, to that extent spirit and energy are congealed. There is no more to learning than serenely attaining this."

The whole work is in stopping thought. The most direct and rapid method for this is keeping mind and breathing together. How so? Energy is the mother of spirit, spirit is the child of energy; mind and breathing keeping together is like child and mother meeting. When spirit and energy merge into one, after a long period of close intimacy this produces great stabilization. This is called returning to the root and restoring life. When the root is deep, the stem is solid; this is the way of long life and eternal vision.

Ancestral Teacher Qiu said, "If the breathing is at all unsettled, life is not your own." I say, "If the mind is at all unforgotten, breathing cannot be settled." Human beings have a universal nature as well as a disposition. The universal nature is the totality of the absolute; as soon as it gets into yin and yang and the five elements, then it is disposition. So the substance of the absolute falls into disposition—it is not that there is a separate nature.

Master Zhang said, "When you skillfully return to it, the universal nature is there." Asked if there is a way of skillful return, he said, "Yes. Confucians speak of cleaning the mind and being inaccessible; Buddhists speak of independent observation; Taoists speak of returning to simplicity. These are the beginnings of skillful return.

"Confucians say that there is stability after knowing when

to stop and there can be serenity after stabilization. Buddhists speak of seeing through the emptiness of mind and body. Taoists speak of returning to innocence. These are the middle of skillful return.

"Confucians speak of having no willfulness, no compulsiveness, no obsessiveness, and no selfishness. Buddhists speak of having no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind. Taoists speak of returning to the infinite. These are the attainment of skillful return."

Human nature is originally good; that which has anything not good in it is disposition. To know this disposition and not be compelled by it is the method of transforming disposition.

MIND

A human being has just one mind. Externally it is feeling, internally it is nature. Going along is consciousness, coming back is wisdom. Now if you want to reverse going along externally to come back internally, is it necessary to practice introspection? Introspection implies introversion and effort to perceive.

The spirit of a human being is in the mind, and the trigger of the mind is in the eyes. Therefore when the function of the eyes is inside, the mind remains inside along with it. Not only does it remain there; it is also stabilized.

Once the mind is stabilized, the fire of the heart descends while the water of the genitals rises. The mouth is filled with sweet saliva, the feet walk on fiery brilliance. There are subtleties to it that cannot be fully expressed in words.

If human beings have just one true mind, why do they stray into confusion? They seem to have awareness, but they

have no self. Therefore it is said that if you know when you stray, then you won't stray. When you need to let go, let go.

Sincerity eliminates falsehood, respectfulness eliminates conceit. When wandering thoughts occur in profuse confusion, don't try to stop them, just look back at the mind itself—what is it that thinks? When you have recognized what thinks, you will attain tranquillity on the spot.

Study of the Way has no special technique: constantly looking within is studying the Way, and when false thinking is no more, then this is the Way. Master Zhu said, "To the extent you are in possession of your mind, to that extent you find power within. If you keep it under close control and don't let it chase things, how could you not succeed in correcting it? This can be experientially proven even in half a month's time."

He also said, "Seeking the released mind does not mean seeking some other mind to focus on. Rather, the moment you notice a released mind, think, 'This mind is my mind; it should be up to me to employ it—it should not be allowed to go out following others.' Even if your mind has been stopped up for a long time, you can wake up and drive away all falsehoods with a shout."

Continue this by observing mind. When there is no mind-ing, continue this by resting on the breathing. When the breathing is settled, the spirit settles along with it. This is what is referred to as real people breathing from their heels.

The only thing that differentiates humans from beasts is this mind. Buddha said evildoers will come back reborn changed into beasts; I say people who lose their minds become beasts right then and there. Why? They may have human form, but they are no longer human.

If your mind is unmoved when you see objects, that is

called being unborn. The unborn does not pass away. Then this mind is not bound by objects of the senses. When there is no bondage, that is liberation.

FEELINGS

The seven feelings have already been mentioned. When you are joyful, energy relaxes; when you are angry, energy rises. When you are sad, energy evaporates; when you are happy, energy scatters. When you are anxious, energy clumps; when you are sorrowful, energy descends. When you are startled, energy is disordered. Perverseness and abnormality produce diseases—swelling and blockage in the heart and abdomen, stabbing pain in the abdomen and sides, blockage of the throat, agitation and panting, shortness of breath. Mixing with blood, they produce bowel obstruction; mixing with water, they produce indigestion, phlegm, and drool. Sometimes they cause scleroses or growths like wadding or like membranes.

These ill effects are too many to mention them all. Therefore those who are skilled at hygiene gather in their feelings and return to essence—this is a good method of getting rid of disease.

Feelings are nature acting out externally. Sages nurture them before they have acted out, so they are able to harmonize their feelings to all things unemotionally, going through it all without possessiveness, getting involved without being swept away. They are like clean mirrors reflecting objects: beauty is the beauty of things, so they do not conceive love on account of it; ugliness is the ugliness of things, so they do not conceive hatred on account of it.

Thus it is said, "Open and impartial, when things come

up respond accordingly." Impartiality means natural truth unadulterated with the subjectivity of human desires. Responding accordingly means that when there are things that must be, then act in such a way as will cause no problems in that context.

Writings on Stabilizing Nature says, "People's feelings have their particular blindnesses, by reason of which they cannot reach the Way. On the whole, these blindnesses are in subjective uses of intellect. When you are subjective, you cannot deliberately be responsive to events; when you use the intellect, you can be spontaneous with clear awareness."

Also, "People's feelings are easily aroused and hard to control, but anger is the worst. If you can immediately forget your anger when angered and observe what is right and wrong in principle, you can also see how external seductions are not worthy of aversion, and furthermore be halfway along the Way."

Master Zhu said, "Forget anger and you will be impartial; see what is true and you will follow it. These two are means of returning to yourself and getting rid of blindness." People who attain the Way are empty and silent inside and out. In the midst of quietude they look within: realizing there is no thing at all, while physically within the circle they mentally transcend things.

THINKING

The human mind should be mortified, while its potential should be vivified. Mortification means causing its desirous thoughts to die out; vivification means enlivening its reason. Thinking is the living potential of the mind. Freedom from error is the overall principle; the nine thoughts are the specific principles—thinking how to see clearly, thinking how to hear keenly, thinking how to make a warm impression, thinking how to be respectful in demeanor, thinking how to be truthful in speech, thinking how to be serious in work, thinking how to pose questions when in doubt, thinking what trouble may occur when angry, and thinking about justice when seeing profit to be made.

Thinking about the Way is correct; thinking about things is error. The Way is inherent in us; when you think about the Way inherent within us, thinking itself is the Way. When thought reaches the realm of subtlety, the comprehending mind, clear and clean, is buoyant and joyful. Only this can be called self-realization; if your mental energy is exhausted in spite of the depth of your thinking, even if you have some perception it is not self-realization.

Those who attain realization without thinking are sages; those who attain realization by thinking are the wise. Not cogitating or striving is called truthfulness, referring to the innate knowledge that infants have without study or reflection. Choosing the good simply means choosing this noncognitive nonstriving.

The human heart has seven openings, most of them stopped by blood channels. If you want to open them up, you cannot do so without learning and thinking. Thinking

has the sense of penetrating, learning has the function of confirming. When thinking and learning are both employed, what path cannot be attained?

When you have not yet penetrated a principle, it is like facing a wall. Thinking is like boring holes in the wall. For each hole you bore all the way through, you get that much light. Starting out small, you enlarge, until eventually the whole wall itself is gone, and there is openness, free access, and no further obstruction.

The *Book of Manners* says, "Think in a dignified way." That it is dignified means it is not forced, that it is done in this way means it is not labored. When it is not forced or labored, it can be called good thinking.

"The thinking of a cultivated man does not go beyond his position." This is called thinking. Whenever it is out of place, it is called thoughts. Thinking is a door of entry into the Way, whereas thoughts are roots of obstruction of the Way.

THOUGHTS

Simply because of unawareness, thoughts suddenly arise; this is called ignorance. Because of the arising of ignorance, it seems mind becomes thoughts. Mind really does not move; when you reach this point in observing mind, those thoughts cease of themselves.

Stopping thoughts is not hard—if you can turn back to before a single thought has arisen, then the preceding thought will naturally not continue.

Before arousal, we are merged with the infinite. But if you want to understand the nonoccurrence of a single thought right now, you must examine where thought comes from.

The past is based on the present, the future is based on the past; if you have no mind in the present, the past is naturally over.

Views of person and self are certainly thoughts, but so are views of attachment to religion, and these must be eliminated too. If you consciously try to stop errant thoughts, errant thoughts will instead seem to increase. Try observing what the thoughts are and those thoughts will spontaneously vanish.

To cultivate realization it is essential to stop thoughts. To stop thoughts it is essential to observe mind. When you observe mind, mind does not exist; when mind is nonexistent, objects are empty of themselves. Since mind and objects are thus, there is no stopping; so how can observing be?

Guifeng said, "Consciously examine very closely, observe perceptively very intently. If habit energies arise, they will cease on the spot; do not follow them and you will avoid falling into the emotional indulgences of ordinary human beings. Do not destroy them either and you will avoid falling into quietism. The all-at-once teaching of the school of completeness is after all like this; just accord with original nature and conscious cognition will be uninterrupted."

Triplex Unity says, "The ears, eyes, and mouth are three treasures; shut them and do not allow passage. Let go of willfulness and return to empty nothingness; freedom from thoughts is normalcy."

Those who attain mindlessness in mind itself discern without annihilating the characteristics of mind. Those who are free from thoughts after having had thoughts occur to them realize that thoughts have no essence of their own—being conditionally originated, they are therefore empty.

LIKES

Every human mind has likes. Likes are where the mind tends to focus.

There are things we do not expect to be so, yet are so; after all we do not know why they are so.

Insofar as the level of human character can be judged by a single thought, and a whole lifetime's success or failure can be determined by one time, we cannot but be careful.

If people's likes are humanity and justice, courtesy and music, poetry and classics, we know without question that they are intelligent. If their likes are idleness, gambling, drinking, and whoring, then we know without question they are wastrels.

If their likes are gardening, fishing, and woodcutting, we know without question they are peasants. If their likes are quarreling, boasting, and weaponry, we know without question they are violent people.

Generally speaking, there are five losses that go with a liking for amusement and play. They are pollution of the body, wearying of the spirit, waste of wealth, loss of time, and making mistakes at work. Even if you are extremely skilled, you cannot go far; that is why cultured people abstain.

THE BODY

The human body has three chambers in front, called the nirvana chamber, the crimson chamber, and the chamber of the yellow court. These are where spirit and energy dwell. In back there are three passes, called the coccyx pass, the midspine pass, and the jade pillow pass. These constitute the route along which spirit and energy course.

Mencius said, "Sage emperors Yao and Shun did it by nature; Kings Tang and Wu did it by rediscovery." He also said, "Tang and Wu did it in person." This is just a matter of rediscovering it in oneself. Kings Tang and Wu were able to rediscover Emperors Yao and Shun in the bodies of Tang and Wu; if we are able to rediscover it in ourselves, there is a sage emperor Yao and a sage emperor Shun in every one of us.

When we inwardly examine the body, energy is there. When we inwardly examine that energy, spirit is there. Because cultivated people follow the Way with their bodies, when the body is cultivated the Way is established. Immature people follow desires with their bodies, so their desires flourish while their bodies pass away.

The *Shurangama Sutra* says, "Deeply entering one gateway, enter one without straying; when you know the root, the six senses are clear and calm all at once." The reason people are unable to attain the Way is because they are burdened by the body.

If you want to get rid of this burden, you should realize this body is an impermanent thing, a painful material object with no owner, a bag of pus and blood, urine and feces. The whole body, inside and out, has nothing good about it at all.

Why do you want to feed it fine food and dress it in fine clothes? You show off sharpness and sell keenness whenever you are in the presence of others. People who are subject to compulsion are confused in mind and deluded at heart; everyone in the world has been strung along.

Death is followed by birth, birth is followed by death. For infinite eons we have experienced countless pains and vexations, with never any hope of getting out. Now that I have set my heart on learning the Way, I have seen all the way through you and what you are all about. No longer will I be confused by you, no longer will I be compelled by you.

Gradually develop insight into the emptiness of person. If you apply it all at once, abandoning body and phenomena, mortifying your physical body and dismissing your intelligence, and you embrace this and never get beyond it, can you approach the Way?

When practitioners of wizardry cultivate themselves, they invariably restore their bodies. Spirit is energy; when energy is stabilized, spirit is focused. Essence and life both developed, the Way and the vessel ride each other; spirit and body both sublimated, they merge into reality along with the Way.

ENERGY CHANNELS

The human body has twelve main energy channels and eight extra energy channels, but only the two known as the passive and the active channels are connected with human life and death.

In ordinary people, the passive channel is in the abdomen going upward, while the active channel is in the back going downward. Front and back are separated, so the mechanism of transformation has no basis. Thus their length of life depends on the extent of the energy they were born with.

Practitioners of wizardry recognize the passive channel is where all the yin channels meet and the active channel is what unifies all the yang channels. If these two channels are free-flowing, the hundred channels will flow freely. Therefore they repel convergence of negative energy and promote the fire of positive energy, practicing the method of the turning of the waterwheel.

This method is freezing the spirit in the energy opening. This is called returning to the root. With spirit and energy keeping to each other, embrace unity without parting. When stillness climaxes followed by movement, this is spirit again rising up the energy root to nirvana. At this point the course of the waterwheel goes through for the first time.

If you want to know the course of the waterwheel, it is the passive and active energy channels in our bodies. When energy first arises, it steams between the kidneys and genitals, then overflows above the small of the back, flowing like water flooding, not coursing in channels; we quickly use the spirit to drive it back into the coccyx and up to the midspine. It is hard to get through the midspine; press the tongue up

against the palate to make it rise right to the middle of the brain. Here spirit and energy mix; the resulting expansion and fluidity can be recognized to some extent. They turn into sweet dew; now the tongue is to be relaxed right away, so the sweet dew descends through the throat and windpipe, travels through the heart, and returns to the place of storage and stops there.

When you practice this cyclic irrigation for a long time, eventually it is perfected, so that energy fills the three fields, above and below, merging them. This is what is meant by the saying that if you always cause energy to penetrate the joints, vitality will naturally be full and the open spirit will be present.

WORLDLY SOCIETY

The world is restless, society is in flux. Society may be orderly or chaotic. In orderly times, it is valuable to be talented and use it openly. In chaotic times, it is valuable to be virtuous and remain concealed.

There are old and young people. When young, it is important to study and work hard. When old, it is important to take care and be calm.

Our human involvement in the world is like crossing a river; wherever there may be pitfalls where we could drown, we need to know to avoid them. A good horse may be extremely swift, but it always suffers pain caused by dust in the wind. A divining tortoise may be miraculous, but it cannot escape the ill omen of having its guts ripped out.

When a bird rises on the wind or chooses a tree to roost, how comfortable it is! But when it is lured into a cage by

greed for food, it cannot get free. Now, titles and stipends seem to be cages of men!

The good and bad done by people of ancient times and the right and wrong done by people today were and are all their own successes and failures. Things that are already past are all spirits within the world; what is accomplished by insipid talk about them, what is the profit in reciting them? When we do not talk or recite, our minds are quiet. When the mind is quiet, this is the Way.

What freedom and ease you have today come from frustrations of former years; how can we know that today's frustrations might not become freedom and ease some day?

FAME AND PROFIT

Those who have not been successful at learning the Way have failed to stop errant thoughts, which somehow obstruct them. Those who have failed to stop errant thoughts have been unable to forget fame and profit, which somehow control them. If you want to stop errant thoughts, it is first necessary to see through fame and profit.

Fame is hated by Creation, profit is an object of emotional contention. Therefore fame and profit are more fatal than weapons. Why? With the way weapons can kill, people know to avoid them; but with the way fame and profit kill, people will go to their deaths unrepentant.

In ancient times, people imbued with the Way often feigned madness, because they did not want people to know them. Nowadays if people have the slightest strength they want to announce it to the whole world—how base!

When cultured people study the Way, they forget all

competitiveness and self-display. Inconspicuously they practice inner cultivation, and when the Way is clear and their character is established, they still do not claim expertise. Therefore it is said, "That in respect to which cultivated people cannot be reached is only that which people do not see."

Profit is something that has no virtue yet attracts people. It makes people hot without fire. It has no authority yet gets people to labor willingly. It has no affections yet makes people never forget it for a moment. It causes students of the Way to ruin their character once they have seen it; it causes administrators to twist the law once they have seen it. Since ancient times human hearts and laws of nations have often been spoiled by profit.

There is great harm for the world concealed within great profit, but people do not know it. Not that they do not know, but they are blinded by profit. Pelf obtained by breaking the law is like food that causes illness—when you take them, your only concern is that it is not enough; but when exposed, your only concern is that it was too much. Why is the same thing different according to the time? Because profit and harm follow each other. If when you see profit you think there is harm there, thoughts of grabbing it will inevitably stop.

Cultured people accumulate virtue. Virtue can enhance health and can also make one successful. Therefore, rank and emolument, good repute and long life, come naturally to people of great virtue, without being sought.

Small people accumulate wealth. Wealth can support the body, but it can also damage the body. Therefore people with a lot of wealth may want to leave worry and apprehension behind but cannot.

UNDERTAKINGS

Things that should not be done should not even be thought of. Things that should not be told to other people should not be announced to Heaven. If you check yourself for these things time and again, you will near the Way.

Opportunities to accomplish something in the world are hard to come by. If something can and should be done, it will not do to excuse yourself—shirkers achieve nothing. Something that cannot be done should not be forced—doing things by force brings failure. There is a reason in every case.

Cultivated people discuss right and wrong; small people discuss profit and loss. When people have nothing to do, the mind should normally abide in the heart—one should not entertain random thoughts in the dark. When there is something to do, the mind should be on truth—one should not insist on following subjective views.

When your tasks are few, naturally your pains are few.
When your words are few, naturally your troubles are few.
 — When you eat little, naturally you get sick less. When you have few desires in your heart, naturally you have few worries.

The two things in the world that are hardest to do are crossing the ocean and going into battle; yet people will do these things without fearing their difficulties. When it comes to the Way, it has the ease of being so easy that it is attained upon looking within, not like the danger of crossing the ocean; it has the security of the naturalness of celestial design, not like the peril of going into battle: yet people rarely practice it—why is that?

THINGS

The existence of myriad things is born from nonbeing. The feelings of ordinary people stick to existence; it is surely difficult to look into eternal nonbeing, and it is even harder to constantly negate that existence. If people want to stand on the ground of eternal nonbeing it is necessary to focus on essential nature.

When you are focused on essential nature, there has never been any thing; self is forgotten and things sublimate spontaneously. Even though things fill the environment, they always return to nonbeing. Layman Pang said, "Just have no mind on myriad things yourself—why fear things always surrounding you?"

There are bewitching people, and there are bewitching things; both can make people stray. But can they really make people stray? The fact is that people stray on their own. The *Hundred Character Tablet* says, "True constancy should deal with things; in dealing with things, it is essential not to stray." When you see beautiful things and conceive a thought of liking for them, your mind is then drawn away by them—thus you have strayed.

When you see through one thing, you are not confused by one thing; when you see through myriad things, you are not confused by myriad things. The *Diamond Sutra* says, "All compounded things are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows; they are like dew and like lightning—you should practice this observation."

Everything in the world has its own proper principle, in respect to which subjective ideas are useless. So what in the world is there to cogitate about or worry about? This is why

cultivated people take care of matters as they occur, without making anything the matter. They deal with things as they are, without sticking to things.

Cheng Yinquan said, "People who devote themselves to external things want everything to be good, but they don't require their own body and mind to be good. When they happen to have it good in terms of external things, they do not realize their own body and mind are already spoiled." Nowadays people have plenty of housing, clothing, food, and utensils, yet they are embarrassed at not having as much as others; but when it comes to not having as much learning as others, or not having as much conscience as others, they have no shame—why is that? Their thoughtlessness is extreme!

EGO

The *Analects* records that Confucius put an end to four things—willfulness, insistence, stubbornness, and egoism. The fact that egoism concludes the list means that willfulness, insistence, and stubbornness are all mentioned on account of egoism. If there is no egoism, neither is there any willfulness, insistence, or stubbornness.

Egoism is the root of all selfishness. If there is no egoism, the root is cut and the many forms of selfishness do not arise.

Nowadays when people consciously regulate their conduct, is there a single one who does not do it for himself? If it does not profit oneself, effort is omitted; that is because the world views it as extraneous and leaves it undone. If it profits oneself, one will do it even if it is damaging to the health.

How great is the harm of egoism! Only when there is no

egoism is selfishness transformed; conduct becomes upright, and you also forget your physical body. What can burden you then?

Search within your body—what is the ego? Once the notion of self is not there, you attain great liberation.

Yongjia's Collection says, "If ignorance is not understood, you mistakenly grasp it as self. When the notion of self is rigidly fixed, then greed, anger, and false views arbitrarily conceive existences, giving rise to attachments.

"When you know the body is illusory, you realize it has no independent nature. Matter is emptiness—who is the self?

"All phenomena only have temporal definitions, without any true reality. None of the four gross elements and five clusters is the self, and there is no combination either. When you seek, inside and out, ultimately there is no person."

Examine the Chinese character for *self* or *ego*—it consists of two opposing "weapon" characters. The calamities of viciousness and violence all arise from ego. Therefore those whose hearts are on the Way should first be egoless.

UNREALITY

People who study the Way first must recognize reality and unreality before they can enter the Way. We have seen actors portraying failure and success, gain and loss, parting and meeting, sadness and happiness; their outward forms are as they appear, while their minds are inwardly calm. What have they attained that they are able to be unmoved in mind like this? They are clearly aware that these representations, the costumery and the makeup, the states of mind and the life situations, are artificially created—they switch and shift

roles without loss or gain to themselves. Learners can understand the Way by contemplating this.

Also look at marionettes—their hands and feet move, vaguely like human forms. People who do not know may look at the puppets, see the strings, and still not think that there must be someone holding up the strings before the puppet can move. If that person should suddenly leave, the marionette strings would still be there but they would be immobile. The physical body of a human being is like a marionette; its energy and blood are the strings, and the real nature or essence is the puppeteer.

Also look at the sleight-of-hand artist; he changes names and shifts objects to confuse the eyes and minds of onlookers, who declare it marvelous. All worldly contrivances involve mental deception and illusion, no different from sleight of hand—if you can see them without your eyes being dazzled and your mind confused, then you are near the Way.

Also consider shadow plays. They light a lamp and beat a drum, and a crowd gathers to watch the shadows. As their minds and eyes follow the shadows, they forget themselves, until the oil is used up and the lamp goes out, whereupon all the illusions return to nothing. Intelligent people who observe this can thereby understand the Way.

When an existence is produced in nonexistence, it exists yet is not existent; when the existence returns to nonexistence, it does not exist, yet is not nonexistent. Why? The existence of an existence resulting from a conjunction of conditions has no intrinsic identity, so it is said that it is not existent, in order to refute the view of permanence. The emptiness of intrinsic identity inherently has no nonexistence, thus revealing real essence; so it is said that it is not nonexistent, to refute the view of annihilation.

On a small scale day and night, birth and death; on a large scale eras and ages—all can be understood by analogy. Students of the Way should know that one essential nature is real, while myriad conditions are unreal. All things used in daily life are dust and dirt in unreality—why contend with mediocrities over the amount and grade of dust and dirt?

OBJECTS

There is nothing in the world but one mind. Stirring thoughts create all objects. If thoughts are not produced, objects are spontaneously gone. When you thoroughly examine stirring thoughts, thoughts too are empty and silent. So we know there is nothing lost when deluded and nothing gained when enlightened, because the true mind not dwelling on anything neither increases nor decreases.

Mind is around because of objects, objects are viewed by means of mind. If you arouse the mind on seeing objects, even if you live in a mountain forest or on an island in the ocean, it is all mundane toil.

When people are emotionally attached to objects, objects play with people; when the mind loses its normalcy, one becomes deranged. When feelings pursue things, things draw feelings; when the spirit leaves its abode, one becomes idiotic.

Good objects and bad objects are both objects; even if they come in droves, they are not existent. Perverse thoughts and upright thoughts both are in the category of arbitrary thoughts; even though they occur in confusion, they still do not exist.

Do not say sensual desires are pleasant; if you get lost and

forget to return, you will inevitably come to the point of damaging your body and your life.

You should know that one essential nature is real and embrace it without parting. Then you can seek wisdom and thus aspire to sagehood. When you make bedevilments vanish and break through existence, then the impure world is transformed into a pure land. When you go back to the root and return to life, the ordinary body becomes the sacred embryo.

Since the world is only a construction of mind, why not first comprehend mind? Sense data enter via discriminating consciousness, so one must simply interrupt discriminating consciousness. An infant has no discriminating consciousness, so the roiling of sense objects has no opening to enter. In realized people it is purely knowledge; the realm of realities is thoroughly clear, and all is the homeland of understanding subtleties.

MISTAKES

Deliberate deviation from principle is called evil. Inadvertent deviation from principle is called a mistake.

A proverb says, "If people are not sages, how can they make no mistakes?" This saying can be used to forgive other people, but it should not be used to excuse oneself.

When he was fifty years old, an ancient recognized forty-nine years of mistakes. Now that I am eighty-five, am I aware of eighty-four years of mistakes?

If one does not even recognize past mistakes, recent mistakes are not easy to recognize.

Why? When you are deluded, you cling to wrong as right.

When you are enlightened, in contrast, you see even right as if wrong.

Self-examination is not to be done only thrice—how can a mistake be allowed twice?

Master Zhu said, "In the course of daily activities, when you realize something is wrong, then do not act that way. This is how to get rid of sicknesses."

If you ask how to be able to "not act that way," this is riding a donkey in search of a donkey.

When students are practicing Pure Land Buddhism, this involves three working elements—verbal, physical, and mental.

It is easier to be faultless verbally than physically, easier to be faultless physically than mentally. People with determination will apply effort to the hard part, quickly reforming in order to gain access to the Way.

It is sometimes asked whether people who have done wrong can repent. Whatever you have done in the past, whether major or minor, cannot be grasped when you search for it, inside or outside—this is called true repentance.

It is also asked what people should do when they have vows they fear to break. When you are confused, you talk of promises; when enlightened, there are none at all.

Try to look for them right now—where are your vows?

In this way you can attain great liberation.

GOODNESS

Goodness is the positive energy generated by the first movement of the absolute. Humans have this for their essential nature, so human nature is universally good. Those who would cultivate this must nurture positive energy.

In terms of the climate, positive energy arises after pure negative energy in the tenth lunar month. This is the true breath within the compass.

By way of admonition, Buddha said that good and bad causes and effects of heaven and hell are unavoidable and will inevitably be experienced some day in future life.

Confucius simply said, "Arrive above or arrive below, calm and at ease or always anxious." "Arriving above" means advancing day by day to lofty illumination—what is that if not heaven?

"Arriving below" means sinking into base corruption—what is that if not hell?

Being "calm and at ease" means being happy wherever you are—whose blessings can compare to this?

Being "always anxious" means there are pitfalls wherever you go—no calamity is greater.

Generally speaking, the time when you do good or do evil is when you experience blessing or calamity—it is like a shadow or an echo, not waiting for another day or future life.

Someone asked a Chan Buddhist, "Do heaven and hell exist or not?"

The Chan Buddhist replied, "With delight and fear in the heart, good and bad become states; just comprehend one mind and naturally you'll have no confusion."

The questioner asked, "How is the mind comprehended?"

The Chan Buddhist replied, "Don't think of good and bad at all."

Some ask if doing good and improvement are any different.

The answer is no.

When the ears do not listen to obscenities, this is improvement of the ears.

When the eyes do not look at the wrong things, this is improvement of the eyes.

When the mouth does not utter false words, this is improvement of the mouth.

When the mind does not produce errant thoughts, this is improvement of the mind.

When the hands do not pick up anything improper, this is improvement of the hands.

When the feet do not walk on an improper place, this is improvement of the feet.

Emulating the ways of sage leaders to govern the people is improvement of leadership.

Emulating the ways of wise ministers in working for the government is improvement of administration.

Emulating the mother of Mencius, who chose where to live for the sake of her son's education, is improvement of motherhood.

Emulating the disciples of Confucius who cultivated their will to serve their parents is improvement in the role of the offspring.

It is also asked whether there is actually any good in charitable works like improving roads, repairing shrines, and cultivating future life.

I have heard that a sage said, "From the emperors down

to the commoners, self-cultivation is basic for one and all. If you cultivate anything without self-cultivation, this is called not knowing the basis."

DREAMS

Why do dreams occur?

All of them are illusory scenes created by the unawake consciousness wandering in oblivion.

The origin, existence, disintegration, and disappearance of realms of desires, forms, and formless abstractions are just one dreaming mind.

The changes occurring in dreams are existences born in nothingness. While dreaming, pains and pleasures are physically experienced, but on suddenly awakening, they are all gone at once.

It is not that they are nonexistent on awakening—they are nonexistent to begin with. That is why the *Song on Realization of the Way* says, "Within dreams clearly there are a variety of states, but after awakening, they are empty; there is no universe."

The mountains, rivers, and land are all scenes in dreams; kings, lords, generals, and ministers are all people in dreams. The scriptures and classics of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are all books for interpreting dreams.

In ancient times someone asked a master about his sleep: "In a single sleep you take in the primordial wholeness of the universe; when you wake up you break through the going and coming of past and present. Marvelous! Is there also a Way of sleep?"

He said, "There is a Way. When ordinary people sleep,

they first let their eyes go to sleep, then their minds. When I sleep, I first let my mind go to sleep, then my eyes.

"When I wake up, first I wake my eyes, then my mind. By wakefulness of eye, I see mind; when mind awakens, I do not see the world.

"When I do not see the world, neither do I see mind. I sleep mindlessly and awaken without minding."

The questioner asked, "If I want to learn to be unminding, how can I do so?"

The master replied, "Don't notice mind when dealing with objects, and don't notice objects when dealing with mind.

"This is all I know—how could I know anything else? When you wake up, there's nothing to know; the more you know, the more tired the mind."

It is ridiculous to be in the mundane world not knowing that dreams are dreams.

GHOSTS

Half the people in the world are deluded by ghosts, and half are confused by other people. Getting each other all excited, they practically fill the world.

Those of lofty illumination try to save them by speaking clearly, but they do not heed. Those in positions of authority try to restrain them by law, but they do not stop. False doctrines increase in popularity day by day—in the future, who knows where it will end!

Ghosts are people who have already died; people are ghosts who have not yet died; and the spirits of today are all people of ancient times. There are ghosts and spirits everywhere in the world; and not only are there ghosts and spirits

in the world, there are also ghosts and spirits within the body.

How do we know this? Human nature comes from positive energy, while the physical body comes from negative energy. Positive energy is the spirit, negative energy is the ghost. Returning feeling to nature is the way of the spirit, following feeling and losing nature is the business of the ghost.

A proverb says that as long as people have any positive energy they do not become ghosts, while as long as they have any negative energy they do not become immortals. How true this saying is! Human beings are a mixture of yin and yang, a combination of ghost and spirit: a sudden impulse toward good is guidance of the spirit; a sudden evil act is compulsion by the ghost. Cultivated people are careful when alone, observing the beginnings of good and evil; this is the way to distinguish the ghost from the spirit.

S P I R I T

The true nature of human beings is the original spirit. Because it is ethereal and unfathomable, wondrously responsive without convention, it is called spirit. It is called original to differentiate it from the acquired thinking spirit.

Those into whom spirit enters live, those from whom spirit departs die. How do we know the spirit comes? When thoughts stop, the spirit comes. How do we know the spirit departs? When thoughts stir, the spirit leaves.

The physical body is the house of energy; as long as energy is there, the body does not deteriorate. Energy is the matrix of spirit; as long as energy is there, the spirit does not disintegrate.

When people do good, the spirit is concentrated and effective; when people do evil, the spirit is scattered and dimmed. When people are ill, the spirit detaches from the body and does not suffer the pains; when people are in trouble, the spirit leaves first and does not experience the calamity. If people do not find the spirit for even the interval of a breath, then they are not complete for the interval of a breath.

People have three valleys. Their emptiness is like a valley, and the spirit dwells there, so it is called the valley spirit.

The top one is called the celestial valley; this is the nirvana center, the root of heaven, the original chamber of the spirit.

When the spirit dwells in the celestial valley, then vitality changes into energy and the energy rises.

After nine years, the celestial chamber is full, and the celestial gateway is thereby opened up.

The middle one is called the valley of response. This is the crimson chamber, the bright auditorium where government is administered.

When the spirit dwells in the valley of response, the ears hear, the eyes see, the five sense do their jobs, and the whole body follows along.

The lower one is called the valley of soul. This is the elixir field. This is the secret room of hidden cultivation.

When the spirit dwells in the valley of soul, looking and listening are turning inward, spirit and energy keep together, and vitality and consciousness thereby embrace as one.

ENERGY

Ordinary people's energy rises in front and descends in back; realized people's energy rises in back and descends in front. When energy goes out and in, this is called ordinary breathing; when it does not go out and in, this is called true breathing.

Generally speaking, when the ordinary breathing is stilled, the true breathing is spontaneously activated. The way breathing is stilled is not by forcefully holding it so that it does not come out. It is a matter of absolute emptiness and utter stillness; the steadier the mind, the subtler the breathing.

The way to do this is to return the mind to quietude whatever you are doing, not imagining what is yet to come and not thinking about what has already passed. After a long time at this, spirit and energy merge, feelings and objects are forgotten; spirit solidifies, energy congeals, and there is just one breath in the belly, revolving without going out or in. This is called womb breathing.

Once this breathing occurs, keep strictly to empty quiet, refining vitality into energy, which goes through the three passes and pours into the three chambers. This is called the real bellows, the real furnace and cauldron, and the real firing process.

In *Book of the Azure Vault* it says, "In the past I met a true guide, who transmitted the spoken secret; it just requires freezing the spirit and putting it in the lair of energy."

This means that what we human beings first receive when we are imbued with energy as embryos formed of the vitality

and energy of our father and mother is our individual inherent absolute.

In realized people, the spirit rests on the breath, entering deeply into its own lair, subtly continuous, there as such, without the slightest interruption.

Thus one attains the wonder of "concentrating energy and making it supple" and so one is able to "observe its return."

Lao-tzu said, "The space between heaven and earth is like a bellows." Human beings are born by virtue of the energy of heaven and earth; respiration is the mechanism of the bellows.

True breath is the energy of respiration. So this true breath is the stem of reception of energy, the source of production of energy.

The rising and descending of exhalation and inhalation in alternate succession corresponds to the relationship of yin and yang.

Therefore it is said, "The breath count of the natural cycle is counted very subtly; the cold drip of the water clock matches drop by drop."

Some ask if it is also said that the true breathing is the alchemical fire. The answer is that the true breathing is not considered the fire.

The fire is the human spirit; the breathing is the bellows of the fire. The unbroken continuity of the bellows is "breathing from the heels" as realized people do.

Therefore it is said, "Stay leisurely by the medicine stove to watch the firing process; just calm mind and breath and leave it to nature."

The whole human body is an energy circuit. When energy flows freely we feel good, and when energy is blocked we get sick.

So dance around to nourish the energy of the blood. This method can be practiced anytime, at one's convenience.

It is essential to unify the mind and stop the breath so the spirit is pervasive, the energy is full, and energy flows easily.

Then glare and grit your teeth, be stern and strong, and false thoughts will spontaneously vanish.

Do this several times and then sit quietly, and it is most effective at getting rid of confusion and dissolving illness. This exercise has great benefit and should not be slighted.

VITALITY

Realized people refine vitality into energy; in ordinary people, energy turns into vitality. Ancients compared this to quicksilver, meaning that it runs off very easily; and they symbolized it by the dragon, meaning that it is extremely difficult to subdue. Those who learn the Way guard it rigorously and do not lose it; that is called building the foundation.

Spirit, energy, and vitality are always trying to leave people; as long as you can keep them stable and make sure they do not leave, then you can prolong life. Wei Boyang said, "Whenever there is mention of extracting lead and adding quicksilver, actually it means returning vitality to repair the brain."

It is asked, "People say that when the mystic female is established, the true vitality is stabilized. How can we establish the mystic female?"

It is established when "the open spirit does not die." How does the open spirit not die? When you have no desire and are serene as can be, then it does not die.

Those who are good at self-cultivation take the fire of

spirit and the water of vitality and combine them in one place. When calmness eventually reaches its limit, it gives birth to movement; the fire of realization steams, and golden vitality spews beauty penetrating the passes.

EDUCATION

The Way is a speechless sage, a sage is the Way with speech. But even though one has the power of speech, it is only for using that person's way to govern that person's being—it is not for forcing what is hard to know and hard to do.

Those who educated people in olden times educated them by means of the Way of sages. The *I Ching* says, "Nurturing rectitude by innocence is the accomplishment of sages." That is, when educating children, if you present them with emulation of sages, how can people not exert themselves in emulation of sages?

Lao-tzu said, "When you cultivate your own person, that virtue is real." To speak of cultivation abandoning the person is false. Nowadays people who seek wizardry or buddhahood often cut themselves off from society and flee the world in their quest. They consider it burdensome to have a home, to have a wife and children, to have business with people; they believe they cannot attain wizardry or buddhahood on that account, and so they think they must cut themselves off from society and flee the world. They do not realize that the Way of wizards and buddhas is not apart from body and mind.

If you can actually rectify your mind and cultivate your body, then if you have a house you can live there, if you have a wife and children you can enjoy them, if you have dealings with people you can use them for refinement. So household-

ers too can become sages, wizards, and buddhas—why should it be necessary to abandon what is very convenient and do what is inconvenient?

LEARNING

Learning is the journey to the Way. The classics of the sages and traditions of the wise are the tickets for the journey.

In later generations false teaching became very active. Do their words and actions actually accord with the classics of the sages and the traditions of the wise? If there is any inconsistency, then it is demonic suggestion.

Learners of the Way simply must collect their bodies and minds securely. To exercise effort apart from body and mind is not the right way.

Learning the Way is not simply a matter of articulating it, or even just understanding it. It is absolutely necessary to sweep your own heart clean of all desires for things; then you will spontaneously harmonize with the Way.

The will to learn the Way should be all the firmer if you are poor, all the stronger if you are old. If your will is driven by ambient energies or taken away by external things, that is not the fault of these energies or these things, but affliction resulting from failure of will.

Just examine your will critically; reflect over and over and you will see where the problem is. Put a stop to it with intense determination and you will be a changed person.

What cannot be accomplished if you do it in deadly earnest? The mind of sages is the same as that of other people; how could it be only a matter of constant clarity and calm? It is nothing but seeing reality and developing stability.

When you see reality, no illusions can confuse you; when you develop stability, things cannot shake it or take it away.

Seeing and hearing are like food and drink; you need them every day, but you also need to digest and eliminate them every day. If they are not digested and eliminated thoroughly, they remain in the gut, eventually producing illness.

KNOWLEDGE

The foremost priority of learning is attaining knowledge. Attaining knowledge is a matter of investigating things. Having studied, think; having thought, study.

When you reach the point of comprehensive penetration, then knowledge is reached. When knowledge is reached, then sincerity of intention and wholesomeness of mind can gradually be attained.

The knowledge of learners is limited, whereas there is no end to the principles of the world. Therefore when something is known, there is inevitably something unknown. When you come to know the unknown, then there is something else unknown. That is why poets have used the metaphor "like cutting and polishing."

It is not that people have no knowledge, but true knowledge is hard. When it comes to pearls and jades, everyone wants to pick them up and put them in their pockets—why is that? True knowledge is such a treasure that if students of the Way had this attitude there would be no worry that no one would strive for true knowledge.

When it comes to whetting a sword, no one would lick it with his own tongue or try it on his body—why is that? The ability of true knowledge to wound people is such that if

those who shun evil had this attitude there would be no worry that true knowledge would not be purified.

The human mind is originally luminous, but it is covered by desires for things, so it becomes desire. If you know this phenomenon is the veil of desires for things, this is a point of enlightenment; focus your energy on it and stabilize it.

Today you get rid of a little, tomorrow you get rid of a little. Suddenly they arise, suddenly they vanish—are you aware of this?

If you can be aware of this and can watch, then you can be neither aroused nor oblivious.

When you reach the point where you are neither aroused nor oblivious, your mind is stable and your nature is complete.

Now your breath is going out and in; are you aware of it?

If you can be aware of it and can stay with it, you can thereby not deliberately exhale or inhale.

When you arrive at the point of not exhaling or inhaling, then energy is whole and life is established.

ACTION

Knowledge and action are fundamentally one combined effort. To always keep knowledge present is to be able to act on it. Whenever you do not act on knowledge, you are then ignorant.

Cultured people understand the Way with their bodies; wherever the body is, there is where the Way is. Thus there is walking exercise for when you are walking, standing exercise for when you are standing, sitting exercise for when you are sitting, sleeping exercise for when you are sleeping.

Wherever you are, if you are free from thoughts, then wherever you are is exercise.

Whenever there is something you cannot put into practice, it is simply that your knowledge is not authentic. If your knowledge of a truth is genuine, you will naturally be glad to follow that truth. That is why it is said that learning always needs knowledge. If your perception of a truth is not realistic, yet you insist on trying to act on it, how much will and energy do you have? When your will is exhausted and your energy flags, you won't be able to carry on.

Evening and nighttime are times of rest for cultivated people. Accordingly you should withdraw into the chamber of spirit and embrace oneness without parting. Since there are no worldly feelings enveloping you, neither is there an original sublime truth—when you are like a dead man for the time being, that is called great rest. After you get to the point of dreaming and sleeping without becoming muddled, you see the effect of mastering seriousness.

Then the following morning is the time for the cultured person's "daily renewal." Accordingly, you should rise early and daily seek what you have yet to attain, with the determination to do ten times or a hundred times what others do. The days become months, the months become years; those who study without question of how long it takes, be it three years or five years, never fail to reach sagehood. When you are mindful at every moment, nurturing it with each breath, the work is never interrupted; perfected day after day and month after month, learning will shine with light.

Some ask how natural design can be completed. It is essential to consciously nurture it at all times. They also ask how to purify human desires. It is just a matter of diminishing them day by day.

All people have intuitive knowledge and innate capacity. Intuitive knowledge should be brought out, innate capacity should be fulfilled. This is a matter of diligent learning and earnest questioning.

Our real nature is spiritual and most subtle; when thoughts stir it flies off, invisible. If you want to stabilize it, you must look into the source. The mechanism is always in the eye, abiding at rest in the mind; when the mind is always clear and calm, spirit and energy return to the root, eventually producing the supreme treasure, gradually filling, circulating above and below, producing springtime throughout the body.

When you have refined the self to unadulterated maturity, you forget feelings in face of objects. Gather spiritual medicine, using positive energy to control negative energy, developing the embryonic sage. This is called being a realized human.

SELF - EXAMINATION

Self-examination means examining your own mind. Of the twenty-four hours of the day, how much of the time does your mind remain inside, and how much of the time is it outside? If you do this for a long time you will naturally attain some power.

In olden times there was a man who used black and white beans to make a record of his self-examination of mind. Whenever he had a good thought, he would put a white bean in a bowl; and when he had a bad thought, he would put a black bean in the bowl.

At first, there would be mostly black beans. Later the black and white would be half and half.

Eventually there would be mostly white beans, then nothing but white beans. Ultimately there would not even be any white beans.

There is something to this method, clumsy as it is.

Self-examination means awareness and control. It is none other than reforming faults and consciously developing. It is none other than mastering seriousness. Even though the Great Way has no practice and no realization, materialism must be polished away day by day.

People have but one mind. When you want it to stay inside, whose mind is this? When it suddenly runs outside, whose mind is this? When you can discern clearly, then you can make progress at cultivation.

Self-examination ought to be thorough and precise. Self-government ought to be effective and decisive. Conscious development ought to be easygoing and unhurried. These three exercises should be done every day until you reach the point of effortlessness; then they are accomplished.

Some say we can transcend immediately to the beyond without having to make any effort. This might occur among those with higher knowledge, but I would not dare say that everyone can do it.

R E S P E C T

The spiritual light of basic nature has no creation or destruction, no increase or decrease. Even though it be tightly covered for a long time, one flash of the spiritual light can extinguish a thousand evils and give birth to ten thousand virtues.

As long as you keep the spiritual light always present, how are you different from sages?

Some ask how to keep the spiritual light always present. It seems essential to be respectful.

Only by respecting it can the spiritual light be kept always present. Carefulness and caution are certainly respect; industriousness is also respect.

When you are respectful, you do not entertain fantasies, you do not slip into oblivion, and you do not dwell in fullness. These seem to be essential to presence of mind, guidelines for self-cultivation.

Since ancient times sages have transmitted the heart by these means. Nowadays people think that formal dress naturally produces respect. Respect is just a matter of being centered in oneness. When you are centered in oneness, you are naturally free from warp and bias.

The mind is the master of the body; respectfulness is an attainment of the mind. Nowadays when people enter a shrine they become respectful because there are sacred images there—why do they not think how there are a real ghost and spirit in their own bodies, and do not know enough to respect them?

Cheng Mingdao said, "When I practice calligraphy, I am

extremely respectful of it, not because I insist that the characters be good, but simply because this is study."

Cheng Yinquan said, "When Master Zhou spoke of oneness, he meant having no desire. How can ordinary people attain desirelessness? It is just a matter of respectfulness. Keep at it step after step; hold it steady. Just work like this, alerting yourself time and again, not allowing dullness. You can see the results in one or two days."

The compass and the ruler are models of the round and the square. The level and the plumb line are models of the even and the straight. People who have compass and ruler on their left and level and plumb line on their right are models of humanity.

The ruler and compass, level and plumb line, are order; order is based on respect. If a country has no order, rebels and robbers rise and ruin the nation. If one's body has no order, then emotions and desires overcome and ruin the body.

SELF-GOVERNMENT

A sage said, "In learning, you increase daily; for the Way, you decrease daily." This "decrease" means decreasing excess to attain centered balance, decreasing trivialities to return to basics, and reducing human desires to return to celestial design.

There may be a hundred human desires, but it is imperative to master oneself first. Mastering your self is like overcoming an enemy; first you must know where the enemy is before you can send in your troops.

Self-government should be strict, like a farmer weeding,

who must remove weeds by the roots before he can be free of concern that they will grow back.

Self-examination is like arresting a robber—you cannot relax at any time.

Self-government is like executing a rebel—you must cut through with one stroke of the sword. Attacking human desire must be like this before it can be successful.

Self-government is a matter of getting rid of what was originally not in us. We should realize this was originally not there by nature and does not become nonexistent only after being overcome.

Conscious development is a matter of preserving what is originally in us. We should realize it is originally there of necessity and does not come to be there by conscious development.

STOPPING

The *I Ching* says, "Stopping at the back, you do not apprehend the body; going through the yard, you do not see the person." Whenever the human mind cannot be still, it is because desires are pulling it.

All of the human body moves but the back; the whole human body has desire except the back. Therefore when the *I Ching* teaches people to stop the mind at the back and not grasp the body, it means to forget the self.

When you forget your self, then the root that produces desire is severed. This is stopping in stillness.

"Not seeing the person" means forgetting people. When you forget people, desirable things disappear. This is stopping in action.

Master Cheng said, "The human mind must be able to

stop. If there is no stopping it, then it follows things obediently, astray wherever it goes."

Stopping has two meanings. One is abiding in a certain state without moving away from it. The other is cutting something off and not returning to it. These two senses of stopping are complementary means of entering the Way.

SEEING

People get up and work all day long, not knowing where their minds go. Some people may consciously keep presence of mind, but most of them use forceful restraint. Forceful restraint is damaging to the mind.

The human mind is very lively; the spirit should be peaceful. Its nature should be developed in accordance with its potential, not allowing heedlessness, or forcefulness, or interruption. These are the minimum requirements for what could be called guidelines for developing the mind.

What Confucius called "stopping at the highest good" is Lao-tzu's "seeming to be there" and Buddha's "seeing independently." The spirit of a human being is in the mind, while the trigger of the mind is in the eyes. When the eyes are used inwardly, the mind is accordingly inside; hence the term "seeing independently."

Seeing means looking inwardly; independently refers to independence of mind. If you look inwardly for a long time, not only will your mind be present, your mind will ultimately stabilize.

Spirit and energy united and stabilized, in ecstasy you first awaken. The heaven and earth of reality commune, with subtleties beyond the power of words to express.

The *Mind Scripture* says, "I have seen the mind and at-

tained the Way for infinite eons." Now when the sun sets, who knows where the darkness in the room comes from? Then when we light a lamp, who knows where the darkness goes?

We must realize the lamp has no reason to chase the darkness, and the darkness has no feeling of fear of the lamp. There is no effort expended on either side.

The lamp can represent awakened awareness, while the darkness can represent ignorance. Look upon past phenomena as dreamlike, present phenomena as lightning-swift, and future phenomena as completely obscure.

Also look upon all contrived phenomena in the world as changing from moment to moment, troublesome no end, to be put at a distance as soon as possible.

Whatever you may be doing, you should practice both stopping and seeing. Stopping is silent calm; seeing is alert awakeness.

Some ask what the clear mind is. The empty mind is the clear mind. This clear mind has no images of self, person, being, or liver of life; all things are empty.

What is seeing essential nature? Following nature is seeing nature, unconsciously and unknowingly following the laws of God.

CONSCIOUS DEVELOPMENT

The words *conscious development* go together; if you cannot keep presence of mind, what can you develop? Keeping conscious presence of mind is nurturing its nature. Before arousal, it is essential to nurture it consciously; after arousal, it is essential to examine it introspectively. Subjective ideas must be overcome, and when they have been overcome, conscious nurture is again essential. These three are to be applied successively, without allowing any interruption.

Keeping presence of mind is not a matter of using effort to keep hold of it. Simply be pure and have few desires—this is keeping presence of mind.

We must realize that this mind comes when we are aware and goes when we are not aware. How can we manage to be always aware, so that it does not go away? It is just a matter of thorough familiarity, that is all. I have seen wild birds being kept; they are not domestic fowl, but because they have been raised and familiarized, they will not leave even if released. Our mind is here in our own heart—if we develop thorough familiarity with our mind, why would there be any reason to lose it?

Master Zhu said, "The work of nurturing the fundamental is interrupted very easily. However, as soon as you become aware of the interruption, this is the point of resumption. Just keep bringing it to mind all the time, building this up bit by bit, until eventually there is spontaneous continuity, turning into one whole."

Those in whom vitality, energy, and spirit get their proper nourishment and thrive will live; those in whom they miss their proper nourishment and fade will die. Try examining

this in the course of a single day; how much do they get their nourishment and thrive, and how much do they miss their nourishment and fade? Then you can know about your life and death by yourself, without using divination.

The work of learning the Way requires greater intimacy with each passing day, greater intimacy with each passing hour. Eventually you develop spontaneous familiarity and unite with the Way.

DISCIPLINE

Human beings have always acted on emotions and desires; this habit is so deep-seated that if they seek clarity and calm one day, this is not easy to achieve. Therefore it is necessary to keep discipline first.

Keeping discipline means purifying thought, word, and deed.

Not killing, not stealing, and not being promiscuous purify your action.

Not lying, not embellishing speech, not speaking hypocritically, and not speaking viciously purify your word.

Getting rid of greed, anger, and false thought purifies your thought.

When you avoid everything improper in looking and listening, in speech, and in action, this is the consummation of discipline. Overcoming hostility and desire is the origin of discipline.

Confucius said that a cultivated person has three disciplines. He meant that a cultured person always maintains an attitude of disciplined caution, never acting under the compulsion of blood energy.

Confucius also said that a cultivated person has nine

thoughts. He meant that a cultivated person's mind is always alert, spontaneously disciplined without having to keep rules.

The *Shurangama Sutra* says, "Concentrating the mind is discipline. Stability comes from discipline, insight comes from stability."

STABILITY

A writing on the nature of stability says that stability means you are stable even when active, as well as being stable when quiet.

Rather than approving inwardness and denying the external, it is better to forget both inside and outside. When both are forgotten, then you are clear and untroubled.

When you are untroubled, you are stable—how can dealing with people be a burden anymore?

The mind basically wants stability; when it is nevertheless incapable of stability, thoughts are actually burdening it. If you stop thoughts and keep presence of mind, there is nothing to disturb the mind, so the mind spontaneously stabilizes.

Yunmen said, "In the first stage of meditation, thoughts stop. In the second stage of meditation, breathing stops. In the third stage of meditation, the pulses stop. In the fourth stage of meditation, extinction culminates in great stability."

You should know that there are three paths within stabilization.

The first is called natural stability; this means that basic nature is tranquil, inherently unperturbed.

The second is called cultivated stability; this means nurturing the original purity of essential nature.

The third is called the stability of spacious calm; this means following truth with open mind, acting without compulsion. Chuang-tzu said, "The stability of spacious calm comes from the light of heaven."

Those who attained the Way in olden times nurtured wisdom by disengagement. When wisdom develops, it has nothing to do with knowledge.

When you are about to fall asleep but are not yet asleep, things of the world are not on your mind, and you are mentally and physically still, this is a time of *samadhi*.

In the state of cause, this is called stopping and seeing; in the state of effect, this is called stability and insight.

INSIGHT

It is said that the human mind is like water—when it is clear, it reflects every detail; but once it is disturbed, heaven and earth switch places.

We should know that there are three paths of insight.

The first is called insight into the emptiness of the person. This means realizing that there is no birth, no self, and no person.

The second is called insight into the emptiness of phenomena. This means realizing that the elements are conditional, temporary, and not actually real.

The third is called insight into the emptiness of emptiness. This means realizing that cognition and objects are both empty, and this emptiness is also empty.

When beginning to cultivate stabilization, one may suddenly awaken psychic powers, such as knowledge of the past, knowledge of the future, knowledge of others' minds, or un-

inhibited eloquence. This is what Confucians call the Way of perfect truthfulness, by which foreknowledge is possible.

When they learn this much of the Way, many people crave worldly fame, profit, and honor. All this belongs to contaminated spirit and energy; since it cannot be assured, many take to voluntary disembodiment. This should be immediately abandoned, because contaminated phenomena are unreal. The *Tao Te Ching* says, "Ordinary people try to shine; I alone am obscure. Ordinary people try to be smart; I alone am ignorant."

SINCERITY

The whole *Classic on the Mean* is all about sincerity. To choose what is good and hold to it firmly is a matter of sincerity. Involvement in assistance and providing suitable education are works of supreme sincerity. Supreme sincerity is called sagehood; this is the celestial path. Maintaining sincerity is called wisdom; this is the human path. Only when we emulate the celestial can we attain the human; when we fulfill the human, we can accord with the celestial. Therefore it is said that they are one at the stage of attainment.

The Way of heaven and earth can give life to myriad beings only because of sincerity. The way of emperors and kings can govern people only through sincerity; the way of sages can provide myriad virtues only by sincerity.

Being careful when alone and being thoroughgoing are the most essential exercises for seeking sincerity in the midst of daily affairs.

Supreme sincerity can move heaven and earth and summon ghosts and spirits. Ghosts and spirits appear everywhere between heaven and earth; though people do not see

ghosts and spirits, they do see heaven and earth. Ghosts and spirits are souls of heaven and earth, heaven and earth are tracks of ghosts and spirits.

Cultivated people fear the order of heaven; this is why they fear ghosts and spirits. Worldly people dare to do what is not good because they only fear that people will know. Those who are afraid of other people knowing are hypocrites; they are small people. Those who fear Heaven's knowing are sincere; they are cultured people.

FAMILIAL DUTY

Familial duty is the root of a hundred practices, the basis of myriad virtues. Establishing yourself and carrying out the Way constitute lifetime familial duty. Working to provide support is familial duty for one time. If with every step you take, every word you utter, every thought you conceive, you dare not forget your parents and do not make the mistake of disgracing yourself, losing your mind, or shaming your parents, that can be called familial duty. If with every step, every word, and every thought, you dare not disobey heaven and earth and do not disgrace yourself, lose your mind, or violate principle, this can be called humanity.

Parents are the heaven and earth of a home; filial children are attentive to their parents as they are attentive to heaven and earth. When their parents treat them lovingly, they are joyful and do not forget; when their parents treat them badly, they are hurt but not resentful.

Heaven and earth are the parents of all beings. People should be as attentive to heaven and earth as to their parents. When rich and successful, they manage it without ex-

cess; when poor and in difficulty, they accept it without losing their uprightness.

It may be asked how we can exercise familial duty toward our parents after they are dead. The answer is that the bodies of the children are the relics of the parents; if we take care of ourselves without fail, this is how we serve our parents.

Our human nature is a boon from heaven and earth; if we nurture it well and do not lose it, this is how we serve heaven and earth.

V I R T U E

In the present age, those who attain the Way are rare. It is not that the Way is hard to attain; it is because people do not yet know it truly or do not keep to it firmly.

The practice of internalizing virtue begins with making intention sincere. The practice of cultivating virtue begins with taking to goodness.

A sage said, "The richness of inner virtue is like an infant." Who does not start life as an infant? If we can clear away the stain of habits, we return to our primal innocence; the virtue of sages is simply thus.

Political, familial, and social relations are universal expressions of the Way; those who talk about the Way without these are outsiders. Wisdom, humanity, and courage are universal expressions of virtue; those who speak of virtue without these are immoral.

Confucius said to rely on virtue. Reliance means holding firmly so that it is attained once and for all, never to be lost. Eventually it matures, and on maturing it turns into humanity.

HUMANITY

Humanity is human; a human who is not humane yet wants to become a realized human being can in no way succeed. I consider what Confucians call humanity to be equivalent to what Buddhists call relics and Immortalists call the golden pill.

The mind is the house of humanity; humanity is the owner of the mind. Just clean your mind and you will accordingly sense basic energy coming back, filling your whole body; you turn around and look upon all things as one. This is a sign of self-realization. Therefore it is said, "If you master yourself and return to order one day, the whole world reverts to humanity."

As the universal principle of constant renewal of life is present within the human mind, it is called humanity, based on its capacity for giving life. Why not consciously nurture this principle of constant renewal of life in our minds?

Wu Liuquan said, "The humane live long." I have looked at people everywhere in this way and found that, generally speaking, those whose temperament is warm and gentle live long.

Those whose disposition is kind and decent live long.

Those who are broad-minded live long.

Those who are outwardly cordial and dignified live long.

Those who speak sparingly and are quiet live long.

All this is because warmth and gentility, kindness and decency, breadth of mind, cordiality with dignity, and taciturnity are all aspects of humanity—it is fitting that they would foster longevity.

Liuquan's statement has one aspect of humanity, yet even

that can foster longevity. What about the extended longevity of one who embodies all of these qualities together!

It is said that "the humane like mountains." Mountains do not move over the ages; nothing is as long-lived as a mountain. A mountain is always still; humane people are always calm.

When you are calm, the spirit stabilizes, energy crystallizes, vitality fills you, and your body is firm. In this condition, who would not live long?

CALMNESS

A proverb says that sages accomplish the ultimate human attainment based on calmness. The ultimate attainment is great balance as a human being. Sages are based in calmness, not because they think calmness is good and so they focus on it, but because nothing disturbs their minds. They are naturally calm without seeking calmness.

People seeking calmness today have not gotten the true tradition. They all say to chain the mind-monkey tightly and tether the idea-horse fast.

When they find they cannot chain or tether it down, finally they say the mind is ultimately ungraspable and thus calm. They do not even reflect that this practice is a mistake that is due to failure to attain knowledge.

When you attain knowledge, you are clear. When you are clear, you see that all truths in the world are settled and do not admit of any subjective ideas at all. This is what is known as having stability after knowing where to stop. After you are stable, you can be calm. After you are calm, you can be at peace.

Externally, if you forget fame and profit, your body will

be at peace. Inwardly, if you forget cogitation and rumination, your mind will be at peace.

Everyone says that physical security is a blessing; I say that peace of mind is the Way.

When Huike saw Bodhidharma, the founder of Chan, he said, "My mind is not yet at peace; please pacify it for me."

Bodhidharma said, "Bring me your mind and I will pacify it for you."

Huike said, "Having looked for my mind, I cannot find it."

Bodhidharma said, "I have pacified your mind for you."

Wenze said, "When you seek the mind in the past, present, and future, the mind is not there. When you look for delusion in the heart, delusion is originally not there. In that original nonbeing is enlightenment. This is called true attainment of the Way."

HAPPINESS

No happiness is greater than attaining the Way. A day learning the Way is a day of happiness; every day learning the Way is everyday happiness; a lifetime learning the way is lifetime happiness. Learning the Way is basically a method of peace and happiness; that is why sages study it tirelessly.

Zhou Moushu taught the two Cheng brothers to seek the happiness of Confucius and Yen Hui. This happiness is to be found by the individual, within oneself, where it is naturally sufficient.

Mencius said that cultured people have three kinds of happiness: enjoyment of natural relationships, enjoyment of individuality, and enjoyment of education. Happiness that depends on heaven or on other people we cannot necessarily

insist upon; but why not personally fulfill the happiness that is up to us ourselves?

Is there anyone today who is not compelled by anyone else? Is there anyone who is not compelled by things? Is there anyone who is not compelled by the physical body? People have to get rid of these three compulsions before one can talk to them about happiness.

I have seen tired people who have exhausted their physical strength; they feel bliss as soon as they get to let go. If students of the Way can let go, their pleasure is millions of times greater than that of worldly people.

Last year I went on a trip in the hottest part of the summer. I saw old folks sitting under shade trees and thought that would be ultimate bliss. Now when I sit under shade trees in my free time, I do not see what is so pleasurable. Why? Last year I was looking upon leisure when I was tired, that's all. The idea is that this seems to be how the poor look upon the rich, how the lower classes look upon the upper classes.

As adults, we should simply act normally according to our situation; thereby we can be self-possessed wherever we are. Wishful thinking is all useless; all attachments, karmic debts, judgment, and misdeeds come from it. When wishful thinking arises, can we not be careful?

BALANCE

What the ancient sages transmitted was just one thing—balance. Not being biased, not being prejudiced—this is the substance of balance. Not going too far, not falling short—this is the function of balance.

The ancient sage Yao said, "Hold sincerely to this balance." Holding to balance refers to both action and quiet. When you are quiet, you hold to this balance by conscious presence of mind. When you are active, you hold to this balance by adapting to events. "Sincerely" means trusting; it has the sense of spontaneously keeping balance at all times, whatever happens, without the slightest effort or interruption.

The ancient sage Shun said, "Be focused, be unified." Clearly seeing the fundamental subtlety is called being focused; being consistently undivided is called being unified. This says that people must have focused insight and unified discipline before they can keep balance. The word *sincerely* already includes this meaning, but he expressed it more clearly lest people would not understand that.

"The human mentality is unstable, the mind of the Way is faint." Having thoughts is the human mentality; having no thoughts is the mind of the Way. This means that the human mentality easily flares up, while the mind of the Way easily disappears. This speaks of the potential instability and faintness to make people wary, so people will take care to keep balance.

Li Yanping used to sit up straight all day to check his state of mind before the arising of emotions, seeking balance in this way. After doing this for a long time, he realized the

root of the world is really herein. Therefore he said, "Learning is not a matter of a lot of words; just sit quietly, clear your mind, and experience the design of nature. If you see the subjectivity of human desires, they all fade away."

Li Qing-an said, "The center of balance is the point where thoughts do not arise." The *I Ching* says, "Sages use this to clean their minds, retreating into inaccessibility."

LEARNING WISDOM

An ancient said, "Everyone can become a Yao or a Shun. Yao and Shun were born sages; Tang and Wu learned to become sages." Master Lao said, "I am not a sage; I learned this."

Someone asked Zhou Moushu, "Can sagehood be learned?"

He said, "Yes, it can."

"Are there any requirements?"

"Yes, there are."

"What are they?"

"Oneness is the essential requirement. Oneness means no desire. When you have no desire, you are calm and empty and straightforward in action. When calm and empty, you are clear; when clear, you are penetrating. When action is straightforward it is objective and fair; when objective and fair, it is universal. This is to be hoped for."

Learning the Way is learning sagehood. The Way is inherent in us and does not come from outside; sagehood cannot be attained without virtue. Our human nature is the same as that of sages; if we can perfect that nature, we will be sages.

People who study for exams can pass them—everyone knows this. Why doesn't everyone know that people who

study sagehood can become sages? Confucius studied tirelessly precisely because he believed he could become a sage himself, and he taught untiringly because he saw that everyone in the world can become a sage. He traveled throughout the nation-states of his time because he wanted to civilize the world with the Way of sages; he produced editions of the six classics because he wanted to educate later generations in the Way of sages.

What Confucians call sages, Taoists and Buddhists call wizards and buddhas. *Buddha* means awakened; wizards are immortalists. These are standard definitions, but I think there is another explanation for the word *buddha*. The Chinese character for *buddha* is composed of "human" and "not." This has the meaning of not acting on human desires. If you are human yet can do what humans do not, then you can become a buddha.

As for the word *wizard*, the Chinese character comes from "human" and "mountain." As a mountain is still, this has the meaning of always being stable, always being calm. If people can be like mountains, they can become wizards.

Putting down is buddhahood, raising up is wizardry; how can one become a sage? There is only one, not two or three; on examination, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are all realized through freedom from desire.

Some ask, "As we learn to become sages, what can we do about the difficulty of getting rid of the force of habit?"

The answer is that it only seems difficult because you aren't willing to get rid of it. If you were willing to get rid of it, it would soon stop. Why? All force of habit is unreal; when the mind is deluded, it seems to exist, but it is not there when the mind is enlightened. It is not that it becomes nonexistent on enlightenment; it is originally nonexistent.

TREATISE ON SITTING FORGETTING

What people value is life; what life values is the Way. When people have the Way, it is like fish having water. A fish in a dry rut will still seek a bucketful of water, but weak and dying worldlings do not even have the sense to take to the Way.

How contradictory it is to dislike the pains of life and death yet like the works of life and death, and to respect the names of the Way and virtue but disrespect the practice of the Way and virtue!

When at an impasse, you think of getting through; when lost, you think of getting back. Every moment of time is precious as a gem; shame and awe deepen each other. Thus I have gratefully pursued the doctrines of the classics and have outlined seven subjects corresponding to the teaching of mind, to serve as a pivotal aid to the process of cultivating the Way.

SERIOUS FAITH

Faith is the root of the Way, seriousness is the stem of virtue. When the root is deep, the Way can develop; when the stem is firm, virtue can flourish.

A man who presented a gem to a king got his feet cut off in punishment because the king could not recognize the value of the jewel in the matrix; a man who spoke out to save a nation was executed for it.

The implication is that when matter and means attract attention, the mind gets confused; when principles and phenomena appear, thinking gets dizzy.

Now seeing as how the ultimate Way transcends form and flavor, and true essence is apart from objects of desire, how then could one hear of the rarefied and subtle and believe in it, or hear of the imageless and not be confused?

When people hear tell of sitting forgetting, if they believe this is essential to practicing the Way, respect it and have no doubt, and also put it into practice, they are sure to attain the Way.

Therefore Chuang-tzu said, "Mortifying the body, dismissing intelligence, detaching from form, departing from knowledge, assimilating to the great pervasion—this is called sitting forgetting."

When sitting forgetting, what is not forgotten? Inwardly you do not notice your own body; outwardly you are not aware of the universe. As you mystically unite with the Way, myriad cogitations all disappear.

When Chuang-tzu speaks of "the great pervasion," the words are shallow but the meaning is deep. Confused people

hear them without believing—they have a treasure in their hearts, yet they look for jewels. What can be done for them?

Scripture says, "When faith is insufficient, there is disbelief." This means that when faith in the Way is insufficient, then one is touched by the calamity of disbelief. How can one then hope for the Way?

SEVERING ENTANGLEMENTS

Severing entanglements means detachment from entanglements in contrived mundane concerns. Relinquish concerns and your body will not be under a strain; contrive nothing and your mind will naturally be calm.

As serenity and simplicity develop day by day, worldly defilement lessens day by day.

As your behavior departs further and further from the mundane, your mind becomes closer and closer to the Way.

Which of the sages and saints did not get there by this route? The classic says, "Close your eyes, shut your doors, and you do not toil all your life."

There are those who make a show of virtue and ability, seeking people to patronize them.

There are those who busily travel about making visits, attending celebrations and funerals.

There are those who pretend to be hermits while wishing in their hearts for promotion and advancement.

There are those who invite people for drinks and meals, hoping for future favors.

Those who behave in these ways are all cleverly concealing mental machinations for purposes of profit.

Since it is not in accord with the Way, and it profoundly impedes proper practice, behavior like this should be

stopped. The classic says, "Open your eyes, carry out your affairs, and you will not be saved all your life."

As long as we do not initiate anything, others will naturally not get involved; even if others initiate something, we do not get involved.

As past entanglements gradually stop, do not form new involvements. Ritual socializing and opportunistic intercourse naturally become remote, and you become unburdened and at peace.

Only then can you practice the Way.

Chuang-tzu said, "Neither inviting nor expecting, have no feelings about contrived mixing with the mundane."

He also said, "Do not be full of schemes, do not be burdened by concerns, do not be ruled by offices."

If something cannot be neglected, then do it as unavoidable. Do not become enamored of it and fixate the mind on it so it becomes habitual.

COLLECTING THE MIND

The mind is the master of the whole body, the captain of the entire nervous system. When it is calm, it produces insight; when it is agitated, it becomes dim.

When gleefully wandering in states of illusion, who would say truth is right? When complacently taking it easy in artificiality, who would say vanity is wrong?

Confusion and ignorance of the mind come from the ground the mind rests on. Even when you pick a place to live, the intent is to improve your behavior by adapting to the surroundings. When you are selective in your choice of friends, that is because you value the potential for positive benefit. How much the more when you detach from the

realm of birth and death to abide in the ultimate Way—how can you not relinquish the former to attain the latter?

Therefore, when you begin to study the Way, it is necessary to sit calmly, collect the mind, detach from objects, and dwell in nothingness. By dwelling in nothingness you are not obsessed with anything at all; thus you spontaneously enter a nonresistant state of mind and so merge with the Way.

A scripture says, "In the supreme Way is silent nothingness, with incomparable spiritual functions. The substance of mind is also thus."

The root of the substance of mind is the Way itself; but because the mental spirit is subject to influences, its obscurity gradually deepens. After flowing in waves for a long time, eventually the mind becomes separated from the Way.

When you clear away the defilement of mind and open up the conscious spirit, that is called cultivating the Way. When you no longer flow in waves, and you merge with the Way and rest in the Way, this is called returning to the root.

Keeping to the root is called calm stabilization. After a long time of calm stabilization, illnesses dissolve and life is restored. It is restored and continued, and you spontaneously attain knowledge of the eternal. By virtue of knowledge, there is no unclarity; in the eternal there is no change and no extinction. Getting out of birth and death actually comes from this. Therefore to settle the mind in the Way of truth it is important not to be fixated on anything.

Scripture says, "Things flourish, then each returns to its root. Returning to the root is called calm. Calmness is called restoring life. Restoring life is called constancy; knowing the constant is called clarity." If you grasp the mind and station it on emptiness, that is called having an object; it is not

called having no object. Whenever you dwell on an object, that causes the mind to labor; not only is it unreasonable, it even causes sickness.

As long as the mind does not stick to things, and you can remain unmoved, this is the correct foundation for genuine stabilization. If you stabilize the mind by this means, your mood will become harmonious; the longer you do so, the lighter and fresher you feel. If you use this as a test, error and truth become evident.

If you extinguish the mind whenever it is aroused, without distinguishing right from wrong, then you will permanently cancel awareness and enter into blind trance. If you just let your mind be aroused without collecting or controlling it at all, then you are after all no different from an ordinary mortal.

As for those who simply stop the mind, good or bad, without any direction, letting their ideas float and wander while waiting for them to settle of themselves, they are vainly misleading themselves.

As for those who carry on all manner of affairs while claiming their minds are unaffected, they talk very well but their behavior is quite wrong. Genuine students should be particularly wary of this.

Now then, stop confusion without extinguishing awareness; keep calm without clinging to emptiness. Practice this regularly and you will naturally attain true vision. If there are current matters or essentials of the teaching about which you have doubts, then you may think about them to get the matter settled, so that you understand what you had wondered about. This too is a proper basis for developing wisdom.

Once you have understood, have no further thoughts. If

you keep thinking, you will ruin your serenity by your intelligence—you will “diminish the principal on account of the interest.” Even if you exercise temporary brilliance, you will fail to achieve a lasting accomplishment.

SIMPLIFYING THINGS

In the course of human life it is inevitable to experience things. Things are manifold, not up to one person alone.

A bird that nests on one branch in the forest would be lost in a roosting flock; an animal that fills its belly drinking from a river does not go seeking in the ocean.

Finding it in things outside and understanding it in yourself within, you realize you have your lot in life and you do not strive for what is not in your lot. You take care of things that are appropriate and do not take up things that are not appropriate.

If you take up things that are not appropriate, this damages your intellectual power. If you strive for what is beyond you, this wears out your body. If you are psychologically and physically uneasy, how can you reach the Way?

For this reason, nothing is better for people who cultivate the Way than to resolutely simplify things. Discern whether they are inessential or essential, assess whether they are trivial or serious, distinguish whether to eliminate them or take to them. Whatever is not essential and not serious should be abandoned.

It is like when people consume wine and meat, dress in silk, enjoy fame and prestige, and possess gold and jewels. These are all excess cravings of subjective desire, not good medicines to enhance life. The masses all pursue these

things, bringing about their own death or ruination. If we reflect on this quietly, we see how very confused they are.

Chuang-tzu said, "Those who arrive at the truth of life do not strive for anything that has nothing to do with life." What has nothing to do with life is anything excessive. Simple food and old clothes are enough to take care of essential life; why do you need wine, meat, and silk for your life to be complete?

So whatever is not necessary for life should be eliminated, and so should anything that is excessive beyond the needs of life. Possessions have an injurious energy, which hurts people when it builds up. Even if you have few possessions, you still worry about them; how much the more when you have a lot!

If you tried to shoot a sparrow with a jewel, people would laugh at you; how much the more ridiculous it is to turn your back on the Way and virtue, slight nature and life, and shorten your life span by pursuing inessentials!

If we compare fame and prestige to the Way and virtue, fame and prestige are artificial and base, whereas the Way and virtue are real and noble. If you can tell the noble from the base, you should get rid of the one and take the other, not hurting your body on account of fame, not changing your will on account of prestige. Chuang-tzu said, "One who loses himself by working for fame is no gentleman."

The *Scripture on the Western Ascent* says, "Embrace the fundamental, keep to unity." Spiritual immortalists who go to excess cannot keep to unity; they just sit in offices of glory. If you are not selective, everything you come in contact with will burden your mind and dull your intelligence; your practice of the Way will be defective.

As for those who deal with matters calmly and serenely,

who are in the midst of things without being burdened, they are among those who have attained realization. If you say you are unburdened without really having attained it, you are really only fooling yourself.

TRUE SEEING

True seeing is the foresight of the wise, the perspicacity of the able, finding out what calamity or fortune may come, understanding whether action or stillness is auspicious or inauspicious.

When you can see the potential before an event is triggered, and thereby act accordingly, guarding your footsteps with profound care, unobtrusively working to preserve your life, your conduct from start to finish leaving no troubles and not contrary to reason, this is called true seeing.

Eating and sleeping can both be harmful or beneficial; every act and every word can be a source of calamity or fortune. Even if you can manage the branches skillfully, that is not as good as disciplining the root crudely. Seeing the root, manage the branches, but without a sense of competitiveness.

So collect your mind, simplify your affairs, and reduce contrivance day by day. When you embody quietude and your mind is free, only then can you see the subtle. The classic says, "Always be free from desire to see the subtle."

Nevertheless, the body with which you cultivate the Way needs to be clothed and fed. There are some things you cannot dispense with; accept this with an empty heart, take responsibility for it with clear eyes. Do not say this will impede your mind and create vexation and excitement; those who get vexed and excited over things already have active

afflictions of mind—how can that be called pacifying the mind?

Human relations, clothing, and food are our boats; if you want to cross the sea, you use a boat. Once you have crossed the sea, you logically do not stay in the boat. But why would you want to abandon the boat before you have crossed over? The vanities of food and clothing are really not worth working for, but we seek food and clothing in order to get beyond vanity.

Even though you work for your needs, do not give rise to thoughts of gain and loss; then whether or not there is something to do your mind will always be at peace. You seek like others but not greedily as others do; you gain like others but do not accumulate as others do. When you are not greedy, you are not anxious; when you do not accumulate stores, you do not lose anything. Your outward appearance is like that of others, but your mind is always different from worldlings. This is the essence of true practice; you should make an effort to apply it.

If problems remain intractable even after you have severed entanglements and simplified your affairs, just view them objectively. If you are heavily afflicted by sexuality, then you should view addiction to sex as coming from thoughts; if those thoughts do not occur, then there is no sex. So you should recognize that thoughts of sex are externally empty, while the idea of sex is an inward imagination. The imagining mind is empty, so who is the subject of sexuality?

Scripture says, "Sexual objects are just mental imagery; since mental images are all empty, how can there be sexual objects?"

Also, think of how beautiful women are more dangerous than vixen sprites. Vixen sprites charm men, causing them

aversion, so that they will not enter evil ways, even at the threat of death. Because of this aversion, they avoid promiscuity forever. Beautiful women bewitch men so that they become obsessed and grow more and more deeply attached even as it leads to their death. Because of wrong thoughts, on dying they fall into various states and are born in hell. Scripture says, "In this life you willed to become husband and wife, but after death you cannot live together."

Why is the course of human life like this? Because of false thoughts.

Also consider this: if physical beauty is invariably attractive, why do fish dive and birds fly when they see a human, even a beautiful woman? Wizards look upon physical beauty as muck and mire; the wise liken it to a sword or a hatchet.

If you do not eat for seven days you may die, but if you do not have sexual intercourse for a hundred years you will avoid premature death. Therefore we know that sex is not essential for body or mind but is an enemy to essence and life. Why be obsessed with it, bringing destruction on yourself?

When people see others doing wrong and conceive aversion and disdain, that is like grabbing the knife from someone about to kill himself and committing suicide with it yourself. It is the other who is doing wrong, not compelling you; why take on others' wrongs and make them into your own sickness?

Furthermore, if you see those who do wrong as detestable, then those who do good should also be disdained. Why? Because both obstruct the Way.

If you are poor, you should also look into it carefully. Who gave you poverty? Heaven and earth cover and support impartially; your present poverty is not on account of heaven

and earth. When fathers and mothers produce children, they want to make them rich and prestigious; so your present poverty and lowliness are not on account of your father and mother. People, ghosts, and spirits have no leisure even to save themselves; how can they have the power to force poverty on you? Pursue this examination in activity and in retreat and you will find that poverty comes from nowhere but your own action.

Then you will know the command of heaven. Action is created by you yourself, life is bestowed by heaven. The relationship of action and life is like shadow and echo following form and sound; they cannot be avoided and should not be resented. Only the wise realize this; pleased with heaven, acknowledging celestial order, they do not worry; so how can poverty trouble them?

Chuang-tzu said, "Action enters but should not be kept." It is because of your own action that you are afflicted with poverty; though it has come in, it should not be kept around. Scripture says, "Heaven and earth cannot change one's conduct, yin and yang cannot divert their action." Speaking in these terms, this is true fate, not something artificial; what is there to resent?

When a courageous warrior encounters brigands, he has no fear; wielding his sword, he proceeds straight ahead, whereupon the brigands all scatter. Once his achievement is established, his glory and his reward continue all his life. Now, if poverty and sickness afflict our bodies, then these are brigands. If we have a stilled mind, that is the courageous warrior; intelligent examination is wielding the sword, the dissolution of afflictions and troubles is victory in war, and peace and permanent happiness are the glory and the reward.

Whenever misery oppresses our minds, if we fail to use this observation and instead become anxious and burdened, then that is like people who encounter brigands but do no worthy deeds, throwing off their armor, abandoning their troops, and running away. Doing the wrong thing, they abandon happiness for misery—how pitiful is that?

If you are suffering from illness, you should observe that this illness comes from having your own body. If you did not have your own body, where would the ailment be? The *Tao Te Ching* says, "If I had no body, what affliction would I have?"

Next observe the mind as having no real master. Searching inwardly and outwardly, you find no perceiver; all suppositions come from the wandering mind.

Thus if you still the body and quiet the mind, then myriad illnesses will all vanish.

If you dread death, you should think of your body as the abode of the spirit; this physical deterioration in old age is like a house that is rotting away and no longer fit to inhabit. It will be necessary to abandon the house and find another place to rest.

This is how it is when the spirit goes as the body dies—if you cling to life and abhor death, trying to avoid change, then your spirit's consciousness will become confused and no longer operate correctly. Because of this, when you are energized at rebirth, you do not sense the clear, fine energy but mostly find polluted, debased energy. All folly, greed, and baseness actually derive from this.

If you can manage to be dispassionate about living and unfazed by death, that will put life and death in order and also take care of preparations for the afterlife. If you crave all sorts of things, every craving produces an illness. When

even one limb is ailing, it makes the whole body uneasy; so if there are myriad ailments in one mind, how could you prolong your life even if you wanted to?

All craving or hatred is forgetfulness of life. When accumulated illusions are not cleared up, they interfere with perception of the Way. This is why we need to give up cravings and abide in nothingness, so that we have a basis for gradual clarification. If we look back at our former cravings after that, then we will naturally find them unappealing.

If we view objects with minds absorbed in objects, then we will never know there is something wrong. If we view objects with minds detached from objects, only then are we able to see with perfect clarity what is so and what is not. A sober man, for example, can see what a drunken man does wrong, but if he himself is drunk he is not aware of his own errors.

A scripture says, "I basically give up the profane and disdain the mundane." It also says, "Ears and eyes, sound and form, keep afflicting you; the scents and flavors enjoyed by the nose and mouth are enemies." The old master disdained the world, abandoned the profane, and alone saw that scent and savor are enemies—how can those who indulge in craving for them realize that "fish shops stink"?

TRANQUIL STABILIZATION

Stabilization is the final stage of escape from the profane, the foundation of attaining the Way, the accomplishment of cultivated stillness, the consummation of maintaining calm.

When the body is like a withered tree, the mind like dead ashes, without reactivity, without seeking anything, this is the epitome of tranquillity. There is no mindfulness of stabilization, yet there is no instability. Thus it is called tranquil stabilization.

Chuang-tzu said, "One whose capacity is tranquilly stabilized radiates natural light." Capacity refers to the mind; natural light is active insight. The mind is a capacitor of the Way; when it is as uncluttered and quiet as can be, then the Way stays there and insight emerges.

Insight comes from original nature; one does not just come to have it now. That is why it is called natural light. It is just because of the muddling confusion caused by craving that it comes to be obscure. Clean it, make it flexible, rectify it, and restore it to purity and calm, and the original real conscious spirit will gradually become clear of itself; this does not mean that you are just now producing that insight.

Once insight has emerged, treasure it and do not compromise stability by too many concerns. It is not that producing insight is difficult; being insightful but not using it is hard. Since ancient times there have been many people who have forgotten their bodies but few who have forgotten their reputations. Being insightful but not using it is forgetting repute; few in the world attain this, so it is considered difficult.

The noble who can be unaffected and the rich who are not extravagant can keep their riches and nobility because

they are not excessively mundane. Those who can be unshakably stable and insightful without exploiting it can profoundly realize true eternity because they are not excessive in religion. Chuang-tzu said, "It is easy to know the Way; it is hard not to speak of it."

To know but not speak of it is the way to get to heaven. To know and speak of it is the way to get to humanity. The people of old were divine, not human.

Insight can know the Way, but this is not attaining the Way. People may know the advantages of gaining insight without realizing the benefits of attaining the Way. "Use insight to clarify the ultimate principle, employ eloquence to move people's feelings and arouse their hearts, increasing in the course of events, coming in contact with others. If you only speak of constant calm in the midst of activity, how can you know that calmness is a matter of being calm in order to deal with people?" These words do not express tranquil stabilization. Even if you are intellectually outstanding, that only makes you so much less near to the Way. You may have originally gone chasing deer, but you are going home with a rabbit. What you have got is extremely slight, because you are being small-minded.

Chuang-tzu said, "Those who mastered the Way in ancient times nurtured wisdom by means of serenity. Wisdom grew, but they did not use wisdom to contrive anything." This is called using wisdom to nurture serenity; when wisdom and serenity combine to nurture one another, the pattern of harmony comes from nature.

Serenity and wisdom are stabilization and insight. The pattern of harmony is the virtue of the Way. When you have wisdom but do not use it, remaining peaceful and serene,

after building this up for a long time you naturally attain the virtue of the Way.

This stabilization is accomplished by effort. It may be based on observing advantage and seeing harm, stopping the mind out of fear of calamity, discarding and removing accumulated habits. In any case, when the mind is mature you wind up stabilized, just as if it were naturally so. Even a thunderclap that shatters a mountain does not startle you, naked swords may cross before your eyes and yet you do not fear. You look upon fame and fortune as transient and know birth and death are like oozing sores. Thus we know that when we exercise undivided will we solidify the spirit; then openness and subtlety of mind are inconceivable.

The mind is not existent in and of itself, but it is not nonexistent in action. It is swift without rushing, it comes without being called. Its anger will drive an arrow all the way into a boulder; its resentment will bring down frost in midsummer. Indulge in evil, and the nine hells are not far away; accumulate good, and the three heavens are not distant. Coming all of a sudden and going all of a sudden, mind's movements and stillness cannot be named. Whether its timing is right or not cannot be fathomed by divination. It is incomparably harder to tame than deer or horses.

The exalted ancient master employed eternal good to liberate people; ascending the platform of the spirit, he expounded the ineffable. Summarizing the causes and effects of three vehicles, he expanded upon the naturalness of myriad beings. For a gradual approach he used daily lessening of contrivance; for an immediate approach he used experiential return to where there is nothing to learn. Metaphorically, it is like drawing a bow and penetrating with an arrow; the method is blunting sharp edges and resolving complications.

If you practice this consistently, by habit it will become natural. Dismiss intellectualism, subdue your body, and sit forgetful in oblivion, unmoving in stillness, subtly entering into illumination. Those who go divergent ways will never understand the meaning; those who travel this path have a chance to see the sublime. This requires little effort, but it is very effective.

ATTAINING THE WAY

The Way is something miraculous. It is effective and has an essence, yet it is immaterial and has no form. It cannot be fathomed retrospectively or prospectively, cannot be sought by reflections or echoes. No one knows why it is so, yet it is so. Penetrating life completely, this is called the Way.

Perfect sages attained this in ancient times; sublime teachings transmit it in the present. If you investigate the principles according to the terms, they are completely veracious. Superior people believe wholeheartedly; they master themselves and practice diligently, emptying their minds and opening their spirits so that the Way alone comes and concentrates.

The Way has profound power; it gradually changes the body and spirit. When the body follows the way to penetration and wholly unites with the spirit, such a person is called a spiritual human.

The spiritual nature is nonresistant and fluid; its essence never changes or perishes. When the body is assimilated to the Way, there is thus no birth and death. In concealment, the body is the same as the spirit; when revealed, the spirit is the same as energy. That is how it is possible to "walk on water and fire without injury" and "cast no shadow under

the sun or moon." Whether to remain in existence or disappear is up to oneself; one goes out and in the gateway of nothingness.

The body is a material residue, yet it can still reach immaterial subtlety; how much deeper and further can spiritual knowledge reach! The *Scripture of the Living Spirit* says, "When body and spirit are unified, that is the true body." The *Scripture on the Western Ascent* says, "It is possible to live long by virtue of unification of body and spirit."

However, there are differences in depth of the power of the Way of absolute nonresistance. When it is deep, it also affects the body; when it is shallow, it only influences the mind. Those whose bodies are affected are the spiritual people; those whose minds are influenced only gain insightful awareness, while their bodies cannot escape passing away.

Why is that? Insight is a function of mind; when it is worked too much, the mind is fatigued. When you first attain a little insight, if you are delighted and talk too much, your spiritual energy leaks out, and there is no spiritual refreshment of the light of the body. This ultimately causes an early end, so the Way can hardly be completed. This is what scriptures call dissolution of the corpse.

For this reason, great people conceal their light and hide their brilliance in hopes of attaining completeness. Stabilizing their spirit, treasuring their energy, they study the Way and extinguish their minds. When spirit unites with the Way, this is called attaining the Way. Scripture says, "Those who assimilate to the Way also attain the Way." It also says, "Why did the ancients value this Way? By it one can attain without long seeking and escape from the faults one has."

When there is jade in a mountain, the plants and trees there do not wither; when people embrace the Way, their

physical bodies are stabilized by that. When imbued with its influence for a long time, the physical constitution is assimilated to the spirit. When you refine the body to gain access to subtleties, merging with the Way, then you disperse one body into myriad things and merge myriad things into one body.

The illumination of wisdom is boundless, physical transcendence is endless. You employ the totality of matter and emptiness, set aside Creation to accomplish the work. Genuine response without bias—that is the virtue of the Way. The *Scripture on the Western Ascent* says, “Have the same mind as heaven but without knowing it; have the same body as the Way but without distinguishing it. After that the Way of Heaven is fulfilled.” This refers to attainment of realization of its consummation.

When the spirit does not leave the body, it lasts as long as the Way. When the body is assimilated to the Way, then it never ceases to exist. When the mind is assimilated to the Way, there is nothing it does not penetrate. When the ears are assimilated to the Way, there is no sound they do not hear. When the eyes are assimilated to the Way, there is no form they do not see.

Clarity and effectiveness of the six senses come from this, but mediocrities of recent times whose consciousness does not reach far have only heard of the path of relinquishment of the body and have not realized the marvel of the body in itself. Unashamed of their own shortcoming, they imitate others' errors. They are like summer insects that do not believe in ice or frost, or bugs in a jar that deny the sky and earth. They cannot be reached in their ignorance—how can they be taught?

SITTING FORGETTING

Essentials and Auxiliaries

If you want to cultivate the Way and attain realization, first get rid of warped behaviors.

With external affairs cut off so that there is nothing to get on your mind, then sit straight and gaze inwardly with accurate awareness.

As soon as you notice a thought arise, immediately extinguish it; arrest thoughts as they arise, in order to make your mind peaceful and quiet.

Next, even though you may not obviously have any obsessions, still floating, wandering, random thoughts are also to be extinguished.

Work diligently day and night, never giving up for a moment; but only extinguish the stirring mind, do not extinguish the shining mind.

Disappear into the empty mind; do not disappear into the possessive mind.

Do not dwell on any thing and the mind will be stable.

This method is mysterious, with benefits that are very profound. Unless you already have affinity for the Way and have undivided faith in it, you cannot truly appreciate it.

Even if you know how to recite the texts, you still have to discern reality from artificiality. Why? Sound and form dim the mind, falsehoods fool the ears; personality and ego become second nature, the disease of self-affirmation is deep-seated. When the mind is separated from the Way, the principle is hard to comprehend.

If you wish to return to the supreme Way, have deep faith

and first accept three precepts. If you practice in accord with these three precepts consistently from beginning to end, then you will attain the true Way.

The three precepts are:

1. simplifying involvements
2. not craving anything
3. quieting the mind

If you diligently practice these three precepts without flagging, then even if you have no mind to seek the Way the Way will come of itself.

A scripture says, "If people can empty their minds and not contrive anything, it is not that they want the Way, but the Way spontaneously reverts to them."

Speaking on this basis, this quintessential method is genuinely trustworthy and truly valuable.

Nevertheless, the ordinary mind is excitable and obstinate and has long been that way, so to bring the mind to rest by means of precepts is in fact very hard.

One might try to bring it to rest but not succeed, or one may temporarily succeed but then lose it again. In the struggle to keep it as it slips away, the whole body runs with sweat.

After a long long time the mind becomes flexible but straight; only then is it fully tuned. Do not give up everyday work just because you are temporarily unable to concentrate or control your mind.

As soon as you have gained a little calm, then you should consciously stabilize it at all times, whether you are walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, while you are dealing with concrete matters and tasks, in the midst of the hustle and bustle.

Whether there is something the matter or not, always be as if mindless; whether in quietude or in a commotion, let your will remain undivided.

If you control your mind too intensely, the stress will cause illness. Fits of insane idiocy are symptomatic of this. If the mind is immobile, then you should let it go, finding a mean between laxness and intensity.

Always tune yourself, being controlled without obsessing, being natural without indulging. When you can be in the midst of clamor without hating it and can deal with things without vexation, this is true stability.

That does not mean, however, that you seek to be busy just because you can deal with things without vexation, or that you take to clamor just because you can be unmoved in the midst of clamor.

Unconcern is true stability, concern is response to events. It is like a mirror, which reflects the forms of anyone or anything that happens to be there.

With skillful application of expedient techniques, as long as you are able to gain access to stabilization and unleash insight, whether it comes sooner or later is not up to the person. Do not hastily seek insight within stabilization, for if you seek insight that will damage your stability, and if you damage stability you will have no insight.

If insight occurs spontaneously without your seeking for insight, then that is true insight. To be insightful without exploiting it is true wisdom appearing ignorant, enhancing the twin beauties of stability and insight without end.

If you think when in a stabilized state, you will be very sensitive and all sorts of devils and sprites will follow your mind and appear accordingly. The wondrous and weird phe-

nomena encountered by the realized people and the old masters are evidence of this.

Just let there be uncovered openness above the stabilized mind and groundless vastness below the stabilized mind. Old habits dissolve, new habits are not created; not bound or obstructed by anything, you get out of the net of the world.

Practice this for a long time and you will naturally attain the Way.

In people who attain the Way there are five mental times and seven physical phases.

The five mental times are:

1. more movement than stillness
2. equal movement and stillness
3. more stillness than movement
4. stillness when there is nothing to do, movement when something impinges
5. the mind merged with the Way, not stirring even on impact

Only when you reach this last stage do you finally attain peace; the dirt of sin entirely gone, you no longer suffer vexation.

The seven physical phases are:

1. one's action accords with the time, one's countenance is gentle and pleasant;
2. chronic ailments all dissolve, body and mind are light and fresh;
3. youthful damage is repaired, the basis is restored, and life is revived;
4. the life span is extended thousands of years—people like this are called immortals;

5. the physical body is refined into energy—people like this are called real humans;
6. energy is refined into spirit—people like this are called spiritual humans;
7. the spirit is refined to merge with the Way—people like this are called perfected humans.

The power of perception becomes clearer with each phase, until it is perfectly completed when one attains the ultimate Way and achieves insight.

Even if you have practiced stabilization for a long time, if your body and mind do not have these five times and seven phases, you will have a short life in a polluted body, returning to the void when matter disintegrates. If you then claim to have insight or to have attained the Way, even if you find it in theory you are not there in reality. This is surely mistaken!

SAYINGS OF TAOIST MASTER DANYANG

SELF-ENLIGHTENMENT

Learning the Way is a matter of self-enlightenment. Failure to realize enlightenment is caused by ignorance.

If you want to break through ignorance, first clean your mind.

This is a matter of purifying and calming it until it is perfectly clear.

When you succeed at this you attain fulfillment. You do not necessarily need to ask another for instruction.

ENERGY, NATURE, CHARACTER, AND THE WAY

Eat plainly to cultivate energy.

Get rid of anger to cultivate nature.

Be humble to cultivate character.

Keep unified, clear and clean, calm and serene, to cultivate the Way.

When your name is not on the rolls and your heart is not on power and profit, this is how you shed the human shell and become a companion of Heaven.

MINDLESSNESS AND MASTERY

Energy is hard to master; it is swift as a galloping horse. Only by calmness does it become easy.

Get rid of external longings. If you see the hubbub in front of your eyes as if it were deep in the mountains, in inaccessible valleys, this is the heart of a Wayfarer.

No one can exercise mastery without reaching the state of mindlessness.

NATURAL PATTERNS

When the mind is stable, feelings are forgotten.

When the body is immaterial, energy circulates.

When the mind dies, the spirit lives.

When positivity is strong, negativity vanishes.

These are natural patterns.

SLEEPING TECHNIQUE

The subtlety of preserving nonvolatile energy is in keeping vitality complete.

It is most important to be guarded when sleeping. When you are going to sleep, keep accurate mindfulness present, so myriad thoughts disappear.

Lie on your side, breathing softly through the nose, the soul not stirring within, the spirit not roaming outside.

Do this, and your energy and vitality will naturally stabilize.

PURITY AND SERENITY

If people can master the path of purity and serenity, that is most excellent. Therefore scripture says, "If people can always be pure and serene, heaven and earth will resort to them."

This "heaven and earth" does not mean the external sky and ground. It refers to the heaven and earth in the body.

Above the solar plexus is called heaven, below the solar plexus is called earth. If the energy of heaven descends and the vessel of earth opens, so that there is harmony above and below, then vitality and energy spontaneously stabilize.

ATTAINING THE WAY

The substance of the Way is no mind, the application is forgetting words.

The basis is softness, the foundation is purity and serenity.

If it is to be carried out among people, it is necessary to be moderate in eating and drinking, to stop musing and mulling, to sit quietly to tune your breathing, and to sleep peacefully to nurture energy.

When your mind does not race, then your nature is stable.

When your body is not belabored, then your vitality is complete.

When your spirit is not disturbed, the elixir crystallizes.

After that you extinguish feelings in emptiness and settle the spirit in the absolute.

This can be called attainment of the subtle Way without leaving home.

PREPAREDNESS

Everything requires preparedness, for then there is no trouble.

So if those who work on the Way would control their emotions and desires when they are young, thus making early preparations for it, then spiritual immortality is possible.

If you wait until you are old and your willpower and energy are declining, it will be too late to study the Way.

CLARITY AND PURITY

Clarity and purity mean clarifying the mind source and purifying the energy ocean.

When the mind source is clear, external things cannot disturb it, so feelings settle and spiritual illumination takes place.

When the energy ocean is pure, wrong desires cannot affect it, so vitality is complete and the belly is full.

So clarify mind as you would clarify water; nurture non-volatile energy as you would nurture an infant.

When nonvolatile energy blossoms, the spirit is effective. When the spirit is effective, nonvolatile energy transmutes.

This is effected by clarity and purity. If you practice conscious, deliberate exercises, these are limited techniques. If you practice the principle of mindless noncontrivance, this is unlimited clear emptiness.

NONCONTRIVANCE

Noncontrivance means not musing or mulling.

Though you may act in the midst of love, desire, anger, accumulation, gain, and loss, be always uncontrived.

Even when involved in things, be always unconcerned.

If you concentrate totally, moreover, clarify your mind and purify your will, nourish your energy and make your spirit complete, you will drift into the land of freedom and enter the village of nothing-whatsoever.

MINDLESSNESS

Mindlessness, or no mind, does not mean being mindless like cats or dogs or bugs.

It means striving to keep the mind in the realm of clear purity, and having no warped mind.

Vulgar people have no clear pure mind, while people of the Way have no polluted dirty mind. That does not mean they are totally mindless like trees, rocks, cats, or dogs.

PRACTICE

Students of the Way should have their minds on the Way at all times, no matter what they are doing.

When they walk, they set foot on the path of evenness.

When they stand still, they freeze their feelings in cosmic space.

When they sit, they tune the breathing in the nose.

When they recline, they embrace the jewel below the navel.

Eventually the tune of the breathing is unbroken, and you are like an imbecile all day long. This is correct practice—it has nothing to do with contrived observances.

ENERGY AND SPIRIT

The energy in the body should not be scattered, the spirit in the mind should not be dimmed.

How do you avoid scattering energy?

By not acting compulsively.

How do you avoid dimming the spirit?

By not keeping things on your mind.

SECRET WRITINGS ON THE MECHANISMS OF NATURE

COLLECTING THE MIND AND REFINING THE SELF

The realized man Zhengyang said:

Starting in on cultivating realization is entirely based on refining the mind. Concentrate on watching when thoughts arise and be sure to keep accurately aware; sweep away miscellaneous thoughts and return to one thought.

When you master calmness to the utmost, return to openness to become stabilized; sweep away thoughts of past, present, and future, annihilate notions of self, person, being, and liver of life.

After the ground of your mind is calm and the sky of your nature is clear and cool, solidify your spirit to stabilize it in the aperture of nonvolatile energy.

Single-mindedly silently watch over the mechanism of closing and opening, the numbers of exit and entry. When

you breathe out, the energy mechanism opens; when you breathe in, the energy mechanism closes. The spirit remains in the aperture of nonvolatile energy, consciously visualizing the energy of exhalation and inhalation rise along the active channel up the spine, like a red sun rising up to the top of the sky in the crown of the head, then descend along the passive channel, like a white moon, down to the furnace of the earth in the belly.

Count your breaths this way to ten by ones, then to a hundred by tens, then to a thousand, to ten thousand, keeping your mind on the number without missing, in order to cause your thoughts not to scatter and your attention not to be disrupted. When mind and breath stay together and work in unison, this keeps the mind from leaping about and prevents attention from running off.

An ancient said, "True attention comes and goes without interruption; knowing without keeping watch is meditation. If you fixate attention, you go wrong everywhere; but if you are inactive, you fall into a void. From mindfulness you turn mindless." If you make the mind empty and open, nonresistant and receptive, then it has no birth or death.

If you want to get rid of random thoughts, first keep accurate awareness. When you have awareness, you naturally have no thoughts. When having no thoughts is practiced until it becomes thoroughly familiar, it can result in having no dreams. When you have no dreams, then "the mind dies and the spirit lives."

This is very important in the here and now. After all, if the mind is not refined, then the spirit is not stable, so the light of essence inevitably wavers. If the attention is not refined, then emotionalism does not die, so the root of life is not firm. It is necessary to quench the fires in the mind

completely, extinguishing endless desires. At all times keep inward watch over the sole reality; in all places realize myriad objectifications are empty. Then the sky of your essential nature will be clear and cool and you will no longer be carried away by joy or delight.

This is merely an effect of refining the self. Therefore it is said, "Before you refine the restorative elixir, first refine your self. When you have thoroughly refined your self, then refine the elixir."

RETURNING TO EMPTINESS AND HIBERNATING IN THE CAVERN OF ENERGY

Master Shouyang said:

When you go into retreat to work on the path of return, you should sit straight in a quiet room and turn your awareness inward.

Congel the spirit on the ground of the gateway of life, aware but not fixated, conscious of it at first, then afterward forgetting it.

Empty the mind and solidify the spirit, not sticking to material form yet not falling into empty oblivion.

With open awareness undimmed, consciously nurture silent shining.

Do this for a period of three sticks of incense at a time.

As long as you sense your breathing is gentle and feel empty, clear, and exhilarated, this is correct practice of solidifying the spirit and attaining transformation.

Within seven weeks of practice, water and fire will mix and true yang will be born. Keep illumination stable for three months and you can approach the inner precincts.

Gradually stabilizing and crystallizing the pill, keep illumination steady for one hundred days, and then it can penetrate the passes and get through the openings.

When the mind rests below the navel, that is called womb breathing. Mind and breath submerge together into the region below the navel; keeping them clear and pure naturally is called "not forgetting," while going along with their clarity and purity naturally is called "not fostering."

It is all a matter of making space the place you store your mind, using abstruse silence as the place you rest your spirit. Do it over and over again, clarifying and clarifying, deepening and deepening; gradually mind and breath come to stay together, spirit and energy merge harmoniously. Before you realize it, positive energy arises ecstatically, and you are as if intoxicated.

THE NATURAL MECHANISM OF TURNING ATTENTION AROUND TO GAZE WITHIN

Bai Yuzhan said, "The path of inner refinement is extremely simple and easy; just get the fire of the heart to descend into the elixir field. The elixir field is the chamber of water, while the heart is fire. When fire enters water, then water and fire mix and true yang is produced. Therefore people call them heart and genitals, not water and fire."

The realized man Zhengyang said, "Getting the fire of the heart to descend is the South Star shifting to the position of the North Star."

Shi Xingling said, "Gather in your spirit and return it back into your energy and the alchemical process will naturally take place."

Liu Haizhan said, "I have realized the principle of long life—intense yang subdues intense yin."

Xu Jingyang said, "I will disclose my family way to you—the sun shifts into the light of the moon."

Master Wang Chongyang said, "When you begin to build the foundation, first take the spirit in the upper opening and sink it into the lower opening, in the cavern of energy. Mind and breath keeping together causes pure attention to be ever aware. Alternating exhalation and inhalation come and go in the furnace of creation; after a long time this becomes thoroughly familiar, and fire will naturally erupt from below the navel, a tiger will emerge from the water. Without even trying to return to central balance, you spontaneously revert to central balance.

"When you first watch over the opening, turning your attention around to gaze within, it is a black pearl, like the dark side of the moon. Steadily illumined by the fire of mind following the wind of respiration, the blackness spontaneously produces white, fire erupts in water, and warm energy circulates in the cavern of energy. This is the initial movement of true yang, producing being from nonbeing."

He also said, "The forging and refining of wind and fire must be applied to pure yang to activate the yang energy. This is all a matter of discovering and consciously nurturing the basic spirit, a point of empty nothingness, storing it down in the cavern of energy. This is called sending it back to the earth pot and sealing it tightly.

"With the ethereal spiritual light of essence of the basic spirit within, be like a turtle hiding, like a snake hibernating; do not forget, do not force, as if present yet as if absent. Eventually exhalation and inhalation will join, spirit and energy will embrace, the mystic pass will naturally open, and the seed of realization will be produced."

ZHANG SANFENG'S TAIJI ALCHEMY SECRETS

THE ALCHEMICAL PROCESS

1

The actual practice of the work cannot follow anything created as a rule, because everything created is temporal. Taoism today has mostly deteriorated in this way, so there are few in the world who transmit truth.

It is not right to get fixated on nondoing either. If you don't do anything, you will fall into inert vacuity. Buddhism today is mostly affected by this deterioration, so there are few Buddhists in the world.

The reason this Way is not operative is that the Way is not clearly understood. At first the work is a matter of extinguishing emotionalism and sweeping away miscellaneous thoughts. This is the first step, building the foundation and refining the self.

Once the human mentality is set aside, the celestial mind comes back. Once human desires are purified, then the celestial design is always present.

Every day, first be quiet for a time, until body and mind are both peacefully settled and your breathing is gentle and even. Now lightly close your eyes and gaze into the region below the heart and above the genitals, within a space of 1.3 inches, without becoming fixated on it and without departing from it either. Do not forget it, do not force it. When myriad thoughts disappear and the soul alone is present, this is called right mindfulness.

At this time, in this mindfulness is liveliness and buoyancy; in that energy is serenity and contentment.

When exhalation rises, it is not to collide with the heart above; when inhalation descends, it is not to collide with the genitals below. Closing and opening, coming and going, practice this for one or two weeks, and naturally the kidneys and genitals will gradually steam, the energy in the elixir field will be warm. Breathing will be spontaneously tuned without your having to tune it; energy will be spontaneously refined without your needing to refine it.

Once energy and breath are harmonized, then there is naturally no exit or entry, no coming or going above, in the middle, or below. This is womb breathing. This is spiritual breathing. This is the true bellows, the true cauldron and furnace. This is returning to the root and restoring life. This is the opening of the mysterious female, the root of heaven and earth.

When energy reaches this point, it is like a flower just budding, like an embryo just conceived. True energy spontaneously steams and circulates, from the coccyx up through the spine into the head, down the nasal passages, through the windpipe, to the heart, where it drops into the central elixir field. This is the initial movement of the "waterwheel,"

but only energy gets there—the spirit is not yet complete, so it is not the true movement. Don't bother with it.

I just gaze steadily, very very subtly, watching over the central chamber. Naturally there is endless living potential there. Practicing this for a month or two, my spirit becomes quieter and quieter. When you are quiet for a long time, energy is increasingly produced. This is called the practice of spirit producing energy and energy producing spirit.

A hundred or more days of this, and the vital spirit grows and grows, while true energy gradually becomes full. Warmth appears in abundance, and there is good circulation. Water and fire naturally commingle, and heaven and earth join. The spirit is fluid, the energy is expansive. In a short while true energy unifies, and a whirlwind spontaneously rises up into the hundred channels. This is the true movement of the waterwheel.

During this interval, if a point of spiritual light is sensed in the elixir field, this is the "dark pearl at the bottom of the water," the "yellow sprouts inside the earth." At that time one yang returns, hazy like a red sun when it first rises, shining on the ocean, foggy, misty, obscure yet visible; then "lead fire" is born therein.

While heaven and earth and water and fire have yet to combine, still the spirit in the utter quiescence of empty nothingness, allowing no interruption in this exercise until you turn into a single solid whole; this is called the mating of the five elements. Then when water and fire mix, you cull them in two stages; as the waterwheel turns in reverse, you gather medicine at four intervals. The spirit remains inside, the light of the alchemical pill does not leave. This is called the major cycle and is referred to as carrying out the major restoration in nine revolutions.

At this time a point of absolutely positive vitality crystallizes within the center. It is stored in the time when desires are cleared and emotions are stilled, yet it has appearance and form. When you get to this stage, the breath stays in the "womb." Incubating inside and out with unerring timing is called the ten months' work.

2

The exercise of stillness is in each interval of time. Even within a quarter hour there are the exercises of refining vitality into energy, refining energy into spirit, and refining spirit back into openness. This is not only so for the ten-month incubation period; it is so in one hour, one day, one month, and one year.

Sit down, close your eyes, become aware of the spirit, quiet the mind, and tune the breathing. This exercise is to refine vitality into energy.

Turn attention around to gaze inwardly, freeze the spirit in the alchemical opening, make the true breath circulate; center the infinite celestial potential within, acting when stillness reaches its maximum, becoming still when action reaches its maximum. This exercise is to refine energy into spirit.

In this way true energy gathers at the source, yin and yang return to the origin and mate; spontaneously the wind grows still and the waves are calmed. At this time I keep right mindfulness in the elixir field; this is the process of "sealing."

When you carry out these three practices, it is not just a matter of going into retreat for ten months; as it is said, "When you operate the process for a quarter hour, there is a

quarter-hour cycle. When you operate it for an hour, a day, a month, or a year, there are hour, day, month, and year cycles."

So in one quarter hour, the first half of the quarter hour is the "warming," the "fostering of the fire," the "beginning of the lunar cycle," the "first phase of the moon," "difficulty in the morning," "spring and summer." The second half of the quarter hour is the "cooling," the "withdrawing," the "end of the lunar cycle," the "last phase of the moon," "darkness in the evening," "autumn and winter." In one double hour there are divisions of four quarter hours in the first half and four quarter hours in the second half. The same is true of a day, a month, or a year.

This is called assembling the five forces of yin and yang; in a quarter hour's exercise you take over the energy process of a whole year. At this point you are truly empty and truly calm. Go on for one or two years, up to ten years, or a hundred years, and you break through space to merge with the cosmic void. This exercise is for refining the spirit back into emptiness.

Once the ten months of the preliminary work are completed, then you must watch over the "infant" at all times. Ten steps, a hundred steps, a thousand miles, ten thousand miles—it goes out gradually. If you just let it go with no restraint, it will get lost and not return.

A classic of immortalism says, "When spirit enters energy, it forms an embryo; when energy cleaves to spirit, it crystallizes the alchemical pill." This is what is called "a point dropping into the yellow court."

People who have few miscellaneous thoughts obtain the elixir pill rapidly, while those who have a lot of miscellaneous

thoughts are slow to obtain the pill. This method is simple and easy, but people just will not put forth the effort. If you can practice it consistently for a long time, you will surely "penetrate metal and stone," "walk on water and fire," and "comprehend heaven and earth."

SECRET RECORDS OF UNDERSTANDING THE WAY

TRUE AND FALSE

The Old Man of Clear Serenity said:

There is nothing in the world that does not have both true and false versions. Practice of the Way may also be true or false, so students should first distinguish the difference clearly.

True practice is total sincerity. It is not a matter of avoiding the world or leaving society. And neither does it depend entirely on deliberate sitting and reciting scriptures. The essential thing is to refine away the false within the true to filter out the true from the false. Only then do you attain the true reality of perfect sincerity.

If you only concern yourself with reciting scriptures in front of other people and do not concern yourself with inner cultivation and self-government, or if you sit quietly all day, immobile as a statue, looking good outwardly but inwardly

agitated by roaming thoughts and miscellaneous ideas—all of this is false.

The false is antagonistic to the true, so if it is not eliminated it will harm the true. But to get rid of it you have to find the appropriate way. If you do not find the way, it is like shutting the door to catch a robber; the false cannot be eliminated and the true is sure to get hurt.

People who are not of the highest wisdom are influenced and conditioned by false images every day, so they lose sight of natural realities. They are so used to untruth that it becomes truth for them.

Even if there are some who have a little higher consciousness and clearly know that worldly affairs are all artificial, when taught to cultivate the real they still find the artificial hard to relinquish. If they are to be resolute, they first have to refine themselves within the artificial until they feel they have no more interest in artificial things; if they set them aside to seek the real after that, then they will be able to find the real.

If you happen to have been born in a rural area and are basically uncomplicated and unaffected, and never having experienced the bedazzlement of prosperity you do not know there is such a thing as artificiality, then you do not know there is reality either. That is because the real is hidden within the artificial and the artificial is not outside the real. What is quintessential is to be able to find out the real in the midst of the artificial and discern the artificial in the midst of the real.

Therefore cultivation of the Way does not require leaving home. You must mix with society, harmonizing illumination, living in the material world without being infected by materialism.

NO HURRY

The Old Man of Clear Serenity said:

In quiet sitting, whether or not there is a specific process, you should not cling to form. If you consciously and deliberately try to apply mental images, you are prone to develop all sorts of illnesses. That is called drawing a snake with legs on it; you will bring trouble on yourself.

When we look into the source of this problem, we find it can be attributed to one's own fixation, inflexibility, and habituation to biased views. It also comes from conceit and rigidity and failure to clarify instructions from a teacher so as to understand them thoroughly.

The upshot of this failure to abide by the principles of the practice, taking in the elixir too rapidly, without the process's being completed, sitting hastily and carelessly before yin and yang energies have found their respective places.

Some consciously focus their attention on the lower elixir field when they sit. Some roll their eyes up into their heads to gaze upward. They are doing mental gymnastics.

Some concentrate attention on the breathing, like pumping a bellows. Some focus their minds on counting breaths, trying to take energy in without letting it out.

There are a number of such patterns. They can cause dizziness, deafness, reddening of the eyes, distention of the abdomen, pain in the tendons and bones, mental foginess, nocturnal emissions, and other symptoms.

People who lack the basic capacity tend to develop illnesses by what they do in their pretenses of practicing Taoism. What they do not realize is that practicing the Way is

cultivating and nurturing the Way of nature, the natural course.

First it is essential to clear the mind and minimize desires. After that, you preserve and nurture the vital spirit. You may succeed in prolonging life, or even in permanent realization of wizardry or buddhahood; but the effective result is due to inconspicuous practice according to principle, clearing the mind and not making up anything—it does not come from artificial contrivance.

Generally speaking, quiet sitting has three types of principles. First there are the principles on which higher alchemy is based. In the middle there are the principles of refining the alchemical elixir. Finally there are the principles of lower alchemy.

So every step has its process. The order must be understood, the principles must be observed. Even those who are sincere and genuine may be able to keep the principles of preparation and procedure, but most act carelessly when it comes to completion.

I am going to reverse the order and talk about lower alchemy. You cannot rush; you will be finished only when you have attained thorough resolution, so that your vital spirit is clear and fresh. Otherwise you will merely have one or two experiences, or the process will break down after starting.

If you are careless with lower alchemy, it is very easy to cause harm. I see so many people trying to practice without doing it correctly from the start. Before their minds are settled, and before they have perceived the right conditions, they immediately cross their legs, fold their hands, and deliberately sit. Their heads are not right to start with; their bodies are not upright, their gaze is not even. They try to operate the process before the fire is even burning in the

furnace. Even though there remain a number of conditions that have to be present, they cannot wait—they shut their eyes tight, so that purity and pollution are not distinguished and positive energy cannot rise. This way of practice is hardly effective.

In practice, the eyes and ears are the most difficult points. If you simply take the distention of the primary opening to be the process of the work, you may experience itching and ringing in the ears, blurriness in the eyes, and drooling from the mouth that must be consciously drawn in. These are all examples of inability to await the right opportunity, like eyesight and light unable to combine.

If the opening of the ears has not been shut to the outside, the breath in the nose has not become subtle, the true liquid has not been produced, or the fire in the furnace has not been ignited, no state is genuine.

It is altogether essential to reach the point where the eyes, ears, nose, and tongue merge, and vitality, energy, and spirit fuse; *that* is when the light of insight shines forth. If you do not wait for the medicine to be produced and the fire to ignite, how can the great elixir be refined? If the firing is insufficient, the negative polluted energy in the body cannot be cleared away. Then pure positive energy cannot rise.

I always tell people that the first essential of practice is to even the temper well. You should not practice sitting hastily; wait until positive energy rises and the medicine is produced—only then is the time right.

When it comes to contemplating emptiness, it is essential to attain reversal of attention inward, the state of *turning the light around*. Rolling the eyes up into the head is not reversal of attention, nor is it turning the light around when the eyes see darkness. You must reach the point where the eyes do

not see, the ears do not hear, and the breathing in the nose is extremely subtle. Then you have no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind; you are aware only of the existence of the primary opening, nothing else.

When you arrive here, the light of your true nature emerges. This is called the celestial monarch of the four elements offering a bowl.

Afterward, work on not letting go of this little mystic pass; that will surely be a good way to produce an alchemical pill. But work individually, because the state of turning the light around may take more or less time, depending on the individual.

Above all, don't be in a hurry. If you do not wait for a genuine state to occur but forcibly withdraw your vision and consider that to be turning the light around, sitting with your eyes closed, then positive energy cannot get in and negative energy cannot get out. You will only toil uselessly, without benefit.

There are some people who roll their eyes up into their heads and gaze upward with excessive force. If they do this for a long time, they will suffer either brain damage or possibly blindness, both irreversible. This is very harmful, so I have taken up the admonitions left by the masters over the ages to systematically encompass the practical requirements for realizing the Way.

I have revealed the mechanisms of mysticism without fear of celestial regulations, in hopes that each individual may find out what it is to be human, and return home, to permanent realization of the state of fulfillment of higher development.

If you have worked for a long time but have not perceived any truth, it is because your mind is still unstable. Sages

taught people to know how to stop, after which there is stability, calm, and peaceful meditation. The function of stabilization is great indeed! If you practice correctly, your mind will be stable and your temper will be even—how could you then be unable to perceive truth?

Sitting work is called quiet sitting because it is a matter of cleaning all the pollution from your mind. Once the pollution is gone and your mind is clear, truth naturally becomes evident. The reason people cannot see truth is simply because their minds are too noisy and they cannot see through things and events as they really are.

Whether or not they practice quiet sitting, practitioners of the Way must clean old impurities out of the mind, making it clear and pure. Renew this work daily, without haste or hurry, and eventually you will spontaneously see the benefit.

So when you begin, it is essential to make a real effort. Accumulating vitality is setting up the foundation. Stopping thoughts is principal. Unifying spirit and energy is obtaining the medicine. Keeping the spirit still and not letting it scatter is incubation. Refining the spirit back into cosmic space is obtaining the alchemical pill. After the pill is complete, is it not the highest universal truth?

There is a folk saying that if you want effort to deepen, wear an iron pestle down to an embroidery needle. The point is that practitioners of the Way must not be in a hurry to see results.

Whether or not there is any progress cannot be determined on the surface. You should know there is a time to rise up and a time to lie low, a time to go forward and a time to withdraw. It is like walking a mountain path, which

has high and low places, even and uneven places—how can it be viewed as all the same?

You just have to follow the right pathway and you won't go wrong. As long as you don't stop walking, eventually you will reach the peak, so why hurry? If you hurry, your legs and feet will get numb, your head will get dizzy, your eyesight will get blurry, and you will gasp for breath. Then, instead of speeding on your way, you have created obstacles. Unable to go on, you will give up along the way. Isn't that a waste of all your previous effort?

Strive to break through material form, empty your body and mind, and become lively and fluid. Don't "draw a snake with legs on it" and you will naturally not be guilty of "drawing a tiger like a dog." Develop your character in relation to the outside world as much as you can. When your practice is accomplished and its results are fulfilled, then real truth can be seen without looking, inherently containing endless subtleties.