

TAO And LONGEVITY

Mind-Body Transformation



Translated by
Wen Kuan Chu, Ph.D
From the original Chinese by
Huai-Chin Nan

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

Tao and Longevity(静坐修道与长生不老 英文版)
/南怀瑾著. 朱文光译. —北京:东方出版社, 2008. 8

ISBN 978-7-5060-3272-8

I. T… II. 南… III. 气功-中国-英文 IV. R214

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2008)第 119177 号

Tao and Longevity(静坐修道与长生不老 英文版)
南怀瑾 著 朱文光 译

特约编辑: 王一禾

责任编辑: 孙 涵

出版发行: 东方出版社

地 址: 北京朝阳门内大街 166 号

邮 编: 100706

邮购电话: (010)65181955

印 刷: 环球印刷(北京)有限公司印刷

经 销: 新华书店

版 次: 2008 年 8 月第 1 版

2008 年 8 月北京第 1 次印刷

开 本: 640 毫米×960 毫米 1/16

印 张: 12.25

字 数: 270 千字

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5060-3272-8

定 价: 33.00 元

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Translator's Preface

Since childhood I have been fascinated by the stories of immortals portrayed in Taoist books and teachings. I wondered how a person could become an immortal and achieve the godship. I read hundreds of Taoist books but always had a complex feeling of fascination, confusion and frustration whenever I finished reading. They seemed to be written in such a way that only the rare person could understand them. The standard excuse was that the heavenly secret should not be revealed. I could not tell which books were good and which were bad, and I did not know who, among these many authors, was a real immortal and who was a phony or a fake. So, I continued in search of Tao in the Taoist tradition by looking for a genuine teacher and, fortunately, I met *my* teacher in 1961. He is the author of this book.

In China, people usually meditate in order to achieve spiritual growth and to *enhance their health*. I have lived in the United States for many years. To my surprise, the ideas and methods of Western meditation practices are quite different from those of the Chinese. It seems to me that most Americans meditate solely for spiritual growth and seem to want to expand consciousness or develop esp. Almost no one in the United

States has pointed out that meditation can improve a person's health and cure illness. Although spiritual healing is presently quite popular in America, Western methods are very different from those of the Chinese.

According to Taoist theories and meditation methods, the mind and body affect and condition each other. Cultivating the mind for spiritual growth should be accompanied by a "lifting of the body." But since none of the Taoist books describe how to do this, this book has been written—the first of its kind to appear in either Chinese or English. It describes the physiological reactions and phenomena initiated by meditation in step-by-step detail, and ignores the traditional Chinese practice of private instruction. Professor Nan analyzes the vague terms appearing in Taoist books which have remained obscure to the average student because the ancients were unwilling to reveal their symbolism and provide clear instructions.

I believe that anyone who is genuinely interested in meditation will benefit greatly from this book. Professor Nan does not confine his attention to mental and spiritual development alone, but clarifies the relationship between spiritual development and physical transformations in the body. He also discusses many principles of Zen, esoteric Buddhism, and Taoism, revealing the practical phenomena of interest to all serious students of meditation.

Wen Kuan Chu
Los Angeles, California
Sept. 1983

Introduction

One of the greatest of all human desires is the desire for immortality. Matters pertaining to the origins of the universe, the roots of life, spiritual transcendence, and cosmic consciousness have also been pursued with intense curiosity. A number of important religious concepts are based upon these two dispositions. For example, heaven, the Pure-Land of Buddha, Shangri-La, and the land of great immortals all suggest the possibility of spiritual cultivation beyond the realm of earthly desire.

Our curiosity about the nature of existence, an inclination to seek knowledge of the root origins of life, and a tendency to long for immortality stand at the foundation of some nonreligious schools of thought. The yoga techniques practiced in the traditions of India, and the meditation methods practiced in the style of the ancients in China are different methods of cultivation, but they are based upon a single body of knowledge. For example, both recommend that a person begin to cultivate and refine body and spirit in the course of the present lifetime. Further, they both involve the practice of techniques that may enable a person to transcend the bounds of the material world, to attain eternal existence, and to unravel the mysteries of life.

These teachings are, in some ways, very similar to religious teachings but these schools are not religions. Thus, one who decides to practice these techniques is neither required to abandon any of his religious beliefs nor required to posit and adhere to any additional beliefs in order to begin.

Since ancient times, a great many books about immortality have been written and carefully studied. But who is a real immortal? Since it sometimes seems unreasonable for one to expect to live a long life, it is not at all irrational to suspect that the theory of immortality is based upon a lie. This sort of suspicion is not merely a modern one. Some of the ancients apparently entertained very similar doubts. For example, Chi Kang, one of the seven wise men of the bamboo grove, developed a theory of regimen in which he attempted to rationally prove that immortality can be attained. Since Chi Kang lived and wrote during the Chin dynasty, it seems as if he must have developed his theory in an attempt to demonstrate the truth of the theory of immortality to men living at that time.

Chi Kang argued that following a regimen for attaining immortality is appropriate since the way of immortality enables one to transcend worldliness and attain Godship. Although we may not be able to either confirm or deny Chi Kang's assumption that it leads to spiritual transcendence, at the very least we cannot deny that following the way of immortality is extremely helpful. Since following a regimen of this sort proves to be of considerable assistance to those involved in the Chinese medical arts, as well as to those engaged in modern psychoanalysis,

physical therapy, and holistic health practices, it is well worth promoting.

A theory which has been transmitted from one generation to another for thousands of years must surely have some validity. Although the theory of immortality may not be easy to understand, we are not therefore entitled to believe that it is merely nonsense. Instead, we should attempt to discover why this theory appears to be incomprehensible. There are a number of factors which contribute to our initial difficulty. First, although the ancients were not foolish, there are vast differences between the teaching methods they employed then and those we are accustomed to today. Second, the number of people who have investigated immortality in depth amounts to no more than a handful since this sort of research requires stupendous effort and an ability to work alone. Cultivating immortality is not as simple as a get-rich-quick scheme. Those who are dedicated to the regular practice of cultivating body and mind will benefit from its tremendous self-healing effects, while those who practice only in emergencies will not.

According to the theory of "root bone," those who wish to explore the mysteries and transcend the world should have a natural gift for learning immortality. During the Ch'ing dynasty, Chao I wrote the following poem: "I had difficulty writing poetry. When I was young, I thought it was because I was unrefined and had not yet perfected my skill. I was very old before I finally realized that this cannot be accomplished by hard work alone. Three tenths of it depends upon man's effort but the rest

is up to heaven. "Poetry is a small Tao in literature, but some of the hardships one must endure to attain it are described in Chao I's poem. It is very difficult to change one's temperament in a short time, and thus to gain all the wonderfulness of Tao.

I wish to thank my students for asking questions and posing problems about meditation throughout the years. I hope that this book may help to answer some questions and correct some undesirable meditation practices. I also hope to clarify some of the abstruse points and obscure concepts that appear in the *Tan Sutras* on immortality. Although the ancients may have been unwilling to reveal a straightforward and complete account, I hope this preliminary sketch of my research will not only be helpful to those interested in developing a regimen but that it will also be a first step for additional research into the ways of Taoism.

In this context, the expression "first step" is a careful choice of words and not used as a consequence of modesty. This book does not contain an in-depth analysis of the Taoist theory of immortality, but it describes some of the physiological and psychological transformations that naturally occur during the proper practice of meditation.

Taipei, 1973

About the Author

The author, Huai-Chin Nan, has sought the origin and solution of life and the universe since his youth. He has traveled all over China and Tibet in search of truth and has inherited the Dharma of Zen, Taoism and esoteric Buddhism. In order to cultivate and verify these teachings, he remained in seclusion in the Omei Mountains in the Szechwan Province for three years and then spent several years in the Lu Mountains of Chiang Hsi Province. He has spent half his life as a hermit; he has also taught philosophy in universities. His knowledge is manifold and his wisdom is bright. He has written many books on Zen, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism.

The Translator

Wen-Kuan Chu was educated in both East and West. He studied Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in the Orient for many years. His interest in science led him to the United States where he earned a Ph. D. in soil science from the The University of California at Berkeley.

Dr. Chu devoted his life to scholarship and was well versed in both the wisdom of the ancients and modern scientific theories. During his lifetime he worked to integrate these two systems of knowledge because he believed this integration will lead to the perception of other dimensions and promote the development of a new human reality. Dr. Chu passed from this life on

Christmas Eve, 1985, while warning others of an impending flood.

A Note on the Translation

The word *Zen* has been used throughout the text since it is a term familiar to most Western readers. It should be noted that *Zen* is actually a Japanese word and *Ch'an* is the correct Chinese translation. Readers should understand that the terms are interchangeable.



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The Nature of Meditation

Part I



1 Longevity is Actually Possible

Many people have asked again and again, “Is longevity actually possible? Is immortality attainable?” When people ask such questions I sometimes inquire, “Have you ever really seen a man of longevity or immortality?” The answer is always that they have heard from someone that there is a person somewhere who has lived for several hundred years. They often mention Kuang Cheng Tze at Omei Mountain and Hsu Che at Ching Cheng Mountain, each of whom is still living after thousands of years. But absolutely no one ever claims he can invite one of these famous immortals to meet the people.

At other times when people ask such questions I inquire, “Do you think meditation itself is the cultivation of Tao?” “What is Tao?” “How can you cultivate?” and “Why do you want to cultivate Tao and meditation?” Almost five pair out of ten will respond that they wish to have longevity and avoid illness.

Many people are eager to know about meditation and the cultivation of Tao. They wish to know how to open up *ch’i*

routes, the conception vessel, the governing vessel, and the eight extra meridians. People also wish to know about the three *ch'i* routes and the seven chakras in yoga and esoteric Buddhism. They usually forget the highest principles, or the basis of philosophical theory behind the cultivation of Tao and the opening of the *ch'i* routes for longevity. If someone cultivates Tao for personal longevity, it is the extreme manifestation of the selfishness in human nature.

If opening the *ch'i* route in the body is the fruit of Tao, then this Tao is still the crystal of materialism. Is Tao mind or matter? Most people don't think about this very deeply.

Does this mean that there is no possibility for longevity? No! No! At first we have to understand two important points. 1) Longevity consists of maintaining one's health, slowing down the aging process, living without illness and pain, and dying peacefully without bothering other people. 2) Immortality does not mean indefinite physical longevity; it indicates the eternal spiritual life. What do we mean by "the spiritual life" in this context? It is beyond mind and matter, and it is the primitive beginning of life.

The functions and phenomena of the spiritual life manifest themselves in the physical body and consciousness. Its nature is very complicated and will be discussed in later chapters. Since ancient times, the ultimate goal of all religions is the search for, and the return to, an eternal spiritual life. Because of differences in language and culture the meaning of "spiritual life" has been expressed in different ways.