



O P E N I N G

T H E

D R A G O N

G A T E

THE MAKING OF A  
MODERN TAOIST WIZARD

CHEN KAIGUO AND ZHENG SHUNCHAO

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL CHINESE BY

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# Translator's Introduction

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This book is a translation of the authorized biography of Wang Liping, a living Taoist master, written by two of his longtime disciples. Wang Liping is an eighteenth-generation Transmitter of the Longmen or Dragon Gate branch of Taoism, which traces its spiritual lineage back over eight hundred years. In his childhood, Wang Liping was chosen for special training as a Transmitter by three elderly masters of Dragon Gate Taoism.

The practice of bringing up specially chosen individuals as holders and Transmitters of esoteric teachings is practiced by Tibetan Buddhists and Khajagan Sufis as well as Dragon Gate Taoists.

After being located by the elderly Dragon Gate masters, Wang Liping was subsequently educated and trained in Taoist practices for a period of fifteen years. Now he is himself a teacher. This is the story of his early life and esoteric training, based on his own recollections.

The Dragon Gate branch is a sect of the powerful Complete Reality school of Taoism, which integrated Buddhism and Confucianism into a comprehensive new form of Taoism. Complete Reality Taoism eventually spread all over China during the Middle Ages, and still continues in existence today. Numerous classics and texts of this school have been translated into English over the last ten years.

Complete Reality Taoism is generally divided into two main traditions, Southern and Northern. The somewhat older Southern tradition is rooted in the work of Zhang Boduan (Chang Po-tuan, 983-1082), whose masterpiece *Understanding Reality* is considered

one of the classics of Taoist Spiritual alchemy and is also studied by Taoists of the Northern tradition. Another work on spiritual alchemy by this same master, *Four Hundred Character Treatise on the Gold Elixir*, is also widely esteemed and studied by Taoists of both Southern and Northern traditions.

The Northern tradition of Complete Reality Taoism is rooted in the work of Wang Chongyang (Wang Che, 1113-1171), particularly his *Fifteen Statements on the Establishment of a Teaching*. Wang is believed to have learned from Lu Dongbin (Lu Tung-pin n. d.), the great master known as Ancestor Lu. This Ancestor Lu is associated with the integration of Buddhism and Confucianism with ancient Taoism to produce the germ of the new spiritual alchemy of Complete Reality Taoism. Wang Chongyang is also believed to have studied from Lu's own teacher; later he himself taught a number of famous figures in Taoist tradition.

English versions of works by and about Ancestor Lu, Wang Chongyang, Zhang Boduan, and other adepts of Complete Reality Taoism can be found in *Understanding Reality; Inner Teachings of Taoism; Vitality, Energy and Spirit; The Spirit of the Tao; Immortal Sisters; The Book of Balance and Harmony*, and *The Secret of the Golden Flower*.

The Dragon Gate sect of Taoism, of which Wang Liping is an heir, was an offshoot of the Northern tradition of the Complete Reality school. Its spiritual descent is traced to the thirteenth-century master Chang-chun, who was one of the great disciples of Wang Chongyang. Chang-chun, the Master of Eternal Spring, was one of the sages who advised Genghis Khan to preserve the ancient civilization of China after the Mongolian conquest, over eight hundred years ago. Genghis Khan appointed Chang-chun overseer of religions in China, and the Dragon Gate sect thus played a critical role in the conservation of Chinese culture.

Taoists attribute to Chang-chun the core of the work known as *Journey to the West*, a symbolic story encapsulating Taoist, Buddhist, and Confucian teachings. *Journey to the West* was popularized in drama during the Yuan dynasty (1277-1367) and later elaborated during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) into one of the most famous and most popular novels of Chinese literature. Comments on the interior spiritual significance of *Journey to the*

*West*, written by Liu I-ming, an eleventh-generation master of the Dragon Gate sect, can be found translated into English in *Vitality, Energy, Spirit*.

A living survivor of the tumultuous era of the Great Cultural Revolution, Wang Liping is reputed to be master of a very unusual range of knowledge and capacities. As a specially trained Transmitter, he continues the Dragon Gate tradition of maintaining and updating Taoist sciences. In addition to his teaching and healing activities and work on recompiling the Taoist canon, Wang Liping also serves as an advisor to numerous official committees devoted to research on Chinese medicine, diet, and other elements of Chinese culture traditionally subtended by Taoism. He is also a husband and father.

Over the ages, it has been customary for Taoists to design and employ different educational formats, in accordance with original principles of flexibility enunciated in the ancient classic Lao-tzu, or Tao Te Ching. For the purposes of modern projection of the Dragon Gate teaching, Master Wang Liping presents a new philosophical framework, referred to as the Triple World.

The first level of the triple world consists of three realms; people, events, and things. This is the level of experience that has both form and substance, that which is accessible to ordinary human senses and the scientific instruments that have been invented to extend and augment the range of these senses.

The middle level of the triple world consists of the three realms of heaven, earth, and humanity. This level of experience includes that which has form but no substance, and that which has substance but no form. This is already beyond the domain of ordinary understanding. That which has form but no substance is like dreams; that which has substance but no form is called vitality, energy, and spirit.

The highest level of the triple world consists of the three realms of the universe, time, and space. These terms, as used here in the Taoist context, do not have exactly the same meanings as ordinarily understood. Said to be the domain of that which has neither form nor substance, the upper three realms, as experienced through Taoist practice, are found to be even vaster and richer than what are ordinarily experienced by the senses as the universe, time, and

space. This is the realm of the Tao.

As is the case with all working Taoist frameworks, this philosophical system is not for the purpose of doctrinaire conditioning or abstract conceptualization, but rather is designed as an expedient means of structuring knowledge, practice, and experience. Special cultivation of the faculties is necessary even to perceive what is beyond ordinary conception; so orientation requires some way of hinting at what cannot be exactly described.

As will be seen in this book, describing outstanding events in the course of Master Wang Liping's training, each level of the system corresponds to certain Taoist exercises, levels of perception, and modes of self-cultivation. Thus the system leads the mind from the realm of the known into the realm of the unknown, by development and refinement of capacities that ordinarily lie dormant in the uncultivated state.

This book illustrates something of the possibilities of Taoism hinted at in the classics, through the remarkable story of a modern wizard of the tradition. Along the way, the book describes conditions in China past and present, outstanding personalities of yesteryear, principles and practices of Taoist immortals, the origins of the Dragon Gate teachings, and new visions of human potential and the possibilities of the future.

Part- I  
Entering the Way





# 1

## The Teachers' Search

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In the year 1960, one of the most momentous events in the secret history of China took place one night on a sacred mountain crag, unknown to all the world. The night was brightly lit by the moon from above and pleasantly refreshed by an ocean breeze from below. Three old men, lonely heirs to an ancient knowledge, sat outside a secret cave on holy Mount Lao, deep in meditation.

Mount Lao, or Lao Shan in Chinese, is not well known to many people outside of China. To lay people there, it is the source of most excellent water; to initiates and pilgrims, it is one of the sacred sites of Taoism, China's original wisdom tradition, the world's oldest science. Mount Lao faces the sea on two sides, east and south; steep and imposing, it seems to rise from the very ocean floor. The mountain is scattered with enormous boulders and huge rocks and covered with all sorts of plants and trees. The waves of the sea roar at its feet, white clouds encircle its waist. When you sit on the mountainside gazing at the sea as the sun rises, you feel an enormous sense of transcendence beyond the ordinary world. Thus Mount Lao came to be treasured by Taoist seekers as a place to cultivate realization and develop their essential nature.

Over the centuries, many famous Taoist masters have practiced their secret lore on Mount Lao. Through the years, many Taoist cloisters were built on the mountain; there are also many secret caves in the defiles, covered by foliage and vines, extremely difficult of access and known only to a few.

The three old men sitting on the mountainside that moonlit night

in 1960 were masters of the Dragon Gate sect of the Complete Reality school of Taoism, holders of secrets and capacities long believed legendary.

Zhang Hodao, Wayfarer of the Infinite, was the sixteenth-generation Transmitter of the Dragon Gate sect. Eighty-two years old at the time, he had once been the grand physician of the Imperial court of the Qing dynasty (1644—1911). This wayfarer was popularly called the Uncanny Physician.

Wang Jiaoming, Wayfarer of Pure Serenity, was a seventeenth-generation Transmitter of the Dragon Gate sect. A disciple of the Grand Master Zhang Hodao, he was seventy-two years old at the time. Formerly an instructor at Huangbu Military Academy, he was an advanced expert in martial arts. He was also an expert at the abacus, and was known as the Uncanny Calculator.

Gu Jiaoyi, Wayfarer of Pure Emptiness, was another disciple of Zhang Hodao, and also chosen as a seventeenth-generation Transmitter of the Dragon Gate sect. He had a unique method of curing illness by acupuncture without actually inserting needles into the body; because of this, he was popularly known as the Infinite Acupuncturist.

Over the preceding year, the three Taoist masters had been engrossed in secret consultations about a matter of utmost importance, not only to them, but to the world at large. Advanced in age, they were trying to find a successor, an individual who would bear the knowledge that would enable him to become the eighteenth-generation Transmitter of Dragon Gate Taoism.

The Taoist school of Complete Reality was founded nine centuries ago, when northern China, the ancient homeland and cultural center of the Chinese people, was overrun by mounted warriors of the steppes. The mission of the school during this crisis was to preserve not only the inner teachings of Taoism, but also the inner teachings of Buddhism and Confucianism as well.

Taoists of the Complete Reality school look upon five people as the Five Northern Ancestors: Wang Xuanbu, Zhongli Quan, Lu Dongbin, Liu Haizhan, and Wang Chongyang. Seven outstanding disciples of the last-named master Wang are known as the Seven Realized Ones of the North.

Among those seven was Qiu Chuji, more generally known as Changchun, or the Real Man of Eternal Spring. He was the founder of the Dragon Gate sect eight hundred years ago. Such was the spiritual repute of the Real Man of Eternal Spring that Genghis Khan called him to Central Asia and appointed him head of all religions in China under the Khan.

Secrets inconceivable even to other Chinese, let alone people of the West, are still held within the Dragon Gate, even to this very day. Such is the power of the inner teachings that the three elder masters of the sixteenth and seventeenth generations spent countless hours in deep meditation on the problem of finding an heir to this knowledge.

Part of the secret lore of the Dragon Gate is a special book of symbolic patterns, known as *Figuring the Backbone*. Once used to analyze trends and forecast events, this special book was deliberately scrambled over six hundred years ago by covert Imperial design, as part of a broad campaign to keep the populace in ignorance and in thrall. Fortunately, the original integrity of the book was kept intact within the Dragon Gate sect of Taoism, in accord with its mission of preserving esoteric knowledge.

The new Transmitter the elders sought turned out to be a youth named Wang Liping, who was eleven years old in 1960. Wang Liping was born in 1949, precisely in the middle of the lunar year. People who know him say he was different even as a child. He could always locate misplaced articles around the house and never failed to find his playmates at hide-and-seek, no matter how well they were hidden.

Wang Liping was born in a large city in northeastern China, then later moved with his parents to an ancient fortress town near the famous Everwhite Mountain, Changbai Shan. Through the district of the fortress town cuts Yongding, the Turbid River, which has its source in the depths of Everwhite Mountain. Backed by a mountain and facing a river, the fortress town has an extraordinary energetic force in its atmosphere. With "black gold" in the ground, it is called Coal City, and has thrived all the more in modern times. This new city in an ancient fortress town is where Wang Liping has lived most of his life.

The Wang families were an important clan in the region, one

whose ancestors had once been distinguished. In the time of Wang Liping's father, his family was not as it had once been, but he still managed to graduate from Fengtian Industrial College, which was considered no mean feat in those days.

Mother Wang was a good-natured, kindly woman. She gave birth to four sons and two daughters, all lively and robust except for the second son, Liping, who was slight and weakly. When Liping was one year old, there was a fire in the Wang house. Lost in the commotion, baby Liping got burned on the head. Although the burn healed all right, after that the child continued to suffer from headaches, and his eyesight was also affected. To his mother's dismay, furthermore, none of the doctors they consulted were able to help the boy.

The Wang family had many children, and back then in the late 1950s and early 1960s everyday life in China was hard. Even from childhood little Liping was kind and dutiful, mannerly and deferential, so naturally he was protective of his younger brothers and sisters. He was even that way with his neighborhood friends and playmates. Whenever another child wanted anything and Wang Liping happened to have it, he would give it away freely.

One day in the autumn of 1962, as the Wangs were eating their noon meal, they suddenly heard a loud call at the door: "A mouthful of food, please!" Now life had been very difficult for the past few years, so there were many people fleeing destitution and seeking food all the way from the central plains to the northeast. Whenever people came to the door begging, Mother Wang would gladly give something to help out.

This time it was Liping who was the first to get up on hearing the beggar's cry at the door. Before his mother could rise from the table, he had already grabbed a few vegetable dumplings and was on his way to the door with them. When he opened the door, Liping was startled by what he saw. There were three old men standing there. They looked quite different from the sorts of people who usually came begging. These old men looked kindly and benevolent, and though their clothes were worn and tattered they stood erect like strong young men, their bearing firm and steady, their presence projecting an air of vigor and strength.

The three old men reached for the dumplings Liping had

brought. Gobbling them down at once, without a word the old men extended their hands again, as if to ask for more.

Somewhat disconcerted, Liping went inside without ado and fetched more dumplings for the old men. After they had eaten these, the old men exchanged glances and set off in high spirits. Mulling over the oddness of the event, when Liping looked up, the three old men had already disappeared without a trace.

Although he didn't know it at the time, young Wang Liping had good reason to be disconcerted by this encounter. As it turned out, the three old men were not ordinary people, but Taoist wizards who had long been living in hiding in mountain caves practicing secret arts. In reality, they had not come down from the mountains to beg for food, but to find the heir to their knowledge.

Taoism is the native religion of China. Its most direct and universal functions for people in the ordinary world are recognition of natural laws, promotion of health, prevention of illness, prolongation of life, and stimulation of the development of culture and civilization based on successful cooperation between humanity and nature, and between the individual and society as a whole.

The three Taoist masters who came to find Wang Liping had spent many years in mountain caves cultivating themselves. They had already reached the highest realms of attainment in both inner and outer exercises, far beyond the scope of ordinary Taoists.

In order to find a successor, they had used their inner vision, as well as the special prognostication book handed on in their sect. Arriving at the conclusion that the individual they were looking for had already been in the world for over ten years, they made preparations to leave the mountain to find him.

Their journey to meet their heir took over two months, with more time taken healing and helping local people along the way than in traveling. Charity and service are part of Taoist tradition, whether practiced openly or in secret.

After the three wizards had reached the home of Wang Liping that day and found their spiritual heir, the hardships of the road seemed to vanish into thin air. They talked and laughed on the way back to the abandoned building where they had taken up lodging. Shaking the dust off themselves, they sat back to wait for Wang

Liping to come looking for them.

As for the youth, after his first encounter with the three wizards that day, Liping couldn't shake the urge to go looking for them. A fifth grader at the time, he was in a daze all that afternoon at school. After classes, instead of walking home with his classmates as usual, he found himself absentmindedly wandering around, ultimately wending his way toward the place where the masters had pitched camp.

Wang Liping found the old men sitting in a shed, talking and laughing among themselves. Mesmerized, he sat down to listen to them.

The teachers had found their disciple. And the future Transmitter of Dragon Gate Taoism had found his guides. So in the autumn of 1962 Wang Liping began a course of apprenticeship in Taoist wizardry that was to last for fifteen years.

## 2

# Refining the Mind

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Even though the three Taoist wizards sat and talked among themselves, appearing to ignore the young visitor, they were covertly examining him with their inner perceptions. Ascertaining that the boy suffered from chronic migraine and eye trouble, the old masters set about curing him without making any overt indication of what they were doing.

In a gradual manner, Wang Liping became aware of an exceptional clarity of mind, and his eyesight also cleared. Now he knew those three old men were most certainly not ordinary people.

For their part, once the old masters had gotten a good look at Wang Liping, they realized he was indeed the one they had been seeing in their visions over the last three years, the one they had been looking for. Wang Liping was destined to become the eighteenth-generation Transmitter of Dragon Gate Taoism.

The eldest of the three men sat quietly for a while with his eyes closed. Then he slowly opened his eyes and turned his gaze to young Liping. "Hey there, schoolboy! It's getting late, and you're a long way from home! Aren't you afraid of walking back in the dark?"

Without thinking the youth replied, "Afraid of what? When I play hide-and-seek with my friends, the darker it gets the more fun it is! What's there to be afraid of?"

The three elders were delighted. Gu Jiaoyi pulled Wang Liping to him and said, "Come on, play hide-and-seek with us!" Taking

him outside to a graveyard not far away, the men challenged the boy to a game of hide-and-seek, telling him they'd consider him the winner if he found even one of them out there in the darkness.

Liping readily accepted the challenge. He passed by there every day and knew every detail of the terrain; he thought there was no way the old men could hide from him.

The boy covered his eyes and began to count, waiting for the old men to hide. But Zhang Hodao pulled him over and said, "No need for that. Just stand here with your eyes open and watch us go hide. Watch carefully—we won't go far!"

But the elders just stood there, so Liping urged them to go hide. They still didn't move, but a voice said, "Better take a close look—we've already hidden!"

Hearing this, Liping strained his eyes to look, but couldn't find a trace of the old men. How could they have disappeared even as they were speaking? Why didn't their footsteps make any sound? Liping began to look all over the area, searching every nook and cranny, anywhere that someone could hide. Nothing. Not a sound. The whole place was deserted. Thoroughly stumped, after nearly an hour the boy returned to the tree where the game had started. There the old men suddenly appeared before him, inviting him to admit defeat!

In reality, the wizards had never gone anywhere. They'd been there all the time, exercising the art of disappearance. These Taoist masters didn't even need the cover of darkness; they knew how to disappear from the sight of ordinary people even in broad daylight. This is an art attained only in the middle range of realization.

Wang Liping knew nothing of this; he only knew his astonishment and growing awe of the three ancients. They told him to go home and come back after school the next day; and to tell no one what he had witnessed.

When Liping got home that night, his parents were concerned. Where had he been until so late? What had he been doing? But Liping hemmed and hawed, so they didn't press him. Those were hard times in China, and everyone in the family had to look out for each other, but sometimes one couldn't keep an eye on everything. Liping was the second son, after all, and his parents had to worry



more about his little brothers and sisters. Much of the time, Liping came and went on his own.

As for the three old men, the local people were sympathetic toward them on account of their advanced years, and because they had made their way there from the heartland of the nation. Their healing skills were welcomed by the people, although the old men revealed comparatively little in order to safeguard their identities as Taoist wizards. Over a period of time, the people came to honor and respect the three ancients, who asked no reward for their services. They used to let Wang Liping do chores for them, and he also got to watch them treat people's illnesses. In between times, they would talk to their young protege about things that would help orient him on the Way.

Needing a quiet place to train their new disciple, the three teachers found an old smithy, long abandoned, quite out of the way of ordinary traffic. The masters cleaned the place up, planted some trees out front, and started a vegetable garden in back. The people of the mountain villages, being simple, rustic folk, pure and straightforward in their ways, were touched by the good deeds of the venerable old curers, and used to send them gifts of kindling, rice, and other necessities.

With the passage of time, Wang Liping gradually got used to the old masters, who began to guide him in subtle ways to prepare him for the long course of training he was to undergo.

One cold autumn night, as the four sat around a lone lamp the Grand Master Zhang Hodao began to tell stories about ancient Taoists and principles of Taoism. He went into greatest detail about Changchun, the Real Man of Eternal Spring, who lived in the time of Genghis Khan and was the founder of the Dragon Gate sect.

Changchun entered the Taoist path at the age of nineteen and became a disciple of the great Master Wang Chongyang when he was twenty. After his teacher passed away, Changchun traveled to Mount Zhongnan, an ancient center of spiritual studies.

Arriving in the dead of winter, Changchun was snowed in for five days and nights, holed up in a little shrine. In danger of starving or freezing to death, Changchun entered into a deep trance.

In the midst of his profound abstraction, Changchun suddenly

heard a voice. Looking up, he saw an old man standing in front of him, bearing a gift of food. Placing the offering before Changchun, the old man turned and walked away.

Following the ancient to the door of the shrine, Changchun looked out to see nothing but a vast expanse of virgin snow. There was not a single footprint.

When the snows had receded and travel was again possible, Changchun continued his journey westward, until he came to a huge valley known as Fa River Valley. The riverbed was very wide, and the water alternately rose so high and fell so low that it was impossible to build a bridge or establish a ferry. As a result, travelers had to wade across the river. Seeing the dangers to which people were thus exposed, Changchun resolved to stay there and serve travelers by carrying them across the river on his shoulders.

Fixing up an ancient shrine by the waterside, for six years Changchun lived there by the river, spending the nights in meditation and the days carrying travelers over the water.

During this period of time, Changchun experienced what Taoists call the Great Death no less than seven times, and went through what they call Minor Death countless times. Dying and returning to life, he succeeded in transcending the ordinary world of people, events, and things.

The grand master concluded his talk with these words: "Our spiritual ancestor Changchun had a saying: 'When not a single thought is produced, that is freedom; where there is nothing on the mind, that is immortal enlightenment.' This is how intensely the spiritual immortals and celestial wizards cultivated and trained themselves!"

Then the old man turned to Wang Liping and asked, "Were you listening?"

Startled out of his reverie, the boy replied that he had indeed been listening.

The old man asked him what he had understood from the stories.

Liping replied with clear assurance, "Only with a sincere heart and a firm will is it possible to learn the Way and develop real potential."

The three old men smiled. The eldest master asked the boy, "Do you want to study the Way?"

"Yes," replied Liping in a most serious and determined tone of voice, "but I don't know how. I don't have a teacher to guide me." He still hadn't realized just who the three old men were.

The grand master said, "If you want to study the Way, don't worry about not having a teacher. Who do you think we are? I am the sixteenth-generation Transmitter of Changchun's teaching, and these two with me are the seventeenth-generation Transmitters. Now that we're old, we want to hand on what we've learned. If you want to learn the Way, just be ready to work hard. Otherwise, how can you rise above the ordinary human condition? The first requirement for learning the Way is hard work; then you need to learn to be a member of society, which means doing good and refraining from evil, building up character. When you have developed virtue and built up character, eventually you enter naturally into the Way."

By now the three old wizards had satisfied themselves that Wang Liping did in fact have the potential, and that the timing was right. As in all things, however, they had to begin from the beginning, bringing the disciple along gradually in order to develop penetrating realization.

The *Scripture of Eternal Purity and Calm* says,

*The Way includes clarity and opacity, movement and stillness. The sky is clear, the earth is opaque; the sky is in motion, the earth is still. The masculine is clear, the feminine is opaque; the masculine is active, the feminine is still. Descending from the root to flow into the branches, these produce myriad beings. Clarity is the source of opacity, movement is the foundation of stillness. If people can be clear and calm, the whole universe will come to them.*

*The human spirit likes clarity, but the mind disturbs it. The human mind likes calm, but desires pull it. If you can always put your desires aside, your mind will naturally become calm; clarify your mind, and your*

*spirit will naturally become calm.*

The difficulty in putting this teaching into practice lies in "setting aside desire, clarifying the mind, and entering into stillness." This is particularly hard in the present day, when so many material and human resources are devoted to serving an endless procession of desires and ambitions, without ever really satisfying them, and without ever getting an objective understanding of the effects of this whole process on human society and its relationship to Nature.

The first exercise the old masters taught Wang Liping, therefore, was a practice called "repentance." What this means in the context of Taoism is cleaning the mind, clearing away mundane influences already infecting the consciousness, getting rid of the rubbish.

The way this is done is by temporary isolation and self-examination. The process is subdivided into three parts. First the disciple stays in a dark room for two months with nothing to do. This is supposed to gradually reduce the crudity and wildness in one's nature. The second stage of practice involves sitting still in a dark room for set periods of time, which are progressively lengthened. In the third stage, the disciple is shifted to an ordinary quiet room and required to sit still for at least four hours at a time.

One morning after breakfast, instead of going to school Wang Liping headed straight for the abode of the three old Taoist masters. By this time, Taoism interested the youth more than school did. He found the old men still engrossed in their morning meditations. In spite of their advanced age, the old wizards had youthful faces and dark hair. Their eyes shone with an uncanny light. Liping sat down to join in their exercise, but the grand master stopped him with a question: "Are you really positive you want to study Taoism with us? Are you sure you won't change you mind?"

Liping insisted that he was most assuredly determined to proceed. So the grand master continued. "Once you have set your heart on learning the Way," he said, "you must start from the beginning. Remember that you must not fear hardships. Today we will teach you the first lesson, which involves no explanation of principles, only actual practice. You must do as I say, for if you fail this lesson you needn't come around looking for us anymore." The

old man was firm. With only this brief introduction, he had the youth follow him to the shed they had cleaned out for this exercise.

Pointing into the dark room, the grand master told Liping, "Go inside and stay quiet. Don't start whining to get out, because we're not going to let you out no matter what." With that, the old wizard pushed the boy inside and locked the door.

Wang Liping had never thought the old man would actually do this. The shed was completely empty and totally dark. He couldn't see a thing. Figuring the old man was testing his sincerity and would let him out sooner or later, the boy decided to wait it out calmly.

Easier said than done. After a while Liping began pacing around, groping along the walls after crashing into them a few times. Pacing around until he worked up a sweat, he sat down to rest. Then he got up and started pacing around again. As he kept repeating this over and over, his anxiety mounted; the morning seemed like a year.

Suddenly the door opened a crack, and a beam of light blinded the youth inside. He heard an old man calling him to come out, and he emerged, rubbing his eyes. The boy was extremely upset, but he pretended as if nothing had happened.

Wang Jiaoming asked him, "Can you take more, boy?"

Liping thought the teacher was testing him, so even though he'd already had enough, he said, "No problem. This lesson is easy. Did I do all right?" He wanted to get a good mark.

"All right," replied the old master lightly, "but let's have lunch."

Liping had been unbearably nervous all morning and had already had to urinate in the corner of the shed. When he heard the teacher tell him he had done all right, he figured he had passed the test, though not with very good marks.

This lunchtime was not the same as usual. The three old men spoke very little; no one even brought up the question of how Liping had spent the morning. The boy figured they were feigning indifference, so he decided to play along. Gobbling up his food, he waited to see what the next test would be. He did not expect what happened next.

Wang Jiaoming casually said, "Liping, go back to the shed and stay there." Without even casting a glance at the boy, the old man took him back to the shed and locked him in.

Young Liping had not anticipated this ordeal. He felt he had been tested enough.

Since the old man had given no specific directions as to what he should do, Liping decided to pass the time in sport, shadowboxing in the dark, sitting down to rest when he got tired. Before long, however, the boy realized with growing discomfort that he had not prepared himself properly for this test. The call of nature began to nag him until he thought he would burst. Growing more anxious as the minutes ticked by like hours, eventually Liping wound up pounding and kicking on the door, hollering and screaming for the old men to let him out. Finally he disgraced himself.

As for the three Taoist masters, even while they were occupied with treating the ailments of the local people, nevertheless they focused their inner attention on their young apprentice. By their power of second sight, they were fully aware of his struggle. Lao-tzu said, "Those who conquer themselves are strong." The old masters were not being cruel; they were doing what was necessary to create a new human being. The I Ching says, "Faithfulness and trustworthiness are means of developing character."

From that day on, Liping came back every three or four days to practice "repentance" in the shed. Each time, the length of his isolation was increased, from half a day to a day, from a day to a day and a night. After several sessions, he learned to control himself, and his heart and mind became calm and clear. Having achieved this, he began to use his brain to think about questions. His mentors told him that this "structured thought" was an extremely important subject in training the brain.

Lao-tzu said, "Movement overcomes cold, stillness overcomes heat; clear calm is a rectifier of the world." He also said, "Effect emptiness to the extreme, keep stillness steady; as myriad things act in concert, I thereby observe the return." The essential point here is in calm stillness; when stillness reaches its climax, it produces motion, whereby you observe the subtle. "Structured thought" means that after body and mind have reached the climax of stillness, the brain conceives a "thing," be it a scene, a personage, or an event.

One must think ahead or in retrospect, causing the thing to develop and evolve until a "result" is obtained. When this result contains a definite meaning, the exercise is said to have taken effect. This operation of a thought process is called "structured thought."

Now Liping sat quietly in the dark room practicing structured thought according to the directions of his mentor. First he reflected on the fact that even though his body was restrained in a small dark room, his thought could not be locked up and prevented from going out and about.

With this in mind, Liping deliberately focused his thought on his father. What was he doing now? Liping pictured his father at work, his desk and everything on it—pencils, calculator, drafting tools, a cup half full of hot water, an ashtray containing several cigarette butts. Now Liping mentally saw his father, cigarette in his left hand, slowly exhaling a plume of smoke as he wrote on a large chart, making circular and square notations.

Right now his father was absorbed in his work, a job that was, however, terribly dull and boring. Still not finished even by lunchtime, his father continued on through the afternoon, dismayed by the realization that this task would take him days on end to complete. Such drudgery!

Liping decided to change the subject. Now he began to think of his schoolmates, now in class. It is second period, and the math teacher is lecturing. He is talking about the basics of accounting, bookkeeping, double entry, receivables and payables, balancing accounts, and so on. Also incredibly boring. Everyone is there in class except Liping himself. No one is listening very intently, especially Liping's friends, who are looking at his empty seat and thinking how convenient for him not to have come to this torturous class. They are aching to get outside and play!

But none of this was very interesting either, Liping reflected, and here this thought stopped.

Now Liping began to go through books inside his brain. Here is a textbook, he began, and he started to look through it mentally from the first lesson. There is a picture of the Great Wall, very grand and impressive. Gazing at the Great Wall from a distant mountain ridge, Liping mentally saw it like an enormous dragon

whose head and tail could not be seen, snaking through the fastnesses of the high mountains. He began describing it to himself. The wall is several meters in height, made of boulders and blocks, built along the spines of the mountains. Truly a breathtaking sight. The Great Wall is a crystallization of the blood, sweat, and skill of countless workers; it is a symbol of the Chinese people.

This was better. Liping concluded his exercise with the thought that he would climb the Great Wall one day, gaze upon the magnificent rivers and mountains of his native land, and take in the pride of being Chinese.

Wang Liping's exercises in structured thought developed his intellectual power and enhanced both his physical and his mental well-being. The little dark room was no longer a confining prison, but an integral part of the whole universe of space and time. In this infinite expanse of space and time, thought can soar at will. Everything Liping "saw"—the people, the events, the things—was very concrete, very realistic, very lifelike. This was a universe full of life, a universe in which he no longer felt alone. And he no longer felt time as a burden, for there were far too many things to do for him to be bored.

Liping was often hungry, however, during his work in the shed, because the old masters didn't bring him out for meals anymore. Instead they would show up suddenly at odd times and toss him something. Sometimes it would be nothing but a rock, as if the ancients were playing a joke on him. Sometimes it would be food, which the youth would wolf down in a few gulps.

It was also cold in the shed. The autumns in north China are cold, especially at night, when the chill gets into your bones. Based on the temperature changes and his bodily sensations, Liping had gradually worked out, through structured thought, first the ability to distinguish day and night, and then the ability to distinguish morning, noon, evening, and midnight.

There is a proverb that says, "It takes a hundred refinings to make solid steel." So it is with human beings; they do not attain great capacity unless they are refined. In Taoist terms, if you want to become a realized human being, while the primal basis is of course important, temporal refinement is even more important, because there is no other way to attain realization.



In the course of two months' isolation in the darkness, Wang Liping had his first understanding of the Way. The three ancients saw that his heart was sincere and his will was unshakable. Based on these qualities, they decided to take him on formally as a disciple.

They chose an auspicious date for the ceremony. That night the sky was clear, the full moon hanging in the eastern quarter, shining on the human world below. A gentle breeze was blowing, and a few flecks of cloud drifted by through the sky. The toil of the day ended, the people were now sleeping. The mountains in the distance were barely visible in the moonlight; they looked like a herd of sheep huddled together unmoving. The grains and pulses stood silently in the fields; occasionally the faint rustle of their leaves came whispering in the breeze, but their colors could no longer be distinguished.

The whole earth was plunged into a profound quiet; only the three elders and their young apprentice remained awake, carrying out the ceremony marking the formal initiation of Wang Liping as the eighteenth-generation Transmitter of the Dragon Gate branch of Taoism. He was given the Taoist name Yongsheng, which means Eternal Life, and the religious name Linglingzi, which means the Spiritually Effective One.

When the ritual was completed, the grand master gave the boy a brief summary of Taoist principles:

"The primal Way is formless and imageless, beginningless and endless, unnameable and indescribable. The word for the Way, which we use as a convenience, is pregnant with hidden meaning.

"First two dots are written. The left one symbolizes light, the right one symbolizes darkness, as in the symbol of the absolute wherein yin and yang embrace each other. These two dots represent the sun and moon in the sky, water and fire on earth, and the two eyes in human beings, which seem to reverse their light and gaze inwardly in the course of refinement exercises.

"Under these two dots is written a single stroke, meaning 'one,' which represents the totality of all things. Below this, the graph for 'self' is written, referring to oneself, meaning that everything in the

universe is in one's own body, and the Way is not apart from oneself. When the above pieces are assembled, they form the word 'head,' which signifies that practice of the Way is the best and most essential thing one can do in the world. Finally the sign for 'walk' is written, meaning to travel or operate, signifying the natural working of the teaching throughout one's whole body, the Way being carried out in one's own body, the Way being carried out in the whole world. These are the meanings contained in the structure of the character for the Way."

The grand master paused for a moment, then went on: "Chinese Taoism was founded by Lao-tzu. The essences of its doctrines are all in this word 'Tao,' the Way. The methods of attaining the Way are based on stillness.

"The wonders of stillness are inexhaustible. It is possible thereby to participate in evolution and to embrace all things; heaven, earth, and humanity are all included within it.

"People of the world only know how to talk about stillness; they cannot enter into stillness truly, because they have not found out the source of stillness.

"The source of stillness is in emptiness. All things and the changes they go through are but temporary conditions, which finally return to nothingness, then revert to emptiness. As long as the human mind is not still and quiet, there will be thoughts of desire remaining, which create tremendous obstacles to the cultivation of refinement.

"Once selfish desires arise, the primal spirit is disturbed, the primal energy is blocked, and training has no effect. Get rid of selfish desire, enter physically and mentally into quiet stillness, and the primal energy will be buoyant, while the primal spirit will be lively.

"The way to get into quiet stillness is to gradually eliminate random thoughts of personal desires, sweeping away the obstacles to the growth of primal spirit and energy, making the pathway even. This principle of extinguishing one to enliven the other is the great achievement of stillness. When it comes to resting in the highest good, nothing surpasses stillness. Even though myriad things move it from without, one's mind does not stir, even though one does not

know why. Then when primal vitality, energy, and spirit are full, stillness climaxes and shifts into movement. Once outward movement is unfailingly sensed within, then one naturally knows how it happens. The enhancement and extension of human life are also accomplished in this way.

"Once you have entered the door to the Way, you should understand this principle and apply it diligently. Then the work will naturally make great progress."

Having spoken thus, the grand master stood up and bade everyone good night. It was already one o'clock in the morning.

The next day, everyone rose early in the morning, and the three old men taught Liping some traditional shadowboxing exercises. After breakfast, the Wayfarer of the Infinite and the Wayfarer of Pure Emptiness went off somewhere, leaving the young apprentice alone with the Wayfarer of Pure Serenity.

This old man had once been an instructor at a military academy and was adept at both inner and outer exercises. Vigorous and brusque, he was extremely strict and demanding toward students. He called Liping to him and spoke in the following terms:

"Today you're starting a new lesson. You've passed through repentance, so now you will go through the second barrier, which requires learning to sit cross-legged in a dark room.

"The praxis of the Dragon Gate sect makes a particular point of seeing to it that the foundation is solid, and requires us to make it sturdy. This exercise of cross-legged sitting is essential training for beginners and must be practiced all your life. Every step of the training involves this exercise, so if you learn it properly you can derive endless benefit from it.

"There are three styles of cross-legged sitting. One is natural sitting, which is also called informal sitting. Then there is single cross-legged sitting, in which you place one foot on the opposite thigh. Finally there is double cross-legged sitting, in which you place both feet on opposite thighs. Natural sitting is earth; single cross-legged sitting is humanity; double cross-legged sitting is heaven. When the diverse hand positions are added, the postures of cross-legged sitting are innumerable various. Today, though, I'll just talk about natural sitting.

"Once seated, keep your upper body straight, with both eyes looking directly ahead, gradually collecting the light of the spirit. With the tongue against the upper palate and the lips shut, let the teeth be lightly closed. Place your hands on your knees, palms down. Still the spirit and meditate quietly, gradually eliminating all random thoughts.

"There are few disturbances inside a dark room," the mentor concluded, "so it is convenient for doing this exercise. Why not go there for now?" The old master's manner was dry and sharp. When he had finished, he stared directly at young Liping. Getting the message, the boy realized he had no choice but to follow his mentor's directions.

This time Liping first got a bunch of dry hay and spread it on the floor of the shack before locking himself in to practice cross-legged sitting. Luckily, the teacher had not presented him with a whole lot of other requirements, letting him suit himself. Being young and still in the process of developing physically, Liping was flexible enough to be able to do all three styles of sitting. He could not, however, maintain them for very long.

Having already cultivated hidden practice in this dark room for two months, although Liping still could not enter into total stillness, nevertheless he had learned to adapt to the environment. On this particular day, he slacked off quite a few times in the course of sitting, but on the whole he persevered, undergoing a variety of experiences as he sat. After a few days of practice, his work in sitting had progressed considerably.

One day the Wayfarer of Pure Serenity called Wang Liping to him and asked him what he had gained from his practice. After giving a detailed account of the process and his experiences, the youth finally said, "I can't clear random thoughts from my brain, and I can't attain stillness. Please teach me some method of handling this."

This was precisely what the old wizard had in mind. "To clear away random thoughts," he began in reply, "first use formal judgment to deal with them. As soon as a random thought arises, immediately pass judgment on it: either declare it right, or declare it wrong, or declare that this is as far as it goes. Having made this determination, stop right away and do not allow rumination to go on

and on. Then random thoughts will vanish by themselves, and in this way you can enter into stillness."

Returning to the dark room, Wang Liping sat cross-legged, adjusting his body and tuning his breathing, and began to quiet his mind. Now when he was assailed by random thoughts, he used this method to get rid of them. After repeating the process several times, he found that it actually did work. Liping felt happy inside. After another few days of practice, these random thoughts became fewer and fewer day by day, gradually tending to thin out as the exercise of entering stillness gradually developed. Even though he was only thirteen years old, with little experience of the world and relatively few desires—so his mind was much more pure and innocent than that of an ordinary adult—nevertheless he still had to get rid of random thoughts that occurred to him.

After seven times seven days sitting in the dark shed, Wang Liping had accumulated quite a bit of experience in quiet sitting and had learned an effective exercise. At this point, he had learned the better part of the exercise of repentance, and his wildness had mostly been reined in. Now in his everyday speech and behavior he was rather like a child of the Way. Within a few months, it was as if he had changed into another person.

On weekdays, Wang Liping continued to attend school, so that he would not foul up his ordinary education. After school, he'd go visit the Taoist masters to practice his exercises.

At first, Liping's parents were worried about the change in their son, but when they found out the reason, they realized that the three old men were of impeccable character: they cured the boy's ailments, taught him spiritual exercises, and initiated him into the true Way. When they learned all this, Liping's parents were more than relieved: they were thoroughly delighted.

To return to the story, after Wang Liping had sat for seven times seven days in the dark shed, the three masters called him to them. "Today," began the Wayfarer of Pure Serenity, "we are going to give you a new lesson. Sit here in this room for four hours. After you're finished, you can go home."

After forty-nine days of sitting in the dark, Liping thought, he would certainly have no problem sitting for four hours. Figuring it

was just a test, he got up on the platform and sat in the lotus position facing his teachers. After adjusting his posture properly, he closed his eyes and began to sit quietly.

For the first hour, Wang Liping sat immobile as a statue made of stone. Another hour passed, and he still held firm. After that, however, he had to summon up his strength, wondering when the time would be up, telling himself he had to persevere because his teachers were watching.

The minutes crawled by. Liping's legs began to go numb, just like the first time he had practiced sitting cross-legged. His aching thighs felt swollen, but his hips were still bearable, and as long as he kept his waist straight, there was no problem. After a while, however, even his hip bones began to ache, his waist and lower back began to burn, and his whole body broke out in perspiration. Sweating beads as he struggled to maintain his upright position, finally the youth blacked out and collapsed.

"Sit up right!" barked Wang Jiaoming, the Wayfarer of Pure Serenity, like an army drill instructor.

Coming to, the young apprentice sat up again, but his legs were so numb he couldn't cross them.

"Resume the double cross-legged position," demanded the mentor again.

But Liping's legs would not even follow his own commands; he was at a loss. The two mentors took some rope and bound him hand and foot, tying him up into the proper position so that he could go on sitting cross-legged.

Although still a boy, young Wang Liping had a strong will. His eyes filled with tears, but he refused to let them out. Gritting his teeth, he went on sitting. Later in life his eyes would again fill with tears as he spoke with gratitude of the unsparing efforts, relentless severity, and spiritual kindness of his Taoist teachers.

After six months of strict training, the young Wang Liping completed his practice of the phase of repentance. He could now sit quietly all day and all night, his body steady and his mind still, inwardly and outwardly immune to disturbance.

### 3

## Concentrating the Vital Spirit

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According to Master Wang Liping, the entire course of his training could be divided into nine stages. At this point in the story, he was going into the second stage, which involves collecting the mind and developing essential nature. This work is still concerned with the refinement of the inner essence of mind, but it is at a higher and more difficult level than repentance; its requirements are stricter, and the external conditions of practice are yet more severe. The aim is to get the practitioner to concentrate the vital spirit, using unified concentration of the whole spirit to examine minute changes within the body, producing extraordinary capacities within the ordinary.

For this exercise his mentors moved Wang Liping to a pit in the earth. The pit was narrow, dark, and dank, without good air circulation. Ordinarily one would not think it a suitable place for doing exercises, but the three wizards had a deep reason for finding this spot for their apprentice to sit and do his inner work. It was not just a matter of using a negative environment to develop extraordinary character, as one would usually imagine; the principle of contrary use of the surroundings has a more positive rationale.

The pit, going deep underground, was dark and wet. Could the principle be herein? Earth and depth both correspond to the earth element in the five elements, so the energy of earth is doubled. Shade and darkness are the extreme of yin; and when yin reaches its extreme, yang arises. Moisture corresponds to the water element in the five elements, and it is the source of life. In both the primal and temporal ordering of the eight trigrams of the I Ching, or Book of Changes, earth and water are both below. The *Traditions on the*

*Changes* says, "Consummate is the creative basis of earth; all beings live on its sustenance, as it goes along in accord with what it receives from heaven. Earth is thick and supports beings; its virtues are boundless, its embrace is far-reaching, and its glory is great, so all things flourish."

The Tao Te Ching says, "The Way obeys Nature," and it recommends quiet emptiness and keeping centered, which are both virtues associated with earth. In the I Ching trigram symbol for water, yin surrounds outside, and yang is in the center, representing "yang submerged in yin, outwardly empty while inwardly fulfilled." *The Traditions on the Changes* says, "Going through dangerous straits without losing faith, that mind gets through successfully, by means of firmness and balance." This seems to be the rationale for the three wizards using a pit in the earth to train Wang Liping. The young apprentice himself, of course, had no idea of his teachers' purpose in putting him there.

Jumping down into the pit, Liping lit sticks of incense at each of the four corners, according to instructions. The little cavern quickly filled with smoke, and the youth sat down and began to practice his inner exercise.

At first Liping was able to sit calmly and quietly, but before long the smoke got so dense, combined with the wet and cold vapors hanging heavy in the air, that breathing became difficult. Finally his primitive nature lost its patience again, and he shouted, "It's suffocating me!" He was hoping the teachers would let him out of the pit, but Wang Jiaoming had already told him to follow instructions strictly, without any fuss. At this point he knew that if he didn't obey, he'd be severely punished. All he could do was follow the course prescribed by his mentor.

Confined in the dark, dank pit, and suffocating, it was hard to sit cross-legged. Figuring that his mentor had already locked up and wouldn't come back, Liping decided to change positions and relax his body a little. So he leaned against the side of the pit and stretched out his arms and legs.

Just as he was getting comfortable, in a flash an incomprehensible change took place in the appearance of the pit, right before Liping's eyes. Suddenly it seemed to be as big as a banquet hall, and full of light. The grand master and the two



mentors were sitting before him, with the air and appearance of people from the immortal realms. The old master's face was red. Speaking solemnly, he said, "What nerve! A mediocre little boy like you dares to fool around in front of the likes of us? How can you go on hoodwinking us? Once you have become a disciple, your commitment stands before you. Whether or not a teacher is present, you should take it to heart. The methods of attaining the Way are transmitted verbally by teachers, but you are required to cultivate them seriously in your own body. The way you are now, unless you eliminate the poisons and delinquent tendencies in your heart as soon as possible, collect your spirit and develop your nature, how can you attain the Way?"

Having finished his speech, the old master closed his eyes. One of the mentors raised a disciplinary ruler, but didn't bring it down. The other mentor pulled out a rope, but stopped there. Wang Liping hurriedly knelt down and cried out an apology and a promise not to be so presumptuous again.

Now when he raised his head again, Liping saw nothing but the interior of the pit, cramped, dark, dank, and suffocating as before. But he felt a pain in the palms of his hands, and he saw that his legs had been bound up tightly. Then he realized that the old master and the two mentors had already administered punishment in some way.

Mortified with shame, Liping now understood how highly developed the accomplishments of the master and the mentors were; he also realized that his mind had not been thoroughly cleaned, and that he was very far from the Way. No longer would he have any illusions and boast of trivial intelligence. He would turn wholeheartedly to the Way, and first he would work on this practice of "collecting the mind and developing the nature," "keeping to the center, silent and empty."

When Wang Liping had learned to sit cross-legged for four hours in the pit filled with incense smoke, the old master and the mentors finally began to transmit to him the teaching of the Dragon Gate sect of Complete Reality Taoism known as "The Art of Inner Exercise of Mental Capacities Attained Through the Classical Spiritual Jewels." As he learned from his teachers, Liping worked on applying the new skills in practice, so his efforts gradually led him into the True Way.

This art of inner exercise of mental capacities according to the classical Spiritual Jewels is one of the ancient Taoist methods of internal work. Its doctrine is "saving one from birth and death is first, comfort and long life come afterward." Its special features are inclusion of both movement and stillness, and cultivation of both essential nature and life energy. The art has many techniques, which are simple and easy to practice, naturally forming a detailed and comprehensive system for training the capacities of the whole human being.

This teaching has been treasured by specialists in method for a long time and has been passed on only by word of mouth and kept only in memory, transmitted individually from teacher to disciple, kept secret and not publicly divulged.

The Art of Inner Exercise of Mental Capacities Attained Through the Classical Spiritual Jewels is divided into "three exercises" and "nine methods." The "three exercises" are the "Three Immortalist Exercises," or quiet sitting exercises, exercises involving external movements known as equilibrium exercises, and sleeping exercises practiced at leisure. The "nine methods" deal with developing mental capacities, stopping illness, curing illness, transmitting awareness, stabilizing mind, settling your birth and death, cutting off the earthly soul, and receiving images.

Among these nine methods, the first four are methods of helping people create happiness; the latter five are methods of overcoming people and methods of controlling people. The fourth method, "transmitting awareness," also includes methods of overcoming people.



One day the old master and the two mentors called Wang Liping to them and started explaining the first method of the Spiritual Jewel attainments, developing mental capacities. Zhang Hodao, Wayfarer of the Infinite, said, "This method of developing mental capacity is a method of exercise in stillness, mainly cultivated while sitting cross-legged. Now that you have learned the basic essentials of sitting cross-legged, you can practice this method.

"This method of developing mental capacity is itself divided into nine steps. The first step is retrospective gazing, returning to infancy. The second step is clear distinction of the real and the unreal. The third step is developing clarity of spirit. The fourth step is knowing the way one is to go. The fifth step is stopping eating to seek life. The sixth step is changing into new clothing. The seventh step is seeing through the mechanism of Nature. The eighth step is revolving time. The ninth step is gazing practice ascending to the moon. Today you will start your practice with the first step, retrospective gazing back into infancy."

Although he gave no sign of it, Wang Liping was delighted. "No wonder they had me learn to sit quietly so long. There are so many things to study!"

Now the Wayfarer of Pure Emptiness, Gu Jiaoyi, continued where the old master had left off. "After you enter into quiet stillness sitting cross-legged, once random thoughts are eliminated, when stillness reaches its extreme, it produces movement. Then various sorts of hallucinations will begin to appear in your brain. When you close your eyes, you will see very lifelike images—birds flying in the sky, animals running and bounding on the ground, flowers, plants, and trees growing in the meadows, people involved in work and other activities. When these images have appeared, they are not actually hallucinations. The brain is beginning to re-present real scenes you have seen in the past, so it is memory.

"When ordinary people remember past things, they do not see them so clearly and graphically. Only after accomplishment is achieved in the practice of entering stillness is it possible to 'see' clearly within the brain.

"Slowly, you should then see things that happened a long time ago, things you could never bring up simply by the power of memory or recollection. Now you will be able to see them clearly. You can keep going back all the way through your childhood, because your thinking has gone into reverse. This is called 'retrospective gazing back to infancy.' When thinking has gone back we say it is 'retrospection,' but in reality it is 'gazing,' a clear viewing of images.

"When these scenes appear, don't be afraid. You must let them change as they may. It is most definitely necessary, however, to

watch them closely and examine them in detail. You must absolutely avoid letting them go too easily, without clear perception.

"All right now," the mentor concluded, "go sit in your hole in the ground, quiet down your mind, and see what scenes appear."

Wang Liping went back to the hole in the ground again and shut himself in. Lighting three sticks of incense, he sat on a bunch of straw and went into a condition of stillness. After these few days of practice, Wang Liping understood the advantage of doing these exercises in the pit. The incense smoke no longer suffocated him, but instead it created an ethereal atmosphere.

After sitting quietly for a while, Wang Liping felt his whole body become nothing. Inside his brain was a complete blank. Then, all of a sudden, images began to appear. These images were not the same as those that had appeared before when he was practicing deliberate thinking in the dark room. Those earlier images had been deliberately mentally formulated; these images appeared spontaneously. They were very real, distinct, and clear.

Following his mentor's instructions, Wang Liping felt no fear, but watched the images closely, observing how they appeared and how they changed, registering all this in memory. He had no idea how time and space could transform this way: space changed into a mirage, and time reversed its flow. As he sat there quietly, Wang Liping actually went through the experience of "retrospective gazing, returning to infancy."

Liping had no idea how much time passed, but eventually the images faded and disappeared. Then he concluded his exercise and got out of the pit. Outside he saw that it was already late at night; then he realized this sitting had lasted four hours. During his retrospective gazing back into infancy, however, he had seen many places and events spanning several years' time.

When Wang Liping told his teachers about his experiences in inward gazing during this session of quiet sitting, they saw that he was really intelligent, sincere, and quick to learn. Delighted, they urged him to keep on practicing his exercises, to achieve solid stability.

For his part, after this experience Wang Liping became even

more attentive to his study of Taoism. One day when he went into the pit to sit, not long after entering into stillness, both eyes gazing inward, unexpectedly he found that he was able to see everything in his own body, from the outside to the inside. His youthful heart was pure, and he felt no fear, only a sense of wonder. Without getting upset or excited, he continued to gaze, observing every detail.

When Wang Liping finished this exercise session, he reported his inner vision to the three masters. Exchanging meaningful glances, the old wizards smiled without saying anything. Realizing that they must have something to tell him about this experience, however, Liping asked the mentors for a pointer.

The Wayfarer of Pure Emptiness laughed and said, "You have again progressed further in quiet sitting. Now you have already entered into the second step of the method of developing mental capacities, which is called 'clear distinction of the real and the unreal.' When you gaze inwardly at your own body after entering stillness, even though your eyes are closed and you are in utter darkness, you can see the internal conditions of your own body with perfect clarity. When this happens, you should never be startled or frightened, and you should not engage in any activity. You must observe and make distinctions with accurate precision. See exactly how many bones there are in your head, what shape they are, and how they are joined together. What are the shapes of your internal organs? What colors are they? Are there any spots? When you can see these things plainly and register them clearly, then this becomes useful. This exercise is basic when it comes to diagnosing and curing disease. People may look well from the outside, but when you can see the internal condition of their bodies you know whether or not they are sick, and where the ailment is if they are. So this exercise method is called 'clear distinction of the real and the unreal.' Now that you have entered this domain, you should continue to practice, observing the structure of your body, remembering every detail."

After a moment of silent reflection, the Wayfarer of the Infinite took up the thread."After these two steps are completed," he began, "the foundation of your inner work is secure, and you need more understanding of the principles of inner work cultivated by ancient health practitioners.

"Inner work cultivates both essence and life. Essence exercises cultivate the spirit, soul, will, awareness, tranquility, and stability. Life exercises cultivate the energy, blood, vitality, sinews, bones, and skin. The methods of cultivation include both stillness and motion. They are orderly and measured, yet adaptable to accord with natural conditions.

"The health practices of the Dragon Gate sect are based on ancient longevity teachings. They are modeled on the principles of yin and yang and are adjusted to calendrical logic. Yin and yang are constants of the sky and the earth; calendrical logic is the organization of hygiene.

"The inner work of the Spiritual Jewel teaching includes aspects associated with heaven, earth, and humankind, used as a means of mating external yin and yang, the five elements, and the eight trigrams with internal yin and yang, the five elements, and the eight trigrams, in order to cultivate them. This work is the basis for establishing essence and life and cultivating essence and life.

Heaven, earth, and humankind are a universe; the individual human being is also a universe, a microcosm. Changes in the macrocosm, the universe at large, all affect the microcosm, the little universe of the individual, and changes in the microcosm all correspond to changes in the macrocosm.

"Refining practices cultivated on the model of the moon circling the earth result in the microcycle, penetrating the three passes, breaking through the gate of heaven, opening the celestial eye, and descending through the three fields. When the aperture of the celestial eye opens, then inner vision is possible.

"The aperture of the celestial eye consists of three points on one line, from outside to inside, combining to form the 'higher elixir.' The 'aperture' is between the eyebrows, the 'eye,' which is popularly referred to as 'nirvana,' is inside that, and the 'heaven,' also called the 'celestial mirror,' is behind that. The aperture is naturally always open, but the eye has to be cultivated; the celestial is primordial. The aperture is open, but does not perceive objects. The eye perceives things even when closed, seeing back into the celestial. Now that your celestial eye aperture is open, you are capable of inner vision and thus can successfully cultivate refinement in conjunction with the cycles of the sun and moon. This is followed