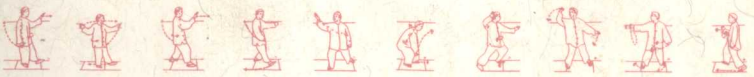
T'AI CHI CH'UAN & MEDITATION



DA LIU

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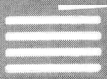

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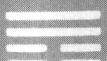

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PREFACE

In an earlier book, *T'ai Chi Ch'uan and I Ching* (Harper and Row, 1972), I briefly discussed the relationship between T'ai Chi Ch'uan and the practice of meditation. Since the book appeared, I have received many letters from readers interested in this subject. Some have requested a more detailed account of how the T'ai Chi exercises are related to the practice of meditation. Others have expressed doubt and even opposition to the idea of practicing these two disciplines in conjunction with one another. It seems to me that this latter reaction deserves further comment.

Those who object to associating T'ai Chi Ch'uan and meditation are apparently unaware that the T'ai Chi system of exercise was originally developed by the Taoist master Chang San-feng as a form of discipline complementary to meditative practice. More important, they do not recognize that the two disciplines stem from a common source, the *I ching* (*Book of Changes*), and are based on the same yin-yang principle. Although T'ai Chi Ch'uan's character as a system of self-defense is not to be neglected, it is fundamentally a way of becoming in harmony with the basic forces of the universe—the yin and the yang—with the aim of attaining health, longevity, and inner tranquillity. As such, it seeks the same result as meditation, in a complementary way.

I am convinced that in order to obtain the full benefit of the practice of meditation or of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, one must come to understand the philosophical perspective from which they can be clearly seen as two aspects of the same process. As a result, this book contains not merely a practical description of the methods of meditation and exercise, but an explanation of the underlying theory that will enable the reader to practice

the techniques in a deeper way. The book may be considered a sequel to and further development of the ideas contained in my earlier book mentioned above. Since that book contained a detailed description of how to perform the T'ai Chi Ch'uan form, that information will not be repeated here. However, I have selected some important movements and related their outer movements to the inner movement of *ch'i* and how this helps meditation.

The sources of the theory that will be explained in this book include not only the *I ching* but also the diagrams known as *T'ai Chi T'u* and the commentaries explaining them written by the neo-Confucian philosophers of the Sung dynasty. These diagrams and commentaries embody the theory more directly and clearly than the *I ching*.

Many Taoist masters have attested to the importance of physical exercise in conjunction with the practice of meditation. Chao Pi Ch'en, the author of *Taoist Yoga* (New York: 1980), a comprehensive exposition of the methods of Taoist meditation, emphasized that the meditator should practice physical exercise to strengthen the body and to help to open the psychic centers important for meditation more effectively than the practice of meditation alone. Other masters have also attested to the effectiveness of a combination of meditation and physical exercise such as T'ai Chi Ch'uan. Among these are the famous Li Ch'ing Yuen, who is said to have lived 250 years (1678–1930), the well-known master Li Shou Ch'ian, who lived to his nineties, and the contemporary master Wang Huai Mien, who still practices and teaches T'ai Chi Ch'uan and meditation at the age of eighty-five.

My own conviction about the relationship between T'ai Chi Ch'uan and meditation comes not from the classics or from the testimony of others, however. This book is not a report of my reading or research. It is a result of my own practice and teaching of these disciplines for the past fifty years. My purpose is to show that, at the highest level, the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan aims at the same results as meditation, and to

present a detailed, intelligible account of the practical relationship between the two techniques.

CONTENTS

T'AI CHI CH'UAN and MEDITATION

INTRODUCTION

The theory and practice of health exercises and meditation are very old aspects of Chinese culture. Indeed, they apparently originated before the beginning of recorded history, and so accounts of how and by whom they were developed must be regarded as legendary. According to a long-held tradition, Huang Ti, the so-called Yellow Emperor, who began his rule around 2700 B.C., practiced a form of exercise called Tao Yin with the aim of increasing his life span. The word *Tao* means "guide," and *Yin* means "leading." These terms give a hint of how the exercise works: the movements of the limbs guide the circulation of the blood so that the tissues throughout the body can be repaired and cleansed more efficiently. The movements also lead the breath in and out of the lungs, so that more oxygen can be inhaled to nourish and energize the body and the poisons can be exhaled more efficiently. Thus movement is the foundation of a discipline that guides and leads the automatic bodily processes so that they will function in a more beneficial way. Of course, not just any movements will have this effect. It is a remarkable thing about Chinese civilization that the secret of how to achieve this was discovered and understood in prehistoric times.

Essential to the practice of Tao Yin was the way in which the movements of the limbs were combined with the breathing. It is actually this combination that makes the exercise so beneficial for health. Huang Ti's exercises were also known as T'u Na. The word *t'u* means "exhale," and *na* means "inhale."

It is said that Huang Ti once went to the K'ung Tung mountains, where he met the immortal sage Kuang Cheng-tze. This master advised him that in order to preserve life, he should be careful not to thoughtlessly stimulate his passions or stir up his

emotions, and should often sit quietly and make his mind more peaceful. By following this advice and practicing his exercises, Huang Ti was able to lead an amazing life. His reign as emperor lasted a hundred years. He had over a hundred wives. Eventually he became an immortal and rode off to heaven on the back of a dragon. When the people saw him riding away, they called out for him to stay, for they loved him so much that they didn't want him to leave. And so, as a final gift to them, Huang Ti dropped down his shoes. A tomb said to contain these shoes still exists in Shanxi Province.

The activities of Huang Ti were precursors of the methods of Taoist meditation and of the form of exercise known as T'ai Chi Ch'uan. These practices did not become widespread during the time of Huang Ti, however. In fact, he is said to have tried to keep them secret. The full development of Taoism did not take place until much later, as we will see in Chapter 1.

The theory behind these practices is based ultimately on the Tao as a joining together of opposites, the fundamental principle of Taoist philosophy. The two opposing manifestations of the Tao, called yin and yang, have universal significance and apply to the phenomena of the cosmos as well as to the operations of the human body. On the largest scale, heaven is yang, while earth is yin. Day is yang, while night is yin. Bright and clear weather is yang; dark and stormy weather is yin. On the scale of living things, the male is yang, the female yin. Spirit is yang, body yin. The opposition applies to the parts of the body and their functions as well. In the circulatory system, the arteries are yang; the veins are yin. In breathing, exhalation is yang; inhalation is yin. In human activities, movement is yang; rest is yin.

A systematic description of the relationships of yin and yang is found in the hexagrams of the *I ching,* the oldest and most important book of Chinese philosophy. The hexagrams themselves date back a couple of centuries before Huang Ti. There is little doubt that his health practices, consisting of an alternation of movement and rest, and his form of exercise involving

breathing in and out were direct applications of the yin-yang principle.

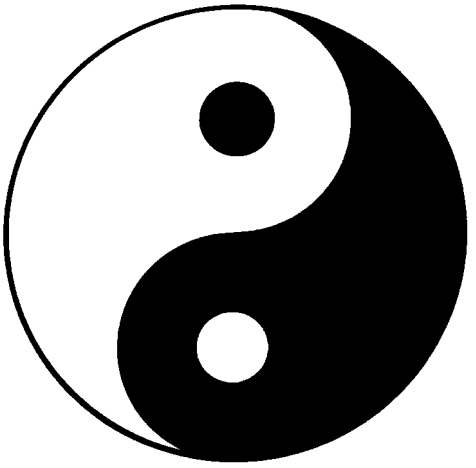
This principle has been the basis of the Chinese understanding of health and sickness since ancient times. Good health requires a balance between yin and yang forces within the body. If one or the other is too predominant, sickness results, and it is the aim of the medical sciences, including both acupuncture and herbal medicine, to discover the source of the imbalance and restore the forces to their proper proportion. However, the Taoist philosophy that underlies the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan and meditation involves a somewhat more complex theory of the relationship between yin and yang within the body. Taoism does not deny that a general balance between these forces is necessary to avoid sickness. Nevertheless, in a certain respect, it is the aim of meditation to greatly increase the yang and to reduce and diminish the yin. One of the fundamental beliefs of Taoist philosophy is that the reason people become old and weak and eventually die is that they lack sexual energy. This explanation is based on the insight that physical reproduction is but one aspect of the process of maintaining the life and creativity of the individual person. When we are young, our sexual activities naturally generate a powerful energy that pervades all aspects of our life, both physical and mental. The generation of this energy occurs in the production of the sexual essences: the sperm in the male and the menstrual fluid in the female. These substances are both yang. As we grow old and these essences are no longer produced so easily, this natural source of energy tends to dwindle and become less powerful. Thus the sexual essence can be thought of as somewhat like the fuel in a machine. When the machine runs out of fuel, it can no longer move. However, such a loss of energy is not an inevitable result of growing old. Since ancient times, Taoist philosophy has been concerned with the question of how to reproduce and maintain this kind of energy so as to prolong the life and creativity of the individual. The answer to the question is to be found in the

methods of Taoist meditation, in which a combination of movement, breathing, and mental concentration is used to purify the sexual essence and distill out its pure yang aspect—that is, pure vital energy—and to transmit it through the eight psychic channels to every cell in the body.

The ultimate aim of such methods, according to the classic Taoist treatises, is nothing short of the attainment of physical immortality. There is no doubt that Taoism has long carried the conviction that this is actually possible. Of course, one would have to be truly exceptional, a person of the stature of Huang Ti, to realize this possibility. Nevertheless, the regular practice of these methods has definitely been shown to result in longevity, good health, vigor, mental alertness, and creativity far beyond what is experienced by most people. In fact, it can also greatly prolong sexual potency and activity, as I will discuss in detail in a later chapter.

In order to obtain the full benefit from this practice, it is essential to understand the principles underlying the methods. Hence it is the aim of this book not only to describe the methods of meditation and exercise, but also to explain how they are based on the philosophy of Taoism. An important insight to be attained through an understanding of this philosophy concerns the way in which the practice of an exercise such as T'ai Chi Ch'uan and meditation should complement one another. The relationship between them manifests a subtle interweaving of opposite (yin and yang) tendencies. This relationship can be seen in the famous diagram known as the T'ai Chi T'u (Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate). This diagram consists of two fishlike figures within a circle: one black, the other white. The black fish, representing rest, is called "greater yin," and the white fish, representing movement, is called "greater yang." Within each figure there is a smaller circle of the opposite color, which may be seen as the eye of the fish. The black circle within the white figure is called "lesser yin" and the white circle within the black figure is called "lesser yang." These inner circles represent the way in which each of the opposing forces, yin and yang, contains within

itself its opposite, and also continuously originates from its opposite in a smooth, never-ending cycle. In the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan and meditation, the relationship between movement and rest should reflect the interweaving of yang and yin represented in this picture. T'ai Chi Ch'uan, essentially a form of movement, is yang, the white fish. Meditation, which involves standing or sitting quietly, is yin, the black fish. But this distinction takes into account only the external aspects of these activities. To perform the T'ai Chi Ch'uan exercise correctly, one must be very peaceful and quiet inside while executing the externally visible movements. Conversely, the meditator must use the breath and mental concentration to move the vital energy through the psychic channels while remaining externally at rest. Thus the inner aspect of each of these practices is opposite to its outer aspect, just as the greater yang contains the lesser yin within it, and vice versa, as pictured in the diagram.



Seen in yet another way, the picture represents the way in which exercise and meditation grow out of one another as alternating practices. The movements of T'ai Chi Ch'uan,

while producing more and more energy and vitality, tend to increase the yang side of the yin-yang balance in the body. Eventually, when the yang reaches a high point, it generates a need to sit quietly and purify the energy. This is done through meditation, which produces a more peaceful condition, increasing the yin side of the balance. When the yin reaches a high point, it generates a need to increase the yang once again. Thus it is through the alternate practice of these two opposite methods that one can obtain beneficial effects, including longevity. The achievement of longevity through the alternating cycle of yin and yang activities is thus based on a fundamental principle of Taoist philosophy. Chou Tun-i (1017–1073), the great neo-Confucian philosopher of the Sung dynasty, expressed the principle as follows in his treatise *T'ai chi t'u shuo* (The Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate Explained):

> The Supreme Ultimate through movement produces the yang. This movement, having reached its limit, is followed by quiescence, and by this quiescence it produces the yin. When quiescence has reached its limit, there is a return to movement. Thus movement and quiescence, in alternation, become each the source of the other. The distinction between the yin and yang is determined, and their two forms stand revealed.[1]

This theory of the alternation of yin and yang is coordinated with the principles of T'ai Chi Ch'uan and meditation. After practicing T'ai Chi Ch'uan for a long time, one should rest and practice meditation. Then, after becoming very quiet through meditation, one should practice the movements of T'ai Chi Ch'uan once again to stimulate the blood circulation, release physical stagnation, and relax the mind.

I will discuss the philosophy of Chou Tun-i and of other Taoist scholars in detail in a later chapter, in which it will become clearer what is meant by the two forms of yin and yang. The basic principle is much older than the writings of Chou Tun-i, however. Actually, it is to be found in the *I ching* itself. As the seventeenth-century scholar Wang Ch'uan-shan pointed out, the *I ching* never speaks of "birth and destruction" but only of

the alternation of "coming and going."[2] And the text of the *I ching* intimates the same principle in the commentary on hexagram 32, Heng (Duration): "Duration means that which lasts long. The strong is above, the weak below; . . . Gentle and in motion. The strong and the weak all correspond: this signifies duration."[3] The words *strong* and *motion* symbolize the exercise; *weak* and *gentle* symbolize the meditation. Together they bring about duration, that is, longevity.

NOTES

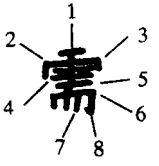
1. Quoted in Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy,* trans. Derk Bodde, vol. 2 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 435.
2. See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China,* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 512.
3. *I ching,* trans. Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 546. All subsequent quotations from the *I ching* are from this edition.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORY OF MEDITATION AND EXERCISE IN CHINA

The practice of meditation began in China in prehistoric times. The underlying principles can be found in the *I ching,* which was written over three thousand years ago—at least two centuries before the legendary rule of Huang Ti. Several hexagrams of the *I ching,* which existed prior to the *I ching,* represent and describe both the practice of meditation and the processes that occur in the body as a result of this practice. One example is hexagram 5, Hsu (Waiting). The Chinese character for this hexagram pictures a person meditating in a sitting position. The text, particularly the Judgment, pertains to the flow of vital energy from one psychic channel to another, a process that occurs during meditation.

5. Hsü/Waiting (Nourishment)



Many of the hexagrams in the *I ching* relate to meditation. Hexagram 5, Hsu, is especially significant. This hexagram symbolizes the process of meditation not only in the Commentary on the Decision, Image, and Lines, but also in the form of the Chinese character itself. Each stroke of the character pic-