

The Tao - Remaining Still - Solala Towler

When people hear the term meditation, they may think of an austere practice of sitting in an uncomfortable position for an interminable time, trying very hard not to think of anything as the mind races madly and the legs and back cramp up. Or they may think of sitting high in the mountains and leaving their earthly forms behind and soaring into the realm of infinity. Others may come up with the picture of rows and rows of silent bodies sitting long into the night trying mightily to transcend "normal" consciousness and attain some sort of enlightened state, which will immediately solve all their earthly problems. The difficulty with these pictures is that meditation can contain aspects of all of this, yet it is, at its core, much more simple, more direct, and easier to learn and to make a part of one's everyday life. That having been said let me also say that for many people, meditation can be the most difficult, painful, challenging practice of their lives. It can raise issues that have been buried so deep that they have been successfully ignored for a lifetime. It can bring one to the very brink of one's sanity or it can bore one to tears.

On the other hand, meditation, practiced correctly and regularly in the way that is most appropriate for each individual, can open doorways into worlds that we can only imagine. It can open lines of communication to the world of helping and healing spirits and can bring one closer to whatever one's idea of God or Tao or the Eternal or the Great Mystery is. It can allow greater awareness of one's bodily condition or energetic state as well as allow greater insight into one's emotional terrain. Taoist meditation is a little different than many other types of Eastern meditation. For one, it does not only work with the mind, although that is a component of Taoist meditation. It is not just a relation practice, though it does also have that function. It is not simply a quest for a higher state of consciousness, but seeks to balance mind, body, and spirit into one unified field. It utilizes all three of these (mind, body, and spirit) as well as the life force energy that animates all living things, which the Taoists call Chi (pronounced chee).

During meditation, Taoists direct qi to various organs and through various channels or meridians in order to facilitate healing, greater vitality, and a long and healthy life. They are also dissolving areas of "stuck" Chi, which can cause anything from pain to tumors. They are learning to breathe deeply from the belly, thereby exercising the diaphragm muscle and massaging all the internal organs, from the lungs to the digestive tract. They also learn to breathe into the lower and upper back, massaging the kidneys and the heart. Taoist meditations can also quiet the "monkey mind," that part of the brain that never shuts off but runs and jumps from one thought to another like an excited monkey. Like a static-ridden radio, our minds are often so full of outside noise that we rarely get to hear that still, small voice within that can give us so much information and guidance from our higher selves or Tao nature. Just taking a few moments a day to tone down the static and neutralize its effects can not only bring us serenity of spirit, but open pathways of communication from the spirit world (what in the West could be described as the angelic world).

Meditation is sometimes referred to as insight practice. By turning our gaze inwards, we can illuminate those dark areas of sickness, pain, and emotional turmoil that often run (and ruin) our lives. By gently circulating the golden light within us we can reach that en-light-en-ment state whereby our problems do not have as much weight as they did and we can make decisions from a calm, clear, and balanced state. Another major difference in Taoist-style meditation practices is that they utilize sitting, laying down, standing and even moving meditation techniques. To be able to maintain the meditative state while moving is a very valuable and powerful experience and one which can help to bring the meditative state into one's daily life. The foremost concern of the Taoist to go with the flow of nature, not expending too much energy and ending up depleted, and not doing anything that is unnatural for the individual. In Chinese this is called *wu wei*, sometimes translated as "not doing." What it really means is being so sensitive to the moment that one is able to do just the right thing at the right time, which may include doing nothing. The important thing is not to overdo anything, including meditation. A Taoist teacher once told me that too much meditation will make your teeth fall out! What I took him to mean (although you never know with these Taoist masters) is that not moving for too long a time will make the energy or Chi stagnate in the body, causing all kinds of circulatory disturbances. We are already seeing this happen in the modern world: people sit in front of computers all day only to go home and sit in front of the television. In the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu, tells us: *Better stop short than fill to the brim. Over sharpen the blade, and the edge will soon blunt. And: Retire when the work is done. This is the way of heaven. (Chapter nine)*

Another aspect of Taoist meditation is internal alchemy. Briefly, internal alchemy is concerned with the mixing and refining of internal energies that are natural to our body / energy systems in order to allow deeper states of health and spiritual Cultivation. This is referred to in ancient Taoist texts as immortality practices. Taoists do not believe that there is something inherently wrong with the material plane. They do not see it as a "vale of tears" or as an illusory state to be transcended in order to experience a spiritual life. True, the material plane has its share of problems. Lao Tzu tells us to: *Accept misfortune as the human condition. Later on he explains, what do you mean by "Accept misfortune as the human condition?" Misfortune comes from having a body. Without a body, how could there be misfortune?*

Of course, the Taoist does believe that one must utilize the energies and attitudes of the body itself (which includes the energetic body) for assistance on the mystical quest to oneness, or as it was called in

the old days, *Returning to the Source*. The Source of all being, as well as non-being, is sometimes called the Primordial (Wuji) or the Realm of the Subtle Origin, or of Tao itself.

In the Taoist canon, the Western Queen Mother is the personification of the primal yin force in Taoism. She said, "Whoever wants to extend his life must grasp it within his body before going outside his own body."

By learning how to harmonize and strengthen the physical, mental, and energetic / spiritual layers of our own bodies, we can not only revitalize our systems but gain deeper spiritual awareness and understanding that will, in turn, allow us to be example to other seekers. Taoists do not proselytize, they do not sermonize, and they do not seek to convert others. Instead, they believe that to be a good example of a healthy, spiritually realized person is the best way to help the world. We all learn at our own pace, in our own time, and in our own fashion. That is why there are so many different types of practices in Taoism and why there is no one practice that is right for everyone.

Again, we look to Lao Tzu for guidance: *Returning is the motion of the Tao. Yielding is the way of the Tao. The ten thousand things are born of being. Being is born of not being.*

Taoist Meditation and Qigong

There are many ways and occasions to meditate. Indeed, Taoist meditation is a form of qigong, a term which means working with Chi or primal energy. There are many hundreds, if not thousands, of different types of qigong in China. Millions of people practice some type of qigong daily. They practice in parks, on mountaintops, in hospital clinics, and in their own homes. There is a hospital called the Huaxia Zhineng Qigong Center in China that does not use Western medicine, acupuncture or herbs. The only treatment they use is qigong! (See *101 Miracles of Natural Healing* by Luke Chen.) Sometimes called Nei Dan or Dao In in the ancient Chinese writings, qigong utilizes breath, movement, and visualization to access, circulate and store Chi or primal energy in the body, thereby affecting the practitioner on all levels—physical, mental, and spiritual.

As previously mentioned, there are many different styles of qigong—from long, complicated sets or forms to very simple meditation styles. Most, if not all, types of Taoist meditation can be considered qigong practices. Working with the breath, directing or guiding Chi through pathways or organ systems, or working with the three dan tiens—all of these can be considered qigong practices. Remember, there are many reasons to begin a meditation practice—from cutting down the stress in your life to the Taoist immortality practices. Human beings have always meditated. The oldest cultures, including those from India as well as China, have utilized various meditation practices to maintain health, stamina, and vitality, as well as to commune with the source of all life. All of these reasons are valid to begin or maintain a meditation practice. The trick, of course, is to be able to bring the meditative state or the fruits thereof into the rest of your life. The more you can erase the line between your meditation or spiritual practices and the rest of your life, the better. The more you integrate meditation into your life, the more whole, balanced, harmonious, healthy, insightful, and spiritually aware person you will be. Taoists believe in learning from Nature, both external nature and internal Nature. Ancient Taoists spent a lot of time simply studying Nature around them. They watched how animals comfort themselves in circles before laying down, how certain birds stand on one leg with the other leg sealing up to close off various openings, and how other animals curl up to close off various openings, thereby stopping any energy leakage. They noticed which plants animals ate when they were sick or injured.

The Taoists observed the slow passing of each season, of day into night, and the interplay between light and dark. They experimented on themselves with various breathing practices, sitting, and even laying down meditation postures. Over thousands of years of experimentation, they came up with various practices that have stood the test of time. They found ways to open the doorways between worlds, to extend life, and to heal the deep layers of trauma that we as humans have accumulated through lifetimes. As in ancient days, the best teacher is still Nature, if one has the eyes to see. But even that can take training and practice. The next best teacher is life itself, but one must be able to look with a gaze of objectivity and introspection, something not all of us has been trained to do. The best teacher after that is another person, a teacher of meditation or qigong. There are some things that you can receive from another person that you can never get from a book or a video, especially if that person is a gifted teacher. After that, knowledge can come from book, tapes and videos. Depending on how much you put into it, Taoist meditation can effectively change, or at the very least, enhance your life. For those with experience in other forms of meditation, it can open new areas of experience and vision. Taoist meditation can give you greater clarity, both emotionally and mentally, a stronger sense of roundedness in your energy body, and some valuable tools for exploring the "inner space" of your psyche, spirit, and energetic being. Last of all, Taoist meditation is not necessarily connected to a religious format. In other words, it is not necessary to convert to Taoism to practice Taoist meditation. The benefits of Taoist meditation can be attained by anyone, regardless of religious persuasion. All it takes is the willingness to relax, to be open to change, and to experience oneself as an energetic as well as a spiritual being.