GATEWAY TO WISDOM

Taoist and Buddhist Contemplative and Healing Yogas Adapted for Western Students of the Way

John Blofeld

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS: YOGA

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Foreword

All my life I have been captivated by the marvellous wisdom of China, which is largely composed of what are known collectively as the San Chiao or Three Teachings. The Chinese seldom speak of them as 'religions' because they are concerned less with dogmas and beliefs than with the art of living wisely. Confucianism, though not without religious overtones, is an ethical rather than religious system; followers of Taoism can be much taken up with religious practices or dispense with them altogether without being any the less Taoist for that. Buddhism, though it comes much nearer to being what Western people mean by a religion, is free from dogma and places emphasis on attaining a particular state of mind rather than on a body of belief. In pre-communist China, the followers of all three systems liked to speak of themselves as cultivating the Way, for the Chinese word *Tao* (the Way) was commonly used by all of them, though with differing shades of meaning. Entering upon a search for wisdom was known as *Ju Men* (Passing through the Gateway).

With Confucianism we are not concerned here; its doctrines, though tinged with mysticism, did not give rise to yogic practices. As to the others, Buddhism is already fairly well known in the West, where it has taken firm root; whereas Taoism, except as a philosophy, is scarcely known at all. Taoist sages, always elusive, seem for the most part to have vanished from human ken since the rising of the red flood in China; even in countries adjacent to their ancient

homeland -which no longer permits overt cultivation of the Way - it is rare to come upon a genuine Taoist master. In an earlier book, *The Secret and Sublime,* I speculated whimsically in the epilogue on what might have happened had some of those sages, bestriding the backs of multicoloured dragons and *ch'i lin* (Chinese unicorns), soared through the clouds above the ocean to make a landing in the West. Little did I think while writing that epilogue that I myself would one day be carried in the belly of a huge man-made bird to the New World, where I had never yet set foot, there to hold seminars on various aspects of Chinese and Tibetan wisdom. Yet, in the summer of 1978, that was where my destiny (moulded by the determined efforts of the Alan Watts Society) took me; and I found in those far-flung lands 'beyond the Eastern Ocean's rim' a positive hunger for the wisdom so tragically rejected by China's present rulers. Of Buddhist teachers from various Asian countries I encountered many who had settled down happily in their new surroundings, though not in such numbers as to satisfy the surprisingly great demand for them. Of Taoist masters, I failed to meet even one, only some specialists in arts and sciences loosely associated with Taoism, such as I Ching divination, calli-graphy, *fai chi* callisthenics, acupuncture and Chinese medicine.

This failure was not due to remissness on the part of myself or my hosts, for I spent more than three and a half months in North America, visiting eleven states of the USA and three Canadian provinces, always on the look out for such Taoist teachers as might be found there. From the distressingly vast city of Los Angeles, I was driven along the rugged coastline of Big Sur, thence to golden San Francisco and onwards through

endless vistas of incredibly enormous trees along the coastal road to Vancouver, penetrating to the peaceful isles and mountains lying about a hundred miles to the north of that fair city. On a subsequent leg of my journey, I flew to Colorado, where my daughter, Suwimol, having spent almost all her life in Thailand's steamy plains, enjoyed walking through the snow that lies, even in August, above the tree-line in the mighty Rockies. The next halt was many-towered Chicago, whence I was driven to that part of Wisconsin where the little sisters of Lake Michigan abound. Flying thence to Toronto, I was driven through smiling fields and woods to Montreal to board a plane for Boston, where someone was waiting to drive me through New England to northern Vermont at a time when some of the maples were donning their blazing ornaments of gold and crimson to give travellers a taste of the autumn splendour yet to come. Next I was plunged into the gamut of new experiences offered by those unique cities, New York and Washington, DC, before returning to California to stay peacefully on the slopes of Mount Tamalpias, once a holy place of the American Indians. My companion on both these journeys, the indefatigable Bob Shapiro, proved himself a master of the Taoist art of cleaving his way effortlessly through obstacles; these might otherwise have proved insuperable to someone quite new to a part of the world where planes take the place of buses and a bewildering network of almost identical highways needs skilled navigation.

Mount Tamalpias retains much of its ancient magic. Though indubitably in America, it offers views lifted bodily from China's pastel-tinted Kiangsi Province and from Japan's

matchless Inland Sea. Indeed, while standing on its peak, I had the joy of pointing out to one who shall always be known to me as Lady Ruth a most astounding sight: sailing towards us through the clouds and easily recognisable were the Eight Immortals from the Taoist pantheon in their ancient square-sailed junk!

Set variously amidst North America's cities, farms, forests, mountains and sea-girt islands, I came upon numbers of institutions large and small where thoughtful people are earnestly seeking remedies for the shattering environmental, psychological and spiritual problems that have arisen in the wake of the unrestrained 'progress' made by capitalistic enterprise and technological invention. Some of these, known as growth institutes, are making a broad psychological approach to the task; though by no means exclusively interested in the contributions that can be made by the teachings of Asian sages, they welcome every kind of technique for attaining a positive, well-balanced attitude to living and an unshakeable tranquillity of mind. My seminars in these places yielded a great deal of experience that has been valuable to me in writing this book. Of even greater interest in this connexion were the institutions and communities specialising in the study and practice of Buddhism. These include a number of very active Zen communities, and others under the direction of Tibetan lamas. One of these, founded by Thrungpa Rinpoche, has already blossomed into a Buddhist university; another, under Thartang Tulku, bids fair to do so; and at California's City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is a nucleus of Buddhist institutions, under the direction of the Chinese Dharma Master Hsüan

Hua, from which it is intended that a university shall emerge. As to Buddhist temples, institutes and communities on a smaller scale, founded by Japanese, Tibetan, Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai monks or by native Americans, these are to be found scattered over many parts of the USA and Canada; to say nothing of small, loosely-knit Buddhist groups that meet regularly for discussion and meditation. A more or less complete list would be very long indeed, and the same is true of other institutions and groups that specialise in acupuncture, Chinese medicine and *t'ai chi* callisthenics.

All these developments are most encouraging and yet, on leaving North America, I was unable to view the whole picture I carried away with me ina spirit of unalloyed hope. I had heard from many sources of thousands of young people, driven by a great longing to discover ways of life more meaningful than those offered by a highly developed capitalist-technological society, who, being in too much of a hurry to choose well, had become the prey of gurus whose appeal is to the emotions rather than to wisdom and good sense. There had been much talk of brain-washing and even of kidnapping, of communities that demanded the handing over of private wealth and property, and of youngsters who had enrolled under one or other of these so-called gurus being threatened if they desired to withdraw. I had also read advertisements by groups claiming to teach 'tantric Buddhism' whose object was clearly to promote more exciting forms of sex! All these ills result from unrestrained, naive enthusiasm coupled with a shortage of teachers with high spiritual qualifications; the situation is all the more dangerous on account of the difficulty faced by inexperienced

youngsters in distinguishing between gurus worthy and unworthy of that name. This situation is profoundly disturbing and may be very hard to remedy in a country where 'freedom of religion' is so highly respected that the law is often powerless to intervene.

My decision to write this book arose mainly from two matters that became clear to me during my seminars. First, though in North America (as in Britain) there are areas where good teachers are no longer a rarity, in others this is far from being the case; plenty of people eager to study the Way are tied by jobs or family responsibilities to places where no teaching is available. Second, there are now so many books about Eastern wisdom that people who take the trouble to attend seminars on branches of that subject are apt to be less eager for information than for instruction leading directly to *action* of some sort. They want to be taught techniques of yogic practice. Aware that beneficent and sometimes blissful experiences result from contemplative yogas regularly performed and that life thus becomes more meaningful and joyous, they long to undergo such experiences themselves. During my tour this placed me in a quandary, for spiritual practices can seldom be depended upon to produce quick results; in a seminar lasting at most eight days, even if everybody were to devote most of the time to practising meditation, notable developments would be unlikely to result. However, I did my best to introduce some action by, for example, demonstrating the ritual casting of yarrow stalks for I Ching divination; teaching participants how to chant ancient Chinese invocations and recite mantras; or giving some instruction in various forms of meditation, as

well as in the employment of certain ritual actions and mudras, some of which T'ai Chi Master Huang promptly incorporated into a magically graceful ritual dance. All these attempts were enthusiastically received, but they did not (and could not) produce remarkable results in the time available. The one exercise that did lead to a sense of achievement was the practice of group healing, during which we jointly performed a type of yogic concentration for the benefit of two dangerously sick people, whose subsequent recovery was so rapid as to make it seem very likely that the practice had been effective. This encouraged me to consider writing a book on simple yogas that could guide people to similarly effective action, if designed specifically to meet the needs of Westerners under the circumstances now prevailing in North America and Europe.

When the idea first occurred to me, I hesitated. The attainment of expanded states of consciousness during which exalted spiritual insights are experienced demands not only sustained and rigorous practice, but also accurate knowledge and strict discipline of mind and body. Hence, the personal supervision and guidance of a teacher are highly desirable; without such aid, things may go seriously wrong. On this account, I put the thought away for a time, but it kept recurring.

'Even the longest journey must begin with a single step', as the Chinese saying goes. One can, as I know from experience, go at least a short way towards a high yogic goal while progressing on one's own. This being so, I realised that there is room for a book that could be used at the initial stages of the path in preparation for a time when the opportunity

arises to acquire the personal guidance of a well qualified teacher. The reader should clearly understand that a mere book can -except in very rare cases - take him only a little of the way. By following some of the yogic practices described in the following pages and developing the necessary attitude towards them, he can, however, begin to enhance the quality of life for himself and those around him, besides preparing for the day when a teacher becomes available. Yet it would be reckless for him to think of proceeding to those wider seas where fierce currents and submerged rocks imperil all who sail there without the assistance of a pilot who knows how to find his way past those dangerous obstacles. The book may also be of some use to those people who have been set on the right path by a good teacher, but whose circumstances do not permit them to remain within reach of him - a situation in which I have often found myself. For them, some of the practices set forth here may prove useful auxiliaries to whatever main practice they have, perforce, but incompletely mastered.

The aims, then, of this book are:

to enhance the quality of life in the Here and Now through realisation of the essential holiness and underlying unity of oneself, all living beings and the whole environment;

to inculcate some of the attitudes required for more meaningful living, and in preparation for setting out upon a course for Enlightenment (though no attempt has been made to chart the further stages of that course, for which a teacher's supervision is an absolute requirement).

These aims involve:

achieving some notion of the nature of reality as perceived by mystics in exalted states of expanded consciousness, this knowledge being fundamental to all yogic attainment;

understanding why the entire universe is to be revered as holy;

cultivating man's lost sense of awe;

recognising that the development of wisdom and compassion must go hand in hand;

transmutation of negative emotions and inordinate desires; attaining inner stillness and a state of tranquillity invulnerable to life's ups and downs.

Yogic means of accomplishing them comprise:

fostering simplicity and frugality;

contemplative attunement to nature's rhythms;

contemplative examination of the nature of

self and 'other'

the practice of awareness;

various meditative techniques;

the practice of individual and group healing;

such aids to progress as yogic breathing and exercises, chants, mantras, mudras, creative arts, regulation of diet and sexual intercourse, etc.

These matters are not dealt with in a particular order; some receive lengthy treatment, others are merely touched upon, for they impinge upon one another and whereas some require rigorous practice others arise of themselves as the fruits of progress. Nor does the book run smoothly from shallow into deeper waters; on the contrary, the most profound teachings occur in the introductory sections to each of the book's main parts. This is because, although the actual practices are

simple, the theory underlying them is the same as for highly advanced yogas. The simplicity of the practices is, moreover, in some cases more apparent than real; most can be raised to increasingly lofty levels of performance, their content deepening as they are pursued. It is not intended that any reader should undertake all the practices; each will require a good deal of time to become thoroughly effective. (For example, one can learn to recite a short mantra in a minute or so, but its effectiveness will depend on 'mastering it', which requires frequent recitation over a long period.) The exposition with which each of the parts, Taoist and Buddhist, begins has been kept to a bare minimum; therefore it requires careful study as this knowledge is essential to the proper performance of the yogas; for whatever has to be done with body, hands or tongue owes its importance solely (or very largely) to its effect upon the mind. Mind is pre-eminent. Mind is the king.

My use of the term 'yoga', and also of 'yogin' for one who practises contemplation, may require explanation. 'Yoga' is cognate with the English words 'union' and 'unite'; it was originally employed in India in the sense of 'union with God' and extended to cover the various spiritual exercises practised to this end. Unfortunately it has passed into the English language at the popular level as a synonym for *hatha yoga,* which connotes just the *physical* exercises related to yoga as a whole, with the result that misunderstanding of its full meaning has arisen. 'Yoga' is used in this book neither in its ancient Hindu nor in its popular English sense. Since Taoists and Buddhists do not believe in a personal Creator, they never seek to attain union with God. They hold that all

beings are fundamentally indivisible from (and therefore do not require to be united with) the ground of being, from which man feels himself to be separate only on account of faulty perception. From this faulty perception arises the need for what Taoists term 'Return to the Source' and Buddhists call 'Enlightenment' - a transcendental experience that sunders the bonds of ego-delusion. The experience is accompanied by sensations of blissfulness and hitherto unimaginable freedom. It consists not in attaining unity with the ground of being, since that has never been interrupted, but of joyous perception of that unity, to which they have long been blind. In this context, 'yoga' means *full realisation of an already existing but hitherto unperceived state of union;* by extension it also connotes the various means of attaining this supreme intuitive experience. A yogin is one who employs such means, whether to reach Enlightenment or to achieve more limited objectives along the Way that will raise his potentiality for intuitive experiences and meanwhile reconcile him joyously with his environment. Since his mind is the source of all high endeavour and the receptacle of all deeply meaningful experience, essential yogic practice has far more to do with mind than body (although the well-being of the body is certainly not to be neglected). Therefore, yogic practices are mainly mental in character, there being, by the way, no distinction in this terminology between mind and spirit. I myself sometimes employ the word 'spiritual' because of its inspiring connotations in our language, but my use of it is wholly rhetorical. Indeed, in an ultimate sense, even the distinction between mind and body is found by yogins to be invalid.

In general, I have closely followed Taoist and Mahayana Buddhist tradition, but made some modifications to suit what I deem to be Western needs. In transplanting a tradition from one culture to another, one should not be too particular about detail, but take great care to retain the essence in unchanged form. Taoism, unlike Buddhism, has hitherto been confined to its native country, whence it has been swept away by the coming of the red tide, so there is no satisfactory way of obtaining guidance as to what degrees of adaptation will enable it to flourish on new soil. Buddhism has, from very early times, freely adapted itself to the cultures of different countries, taking on much local colour wherever it has spread, yet without diluting its essence or losing its essential flavour; so its further adaptation fully accords with precedent. Unfortunately, in going about the task, I have been unable to attain sanction from my Chinese teachers, having lost all contact with any of them who may survive; nor is it likely that they are still in this world, for they would now be immensely old. Therefore the responsibility rests with me alone - a responsibility I should have been loath to take but for the fact that the practices concerned do not involve the manipulation of powerful energies (other than the *maha karuna* of the compassionate Kuan Yin Bodhisattva) and are not at all likely to do damage to those who undertake them without a teacher. Even so, I ask pardon from my teachers and guardian deities for any errors that may have crept in.

I have been a little tempted to write this book under my Taoist name, Niu-t'ou Tao-jên (the Oxhead Recluse), chosen partly on account of my birth-year and partly because my head is unusually large. Like many Taoist cognomens, it is a

fun-name. But it would not do at all to delude any readers into supposing it to be the work of a genuine Chinese sage, for the difference between one who has absorbed Chinese wisdom with his mother's milk and one who has stumbled upon facets of it in a desultory way is very great.

John Blofeld

Written in Wu Wei Studio (a place where things may be allowed to happen of themselves), spring, the Year of the Sheep (1979).

Part I *Taoist Theory and Practice*

A THEORY

1

Nature's Grand Design

The Taoist concept of the nature of the universe agrees closely with the Buddhist concept (set forth in part II). It is at once so utterly sublime and so extraordinarily up to date that modern physicists have only recently begun to feel their way towards accepting the same general principle. In this concept, the notion of an omnipotent creator-deity separate from his creation plays no part at all. Belief in God gives place to reverential awe for the majesty and mystery of the cosmos itself. Taoist sages have never presumed to define the ultimate; for, as the great Lao-tzu asserts in the Tao *Te Ching* written two and a half millennia ago, 'He who speaks [of the Tao] does not know; he who knows does not speak'. He also writes: 'The Tao expressible in words is not the eternal Tao; a name that can be spoken is not that of the eternal Tao.' By the Tao (literally 'the Way') he refers not to a power standing outside phenomena, but to the very substance - or, better, non-substance - of the universe. As accomplished mystics belonging to many diverse cultures have come to realise from the direct confrontation with reality that forms the very apex of mystical experience, the supremely holy creative principle is not a *being* to be loved or placated by hymns and sacrifice, but rather a *state of being* that is manifest throughout the

cosmos and lies apart from nothing, since it is the very essence of all existence.

The sublime Tao is that which lies right in front of (and equally in and behind) our eyes. Far from being apart from it, as souls according to Christian theology are apart from God, we are permeated by it and partake of its very being. That most of us experience a sense of loneliness, of apartness both from the highest reality and from all the beings and objects around us, is due to deluded understanding and a faulty sense perception, which lead us to think in terms of 'I am I; other is other'. Yet so deep-seated is this delusion that even Taoist yogins speak of the supreme mystical apotheosis at which they aim as 'Return to the Source'; nevertheless, they are aware that this is a misnomer, for one cannot *return* to that from which no one has ever for one instant been apart. 'Return to the Source' is a figurative term for the unutterably blissful experience of *becoming aware with all one's being* of perfect identity with all that is, has been or ever could be.

People with a Christian or Jewish background are apt to suppose that absence of belief in an omnipotent creator-deity necessarily implies acceptance of the doctrine of materialism. This, however, is a great error. A Taoist would be better pleased if you were to describe him as a follower of the doctrine that matter is essentially spirit; for, though in fact his thought penetrates beyond such distinctions, his concept of the cosmos comes very much closer to that of an unblemished spiritual whole than to what is commonly implied by the doctrine of materialism. He recognises both spirit and matter to be indivisible manifestations of the formless, measureless, ever-existing, undifferentiated and

essentially unchanging Tao, properly called the Nameless because beyond description, but arbitrarily named the Way for the sake of convenience. The Tao is the Way, but also the Source, the Journey, the Traveller and the Goal. One may choose to conceive of it as matter or spirit, or as both of these or neither; such distinctions are valid only for as long as we remain at a very imperfect level of consciousness. Nothing is so poor or insignificant as to be other in nature than all that is most glorious and profound; therefore, even the most ordinary people, animals and things are worthy of the utmost reverence. A man, his fellow men, all sentient beings, their environment and the entire cosmos are inextricably bound together; all alike are tangible but purely transient manifestations of intangible, undifferentiated, illimitable, timeless being - the Tao. In bowing to you, I bow to one greater than God. In inhaling the scent of a rose or the stink of dung, I am breathing in the very essence of being; to admire the one and feel disgusted by the other is to make a worthless and even harmful distinction. The Taoist sage is one who has learnt to cherish every corner, every atom of the environment, to avoid unnecessary interference even with the tiniest or most repulsive of creatures. Ants and cockroaches, no less than man, are manifestations of the Tao; they, too, have their place, their right to cling to life, their aversion to pain and hunger, their need to escape these evils by the means natural to their species. Man is not the lord of the universe; he is doomed to perish if he flies for long in the face of nature and, should that happen, the ants and cockroaches will not even be aware of his demise. Arrogance has no place in Taoism.

Another error likely to arise in the minds of people only superficially acquainted with Taoism stems from the blending that has taken place between that enlightened philosophy and the ancient Chinese folk religion. Some, though by no means all, Taoists go along with that ancient faith in peopling the universe with divers orders of supernatural beings. This notion is sometimes confused with theism and has also led to the supposition that Taoism is a rather primitive system of belief. The notion is, however, by no means central to Taoism; one may accept or reject it without thereby becoming any more or any less a Taoist. In any case, it has nothing to do with a theistic concept of the universe; for gods and demons are recognised by those who credit their existence as part of the universal order, as transient manifestations of the Tao not essentially different from tangible orders of being, such as people, animals and plants, and therefore subject to birth, growth, decay and dissolution like all the rest. Just as elephants have longer lives than mayflies, so may gods live much longer than humans and have special powers and characteristics belonging to their species; but in no sense are they above the universe or empowered to modify the overall workings of the Tao. To use familiar Christian terminology, they are creatures; not one of them can be identified with a creator-deity.

Belief in a multitude of gods and demons is widely regarded by modern man as a characteristic of the more primitive forms of religion, but this attitude demands further examination. Until recently at least, people all over the world, whatever their cultures and creeds, felt sensible of the presence of unseen powers, benificent and baleful. Were they

altogether wrong? I myself would hesitate to assert that there can be no such beings as gods and demons, angels or whatever. It depends on how one views them. One sees crowds swayed by forces alien to the individuals who compose them, and one knows from experience that a person is sometimes mastered by an ovemhelming impulse quite contrary to his nature. It is common to encounter instances of what seem very much like the operation of spells of good luck or misfortune. There are certain mental states that at least have the appearance of spirit possession. Then, again, everyone who regularly practises contemplative yoga (meditation as it is now rather incorrectly called) becomes aware of hitherto unsuspected forces that, rising in the mind, threaten further progress by destroying the yogin's hard-won tranquillity and making concentration wellnigh impossible at times; and there are other times when it seems that sweetly benign forces are assisting him smoothly forward towards his goal. What exactly are all the forces involved in these various instances? Modern man has names for them, but he can seldom provide more than tentative explanations, and learned names are often used to conceal lack of comprehension. Are these forces internal or external, or both? Conceiving of some of them in the form of demons with fiery eyes and pointed fangs may strike us as laughably out of step with the spirit of the age, yet psychic phenomena of all kinds are less frequently laughed at than was the case just a few years ago. Of chief consequence is the fact that impulses not consonant with a person's character do arise, and that sometimes they overwhelm him and cause great havoc. Whether one thinks of them as demons or psychoses, the

effects are there for all to see, and I have known some of them to be cured by methods evolved for the subjugation of demons. The different names and interpretations given to them are matters of cultural background; to dismiss them as non-existent is patently absurd. All that matters is that they should be effectively dealt with, and Taoists strike me as often being better equipped to do that than a good many psychiatrists, which makes the word 'primitive' in this connexion seem inept.

In any case, in performing contemplative yoga one has to reckon with mysterious forces, whatever their origin may be; but I hope I have made it clear that the whole realm of psychic phenomena is merely incidental to (and quite often absent from) the grand Taoist concept of existence. Of much greater consequence is the point made earlier that the real enemies of yogic progress are not demons but man's own propensity to make false distinctions, clinging to this, abhorring that, reverencing spirit, despising matter (or the reverse), loving self and being indifferent to or hating other. Until these distinctions are overcome, progress is bound to be slow; whereas in the blissful experience, Return to the Source, all notion of I and other is utterly dissolved.

2

Some Taoist Concepts

(a) NO DUALITY

In the *Tao Te Ching* it is written: 'The cosmos originated in what may be called the mother of heaven and earth. To grasp the mother is to come to know the child; to know the child is to hold fast to the mother and life becomes secure.' 'Mother' has no anthropomorphic signification here; it just means the formless aspect of the Tao, which closely corresponds to the Buddhist *śunyata* or void, and signifies the cosmos viewed as an undifferentiated unity. Son, on the other hand, connotes the cosmos viewed as a multitude of shifting forms. To perceive and understand the one is to comprehend the true nature of the other, and vice versa. To neglect the mother is to cling to material things and be lost to a sense of mystery and awe, to judge life by mere appearances. To neglect the child is to despise the material world and suppose that true beauty and goodness are to be found elsewhere - the error of the medieval Christians. Beauty, goodness and meaning are to be found right here before our eyes. Our failure to perceive them lies in our own faulty perception, not in the nature of life itself. Spirit and matter are one; here and beyond are one; full perception of this arises with the dawning of inner stillness during contemplative yoga.

In the *Tao Te Ching* it is also written: 'IS NOT is the name of the beginning of the cosmos. IS is the name of the matrix of the myriad objects.' The sage goes on to say that, when one desires to view the mystery of existence as a whole, the mind concentrates on IS NOT, the limitless, intangible, undifferentiated non-substance of the Tao; whereas, when one desires to view the fringes of reality (as do scientists when concentrating on any particular principle, law or phenomenon), the mind concentrates on IS. But, as Lao-tzû tells us, 'these two spring from a common source, though differently named. Both are called mysterious. Mystery upon mystery, the gateway to all marvels.' This passage at once brings to mind the Buddhist teaching 'form is void; void is form'; phrased in familiar Western terms, it means (among other things) that matter is spirit; spirit, matter. The Tao is at once the seemless, intangible *void and* all that confronts us in the Here and Now apparent to our senses. These are NOT TWO!

(b) *YIN* AND *YANG*

The *Tao Te Ching,* in asserting elsewhere that 'the one becomes two', signifies the manner in which the intangible Tao manifests itself as a cosmos containing myriads of shifting forms through the operation of the principle of polarity, the interaction of the polar forces *yin* and *yang. Yin,* primarily meaning the sunless side of a mountain, signifies the receptive aspect of phenomena; *yang,* the mountain's sunny side, signifies their dynamic aspect. These must not be regarded as opposites, but clearly recognised as 'two sides of the same coin', for neither could exist in the absence of the

other. There could be no light without dark, no dynamism without stillness, no plus without minus, no doing without done-to. Nor must one suppose *yin* to be inferior to *yang.* There could be no procreation without female, no hills without valleys, no burgeoning of plants without subsequent ripeness and decay. *Yin andyang* are present in all conceivable phenomena, and not to be found in isolation from each other, for *pure yang* contains the seed *of yin, pure yin* contains the seed *of yang,* as exemplified by the female characteristics to be found in every male and vice versa. It is through varying interactions of *yin* and *yang* that phenomena come to differ from one another; when the *yin* and *yang* components of a phenomenon cease to dwell in harmony, it thereupon disintegrates; and, with renewal of their harmonious interaction, something else comes into being. Philosophically this interplay has an important lesson for the yogic adept, whose ever-deepening intuitive perception leads him to accept with smiling equanimity ups and downs, gains and losses, growth and decay, life and death.

(c) PERPETUAL CHANGE

The one unchanging factor in the cosmos is change itself. Nothing remains the same even for an instant, yet this by no means results in a chaotic state of uncontrolled flux. The transformations of the Tao follow regular cyclic patterns, exemplified by the orbits of heavenly bodies, the progression of the seasons, the alternation of night and day, the sequence of birth, growth, decay and dissolution through which everything must pass. Yet the ever-changing remains forever unchanged. The cosmic non-substance of the Tao is not

subject to augmentation or decrease; what is more, as the American thinker Emerson intuited, the infinite ocean of being has the mysterious property of being wholly present in the smallest imaginable entity. The non-substance of the Tao resembles pure consciousness in not being governed by the laws of space.

Though awesomely holy, the Tao does not require worship, being unaffected by praise or blame. In the words of the *Tao Tê Ching,* 'the myriad objects owe their existence to the Tao, but it claims no lordship; it accomplishes all, yet does not seek to possess'. It is proper to view the self-existent cosmos and its majestic changes and transformations with reverence and awe, but to compose prayers or hymns to it would be merely futile. The Tao is not concerned with the rise or fall of individuals, but with the smooth effortless progress of its transformations, the well-being of the whole. Therefore the yogic adept achieves his goal not by imploring the Tao to favour him but by learning to accommodate himself to its harmonious workings.

(d) THE FIVE ACTIVITIES *(WU HSING)*

The play of perpetual orderly change is a subject that seems to have entranced early Taoists with scientific leanings, of whom there were many. They sought to analyse, and thereby be able to forecast, the interactions of nature's forces, in terms not only of *yin-yang* polarity, but also of five broad categories of mutually supportive and mutually destructive activity. Unfortunately, the names given to these five□metal, wood, water, fire and earth - are so reminiscent of those of the four elements in the ancient Greek cosmology

that the term *wu hsing* has often been incorrectly translated 'the five elements', although the Chinese syllables clearly mean 'the five activities', for ,*wu*means 'five' and *hsing* has the basic meaning of 'to walk, to act, to do'. Elements are static, *hsing* dynamic.

Metal signifies activities involving strength, endurance, resistance, delay.

Wood signifies processes conducive to growth, fruition and decay. Water signifies, among other things, fructifying functions.

Fire signifies strongly dynamic activities. Earth signifies supportive, womb-like functions.

All of them are positive and supportive in some circumstances, negative and destructive in others, according to nature's needs.

Every Taoist yogic manual is full of matter dealing with *wu hsing.* A Chinese might be astonished to come upon a book such as this one and find references to *wu hsing* so few. The problem is that their symbolism is so inextricably related to different Chinese ideograms (or parts of ideograms) and to two systems of reckoning known respectively as the Ten Celestial Stems and Twelve Branches that it is difficult indeed to make sense in the English language of the passages concerning them. They have been mentioned here in passing chiefly because people in the West with an interest in Taoism are almost certain to come upon them in relation to some of the sciences related to Taoism, such as *t'ai chi* callisthenics, I Ching divination and Chinese medicine, all of which are now much more widespread in America and Europe than Taoism itself.

(e) THE THREE TREASURES

Taoist yogic manuals have also a great deal to say about what are known as the Three Treasures. These in their coarse form comprise semen, breath and spirit, each of which is held to have a subtle cosmic counterpart. It is by the generation, nourishment and interaction of these six that remarkable yogic powers are attained and preparation made for the ultimate experience, Return to the Source. The practices pertaining to them, known as the Internal Alchemy, unfortunately require the instruction and supervision of a competent teacher; to perform them on one's own would be dangerous to health and would even induce insanity, for which reason the section on Taoist practice in this book deals with them only briefly. However, not every Taoist master considers the Inner Alchemy essential to mystical experience, so perhaps the loss is not as great as it might otherwise be.

(f) GOALS ATTAINABLE BY MIDDLE-LEVEL ADEPTS

Attainment of the ultimate goal, Return to the Source, is so difficult that many Taoist adepts in China were quite content to aim at lesser goals, of a kind that everyone may hope to achieve by diligent cultivation of the Way. If the exercises set forth in this book are not in themselves sufficient to carry one that far, at least they will lead to making some progress in the right direction. The goals naturally include one that is aimed at by almost all serious meditators, namely the attainment of increasingly profound intuitive insights into the nature of reality - insights that are often accompanied by sensations of bliss and invariably result in a deepening of

wisdom, of joy in life and greater understanding of life's meaning. Other goals, perhaps to be regarded as incidental to this one, are the prolongation or restoration of youthful vigour, excellent health, and longevity extending to upwards of a hundred years of age that is attended by good health and happiness to the very end.

Longevity in itself might not seem altogether desirable but, in this case, it is likely to go together not only with radiant health but also with a joyous tranquillity that will make every moment of life worth living by banishing the negative reactions commonly aroused by boredom, frustration, bereavement, loss, anxiety and fear. Incidentally, a person who is freed from these reactions is likely to be loved and esteemed, if only because he has no sorrows to inflict upon others who feel they have enough of their own sorrows to bear. Besides, he is sure to develop into a merry person, free from envy and dislike, and therefore much sought after as a friend.

I have no doubt that all of these objectives are well within the bounds of possibility. In many a remote hermitage rising from the slopes of one or other of China's innumerable sacred mountains, I used to come upon Taoist recluses extraordinarily merry, healthy and active for their years, able to perform surprising feats of athletic prowess and often skilled as well in such arts as healing, calligraphy, poetic composition, music, painting, defensive combat or miniature landscape gardening. There was a peacefulness and joyousness about them; merely to be with them for a few days restored one's faith in life's value and opened up new possibilities of happiness. All of these proceeded from a

wisdom that comes from inner stillness.

(g) IMMORTALITY AND RETURN TO THE SOURCE

Though we are concerned in this book mainly with the early stages of the Way, these should be understood in relation to the ultimate aims of Taoist yogins. This brings us to their concept of life after death. As a result of interactions between Taoism and Buddhism extending over two millennia, I used to encounter many Taoists who believed that beings undergo a long succession of lives before attaining to full self-realisation; but the more typically Taoist view is quite otherwise. According to early tradition, a man is born with two souls which separate at death, one rising to a celestial region where after a while it disintegrates - though its existence can be greatly prolonged in certain cases - the other sinking into the earth and gradually disintegrating likewise. Therefore, Taoist yogins were impelled by a feeling of urgency to seek the attainment of full self-realisation in this very life as the only sure means of achieving whichever of two high ends they personally believed in.

One of these ends, though termed immortality, actually connotes no more than prolonged existence as an individual in a kind of spirituaUsed mortal shape, whether in a spiritual realm or in one of the mysterious, inaccessible parts of the earth where immortals are beUeved to dwell. DeUghtful though this may be, to desire this state of being is to reveal ignorance of the true nature of the glorious apotheosis known as Return to the Source; for, when that is understood, the joys of relative immortality – however – poetic pale beside it. Those Taoist mystics who, during their

contemplative yoga, have already attained to blissful intuitions of the splendour of the highest goal are fortunate indeed; for they are confident of achieving, either at the moment of death or before that, a goal so high that it transcends all the other goals conceived by man since the beginning of history - at least, that is how it seems to me. This grand apotheosis is of so strange a nature that it cannot be conveyed in a sentence, but has to be led up to gradually. To begin with an unsatisfactory and rather primitive analogy, let us say provisionally that the experience must be something like what a raindrop would feel if it were conscious at the actual moment of merging with the ocean; in other words, the adept, suddenly freed from the last shred of the delusion that he has an individual existence of his own, suddenly becomes conscious of his perfect unity with the whole. However, whereas a raindrop falling into the ocean and merging with it indivisibly can never be more than an insignificant part of the infinitude of water all around him, that is by no means parallel to the case of an illumined adept. In the first place, he has never really been apart from the 'ocean' of the Tao; therefore he does not suddenly achieve a new state of union with it, as does the raindrop, but becomes blissfully aware of having never been divided from it. In the second place - and it is this which makes the experience splendid beyond all power of conception - he does not feel himself to be a minute part of the vast ocean but, as it were, *becomes the whole!* It is as though his consciousness suddenly expands beyond its former puny limits *to contain the whole cosmos within itself!* The Tao, being similar in nature not to a vast material body like the ocean's, but rather to something

closely resembling mind or pure consciousness, does not have parts to it; the Tao is *wholly present* in each of its smallest fragments; therefore, to become conscious of perfect union with it is to become conscious of actually *being* the entire cosmos, of being in all ways infinite! A man who undergoes this glorious experience must feel as though his consciousness, once seemingly contained within his little skull, has all of a sudden expanded to become coterminous with the whole of existence!

This truth was once conveyed to me by an old gentleman called Tseng Lao-wêng who as he was speaking looked into my eyes, and for a fraction of a second I seemed to grasp the purport intuitively; in other words, for that brief moment, I actually experienced to some degree how it feels *to be the universe!* But of course I was not ready for so exalted an experience and hurriedly dropped my eyes, feeling that otherwise I should instantly be burnt up by a current so powerful that not even ashes would remain of me. Naturally I had no time then to reflect on the matter in those terms - I am just trying to convey something of the nature of my feeling during that instant, a mixture of bliss and terror. Yet, had I been far advanced along the Way and properly prepared for the experience, then there would have been no terror - only unadulterated bliss. Such then is the meaning of Return to the Source, insofar as mere words can convey a reality lying far beyond the limits of conceptual thought.

3

Attitude

To succeed in yogic practice, one must of course cultivate a proper attitude to people, affairs and the whole environment. A Taoist adept is one who comes to resemble the Three Friends of Winter. Like the pine-tree, he may hope to achieve remarkable longevity. Like the winter-plum-tree, crimson petals gleaming against the snow, he blossoms in adversity, serenely unaffected by chill and drear surroundings. Like the bamboo, he is so strong and yet so flexible that he bends effortlessly to accommodate the prevailing winds of circumstance and, far from being broken by them, springs back again with matchless resilience. Of these three qualities, the last is of paramount importance; it is at this that he must aim, then the others will come of themselves.

To be tense, rigid, uptight, inflexible, unaccommodating, rigorous in conduct and belief, bigoted, humourless, quick to take offence, easily put out, cast down, care-furrowed, complaining, overwhelmed by adversity - all of these are the very antithesis of Taoist qualities. People who pride themselves on being able to swim against the current, to carve against the grain of things, will never make good Taoists, unless they change their attitude. A Taoist conserves his energy by easily according with and adapting himself to each situation. His will may be as strong as the current in a

mountain stream, but it does not lead him to press forward uselessly against obstacles that are insuperable or else can be easily circumvented. Caring nothing at all for what people may think of him, he takes no pride in heroism for its own sake, so he looks for the easiest way round. That is not to say that he willingly surrenders an objective, only that he will not attempt the impossible, nor expend more energy than is strictly necessary to attain the possible. By no means lazy, he conserves his powers in order to make the most of them.

A Taoist has no desire for prominence or popular esteem. Though happy to be of service when called upon, he will do what must be done with the minimum of fuss and retire from public notice at the earliest possible moment, well content to let others enjoy the credit. He is the eternal wanderer who tranquilly takes things as they come, putting forth energy when need be, but inwardly relaxed. When things go well, he enjoys them to the full, though rather in the manner of someone charmed by an unexpected vista of primroses in a wood, who rejoices in their fresh beauty for a little while, without the least desire to cling or to possess, and then passes on. When ills befall, he accepts them without repining, knowing very well there can be no up without down, no summer without winter, no growth without decay; besides, he is quick to discover beauty in the seemingly dreary and to find compensations in what to others might appear to be unmitigated ills -rather like a friend of mine who, struck down in middle age by polio, reacted to the doctor's prediction that he would be bedridden all his life by exclaiming: 'Ha, at last I shall have as much time as I want for reading!'

For these and other reasons, there is a special affinity between Taoists and flowing water, which is at once the weakest and the strongest of the elements. Streams are persistent in making for their goal, but do not batter away at obstacles they can circumvent; and, when no way can be found round a wall of rock, they erode it with such patience that the progress of their conquest is often impossible to discern. Where streams running from high ground to low can gush effortlessly, they gush; on level ground, where they have become broad and wide, their motion is often invisible, yet never falters. I believe Lao-tzû had water in mind when he wrote: 'The weakest thing in heaven and earth strikes against and overcomes the strongest. Coming from nowhere [i.e. invisibly in the form of vapour], it penetrates where there is no crack [i.e. through minute pores in the rock]. Thus do I know the value of *wu wei* [literally, 'no activity']. The teaching without words and the value of *wu wei* are not often recognised by the world.'

Wu wei, a favourite Taoist term, is difficult to translate satisfactorily and has led to many misunderstandings about the proper method of cultivating the Way. I think it means no activity that is not rooted in the nature of a situation, no wasteful exertion. Nature, who was Lao-tzû's beloved teacher, is perpetually involved in activity, but not of an unnecessary kind. Trees growing in the shade bend towards the sunlight; all plants draw nourishment from earth and sky; birds build nests and hunt worms to feed themselves and their young; squirrels store nuts for use in winter; fish swim and tigers leap - but these are actions in response to need, to the exigencies of Here and Now. They do not proceed from

calculation or from a desire for pre-eminence, power, pelf or profit, nor are they carried to excess. A deer can stand grazing safely under the eyes of a tiger, if the tiger has had a meal to satisfy him. True, certain fish are said to lay eggs by the million, but that prodigality is in response to an actual need in parts of the ocean where an egg's chances of survival are very close to nil. None of these activities contravenes the principle of *wu wei,* whereas cornering a market or seeking to be one up on someone does not accord with it.

A Taoist's needs are few and simple. Food can be nourishing and tasty without the addition of exotic or unusually expensive ingredients; garments can suit the climate and be attractive without being unduly numerous or made of costly fabrics; one can get along very comfortably without platinum or diamonds, which in any case are tiresome because they need to be guarded so carefully; and one can make a room or dwelling quite charming without going to great expense. In short, there is no advantage - but there are several serious disadvantages - in having too much of anything, and in acquiring and looking after rare and costly possessions. Followers of the Way know instinctively how to combine enjoyment of modest comfort and beauty with a taste for frugality; above all, they shun ostentation.

I have to admit that, though Taoism offers an admirable way of life for the individual, it does not have specific means of solving the mass problems that afflict our great cities; these require mass remedies beyond an individual's power to provide. Even so, just as a murky puddle is made a trifle less opaque by every drop of pure rain or dew that falls there, so is the quality of dense urban communities improved by every

individual who stays unblemished by greed, acquisitiveness, extravagance, envy and crooked dealing. If ever Taoist values come to be cherished by large numbers of individuals in the West, especially if some of them are people in positions of power, society as a whole as well as those individuals will benefit.

The relaxed, good-humoured tolerance that characterises followers of the Way makes them loath to be interfering. Quietly pursuing, their goals, happy to share their wisdom with anyone who comes of his own accord to ask for help or advice, they are content to leave others entirely free to live their lives as seems best to them, to 'do their own thing'. Taoist masters are reluctant to put themselves forward in the capacity of missionaries or busybodies; indeed, they are so apt to shun the limelight that their next-door neighbours may remain quite unaware of living in the vicinity of a sage. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why they are so hard to find. A Chinese friend of mine with considerable influence in Taoist and Buddhist circles recently failed to persuade some learned followers of the Way in Taiwan to visit

America, where plenty of people would have felt honoured and delighted to look after them. Under present circumstances, this total lack of missionary spirit is rather unfortunate, but Western followers of the Way would do well to hide their light under a bushel; eagerness to be proclaimed a guru has no place in a Taoistic attitude to life. As Lao-tzu said of the sages of old, 'They were retiring and hesitant as though shy of the people all around them, and they treated everybody with respect as one treats an honoured guest.' To this day, one does not find a true Taoist sage proclaiming 'I

know all about the Tao. If you want to attain the goal, you had better enrol among my students.' Self-advertisement is so foreign to the Taoist spirit that it is really hard to find a teacher, but that is better than having a lot of self-proclaimed teachers who, having little real knowledge, are likely to lead enthusiastic students astray. Moreover, it provides a criterion for judging what teachers *not* to follow, namely anyone who makes extravagant claims to be far advanced along the Way. On the other hand, if some good teachers do arrive and let their lineage be known, that is another matter, for that kind of information can generally be checked. By lineage is meant the names of the teacher's own teacher, his teacher's teacher and so on back for perhaps many generations. In China, discovering a teacher's spiritual lineage was one of the ways of ascertaining that he had something worth while to teach. In course of time, there may well be Westerners qualified to teach much more advanced yogas than those contained in this book, and one of the ways of recognising them initially will be to discover the names of the teachers who instructed them.

B PRACTICE


image
not
available


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departures from the Way; so, too, is over-concern about what to eat and not eat such as one commonly finds in California these days, for concern leads to anxiety, which is as harmful to physical and mental health as a slow poison. Taoism inculcates a relaxed attitude to just about everything.

(c) INTOXICANTS

Taoist adepts, though they drink wine and spirits in moderation especially when the weather is damp or cold, regard even occasional drunkenness as a departure from the Way, since it is not good for health and far from conducive to progress in yogic meditation. Moreover, alcohol is never taken except as an accompaniment to eating; they would not be tempted by cocktails before dinner, or by spirits taken after dinner and before going to bed. That tobacco is not listed as a harmful substance in the yogic manuals is due to the fact that they were written long before tobacco smoking became prevalent in China. Tobacco *is* harmful yogically, because not conducive to the best functioning of the respiratory system; breath is one of the yogin's Three Treasures, which have to be guarded, nourished, refined and kept from all polluting influences as far as possible. As to hashish, 'hard' and psychedelic drugs, these are not regarded as a legitimate way of attaining to higher states of consciousness. There is no denying that they do sometimes have that effect, but their action is difficult to control, their effects on the psychic channels are harmful, and the exalted states of consciousness they sometimes give rise to are of no help in attaining the permanent expansion of consciousness at which yogins aim. It would be hard indeed to find a