

Lesson 2:
"Gong-fu" Transformations Within the Physical Body

by William Bodri

Wbodri@nyc.rr.com 718-539-2811

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Taoism offers its own ways of describing the various stages of the path to spiritual enlightenment. Because Taoism is a "form school" that emphasizes cultivation of the physical body, its descriptive scheme heavily emphasizes physical characteristics--rather than mental realms--for delineating the process of spiritual training and actual progress on the spiritual trail.

No matter what spiritual cultivation school we choose, the overall process of spiritual attainment is basically the same. However, each religion usually describes the path using a different angle from its cohorts. In particular, Taoism describes progress on the spiritual path using the landmarks of physical transformations and material phenomena rather than by emphasizing changes in mental phenomena. Thus in terms of the main Chinese cultivation schools, it's often said that "Buddhism describes the path in terms of the mind, Confucianism describes the path in terms of behavior, and Taoism describes the path in terms of phenomena."

Naturally, all these schools describe the cultivation path in other ways as well, especially Buddhism, but this particular maxim draws attention to the outstanding characteristics of each of these spiritual schools.

To fully comprehend the Taoist way of defining spiritual cultivation, it's essential that you first understand the meaning of three basic substances: jing, chi and shen. If you can understand these substances, which are a cornerstone in Traditional Chinese Medicine theory (and which also play an important role in Indian ayurvedic medicine through their Vedic equivalents), you can use them as a reliable framework for interpreting the various mind-body states which occur along the spiritual ladder.

In other words, the use of this particular set of terms can be readily employed to explain the various gong-fu phenomena experienced along almost any true spiritual trail. In particular, an understanding of jing, chi and shen can shed

tremendous light on the mind-body studies that many scientists are currently undertaking.¹

JING, CHI AND SHEN

What is jing? Jing is a Chinese term that refers to our body’s seminal essence, and in Hinduism the closest equivalent term is ojas. True jing is not actually the physical semen of the body, however, but is more akin to the body’s vital force that is present within each and every living cell. Of course, the crudest meaning of jing does indeed refer to the physical body’s seminal, ovarian and endocrine secretions, but that’s only the coarsest meaning out of all the different definitions available. An even better physical correspondence would be the endocrine substances of the kidneys and reproductive organs. The “bindus,” “bodhicitta” and “bodhimind substances” described in Tantra all commonly refer to jing in some form or another, and the term “water element” of the body found in orthodox Buddhism usually refers to these same substances as well.

Simply put, we can think of jing as referring to our body’s hormones and endocrine secretions, or the semen or eggs within a man’s or woman’s physical body, or simply as the materialized essence of the physical body’s vital force which is found within all living cells.

To make successful progress in spiritual cultivation, it’s a common rule across the various spiritual traditions that you mustn’t lose your seminal jing via excessive leakage, namely sexual activities. Thus we have the injunction of “discipline” found in Buddhism, “no-leakage” found in Taoism, “celibacy” found in Christianity, and “brahmacharya” found in Hinduism.

This principle of no-leakage is embedded in the concepts of “innocence,” “virginity,” or “purity” which are found in most all of the genuine religions. This type of concept suggests a combination of the purity of mental emptiness, an absence of

¹ For instance, please see:

- The Physical and Psychological Effects of Meditation, M. Murphy and S. Donovan, (Institute of Noetic Sciences, Sausalito: California, 1997).
- Yoga Research Bibliography: Scientific Studies on Yoga and Meditation, R. Monroe, (Biomedical Trust, Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1989).
- “A bibliography of meditation research 1931-1983,” M. Murphy and S. Donovan, *Transpersonal Psychology* 15:2, 1988.
- Mind/Body Health, Brent Hafen, Keith Karren, Kathryn, and N. Lee Smith, (Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1996).
- Mind Body Medicine, ed. by Daniel Goleman and Joel Gurin, (Consumer Reports Books, Yonkers: New York, 1993).

sexual desire, and the discipline of not losing one’s jing through sexual activities. As the Hatha Yoga Pradipika directly tells us,

Therefore, the knower of yoga conquers death by preserving the bindu (semen). Release of the bindu means death; conservation of semen is life. As long as the bindu/semen is steady in the body, then where is the fear of death? The yogi’s body smells pleasant by conserving the bindu/semen. A man’s semen can be controlled by the mind and control of semen is lifegiving. Therefore, the semen and mind should be controlled and conserved.²

All the various injunctions for celibacy that we find in religions—whether for men or for women—basically state that an individual must preserve their jing while simultaneously cultivating a state of mental emptiness. In that way, the regenerative nature of this vital force can accumulate through non-leakage, and then be harnessed and directed into the cultivation path through transmutation. If you can retain your generative fluids by preventing their dispersal through dissipative sexual activities, and if you can meanwhile cultivate a mind of emptiness which allows them to effortlessly transmute into yet higher spiritual substances, then you might be able to achieve something substantial on the spiritual path. If you cannot do this, however, then the highest stages of spiritual attainment will forever be barred from you.

The energy within pure jing is absolutely fantastic, and this force can actually produce renewal in the physical body and boost one’s progress up the spiritual ladder. Lao Tzu tried to communicate jing’s great potential when he mentioned that a male baby will often experience an erection of his penis even though the baby does not yet know anything of sexual desire. Taoism offers a related saying on this matter as well, which is, “To not know the intercourse of male and female and yet have an erection, this is the arising of jing.”

The reason that we’re getting into a discussion on jing is that I’m laying the groundwork for a detailed discussion on the following cultivation principles: that the path of spiritual striving involves chain of transformative processes involving the physical nature, these physical transformations evolve in a definite sequence of step-by-step transmutations, and the initial transformations along the spiritual path involve the jing of our physical body.

² Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Swami Muktibodhananda Saraswati (Bihar School of Yoga, Bihar: India, 1993), pp. 344-349.

No matter who you are on the road of spirituality, you will have to experience these physical transformations. Furthermore, these physical transformations all require a certain minimum amount of time to reach a stage of completion, just as it takes a certain amount of time to go through puberty, and there is very little you can do to accelerate this transformative process.

Along these lines, the Surangama Sutra of Buddhism comments, "The mind can be suddenly enlightened, but daily matters [karmic entanglements] cannot be suddenly removed." The great Zen master Kuei-shan also commented,

If, due to an intervening cause, one is instantly awakened to the truth in the time of a thought, there still exists since the time without beginning the force of habit which cannot be eliminated at a stroke. (In this case), one should be taught (by one's teacher) completely to cut the flow of discrimination caused by outstanding karma; this is practice but it does not mean that there really is a definite method which one should be urged to follow and practice.³

These quotes refer to the fact that spiritual awakening can be a sudden affair, but an individual who becomes spiritually enlightened still requires time to cut off the force of lingering habits and transform the physical body into a more fit spiritual vehicle.

This is one of the reasons that Zen master Hui-neng, after his enlightenment, went into hiding for nearly a decade, as one of his objectives was to completely transform his habits as well as his physical nature. Because the transformative gong-fu of the path involves the physical body, this gong-fu can only transmute in a step-by-step fashion just as we have our ordinary sequential stages of growth involved in becoming a full adult.

The root source, or first step of this series of spiritual-physical mind-body transformations starts with the transformation of our jing generative essence, but this jing is not restricted to a male's semen or female's sexual fluids. Rather, it *includes the jing in every cell of the body*. To simplify matters we usually just restrict our talk so that it's focused on the endocrine essences involved in sexual relations. People usually just refer to this aspect of jing because these fluids play a critical role in the transformation of the physical body on the road of spiritual evolution, and because the comings and goings of seminal jing are the easiest form of jing to experience and understand. If you don't accumulate this form of jing due to sexual restraint, then it will be almost impossible to make great progress in spiritual cultivation. Therefore

³ Ch'an and Zen Teaching: Volume 2, Lu K'uan Yu (Rider and Company, London, 1962), p. 60.

it doesn't make sense to focus on the higher aspects of jing if you can't get past this initial sort of spiritual barrier.

If you lose your jing through sexual activities, the entire set of subsequent cultivation spiritual transformations will almost never come about, and so you'll never be able to climb the heights of spiritual cultivation. You'll never truly climb to the highest ranks of spiritual progress if you let your “elixir” carelessly leak away. That's why people are always told not to carelessly lose their jing when they're trying to spiritually cultivate themselves to self-perfection, and why jing is often said to be “as precious as gold.”

Jing is as precious as gold because this is the first substance that must be transformed on the road of religion in order to create a new spiritual life, and yet most people carelessly squander this substance. If you don't accumulate this potential spiritual substance, then a new spiritual and physical life are just impossible to create, and carelessly squandering it is the same as throwing away money.

On the spiritual path you need to transmute the essence or energy of jing—which is the substrate responsible for building your physical body—into even higher essences that are required for spiritual growth. Thus jing is a source of both physical *and* spiritual life, which explains its “precious” label. That's why it can't be squandered on the path, and just knowing this secret alone puts you light years ahead of others as to your ability to make genuine spiritual progress. If you wonder why certain people who cultivate never seem to make any progress when they're using the correct methods and also practicing correctly, you must consider whether they are carelessly losing their jing.

Because of these principles, it should come as no surprise that the discipline of sexual restraint is therefore greatly emphasized by almost all religions at their Stage of Wisdom and Merit Accumulation. Naturally it's also required at the Stage of Intensified Preparatory Practices as well, otherwise you wouldn't be able to achieve any spiritual samadhi attainments. The samadhi attainments are made possible by the transformations of jing to other spiritual substances, so they're even more important at this stage of practice if you truly want to climb the spiritual ladder.

Whether we're talking about the Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Judaic or some other spiritual tradition, the idea of “celibacy”—which is simply the injunction on not losing your jing—is why it's usually the monk and not the regular person who reaches the samadhi achievements of high spirituality. In fact, the first rule of discipline of the Hinayana cultivation schools is the prohibition on lust, which reflects upon the

importance of conserving jing. The first rule of the Mahayana cultivation schools, however, is the prohibition on killing.

The Mahayana cultivation schools actually allow for sexual relations, but they're only allowed under certain circumstances, and there is still the prohibition of losing one's jing through careless sexual activities. To handle the possibility of sexual relations the Tao school and school of Esoteric Buddhism have developed a special means of sexual intercourse. In this type of lovemaking, neither partner loses their jing and yet they achieve a full body orgasm on the borders of the spiritual realms that's a hundred or thousand times greater than any sort of normal sexual ecstasy.

Why exactly is sexual restraint so important on the cultivation trail? Not because there is anything wrong with sexual relations between males and females (for some cultivation schools even use sexual activities as part of the cultivation path, as just mentioned), but because you need your jing to produce other spiritual essences that are necessary for spiritual cultivation. *In short, the initial transformation of jing into other spiritual essences is used to initiate various other processes of the spiritual path.*

If jing is therefore the key substance for transforming the physical body and bringing about these spiritual transformations, and if these transformations cannot be initiated without the presence of sufficient jing, you can now understand why it should not be carelessly lost when you really want progress on the spiritual trail. This one fact alone is one of the main reasons that people never ever achieve the spiritual state of samadhi. They do not achieve it because their jing never becomes full. Now that you know this fact, you can also understand why many people who train to become psychic or have out-of-the-body experiences never reach these goals either!

On the other hand, if you do successfully retain your jing for a period of time through the practice of celibacy but don't cultivate the dual requirement of mental emptiness, then your celibacy will amount to nothing but an exercise in restraint and better physical health. Without the accompaniment of mental emptiness, even though you retain your jing you won't be able to climb up the spiritual ladder. *You need both celibacy and a mind stream that cultivates emptiness to bring about the necessary transmutations on the spiritual path.*

Forced celibacy without emptiness is useless, and you can often see this sort of incorrect practice reflected in the "dried up," joyless, wrinkled, or sunken faces of

monks or nuns in monasteries or convents. In fact, an overly forceful restraint from sexual activities, when an individual doesn't cultivate mental emptiness, usually leads to an even greater interest in sex in the following reincarnation. You have to cultivate the accumulation of jing, but you have to release the desire for sexual relations through the emptiness of spiritual meditation. That's when all sorts of physical and spiritual changes can come about. If your mind stream reaches some degree of emptiness and you naturally practice restraint, this type of cultivation will bring about all sorts of spiritual fruits.

The initial problems encountered in spiritual cultivation usually focus around the problem of sexual desire, which usually results in the leakage of jing. It's not that you should block sexual desires so that they don't arise. Rather, if and when they arise you have to ignore them, and pay them no mind. There is just no way around this—this is just what you have to do and that's why sexual desires are considered such a major obstacle on the spiritual path. You have to find some way to transmute these energies into higher spiritual forces, and retain your sexual essences all the while.

Sexual thoughts and desires are mental events and therefore forever ungraspable, forever transforming. Thus you shouldn't grasp them, and you shouldn't let them grab hold of you either because that's always the proper way to cultivate. On the road of spirituality, you must learn how to liberate sexual and other clinging desires into emptiness. Most people are patient once, then twice, but when they can't be patient any longer, sexual desire turns them upside down. You have to learn how to conquer it on the cultivation path.

This task is a particularly large hurdle for men on the spiritual path, but it becomes a lot easier for them to handle when they remember the scriptural injunction, “Sexual objects are just mental imagery; since mental images are all empty, how can there be sexual objects?”⁴ In any case, jing is considered a precious substance you shouldn't carelessly squander. As the major Indian yoga work Hatharatnavali advises, “Jing as well as mind should be preserved with effort.”⁵ Taoism, Buddhism, and other spiritual schools all say the same thing.

Because jing is related to our life essence, when you lose too much jing you will often become tired, more readily susceptible to disease and nervous exhaustion,

⁴ Taoist Meditation: Method for Cultivating a Healthy Mind and Body, trans. by Thomas Cleary (Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2000), p. 90.

⁵ Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Swami Muktibodhananda Saraswati (Bihar School of Yoga, Bihar: India, 1993), p. 370.

and you may even shorten your life span. These are the common warnings of both Chinese Medicine and Indian ayurvedic medicine, and the warnings are true even though modern science has not yet caught up with these findings. In our age of permissiveness, most people scoff at such statements because of their own sexual inclinations, but inclinations or not, these are facts which you just cannot change.

If you carelessly squander your jing then you create a situation of potential harm to your health and longevity. Eastern medical schools all say this from their studies, and Eastern spiritual schools say this as well. Furthermore, if you always lose your jing, then because you lack sufficient quantity you will also fail at achieving the internal alchemical transformations that are absolutely necessary on the spiritual path. As Swami Muktananda summarized for us,

The sexual fluid contains the subtle essence of a human body; an entire human body arises from a single drop of sexual fluid, and it grows with the help of the strength that is in the sexual fluid. Once you understand this, you will treat the sexual fluid with reverence. It contains great power. When there is less semen in the body, the mind becomes weak and wanders more. That is why older people are not able to absorb learning as quickly as the young.

The sexual fluid is the source of health, longevity, and endurance. Though I am an old man, because of the retention of sexual fluid I feel very young inside. Sexual fluid is your glow, your vigor, your radiance, and your contentment. It also gives strength to your *prana* and gives force to your meditation. It is the force of the sexual fluid which powers one's meditation. If you were to hold it inside, it would give you tremendous energy and make you much more attractive. As a person conserves the sexual fluid, it begins to move upward in the body. Then he gains tremendous power. Just as you save some of your earnings in the bank, you should save some of your sexual fluid.⁶

The Chin Hsien Ching Lun of the Tao school also says for us,

The generative force is the most precious thing for the human body that contains it lives and the body without it dies; because it nourishes and preserves the root of (essential) nature and (eternal) life. No worldly men know how to produce and purify it. If it is exhausted it

⁶ I Have Become Alive: Secrets of the Inner Journey, Swami Muktananda, (SYDA Foundation, South Fallsburg: New York, 1992), p. 93.

should be restored by the reproducing process; this is called restoring the generative force to invigorate the brain. ... Vitality is basically adequate in the human body but dissipates because of sexual indulgence; hence its deficiency.⁷

Even the famous author Napoleon Hill, in his classic work Think and Grow Rich, came to a similar related conclusion that has bearing on our case and which is worthy to note:

I discovered, from the analysis of over 25,000 people, that men who succeed in an outstanding way, seldom do so before the age of forty, and more often they do not strike their real pace until they are well beyond the age of fifty. This fact was so astounding that it prompted me to go into the study of its cause most carefully.

This study disclosed the fact that the major reason why the majority of men who succeed do not begin to do so before the age of forty to fifty, is their tendency to dissipate their energies through over-indulgence in physical expression of the emotion of sex. The majority of men *never* learn that the urge of sex has other possibilities, which far transcend in importance that of mere physical expression. The majority of those who make this discovery, do so *after having wasted many years* at a period when the sex energy is at its height, prior to the age of forty-five to fifty. This usually is followed by noteworthy achievement.

The lives of many men up to, and sometimes well past the age of forty, reflect a continued dissipation of energies, which could have been more profitably turned into better channels. Their finer and more powerful emotions are sown wildly to the four winds. Out of this habit of the make grew the term, "sowing his wild oats."

The desire for sexual expression is by far the strongest and most impelling of all the human emotions, and for this very reason this desire, when *harnessed and transmuted* into action, other than that of physical expression, may raise one to great accomplishment.⁸

Why do most men fail in their efforts of spiritual cultivation? *Because of sexual desire, which causes them to lose their jing.* That's why the Surangama Sutra of Buddhism says, "The difference between the worldly and the saintly ... depends

⁷ Taoist Yoga, Lu K'uan Yu, (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1984), p. 33-34.

⁸ Think and Grow Rich, Napoleon Hill, (The Ballantine Publishing Group, New York, 1960), pp. 165-166.

solely on the elimination or not of sexual desire.”⁹ The big hurdle for men who cultivate is to get over sexual desire and this is a difficult feat. Your sexual desires will actually build due to cultivation – because it arouses your chi – which is one of the reasons that Judaism discourages Kabbalistic practice for unmarried men and those under forty. As Napoleon Hill found out in analyzing the cases of over 25,000 successful men, “the major reason why the majority of men who succeed do not begin to do so before the age of forty to fifty, is their tendency to dissipate their energies through over-indulgence in physical expression of the emotion of sex.”¹⁰

Women, on the other hand, usually fail at achieving something substantial in their spiritual cultivation due to the barrier of emotional and mental clinging that obstructs their inherent prajna wisdom. They have a much easier time than men in triumphing over the first barrier of sexual desire on the spiritual path, but typically fall short at the subsequent requirement to fully detach from emotions.

For male practitioners, however, the first major barrier in spiritual cultivation is to detach from and thereby triumph over the barrier of sexual desire. If a man can detach from this sort of desire, then the vital energies that go into sexual energy can be channeled into the spiritual path and be transmuted into higher substances. On the other hand, if a man cannot pass this hurdle, he will continue to lose his jing and never have any hope of the higher attainments on the spiritual trail. As Shakyamuni Buddha said in The Sutra in Forty-two Sections,

As to love and desire: no desire is as deep-rooted as sex. There is nothing greater than the desire for sex. Fortunately it is one of a kind. If there were something else like it, no one in the entire world would be able to cultivate the way.¹¹

You can argue all you want about the fact you must triumph over sexual desire to tread the path. You can kick and scream and deny it or wish it weren't so, but that's just the way it is. A man has to discover that the heroic journey to spiritual realization will always require a degree of restraint, and he must come to recognize the path can never be achieved by sexual means.

The first step on the spiritual path is just this plain and simple—sexual restraint for a period of time--and yet it's very difficult to accomplish this first step. If you can eat less, practice pranayama breathing exercises and body unmindfulness

⁹ Ch'an and Zen Teaching: Volume 3, Lu K'uan Yu (Rider and Company, London, 1976), p. 207.

¹⁰ Think and Grow Rich, Napoleon Hill, (The Ballantine Publishing Group, New York, 1960), pp. 165.

¹¹ Sutra in Forty-two Sections, Ch'an master Hsuan Hua, (Buddhist Translation Society, San Francisco: California, 1977), p. 51.

(wherein you ignore the pulling sensations of your body), then it'll be much easier to get past this particular barrier. This first hurdle is mentioned in almost every spiritual cultivation school because the transformation of jing into higher spiritual essences is a basic step on the spiritual path, and yet it's very hard to climb up this first step because of our sexual urges. The desire for sex can originate from either a psychological or physical cause, and at the earliest stages of cultivation you have to learn how to handle both of these possibilities.

Chi, which is often spelled "ki" or "qi," is another substance that spiritual adherents must become familiar with if they truly wish to cultivate the road of spirituality. Chi is often translated as the "life force" of the physical body, or life energy. There are an incredible number of different terms used to designate chi because it's such a commonly recognized phenomenon across the world's different spiritual traditions.

Here are some of the other terms for chi: pneuma, life force, ether, odic force, bionic energy, psychotropic energy, eloptic energy, biocosmic energy, bioplasmic energy, orgone, elan vital, lebenskraft (German), Gestaltung, ka (Egyptian), mana (Hawaiian), huna, nefish (Jewish), baraka (Sufi), kerei (Indonesian), mungo (African), numen (Roman), munia, ki (Japanese), orenda (Iroquois), blima (Belgian Congo), wakan, ruakh, Holy Spirit, kundalini, Odyle, and many other terms as well. All of these terms serve to try and designate chi. Most common of these alternatives, however, is the term "prana" used in the Indian cultivation schools and its Buddhist, yogic and Tantric designation as the "wind element" of the physical nature. When you see "wind" in Buddhist scriptures it refers to chi. When you see "prana" in Hindu or yogic literature, it is chi as well. "Kundalini," too, is just a particular form of chi.

Chi flows throughout the whole physical body, and without chi you'd be dead. In fact when you die it's because your chi, or life force, withdraws from the physical nature and moves on to a different realm. As regards the process of spiritual cultivation, we must recognize that our chi flows through special energy channels in the body which are called "chi channels," "nadi," "mai," or even acupuncture meridians.

Our body has hundreds of thousands of these channels that are spread within us just as there are countless nerves, blood vessels, lymph channels and capillaries. The religious texts of various schools always mention a varying number of these channels, and many modern scientists have verified the existence of these channels through their own independent measurements. While a large number of chi channels exist, only about a dozen or so are of *major* spiritual significance.

When people talk about acupuncture meridians, naturally these meridians refer to the very same energy channels that become progressively cleared through the process of spiritual cultivation. A major portion of the cultivation path, in the very earliest stages, is to clean these energy meridians so that the chi in the body can run through them without any obstructions, and that's only possible if the channels are not blocked or obstructed. Only when a spiritual adherent reaches this stage can he or she gain access to the higher results of spiritual practice.

In other words, if your chi and mai are unpurified or unclean, then the higher stage gong-fu of spiritual achievement is impossible. If you can fully clean these chi channels, however, then even after you die your body will tend to remain in a state of incorruptibility, and barely suffer from the stage of rigor mortis.

The reason it becomes impossible to reach the higher states of spiritual practice, when our chi and chi channels remain unrefined, is because our chi and mental states are linked; if the pathways through which our chi flows are corrupted or obstructed, then the circulation of our chi will not be smooth and our mental states will accordingly be afflicted. Some spiritual schools tell their practitioners to recite mantras that mimic the sound of chi flowing smoothly through these channels in order to help calm the mind and clean them, and if you can actually master the flow of the body's prana through certain chi channels, then it's definitely possible to develop certain forms of yogic gong-fu, meaning paranormal powers. Many people who have psychic abilities owe it to the fact that their chi channels are a bit more open—for whatever reasons--than those of ordinary people.

A particular phenomenon that occurs with advanced cultivation practice is that your external breathing will eventually slow down to such an extent that it will seem to disappear. It will calm down so much that it will virtually disappear.

When you cultivate and reach this stage of respiratory cessation, it indicates that your physical body has become full of chi. Since this state of respiratory cessation happens naturally on the cultivation trail, it isn't anything to worry about because the body wouldn't naturally produce this sort of resting phenomenon unless it was supposed to happen. The reason it can happen in the first place is because your chi is the real life force of your body, and if you become full of chi because of devoted meditation practice of mindlessness, then your oxygen and respiratory needs will decrease.

If you're meditating properly, this stage of respiratory cessation is an important stage of physical gong-fu that will definitely occur without exception, and many spiritual schools specifically train their practitioners in a way that makes it easier for this state to commence. They specifically use certain spiritual and physical

exercises that help produce this necessary stage of cultivation practice. They do this by promoting all sorts of breathing exercises where you must hold your breath, and from continual practice in effortlessly holding the breath for longer and longer periods of time, your body's chi channels will become somewhat purged. The most basic form of these breathing practices has been described in the Yogatattva Upanishad as follows:

Holding his body very straight,
the yogi will first salute
his chosen deity;
then he will stop up with his thumb
the right nostril where the pingala [right chi channel] has its source
so as to inhale air gently
through the left nostril where the ida [left chi channel] has its source.
Then he will hold in his breath
as long as is possible,
then expel it gradually [more advanced techniques require forceful expelling],
without forcing, through the left nostril.
Later, he will inhale again,
through the left nostril this time,
conveying the air down into his belly
which he will gradually fill.
After having kept it there
as long as he can,
he will expel it through his right nostril,
gently, without forcing.
He will continue in this way,
Inhaling through one nostril,
afterwards exhaling through the other,
each time holding the breath
As long as he can.¹²

When the chi channels become less obstructed due to this sort of exercise, your life force chi will become able to flow throughout the body without the normal obstructions, and it will then become easier for the body to reach and then remain in this state of respiratory cessation.

¹² Yoga and the Hindu Tradition, Jean Varenne, trans. by Derek Coltman (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1976), pp. 162-163.

In terms of the overall process of spiritual transformation on the path of cultivation, when your jing and chi are properly cultivated then the body's chi channels will fully open, chakras will subsequently form, and you will reach a stage where you no longer seem as if you're engaged in the process of breathing at all. In stages of advanced spirituality, such as advanced forms of meditation, your external respiration will seemingly come to a halt.

Many people today commonly think that this stage marks the end of the cultivation path, but it's actually just the beginning of the path! It's only a preliminary spiritual accomplishment that lays a good foundation for the genuine entry into the path of spiritual progress. When you reach this stage of development it means you're properly cultivating your chi channels and chakras, but there is absolutely no way that you can possibly term this the end result or ultimate purpose of the path.

The third essence we must consider on the spiritual trail is shen, which is yet even more refined than jing or chi. The I-Ching tells us that shen has no direction or form, and "it cannot be measured by yin or yang." Thus unlike jing or chi, shen is a non-material spiritual essence that belongs to the realm of the formless. The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine comments, "shen illuminates all things and when it becomes clear, it's as if the wind has blown away all the clouds." Another Taoist text states, "shen is the awareness that shines out of our eyes when we are truly awake." Hence shen has a definite correlation with the state of luminosity we refer to as transcendental wisdom, and for this reason Taoism often translates shen as "spirit" or "light."

Buddhism sometimes refers to shen through the word "emptiness," but only when it's talking about gong-fu and the very lowest stages of the spiritual path. Shen isn't the emptiness of Tao, but still a spiritual essence we must cultivate along the way to realizing the true emptiness mind of spiritual cultivation. In the West we often say you can see an individual's spirit through their eyes, and the Chinese often say the eyes are "bright with shen" or that it reflects the individual within.

From collecting all these points together, we can therefore glimpse some understanding of the fact that while the world is crazily talking about "chi this and chi that," shen is much closer than jing or chi to the ultimate purpose and process of spiritual realization. Jing is akin to the body's physical or vital essence, chi to its energetic or life or soul essence, and shen to its spiritual essence. In Christianity we would find that jing, chi and shen correlate to body, soul and spirit.

There are many correspondences to jing, chi and shen to be found in the various interconnected spiritual paths of the world. In Hinduism, the triumvirate of jing, chi and shen roughly corresponds to the three gunas of tamas (inertia), rajas (dynamism) and sattva (luminosity). In the Indian medical science of ayurveda, they roughly correspond to ojas, prana and tejas. In Vedanta they also correspond to ananda (bliss), chit (consciousness) and sat (being), which naturally represent even higher principles of the spiritual path.

In this last particular trio of ananda-chit-sat, jing is paired with physical bliss because the body's hormonal system is responsible for producing the physical bliss generated in spiritual cultivation. Chi is related to consciousness because chi and consciousness (the thought mind) are linked, and shen is related to beingness because shen is related to empty clear awareness. However, in making these correspondences we're only talking about very crude correlations between these sets of principles, and we're only doing this in order that you can gain a better understanding of the spiritual path in total.

Esoteric Buddhism also has its own correspondences to jing, chi and shen. These are the gong-fu states of bliss, internal illumination and no-thought that occur on the spiritual path. If we go into physics, the jing-chi-shen trio corresponds to heat, force and light. In medicine we find that shen centers its functions in the region of the human brain, chi functions in the chest and stomach, and jing—which is closely related to our endocrine system—figures predominantly in the functioning of our kidneys, lower abdomen and genitalia (sexual organs). In terms of the environmental sciences, the three principles can be compared to water, air and sunshine.

To give you an idea of how these three substances relate to one another in the overall process of spiritual cultivation, we can turn to the environmental cycle of replenishment found in nature. In this cycle we know that the sun shines on bodies of water below and heats them. The water then evaporates and rises to form clouds. As clouds collect in the sky, eventually enough water droplets mass together to fall as rain. Rain pours down on the earth, and then this earthly cycle of jing-chi-shen repeats over and over again.

This natural cycle of the energy transformations behind the weather is actually quite similar to the transformations between jing, chi and shen that occur within the physical body during spiritual cultivation. That's because in cultivating a state of empty inner awareness (cultivating the shen), the body will become warmer and the jing of the sexual organs and body cells will transmute into chi. Because of

meditation, your chi then rises up the tu-mai energy channel in your backbone and reaches your head.

When the chi finally reaches the brain, you’ll experience a state of mental emptiness while having bright awareness, which is akin to cultivating your shen. When you cultivate mental emptiness correctly, endocrine hormones (“watery” substances) will be secreted from the brain because of your proper meditation efforts, and then they will fall like rain, descending down the jen-mai energy meridian in the front of the body to complete a full circuit of natural circulation.

This in short, summarizes the process of alchemical transmutations that occur because of the path of spiritual cultivation, and it occurs regardless of your religious school or spiritual tradition. Your jing transforms into chi, your chi into shen, and from there you enter into even higher stages of spiritual transformation.

When any sort of correct spiritual practice (such as meditation) becomes truly effective then your jing, chi and shen will all be cultivated properly, and these substances will all eventually become transformed. There is no way to avoid this process, and it’s not a matter of science fiction. It actually *has to happen* if you’re cultivating correctly, but it’s not something you have to force into transpiring because it will occur naturally, just as it should.

In this process of spiritual transformation that affects our physical nature, chi is akin to our invisible vital force or life energy (which is why it’s closely connected to our breathing), and jing can be thought of as its expression in a physical form. Shen, on the other hand, is free of form-based connotations and so can best be described as pristine mental clarity, or undistracted clear mental awareness. This is one angle from which you can learn to understand these essences although the study of medicine, martial arts, weather, feng shui, astrology, and so on will provide other insights as well.

Jing, chi and shen are extremely important concepts to understand in spiritual cultivation, and if you want to understand the spiritual path, it’s absolutely essential that you become fluent with this trio. If you don’t learn this terminology and understand what it refers to, you’ll never really be able to understand the theory of cultivation, and you certainly won’t be able to match its teachings with modern science. Hence to aid in attaining some fluidity with these concepts, you might choose to further familiarize yourself with the concepts of jing, chi and shen. Some good sources on these topics include the following books:

- Tao and Longevity: Mind-Body Transformation, by Huai-Chin Nan and Wen Kuan Chu, Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1991.
- The Jade Emperor's Mind Seal Classic, trans. by Stuart Olsen, Dragon Door Publications, Minneapolis, 1992.
- Vitality, Energy, Spirit: A Taoist Sourcebook, trans. by Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1991.
- Cultivating Stillness, trans. by Eva Wong, Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1992.
- The Essential Book of Traditional Chinese Medicine: Volume I Theory, Liu Yanchi, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988.
- The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine, trans. by Maoshing Ni, Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1995.
- Guarding the Three Treasures, Daniel Reid, Simon & Schuster, London, 1993.
- The Tao of Health, Sex and Longevity, Daniel Reid, Positive Paperbacks, New York, 1991.
- The Web That Has No Weaver, Ted Kaptchuk, Congdon & Weed, New York, 1983.
- The Roots of Chinese Chi Gung, Yang Jwing-Ming, YMAA, Jamaica Plain: MA, 1992.
- The Art of Chi Kung, Wong Kiew Kit, Element Books, Rockport: MA, 1993.

LOSING JING, CHI AND SHEN

On the road of spiritual practice, you already know that it's important for you not to lose jing when you're cultivating strongly. Furthermore, you shouldn't carelessly lose your chi or shen as well. Rather, you must preserve and transmute all three of these essences because they constitute the basic meta-physical core around which the path of spiritual development rotates.

It's particularly easy to lose your jing through indulgence in sexual activities, your chi through hard breathing and exercise,¹³ and your shen through the rectum or through excessive thinking or straining of the eyes. Whenever you lose these substances in abundant measure, you are sure to eventually suffer from a variety of

¹³ Chi is particularly lost through the back of the neck or through the joints of the limbs. This is one reason that these areas of the body should be covered by a towel during meditation. A towel should be placed so that it covers the knees, and for some individuals, the back of the neck should be covered.

health problems. Cultivators, in particular, tend to acutely feel the loss of jing as they make progress. Furthermore, the higher your cultivation practice, not only will you more readily sense any loss of these essences but the more detrimental will be the result of any losses you experience. As you start reaching high stages of cultivation, the more you lose these substances the more you'll really feel it, and the reasons for these injunctions then naturally start to become clear.

Ordinary individuals, however, just don't know! They cannot recognize any of this at all because their bodies are so insensitive, and yet they still suffer the same detrimental effects without knowing it. So of course for regular individuals these injunctions don't matter and are commonly ignored—which is another reason why these people don't make any great gong-fu progress on the path of spiritual practice—yet this is a perfect example of how the various principles of cultivation science were developed over time. Past masters ended up sensing all these things, or made certain mistakes in their cultivation and learned these particular lessons, and then formulated various rules of discipline or conduct in order to codify what they learned in a format that would help others who came after them.

From the standpoint of Chinese medical science, those men who lose too much jing from frequent ejaculation will weaken their kidneys, experience a reduction in vitality, and shorten their life spans. As an example, it is a well known fact that men who engage in sexual excess (and who therefore lose too much semen) will usually feel sore or weak about their waists or in their knees, and sometimes they will become a bit foggy headed or listless until they start to recover. When they get older, they especially feel the loss of semen in the joints of their knees. Some men will also experience trouble with their ears or their hearing because of excessively dissipating their generative essence.

In brief, jing dysfunction is commonly related to sexual difficulties, premature aging, and lack of strength and physical weakness. In ancient times, many kings died at a quite young age due to this contributing factor of sexual excess. They lost too much jing because of sexual intercourse with the many concubines now available in their harems, and the physical weakness this engendered opened the door to general debilitation and death.

As to the symptoms of excessive chi loss, these include a lack of physical and mental energy, a lowered physical resistance to disease, emotional instabilities, and overall general decline. For instance, people today commonly need reading glasses because they are rarely taught to use the proper lighting and to hold their neck straight while reading. Of course the problem of improper lighting is a contributing

factor, but also the prolonged habit of bending or “opening” the neck in this fashion repeatedly gives “external wind [chi]” the opportunity to enter the body through the cervical vertebrae joint spaces, which over time can lead to vision problems.

There are many correlations to chi that can be found in Chinese medicine, especially in the Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine. This particular medical classic not only links chi to illness and disease but to mental and emotional states as well, a topic which modern mind-body medicine is just beginning to rediscover today:

Anger causes the chi to rise, joy causes the chi to slow down, grief causes the chi to dissipate, fear causes the chi to descend, surprise causes the chi to scatter, exhaustion causes the chi to waste away, and thought causes the chi to concentrate.

Chinese Medicine also says, “the hundred diseases all start with wind,” clearly signifying the principle that most diseases start with internal chi imbalances. In Indian yoga, hiccups and general uncomfortableness are connected with chi imbalances as well. According to Chinese and Indian ayurvedic medical theory, if you don’t address chi imbalances immediately, they can eventually grow out of control so as to produce bigger problems down the road. This is why many spiritual schools stress the need for “adjusting” or “purifying” your chi, and why they focus on early preventative and curative efforts rather than cures.

Because our chi is connected with our emotions, this is also why it’s become common practice today to recognize the connection between disease states and emotions. Complimentary, Alternative or Integrative medicine has cataloged quite a few connections between illnesses and mental states, and wholeheartedly recommends that we abandon negative emotions in order to help cure ourselves of illness. This is nothing other than a spiritual cultivation teaching which has finally made it’s way down into modern science, and yet it still has a long way to go before it’s fully accepted by the orthodox medical community. Just a small peek into the connection between disease, consciousness, and chi can be glimpsed from following dialogue from the Tibetan school of cultivation and medicine:

First, sickness abides latently in the all-ground, in the manner of the constitution of the channels and as habitual tendencies. It occurs due to unwholesome karma accumulated through ignorance and ego-clinging. It is activated by means of the disturbing emotions, conceptual thinking, prana-winds, or gods and demons. Its matured

results are the 404 types of disease, headed by heat and cold, phlegm, aches, and swelling. In short, the disease of coemergent ignorance is the chief cause and the disease of conceptual ignorance is the chief circumstance.

All sickness possesses these five factors: the latent basis, unwholesome karma as the cause, disturbing emotions as the circumstance, conceptual thinking as the connecting link, prana-wind as the concluding assembler, and gods and demons as the supportive factor.

For instance, if a 'coldness' disease manifests, it is caused by the habitual tendency for desire lying present in the all-ground, and is activated by the circumstance of intense desire. The connecting link is made by the conceptual thoughts, "I am sick! I am disabled! What shall I do if it gets worse?" This causes the 'downward clearing wind' to malfunction, opening you up to attack from the female [yin] class of evil influences.

Similarly, the seed of anger as the cause is activated through the circumstance of intense anger connected with the link of conceptual thinking. This causes the fire-equalizing wind to malfunction, opening you up to attack from the male [yang] class of evil influences, resulting in the heat diseases. [This will affect the liver]

The seed of stupidity as the cause is activated by the circumstance of strong stupidity, connected with the link of conceptual thinking. This causes the 'equal-abiding wind' to malfunction, opening you up to attack from evil 'earth spirits'. It results in the phlegm diseases. [This will affect the stomach and spleen]

The seed of envy as the cause is activated by the circumstance of strong jealousy, connected with the link of conceptual thinking. It causes the 'life-upholding wind' to malfunction, opening you up to attack from the *tsen* class of evil influences, and resulting in the aching diseases.

The seed of pride as the cause is activated by the circumstance of strong conceit, connected with the link of conceptual thinking. It causes the 'pervading wind' to malfunction, opening you up for attack by the *gyalpo* class of evil influences and resulting in the swelling diseases.

Since the cause is ignorance, you must recognize coemergent wisdom to cure these diseases. Since the condition is disturbing emotions, you must settle your attention in evenness. Since the connector is conceptual thinking, you must cut through the ties of

thought. Since the gatherer of the conclusion is wind, you must focus on the key point of wind. The back-support is the gods and demons: you must abandon the notion of a demon. By doing this you will be freed from all kinds of disease.

To cure the essence of illness there are three points: best is to leave it to be self-liberated; next-best is to abandon reference points concerning exorcism or meditation; last is to cure is by means of visualization.

For the first, don't even take one single dose of medicine. Don't chant one syllable of a healing ceremony. Don't regard the illness as a fault, or see it as a virtue. Leave your mind unfabricated and spontaneous. Totally let be in the natural thoughtfree state of simplicity. By doing so, the flow of conceptual thinking is cut; thoughtfree wakefulness dawns, and the illness is cleared away. The sickness and the thought are liberated simultaneously.¹⁴

All these comments—however imperfect—are based on the fact that chi and consciousness are interlinked, which is a basic principle in medicine as well as spiritual cultivation. Thus it is that many cultivation masters will—at the first signs of trouble—treat their body with meditation in order to get rid of an incipient illness. Sometimes, however, they will use herbs or other medicines instead since meditation isn't always the quickest or most appropriate cure for a physical imbalance. After all, the body itself has karma irrespective of the "I" within, so sometimes you must treat the chemical nature of the body according to the rules of healthy biochemistry.

The point, however, is that wise masters will always treat symptoms at their earliest stages because they know that prevention is the proper way to preserve health. A secondary point is that meditation can and will always assist in the cure of a disease, and can never hurt you in this requirement.

One dietary principle to note is that wise cultivation adepts do not eat excessive amounts of anything. Excessive nutrition can drive illness deeper into the body, and excessive food actually interferes with the cultivation of your chi and mai. In other words, too much of a good thing can be detrimental. There were many Emperors of the past and many adepts of the Tao school who died because they either ate poisonous substances, *or because they ate too many tonifying medicines or supplementation substances that were over-stimulating in nature.*

¹⁴ *Advice from the Lotus Born*, trans. Erik Pema Kunsang, (Rangjung Yeshe Publications, Hong Kong, 1994), pp. 86-87.

Since modern nutritional supplements can act in this same stimulating fashion, this is a reminder that you can use modern nutritional supplements some of the time, but not always. People who spiritually cultivate actually change their physical bodies, and so their reactions to these substances will often differ from those of the general population. They may become more sensitive to such substances, or react in a more extreme manner due to the changes brought about by cultivation and of course due to the standard fact of biochemical individuality.

Nutritional supplements definitely work—there is no arguing about that—but when you cultivate and change your chi mai, their effects on the body are often amplified in the extreme to the extent that their results can become unpredictable, or even harmful. *Modern medical science understands the average human body—and only to a limited extent at that—but it doesn't understand not gong-fu of any individual who has successfully reached any extent of spiritual cultivation.* It just shakes its head at the gong-fu of the spiritual path, and walks away.

In general, cultivation practitioners are often overly sensitive to herbs and pharmaceutical medicinals, and sometimes exhibit reactions that modern medicine just cannot fathom. This is not just due to biochemical individuality, but also due to the advanced gong-fu that results when people have started to transform their chi and mai. When you consider the fact that the chi mai of the body only thrive because of emptiness cultivation, then you can understand that herbs, vitamins and nutritional supplements only have a limited effect on helping your cultivation gong-fu anyway. A wise practitioner is therefore careful as to how and when they might ingest such substances.

Another and perhaps larger problem involving the body's energy meridians is that many people don't protect themselves from drafts or the cold during sexual intercourse. They foolishly engage in intercourse in front of an operating air conditioner, or drink cold liquids immediately after sexual congress. Because they don't protect themselves at this vulnerable time—when all the pores of the body have become opened—all sorts of “external wind (chi)” seize hold of these entrances to invade the body. When this invading chi finds an entrance into the body and isn't countered, it will reside internally and slowly gestate into all sorts of illnesses which will erupt later on.

Having never heard this before, many people may think this a crazy notion, but this is a cornerstone principle of Traditional Chinese Medicine that has been verified again and again over thousands of years. The same principle has been

independently discovered in a number of other medical systems as well, including the ancient Mayan medical system.¹⁵ Many people who experience headaches immediately after, or the next day after sexual intercourse, have suffered from this sort of wind invasion that we are discussing.

When people become sick and their chi is imbalanced, some will try to suppress their illness by drinking ginseng and other strong tonics. However, most any illness involves imbalances in your chi flows and when chi flows are involved, ingesting strong tonics will actually contribute to the problem and worsen the situation by driving any sickness chi deeper into the body. Sickness chi can be actually be driven into the bones and tendons of the body such that it no longer appears through surface symptoms. However, if pushed deeply into the body it will secretly reside at a deeper level in the physical nature where it can end up doing far more physical damage. That's why you often have to wait until you are sick with a cold, flu or fever to get rid of this type of penetrative invasion. Colds and the flu actually help give your body a chance to purge itself of any of these imbalances.

This is also why meditation, when it's effective, will sometimes reveal pockets of cold or hot chi which have been locked away in the body and which would have developed into large illnesses if they were not released through the conduit of spiritual practice. As Tao and Longevity states, "everyone should realize that latent diseases may be discovered, but are not actually caused by meditation. In other words, meditation increases inner vitality and begins to heal the body. By persistent meditation and appropriate medical treatment, one can recover one's health."¹⁶ As Jeff Levin found in studying the spirituality-healing connection, "Mystical experiences benefit health by activating a healing bioenergy or life force or altered state of consciousness."¹⁷

Taoist Yoga also states,

[If you are determined to attain the Tao] you should quickly eradicate all the ailments latent in the body; and it will not be late to practice the Tao after you are free of all of them. The saints and sages of old did not wait for illnesses to manifest and then cured them; they cured them while they were still latent.

¹⁵ See

- Satsun: My Apprenticeship with a Mayan Healer, Rosita Arvigo, (HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1994).
- Wind in the Blood: Mayan Healing and Chinese Medicine, Hernan Garcia, Antonio Sierra, Gilberto Balam, trans. By Jeff Conant (North Atlantic Books, Berkeley: California, 1999).

¹⁶ Tao and Longevity, Huai-Chin Nan, (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: ME, 1991), pp. 45-46.

¹⁷ God, Faith, and Health, Jeff Levin, (John Wiley & Sons, New York, 2001), p. 14.

If you look at people they all seem to be in good health and free from sickness but in reality they have in their bodies the roots of illness which have not yet developed. It is regrettable that they only look for pleasures without realising their mistakes and errors. ... Their health declines but they are not aware of their foolishness. When they get ill they look for medicine when it is too late. They do not know that illnesses are caused by excess of food, drink and pleasures. They do not realise that inner ailments are latent in their bodies and when the latter manifests it is (sometimes) difficult to cure them.¹⁸

This explains why there are many people who suddenly get a serious illness such as cancer, but who can honestly claim that they have never previously been sick in their entire lives. If you talk to a doctor or naturopath, they will readily tell you that these folks are definitely the most difficult cases to cure. These people were definitely sick inside, but that sickness simply never showed itself on the outside. These are the individuals who rarely purged themselves of any internal sickness chi, and it slowly festered inside until it developed into a critical illness.

Degenerative illness can slowly creep up on people without any warnings at all, which is another reason to engage in meditation as a major preventative for disease. Exercise can help with blood flow in the body, but meditation will help with chi flow, which is the body's actual vital force. As a result, meditation is primary over exercise for it can actually cure people of illness and disease whereas exercise cannot.

Because certain symptoms are suppressed when an individual imbibes various stimulants, it's true that an individual may temporarily feel better when they take stimulants. However, most tonics and stimulants actually push the degenerative sources of illness into the deeper layers of the viscera. If they're moved to a deeper level, we now know they can cause even more trouble. So when people on the spiritual trail take sexual stimulants so that they can sexually perform past what their age or what illness would normally permit them to do, they're not just going against the protective designs of nature. Not only are they usually hurting themselves, but they end up losing a crucial portion of their ever-declining reserves of precious jing and chi. This loss, in turn, will of course hasten the process of aging.

No matter what stimulants, hormones, or nutrients you may use, you will never reverse aging unless you also work at the level of jing and chi. When an individual can conserve and nourish these substances then they'll renew their body

¹⁸ Taoist Yoga, Lu K'uan Yu, (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1984), p. 42.

from within and will better resist disease as well as develop both healthy bodies and firm wills. At that point, they will be able to have sexual intercourse whenever they wish because their vitality stores will always be full. However, it will still be important, for men at least, to learn the Taoist sexual practices of sexual intercourse without ejaculation.

The important question for health and spirituality is, how do you nourish your chi? One popular method is to practice breathing exercises because there is a link between the chi and the breath; cultivate the breath and you can cultivate your chi. The philosopher Mencius (of the Confucian school) spoke several times of this spiritual path, for he said, "Nourish the chi with integrity and place no obstacle in its path. Then it will fill the space between Heaven and Earth." The yoga, esoteric schools, Taoism and even many Western religions all promote various spiritual practices that target chi cultivation through means of the breath, and to understand the spiritual path this is something you must look into.

As to shen, when you lose your shen it will negatively affect your mental health and mental balance such that it becomes easy for you to lose your concentration and mental focus. That's why an excessive loss of shen often results in individuals becoming mentally weak, foggy headed, unbalanced, unstable, and unclear. The Chinese Tao school points out that shen leaves through the rectum, as well as through the eyes. When people die they have one last bowel movement and their eyes remain opened, which attributes to the loss of shen. It's interesting that Hinduism says that the great God Yama (the God of Death) lives in the rectum, and people can't understand this reference because they don't know about any of these details or the fact that longevity depends upon maintaining a clean colon.

Many people have at one time or another experienced lightheaded feelings that accompanied the experience of a prolonged diarrhea. These feelings of mental fogginess and unclarity aren't just due to the dehydration losses of water and body fluids. They're due to the accompanying loss of chi and shen as well. Therefore, the Tao school instructs people to clamp their teeth when they defecate in order to help prevent the loss of these essences by sending them upwards. When people practice this, they won't lose too much chi and shen when they defecate.

Chinese herbal medicine provides various herbal treatments to help individuals regain their lost shen, but the best means of all is simply to meditate. If you learn to meditate, especially when you are older, the practice will definitely help you to increase your mental clarity as well as lead to all sorts of other health benefits. In addition to lowering your blood pressure, decreasing production of the

stress hormone cortisol, increasing immune function, getting rid of skin problems, calming brain-wave activity and a number of other health benefits, meditation has already been scientifically proven to produce a variety of other health improvements:

- Premenstrual syndrome symptoms decreased by 57 percent
- Migraine headaches decreased significantly
- Anxiety and depression were reduced significantly
- Working people missed fewer work days due to illness.
- Patients with AIDS and cancer experienced decreased symptoms.
- Seventy-five percent of patients with insomnia were cured, and almost 25 percent improved.
- Patients with chronic pain required an average of 36 percent less treatment.
- Patients with high blood pressure recovered completely, or improved.¹⁹

Older individuals who meditate correctly almost always report a recovery of long lost vitality (jing), energy stores (chi), and mental clarity (shen), so this should be seen as the best way to recover one's declining health, vitality and acuity. When older individuals are deemed wise, it's usually because of their mental clarity, sharpness, wisdom and acuity which are the results of having cultivated the quietude, or samadhi, of shen.

INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN JING, CHI AND SHEN

There are several very important interrelationships between jing, chi and shen which have been classified by the Tao school, and you have to know these scientific relationships in order to understand the various stages of spiritual cultivation. First are the general rules:

When your jing becomes full, you won't think of (feel you need) sex.

When your chi becomes full, you won't feel like eating.

When your shen becomes full, you won't feel like sleeping.

This means that at various points during the process of cultivation--if you practice the restraint of non-leakage *and* you meditate in the proper fashion--your jing will become full. At that point, your body will become comfortable and you won't think of sex, and this will be an entirely natural outcome that occurs without any necessary activity on your part.

¹⁹ Meditation as Medicine, Dharma Singh Khalsa and Cameron Stauth, (Pocket Books, New York, 2001), p. 42.

The only necessity for this achievement is that your mind be kept free, open, empty and away from clinging so that your jing will settle harmoniously. That's when your jing can transform into chi. Of course you shouldn't purposefully think of sex, but just maintain the focus of mental cultivation that frees you of thoughts so that you can abandon the final threads of any sexual thoughts completely.

If you continue meditating while continuing to practice non-leakage and emptiness cultivation, your chi will eventually accumulate because you'll have retained your jing. In other words, because you have retained your jing, you will have created the opportunity (because of non-leakage) for it to transform into chi. When your internal chi thus becomes full, your need for food will decrease and you won't feel that your hunger is the same as before. Why? Because you'll be full of chi, and in becoming full of life energy you won't have the same need to eat. Eating will be seen more as a habit than as a necessity.

Chi is your true natural life force, and when it becomes full it's always true that you'll be able to decrease your reliance on outside sustenance. This is why advanced spiritual cultivators can go on prolonged fasts without dying. Basically, in cultivating your chi or life force, your need for external nutrition will decrease. In fact, you can go about your regular activities while eating a lot less food and will then realize at this stage that you've always been eating more than you should *simply out of habit rather than due to actual needs*.

Advanced meditation practitioners usually find that their eating habits may change significantly when they've begun to successfully cultivate their chi, or alternatively their eating habits will change because they have simply become more healthy. They usually end up eating less food and cleaner food, though of course some of these preferences are due to the natural processes of aging.

Most people don't realize that eating is primarily a habit, nor do they realize that we don't need as much food as we usually stuff ourselves with. Rather, we need to eat the right types of healthy and nutritious food as well as water, sunshine and clean air. Without air you die immediately, while without water you die after many days, and you can go without food for more days than you can go without water.

In some forms of cultivation practice you even fast by "eating air" rather than solid foods, but this stage of practice is one you can only reach after your chi becomes full and your chi mai have become opened. There are many who can fast for long periods of time without eating, but that doesn't mean they've reached the

stage where their jing has been transmuted into chi. Rather, this stage of “eating air” refers to a very advanced stage of chi mai cultivation.

A fact that society doesn’t yet recognize is the following: our excessive intake of food is largely responsible for the excess of random thoughts and sexual desires we experience, both of which represent hurdles on the cultivation path. While society definitely needs enough nutritious food, it’s *excessive nutrition* that is actually detrimental to spiritual cultivation.

Don’t go rushing out to starve yourself, however, for in cultivation we find that moderation and wisdom are always the rule. Furthermore, if you don’t take care of the body, then there is no way you can succeed in cultivation. That’s why both Buddha and Milarepa, after nearly starving themselves to death, had to eat nutritious food and restore themselves to health before they could achieve enlightenment, and the stories of many Zen masters also confirm this necessity.

Sometimes cultivators who do not feel like eating much or who experience little in terms of sexual desire are actually sick or just weak rather than advanced in their cultivation gong-fu. As a rule in cultivation we must therefore follow what the Greeks always said, that moderation is the guide and we should follow the golden mean in all we do. In cultivation you must not be so rigid in your ways that you insist on strictly following ancient customs and traditions without understanding, especially as regards eating habits, for who knows why they were established. Rather, you must rely on your wisdom to follow the golden mean of balance and harmony in all your activities.

As to the third Taoist principle, there are some people who reach a stage due to their cultivation progress—especially with advanced meditators—where their hours of sleep decline tremendously. They don’t need to sleep much anymore, and there are even some people who don’t even need to sleep at all for certain extended periods of time. While there are some pathological states that can cause this, this phenomenon isn’t the result of an unsettled mind or an illness but rather, this stage of spiritual progress occurs when your shen becomes full.

If your shen becomes full, naturally your awareness will be keen and sharp, and your chi or life force will be full as well. That’s why you’ll need little sleep at this stage of progress, and can remain clear and awake without being “jumpy” as we would find in typical reactions to caffeine. Hence for those who reach this stage and experience this phenomenon because of healthy cultivation, it is actually a *positive sign of progress* and achievement on the spiritual path. It’s nothing to worry about.

Most people become afraid at this stage that they're doing something wrong, but it's not a pathological state or negative psychological condition. When your shen becomes full due to cultivation and cultivation progress, it's a good time to keep meditating and to try to let go of all mental objects to discover the true meaning of emptiness. If you can forget your body at this stage, and realize that the mind is everywhere, then you can make really good progress at climbing the rungs of the spiritual ladder. In times like this, the spiritual practice of "seeing the light," as explained in Twenty-Five Doors to Meditation, can be very helpful to your cultivation progress. What you mustn't do at this stage of progress is carelessly lose your jing and chi through sexual activities, otherwise you'll lose this stage entirely.

Sex, food and sleep (as well as the desires for fame and fortune, etc.) are the major enemies of cultivation, but when people experience the lack of these desires they typically get scared. In fact, they become disoriented as to what's really natural and healthy in terms of human development. Due to our upside-down topsy-turvy minds, it's common for people to take black for white and white for black, and thus mistake a wonderful sign of cultivation progress for an illness or aberration. These phenomena are actually the signs of successful spiritual practice and so they shouldn't frighten you if they occur, especially if they're the result of attempts to cultivate the emptiness of peaceful serenity.

To understand the stages in more detail, it would be best to read the previous references cited, especially Tao and Longevity, which discusses these phenomena in detail. Because of the extent of material to be covered in this text, such preliminary phenomena of the path can only be introduced in the briefest manner at best.

In Taoism we also have a second set of principles that once again refers to the process of cultivating your jing, chi and shen:

If your jing doesn't become full, you can't experience [the stage of] physical bliss.

If your chi doesn't accumulate, you can't experience [the stage of] internal light.

If your shen doesn't condense, you can't experience [the stage of] no-thought.

To explain these stages of spiritual and biophysical transformation, you must understand that at certain points on the cultivation trail you'll definitely encounter various very specific, but quite unusual phenomena that serve as the marking stones

of spiritual progress. You'll definitely encounter these particular phenomena, called gong-fu or "visaya," because physical body changes will always accompany progress in spiritual-mental cultivation. What's actually responsible for these phenomena are the internal biophysics of the body that transform because of your cultivation efforts, and these transformations will reveal themselves in various aspects of the mind-body connection.

In other words, when you start to cultivate it's common for "unusual" or "unexpected" phenomena to arise as an expression of the interrelationships between jing, chi and shen that are activated through spiritual practice. Thus these three sentences describe--as any good scientific statement would--various gong-fu phenomena that will appear on the cultivation path and the corresponding esoteric biophysics responsible for their manifestation. They tell us that as a spiritual cultivator you'll end up experiencing certain stages of physical bliss due to transformations of your jing, that you'll see certain types of internal light during cultivation due to the internal accumulation and purification of your chi, and you'll be able to achieve a state of internal mental emptiness or no-thought due to your perfecting the fullness of shen, or spirit.

As a famous Tao school text explained about some of the phenomena we just mentioned, and the means to cultivate these states,

When [the state of jing transforming into chi] is produced the practiser will feel as if the top of his head is raised; the dragon's hum and tiger's roar are heard in his ears; his body floats on the clouds and itches all over; he rises in space and rides on the wind, with an accompanying sense of boundless bliss. [This is a poetic description of the stage of ching-an, or lightness and peace, which is a precursor to genuine samadhi attainments. The description, while a bit exaggerated for emphasis, is technically quite accurate and we'll discuss this stage of attainment in much detail later.] He will then feel as if a spider's web covers his face or tickling ants swarm over it from his forehead to the bridge of the nose, eye sockets, cheeks, jaws, teeth and mouth causing continual secretion of saliva which cannot all be swallowed (in one gulp). He is now disinclined to open his mouth or move his body, thus falling into a state of indistinctness in which nothing seems to exist, even his own body cannot be found, his breathing (appears to) stop and his pulses (to) cease beating. Vitality is fully developed and nurtures the immortal seed. Hence it is said; 'Fullness of vitality makes the practiser forget all about eating.'

At this stage if he continues waiting, the negative principle will remain and the positive principle will not be genuine and will arouse his appetite. As a result the immortal seed cannot form because of deficient vitality.

The practiser should train until he achieves stillness and radiance of his spirit which, when full, will make him forget about sleeping. When his vitality is fully developed and enables him to dispense with eating, he reaches the stage of constant stillness and radiance in which breathing (appears to) cease and a massive golden light manifests while all discriminations stop arising, prior to this realisation of perfect serenity. This achievement is revealed by the moonlight appearing in the forehead which will remain constantly there if he is firmly determined to hold on to the original cavity of spirit (between and behind the eyes) while sparks appear between the eyebrows; both manifestations announce the full growth of the immortal seed.

Henceforth the practiser should guard against the drain of vitality in order to hold it in the body for nurturing and developing the immortal seed. During the latter's growth he should avoid the ten following excesses: 1, excessive walking which adversely affects his nerves; 2, standing, his bones; 3, sitting, his blood; 4, sleeping, his blood vessels; 5, listening, his generative force; 6, looking (at things), his spirit; 7, pleasure, his life; and 10, eating, his heart. In short he should avoid all excesses which are very harmful.

While sitting in meditation the practiser should never: 1, give rise to thoughts which cause the (inner) fire to flare up; 2, relax his concentration to avoid cooling down the (inner) fire; 3, look at external objects, for there the spirit wanders thereby harming the incorporeal soul (hun); 4, listen to outer sounds, for this scatters the generative force and so harms the corporeal soul (p'o); 5, breathe quickly, for such breaths disperse easily and cannot be regulated; and 6, break his breath rhythm, for its abrupt stoppage will make it weak when resumed; and when he suddenly stops breathing he cools his (vital) breath and when he starts again suddenly he heats it thereby damaging the immortal seed. If he does not pay attention to all this he will achieve nothing.²⁰

In a later chapter we'll discuss in detail the characteristics of various mental concentration states, called dhyana and samadhi, and how they relate to these three

²⁰ Taoist Yoga, Lu K'uan Yu, (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1984), pp. 116-117.

particular phenomena. However, at this present point in time we must call to note that the various samadhi attainments in spiritual cultivation are characterized by very specific states of mental joy and physical bliss, and this is somehow related to the state of bliss caused by transformations in our jing.

The physical bliss of the samadhi realms is a type of full body physical bliss much greater than anything ever experienced during sexual orgasm, and it is felt in every cell of the physical body rather than being localized in just one particular region. It's felt in every cell of the body because it involves the real jing of the body that abides in every cell. All the cells of the body become enervated during samadhi, including a form of "sentient matter" which exists in all our cells. It's because all these cells become activated that we can experience the physical bliss of spiritual cultivation.

The important principle to note is that the high state of physical bliss experienced during spiritual cultivation only occurs when the jing of the body (hormones, bindu, bodhicitta, etc.) reaches a certain stage of accumulation and then transformation. It occurs because the warmth of the kundalini attainment "melts" or "enervates" the jing causing it to become more active. In some cultivation schools we say that the fire element of the body enervates the water element, causing it to descend and produce the physical bliss which accompanies the various dhyana.

Bliss is a factor which actually furthers one's concentration and inhibits the mental factor of ill will, so the dhyana realms of mental concentration found on the cultivation path are always accompanied by subtle experiences of physical bliss, as well as mental joy. To further guide us on our cultivation, Buddhism specifically points out that physical bliss is a Desire Realm phenomenon whereas mental joy is a Form Realm phenomenon, a topic that we'll also enter into much later.

As to the stage of internal light you can see when your chi becomes full, at a certain point in cultivating the chi you'll then be able to see all the internal organs of your body, or will even become able to see through walls or see objects in the far distance. This stage of internal illumination is not enlightenment, but just a minor phenomenon that occurs as you start to enter the border realm of the samadhi. In Buddhism it refers to the prayoga stage of progress called "warming," and it occurs when there is an accumulation of chi that masses to a point and which then, due to the resulting "friction," produces a light that illuminates the form environment.

If one keeps meditating at this point of achievement, then a spiritual practitioner can eventually reach a state of samadhi as long as they continue to

cultivate mental emptiness and refrain from losing their jing, chi and concentration. It doesn't matter what religious school you happen to belong to if you want to attain this feat. If you simply put in the required effort and practice in the correct manner, then with time you will be able to achieve this state of internal illumination because it's a nondenominational stage of spiritual progress.

There are biophysical components behind even higher stages of mental emptiness achievement on the spiritual path, and these initially correspond to the cultivation of shen rather than chi, and then other elements of cultivation. To reach these states you must first cultivate your chi, and then you must cultivate a profound state of no-thought, or emptiness meditation, if you wish to make further progress past the stage of cultivating your chi so as to start cultivating your shen. That's why even the Jewish mystic, using the step-by-step meditations of the Kabbalah, strives to reach a stage wherein conceptual thought, with all its connections and distinction, dissolves.²¹

In other words, to achieve the more advanced stages of the spiritual path, you have to cultivate higher and higher degrees of mental emptiness, or non-ego, so that your chi and shen become ultra-refined. When you reach the stage where you end up cultivating your shen, that's when you'll start to experience really profound states of emptiness far beyond the coarser experiences found at the lower stages of the spiritual path. By this stage you should definitely be seeking the advice of someone more knowledgeable in these matters who has greater experience than yourself, for after you start to cultivate your chi and the kundalini arises, the words of a spiritual master are more precious than gold or diamonds.

The stage of cultivating your shen is described in many different ways by a wide variety of cultivation schools. However, the process always entails the very same set of esoteric biophysics. Just as cultivating your chi will lead to a state of interior illumination wherein you can see a light within your physical body, cultivating your shen involves purifying the mind and reaching an even more profound state of no-thought than that attained when you cultivate your chi.

THE SEQUENTIAL PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF CULTIVATION

These three Tao school phrases which we've been evaluating are just a collection of basic principles to help us understand some of the biophysical

²¹ The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism, Daniel Matt, (Castle Books, Edison: New Jersey, 1997), p. 180.

processes behind particular cultivation phenomena that normally appear on the spiritual path. We’ve already hinted as to the actual larger sequence of the cultivation process itself in terms of physical phenomena, but we haven’t gone into the finer details of this path. Since the necessary foundational information for this type of dialogue has been presented, now it’s time to discuss progress on the spiritual path in terms of the evolutionary transformation of the physical body and the various substances connected with it.

As to the actual overall process of spiritual cultivation progress, Taoism describes this as *a sequential process of refining the substances of jing, chi and shen in order to reach advanced spiritual states of mind*. In other words, when you cultivate properly through meditation, *your jing will become more refined and transmute into chi, your chi will become more refined and transmute into shen, and shen will become refined and transmuted so as to enable you to reach an authentic state of mental emptiness that people call no-thought*.

In other words, Taoism defines spiritual progress as a sequential process of transformations between jing, chi and shen—at least for the lowest stages of the spiritual path. It describes the road of spiritual cultivation through a sequential transmutation of physical, and then non-material phenomena. When people restrict their cultivation efforts to the physical nature, you can therefore see that they will never ever penetrate to the higher stages of the spiritual path.

This sequence of spiritual ascendance is summarized through a very famous Taoist maxim which describes the overall process of cultivation, including the individual stages of the cultivation path which can be matched with the Mahayana five step process towards self-realization

You first experience your jing transforming into chi,
You next experience your chi transforming into shen,
You then experience your shen transforming into emptiness,
You must then return emptiness to the Tao [for complete realization].

What this means is that there is a sequence of spiritual transformations which will definitely occur as you begin to successfully tread the path of cultivation. These transformations involve the progressive purification of jing, chi and shen into higher spiritual essences: jing transforms into chi, chi into shen, and shen into emptiness. As the Taoist Liu Jing classic summarizes for us, “Perfecting one’s jing results in perfecting one’s chi, and perfecting one’s chi results in perfecting one’s shen.”

What's the method for attaining this sequence of "perfection"? When you forget about yourself through emptiness meditation then you are actually cultivating your jing, chi, and shen. When you cultivate an empty mind, they all transform naturally and spontaneously. When you further ignore the resulting material phenomena and physical sensations of the body which occur because of these transformations, then this unmindfulness can eventually lead to an even truer mental emptiness, and thus a true advance up the rungs of the spiritual ladder.

In a sense we can say that spiritual cultivation starts with the material realm, advances so that it touches upon the realm of the life force, next advances into the realm of the spirit and then into the realm of the formless. Certain transformations occur involving these various levels of being, but they're always made possible only due to the practice of emptiness meditation. That is, these spiritual transformations come about when you learn to calm the mind and master the emptiness of discriminative thinking.

It's only when you become established in emptiness, and even unmindful of this void so that you don't cling to the emptiness of emptiness, that you can finally be at one with the Tao, spontaneous and natural in all situations. Otherwise, if the mind reaches a state of purity and you give rise to any thoughts of this state, then you produce the state of mental impurity once again.

What's the spiritual process for regaining the natural inherent purity of mental emptiness that enables the return to the Tao? Just let go of everything you're mentally attaching to, which is the practice of meditation! In other words, just watch the thoughts that arise in your mind without attaching to them or trying to impose comprehension upon them. Eventually, thoughts will die away to reveal a mental state of emptiness, peace, purity and calmness. When any state of mental impurity arises in this empty clarity, don't give any thought to it and then you'll spontaneously become free of non-purity. If anybody cultivates in this manner, they'll naturally climb the ranks of spiritual achievement.

This is actually the Zen school description of the spiritual process of cultivation, and thus the true practice of Taoism--in its real form--is exactly like Zen. There is nothing wrong with thoughts or phenomena because they'll always be there, they'll always arise. Just don't cling to them because they're not you. Rather, they're just the weather that appears in the display of the mind.

When you cultivate mental emptiness, this will actually engender your shen. In cultivating emptiness this will also develop your chi, which in turn means that

you’ll be transforming your jing. Everything starts with the mind and arises out of the mind, for even the Surangama Sutra reminds us, “This physical body of ours, as well as the external mountains, rivers, space and the great earth itself are all but phenomena within the wondrous bright true mind.” So the path of spiritual cultivation always starts with cultivating the mind, rather than the body, and in cultivating the mind you’ll end up cultivating the body. That’s why your jing will transform into chi, chi into shen, and shen into emptiness. If you cling to the body and try to force it into various manipulated states, however, you will surely get nowhere on the path of spiritual cultivation. At the most, all you can expect to do is create a healthier physical vehicle.

The path of cultivation, as seen through the eyes of the Tao school, can be viewed going forwards or going backwards. One such view is to cultivate your shen in order to perfect your chi and jing. In cultivation you shouldn’t lose your jing and chi, but you also shouldn’t attach to your jing and chi so that they accumulate correctly. If you then engage in emptiness meditation, they will become purified and transmuted into higher substances required on the spiritual path. Think of this process using the following analogy. All the world’s plants arise due to the shining of the sun. Therefore similarly, when you rest your mind in the awareness of emptiness—which is akin to the shining of your shen--your jing will be enervated as well.

From a Taoist perspective, it’s ultimately your shen that develops, enervates, or actualizes your generative vital force, and if you can sit quietly and meditate without letting this vital force leak away, then you will definitely achieve something truly wonderful in your spiritual cultivation. If you always let this vital force leak away, however, then it’s doubtful that you’ll ever achieve anything substantial on the spiritual path.

Using these principles, however, those who are old and sick can theoretically use meditation to recover their vital energies, and experience shows that this is fact rather than theory! This is fact, just as described, because older individuals who meditate always show a recovery of their health and return to youthfulness because meditation is an unfailing mechanism for developing your jing and chi.

You can also think of this process from the forward end as is usually done. In other words, you throw yourself into emptiness meditation so that your jing will naturally transform into (return to) chi, chi will naturally transform into (return to) shen and shen will naturally merge with its true nature of emptiness. In fact, this is the normal way to describe the process of spiritual cultivation, but we’re introducing you

to both angles of explanation because that’s the purpose of this text. The other end, of course, is to say that cultivating shen, or empty awareness, will end up cultivating your jing and then chi, accordingly. Regardless as to how we describe the process, a basic question we should be asking is how jing and chi are related since jing, a material substance, can transmute into chi (which is an essence of a more spiritual nature)?

The best answer is that jing is the *manifestation of the life force in material form* whereas chi is the life force itself, and so the two can arise out of each other. This is something you can only understand and prove to yourself through personal meditative experience. Nevertheless we should also recognize that both the Indian ayurvedic school and the Chinese medical system have independently developed working systems out of this principle, and we should suspect that these schools wouldn’t have come to such conclusions if they weren’t based on something that had some truth in it.

It’s important to recognize that these transformations of jing to chi, chi to shen, and shen to emptiness are not something you have to force into manifestation when you’re undertaking spiritual practice. They’re not something you *have* to do or have to create. All you must do is to let your mind dwell in the natural spiritual reality of the present moment and then your chi will naturally harmonize and become peaceful, reaching what we call the “fullness of chi.”

After your chi becomes full, your breathing will stop to produce a state we call “hsi.” This cessational state marks the initiation of the true chi, or kundalini life force circulation within your physical nature, and this will start to produce an entire host of other, subsequent transformations. When your chi is cultivated to fullness, then it transforms into shen and your spiritual awareness becomes unbounded. St. Bernard in Christianity described the spiritual stage of chi transforming into shen as “air transforming into sunshine,” and various other spiritual schools describe this stage with other poetic metaphors as well.

We call all these transformations “spiritual stages” of achievement, but actually all these stages of the spiritual path should be known as component stages of “human being science.” In short, when you cultivate correctly your jing will transform into chi and your chi into shen, and this sequence of transformations will bring about all sorts of physical and mental transformations.

All sorts of gong-fu manifestations will transpire along the “mental resting” road of spiritual cultivation, but you must clearly understand that the transformations between jing, chi and shen constitute the primary sequence of physical

transformations that occurs along the spiritual trail. This is not to say that the Taoist or any other valid description of the cultivation path excludes other phenomena. It's just that for the most part, all these other phenomena are entirely consistent with this main sequential line of physical transformations. Furthermore, for those individuals who seek some technical way to describe the physical gong-fu phenomena which appear along the spiritual trail, these Taoist teachings absolutely represent the best and most highly developed of all the different schemes they might choose from.

Your job in this entire process of spiritual development is not to bother to follow all the internal transformations that transpire along this path, especially when you start to activate your prenatal chi. Rather, you just detach from all the sensations that arise, objectively viewing them as if they were a dream and you were a third person observer watching them from a distance. When you learn to master this type of mental detachment from experiential phenomena—this "letting go" from mental attachment to thoughts or feelings--everything will just happen as natural as it should without any necessary acts of intervention on your part.

This is why cultivation is really a path of no-effort, for you need not do anything but rest the mind. There are no efforts on your part because you're not doing anything, you're not even using mental energy to become involved with phenomena. So spiritual cultivation is called the way of not doing, or no action. It's not a practice itself, but *nonpractice of unnecessary mental habits*. As several passages from the Bible tell us in terms of practice, the key is to give up everything and mentally rest in emptiness:

Be still and know that I am God (Ps 46:10)

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him (Ps 37:7)

My soul finds rest in God alone (Ps 62:1)

But I stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother [no longer clinging],

Like a weaned child is my soul within me. (Ps 131:2)

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from Him comes my salvation. (Ps 62:1)

To You silence is praise. (Ps 65:2)

Christianity therefore supports the view that God can be found through silence, as does the great Jewish sage Maimonides who felt that God lies beyond rational thinking and intellectualist contemplation. He felt that an individual should empty their mind to stand before God (Mishneh Torah Tefillah 4:6; Guide to the Perplexed 3:51 [458:12- 18]) and eventually attain to a post intellectual state of silence as the highest form of spiritual cultivation (1:59; 3:51 [456:24- 457:15]). In

other words, God is found through a post-cognitive level of worship, which is a form of worship that transcends intellectual thought.

The Tao, the true spiritual reality is always right here in the now. It's always right in front of you for how could it be otherwise? To reach full realization of that presence without friction, restriction or interface you just detach from all phenomena, *both internal and external*, and thereby you'll gradually learn to be able to perceive the true empty nature of your mind as well as the true empty nature of all phenomena. That's the route of climbing the spiritual ladder.

True reality is clear and pure without any obstructions. True mind is clear and pure without any marks or stains. It's always shining, and due to this shining when it's not disturbed, after a long time chi is developed in our physical bodies. When chi collects in fullness it brings about the state of hsi, or respiratory cessation, wherein the real chi of the body ignites to bring about all sorts of biophysical and spiritual transformations. That, in essence, is the lowest stage of the spiritual ladder, and you climb that rung by learning mental detachment.

If you can accomplish this sort of mental behavior, then you'll eventually be able to unite the state of hsi with your shen, and then mental clarity and your life force will become unified. In becoming pacified they'll reach a state of balance and unify into one. At this stage of spiritual advancement, your chi will spontaneously stop, your pulse will slow down and seem to disappear, and you'll feel as if you're in harmony with the whole universe. In other words, you will seem to merge with the entire universe and your existence will seem as if only that one thing.

Thus in terms of the process of spiritual transformation or ladder of spiritual achievement, you don't have to forcibly guide or lead your chi in any special direction or use any special efforts to force any special chi circulations in the body. All you have to do is learn mental emptiness—whether through prayer, visualization practice, or meditation, chanting and so on—and all this stuff will happen quite naturally, as it should.

People sometimes teach you to guide the chi in your body, but this is actually a mistake in spiritual practice. It doesn't matter that many people and even cultivation schools make this mistake, for it's a mistake nonetheless. All you have to do is calm and clarify your mind by resting it in the open awareness of the present moment (abiding in thoughts is *not* resting in the present moment because it's obscuring the present moment by dwelling in thoughts), and then your chi will automatically return to its origin to initiate whatever spiritual transformations are required on the path.

That’s the entire process of spiritual development in a nutshell—just cultivate emptiness and ignore everything else. The genuine spiritual path of every authentic school always involves resting in mental emptiness, and any physical transformations that are due to happen on the road of spirituality will accordingly transpire naturally without any need of involvement or need of any knowledge beforehand.

When I previously referred to St. Bernard’s description of “air turning into sunshine” as the synonym for the stage of chi transforming into shen, I briefly alluded to the fact that these three sequences of jing transforming into chi, chi transforming into shen, and shen transforming into emptiness are described in different ways by the world’s various spiritual traditions. Nevertheless, they are recognizing the same spiritual phenomena.

In Buddhism, these three stages can be matched with the principles of discipline (for the transmutation of jing), samadhi meditation (for the transmutation of chi), and prajna wisdom (for the transmutation of shen). In Tantra they are matched with the stages of bliss, internal illumination, and no-thought. In Hinduism they can also be matched with a progressive attainment of the four dhyana, but this particular explanatory scheme must be left for the dhyana-samadhi chapter of these lessons.

This Taoist scheme for delineating progress on the spiritual path also corresponds to the Mahayana partitioning of the spiritual process into five great stages. That’s why I introduced these five great stages at the beginning of these lessons, for it’s the best initial framework from which to start reviewing all the competing guide maps for the road of true religious practice, including all the micro-sequences and experiences of the spiritual path. Using this five-fold scheme—which we’ve already introduced—all the phenomena encountered during the transformations of jing to chi and chi to shen fall within only the first two stages of the Mahayana Path.

Accordingly, people who successfully cultivate their chi (or prana), chakras, chi channels and kundalini are nowhere close to the Stage of Truly Cultivating the Tao. They’re only at the beginning stages of Wisdom and Merit Accumulation and Intensified Preparatory Practices. When you finally reach the stage of shen transforming into emptiness, this is *roughly* equivalent to the stage of seeing the Tao. It’s an approximate equivalence of stages, but not exactly.

Now today we typically find Taoist and other spiritual practitioners playing around with their body sensations during meditation practice. They mistake various

feeling sensations they experience during meditation for the movement of chi when they are actually just sensations of internal wind. So in lacking even this most basic wisdom realization, most practitioners playing around with their feelings can only be ranked at the first stage of the cultivation path!

The practices of chi-gong, as well as the ancient (but mistaken) Taoist practices of microcosmic circulation, are examples of typical practices that bring about sensations of internal wind in the body, called fan-chi, which proponents mistake for the true chi of the cultivation path. However, the true chi of the spiritual path only arises when a spiritual practitioner reaches a meditative state wherein their external breathing comes to a halt. When the external respiration ceases a type of internal breathing commences, and that's the stage of chi initiation which brings about all the genuine transformations we read about in old spiritual texts. *Most of the gong-fu within the school of Tibetan yoga, as well as Indian yoga, is based upon bringing about this stage of internal chi circulation.* In these other stages of fan-chi, however, the sensations are brought about by mental manipulations in combination with a strong attachment to feeling states.

When as a cultivator you finally reach the Taoist stage of "shen transforming into emptiness" and then "returning this emptiness to the Tao," this can be approximately matched with the Hinayana accomplishment of "seeing the Tao." We call this the Hinayana stage of "seeing the Tao" because the Hinayana accomplishment of realizing emptiness (or non-ego) is not as complete as the Mahayana Stage of Seeing Tao. As can be guessed from this example, there are indeed differences between the Hinayana and Mahayana stages of cultivation in that the Mahayana accomplishments are much more profound and all-inclusive than the Hinayana. However, for the sake of clarity in correspondences at this point, we will simplify matters and say they're roughly equivalent when it comes to "seeing the Tao."

In Taoist terminology, the stage of "returning emptiness to Tao" roughly equates with the Stages of Seeing the Tao and Cultivating the Tao until you finally attain full self-realization, which is the Stage of No More Learning, Buddhahood, or perfect and complete enlightenment. Hence you can see that although the two separate schools of Buddhism and Taoism focus on different ways of describing the spiritual path, this sequential match-up of stages refers to the same overall process of spiritual achievement! Furthermore, as we fill in more facts we'll eventually find perfect correspondences between most all the other major spiritual schools as well.

This existence of perfect correspondence is something you'll find with all the *genuine* schools of spiritual cultivation, but you shouldn't be so mechanical about these correlations and force things into overly restrictive one-to-one equivalents. When you're trying to elaborate upon the commonality of schools and their descriptions of cultivation sequences, you can indeed point out the overt commonalties and correspondences. However, you will also have to allow for some rough overlaps and some imprecision at times as to the exact one-to-one details of the matter. This is especially true when certain schools do indeed fail to proceed as far as others regarding the spiritual trail, for some schools do fall short of the complete path and there is no way you can make a partial pathway stretch out into the genuine whole.

My best warning is not to become too mechanical in making comparisons between various spiritual traditions. In other words, you shouldn't strive for exact equivalencies between the various processes and stages of the path when comparing spiritual traditions. The point in cultivation is not to study these things like an academic or scholar who gets fixated on the tiny details, but to understand the larger picture because that's what's going to help you. The rest is just an academic exercise whereas to understand the general principles of spiritual cultivation as a whole, and to develop faith in the process and get on with your spiritual practice is the actual crux of the issue! As a simple instance, if you don't engage in meditation practice and try to attain these spiritual states yourself, then all this understanding is just worthless.

Now Taoism is very similar to Esoteric Buddhism and the various yoga sects in that it focuses on the gong-fu side of spiritual development, and thus due to this common emphasis these schools tend to follow similar lines of cultivation practice. These schools particularly focus on the transformations that occur within the physical body, especially the changes that occur in your life force or chi. However, there is one particular aspect of Taoism which is unique amongst these schools, and that's the idea within Taoism that our physical lives can last forever.

According to Taoist philosophy, our bodies are composed of yin and yang forces that represent female and male, or negative and positive energies. When ordinary people want to give birth to a new life, they need to engage in sexual intercourse--with members of the opposite gender--so that the yin and yang energies can combine. Taoism, however, maintains that you don't need to resort to this. Rather, without relying on a member of the opposite sex, you can still enable your own inner forces of yin and yang to give rise to a new internal, immortal life. This doesn't mean that you can create a physical baby by yourself, such as is born to

married couples. Your body’s jing, if you keep your mind empty without letting it dissipate externally, can create a new internal life—a renewal of your physical nature.

Taoist teachings maintain that through the process of cultivation you can learn to constantly renew your physical body, and thus become immortal in the physical plane. In one sense we can say that this process of regeneration corresponds to generating a new life rather than a life which passes away, but the Tao school also speaks of a second aspect of immortality. Taoism also maintains, as does the yoga schools of India, that through spiritual cultivation you can also give birth to a form of new life that can leave your body at will through the top of your head.

This spirit projection of the individual, which goes by a variety of names in different cultivation schools and traditions, is called “emanating one’s shen” or “projecting one’s spirit.” Taoism emphasizes this possibility of spiritual projection, but you can also cultivate this “second life” along any other genuine road of spirituality. Why? Because it’s a nondenominational result of human being development that naturally falls out of the cultivation path.

This “emanating shen” is the same shen as that involved in the transformation of chi to shen. Starting with the jing of your cells, the road of spirituality brings about physical transformations that totally renew the physical body, producing a new internal life. On one hand this “new life” entails a rejuvenation of your old physical body, which under the right conditions can live for thousands of years, and it also includes an immortal spirit body that can leave our external physical casing at will. The Tao school therefore emphasizes that spiritual cultivation can produce an everlasting life, and this immortal life can be taken as a never dying physical form or a never dying spiritual body.

The spiritual ability to “emanate one’s shen” has both a yin and yang achievement level. The “yin shen” emanation is the lower type of spiritual achievement whereas the ultimate shen achievement is the “yang shen” emanation body. The yin spirit is an invisible and intangible body which ordinary people cannot see whereas the yang shen emanation is a projected physical body that people can see and touch.

The yang shen doesn’t have to look like your own body but with training and practice, can appear in almost any shape or form desired. Most often a master projects it in the form of his physical body’s replica or double. It can talk and touch

things and become visible or invisible, tangible or intangible at will. You can even use it to travel the cosmos and visit different realms because with spiritual progress it can appear and then disappear in different cosmic realms instantaneously. In the many stories of Indian masters who could be seen in two places at once, these were usually instances of yang shen achievements. As Tao and Longevity explains,

According to the Tan Tao school, *yang shen* (or positive spirit) and *yin shen* (or negative spirit) may both account for the projection of the spirit from out of the body.

Yang shen can leave this body of flesh and blood, and yet it is a physical body with material form and a visible appearance. It can behave exactly like an ordinary human body behaves and yet it is a spiritual body with a physical form and an independent existence. It is believed to be a projection of the real spirit.

A person who says that he has an invisible and immaterial body, with or without form, that leaves and enters his physical body at will is speaking of the body of *yin shen*. *Yin shen* is similar to those bodies appearing in dreams, but it is much clearer and more distinct than ordinary "dream" bodies. Taoists maintain that the projection of *yang shen* is the ultimate achievement of meditation and the cultivation of Tao. But if one imagines that the projection of *yin shen* is the ultimate goal of Tao, then he is either an ordinary person or in the in state of a spirit or a ghost.

Those who meditate and cultivate the Tao will not have any difficulty projecting *yin shen* out of the body. Some may have an experience of this sort long before reaching the stage of transforming *ch'i* into *shen*. For example, when the connection between the spirit and the body has deteriorated and grown weak, the projection of yin shen may occur spontaneously. This can happen to quite ordinary people who are not meditating, for it happens when one is ill, nearing death, or bordering on schizophrenia. If this can happen by itself under stressful circumstances, the student should understand that, with training, the experience will come much more easily and without the need for stress.²²

As to the scientific process behind the instant solid appearance and then disappearance of the yang shen, the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine explains, "when chi gathers it takes on shape, and when chi dissipates the shape disappears." Is this possible? Until you see it or can do it yourself, people are bound

²² Tao and Longevity, Huai-Chin Nan, (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1991), p. 108.

to remain skeptical despite the testimonials of hundreds of people who have seen such a phenomenon.

One bit of contributing evidence is that in 1907, scientific researcher Duncan McDougall actually attempted to measure the soul by weighing medical patients as they died with ultra sensitive scales. Several patients experienced a sudden weight loss of a half-ounce followed by another sudden one-ounce weight loss within three minutes of the time of death, showing that the chi of the body had some physical component of weight. If this is so, it is not a far leap to the conclusion that chi can dissipate and reassemble in shape under certain conditions, all under the guidance of the mind. Buddha said this gathering and dissipation process becomes possible when someone learns how to solidify their false thoughts, and in the Surangama Sutra he even described ten classes of seers, or rishis, who could accomplish this feat.

While the ability to achieve this stage of spiritual attainment means that you can extend your life span in the world almost indefinitely, Shakyamuni Buddha never said it was a correct form of cultivation practice. This cultivation accomplishment does not entail enlightenment to your original nature, and this stage of chi into shen transformation cannot help you avoid cyclical existence. Many masters have used this type of body to appear before their students, and so there are all sorts of stories regarding this attainment across the world’s various spiritual traditions, especially the Hindu traditions.

When someone says that they have seen an individual in two different places at the same time, the yang shen emanation is one possible explanation behind this phenomenon, and the probable explanation if we are talking about an accomplished cultivation practitioner. Why do so many religions have stories of this sort of body double for their saints and sages? Because it’s a *natural, non-denominational level of spiritual achievement* that occurs at the spiritual stage of cultivating your chi and shen.

At the very highest stages of spiritual cultivation you can produce millions or even billions of these emanations in any form you desire. For instance, when we read in a sutra that a Buddha or Bodhisattva will come and bless you by placing their hands on your head if you read a certain sutra, make a certain promise or perform some special activity, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas accomplish this by sending forth an invisible emanation body to instantly accomplish the task they have vowed.

Buddhism calls these transformation or emanation bodies “nirmanakaya” while other cultivation schools use entirely different names. In China, they go under

the name of “hua shen.” If you are really enlightened, you *must* be able to produce this particular sort of transformation body gong-fu in addition to other gong-fu and wisdom accomplishments as well. If you’re not yet fully enlightened but can still attain this stage of accomplishment, then your status is only equivalent to that of the devas or lower level celestial beings who also at times can use this type of projection to intervene in human affairs.

The Tao school particularly prizes this stage of spiritual achievement, and gives people who accomplish this feat the title of “xian” or “Immortal.” Some in the Tao school equate this accomplishment with Buddhahood or enlightenment, but it’s actually a much lower stage of spiritual attainment that’s far far below the stage of enlightened realization. In fact, you certainly don’t need to be anywhere near the realm of self-realization in order to generate a yin shen, although a yang shen accomplishment definitely places you farther ahead on the path. We don’t even need to equate this phenomenon with a righteous path of religious practice, for it’s a natural outcome of anyone who cultivates according to the principles of human being science.

Although you can find story after story of shen emanations in Hinduism and the yoga traditions of India, the most instructive teachings on the yin shen or yang shen accomplishments belong to the Wu Liu school of Taoism. The yin shen is something that can instantly travel to another location at the speed of thought. When it’s there, it can perfectly see and hear everything that’s being done without being seen itself. The yang shen, being a visible and tangible projection body, can even bring back various items from its travels if the practitioner’s cultivation is high enough.

Today a number of intelligence agencies hope to train people to attain these stages of cultivation, but think carefully. If an individual really achieved this sort of attainment, do you think they would still want to work for those agencies? It takes a very high degree of virtue, merit and wisdom to reach this stage in cultivation, and when individuals actually succeed in this high stage accomplishment, who do you think is the wiser—the boss or the underling? So while the Russians, Chinese and Japanese have tried to train and use psychics for espionage purposes, they can only garner the cooperation of rather low level cultivators whose “readings” would be quite unreliable.

What the agencies, or even popular courses, usually train people to do is enter the shadow side of their discriminatory consciousness, which is to enter a trance-like or dream-like state called the du-yin. The accomplishment of cultivating

the invisible du-yin body sounds very similar to the yin shen achievement in spiritual cultivation, but it's actually much less advanced than the true yin shen achievement, and is fraught with the possibility of error. In truth, this type of accomplishment rests on the border of schizophrenia, or some other sort of mental breakdown or disassociation with the normal world.

It's only after your jing transforms into chi that you can correctly spiritually cultivate the body outside the body, but as for the du-yin you can cultivate it if you enter a mental realm akin to a form of mental illness. As for the yang shen accomplishment, you must first attain the yin shen achievement before you can achieve the yang shen attainment, and the conversion of the yin shen to yang shen will take several years of cultivation effort. If you're not mentally healthy, there is no way your yin shen can ever transform into a yang shen despite decades and decades of devoted cultivation practice. It'll never transform because an unhealthy mentality is a yin mentality, and yin has to become yang for the yang shen to develop.

Please remember that both the yin shen and yang shen emanation bodies are *only minor achievements along the spiritual path*, and so in spiritual practice you shouldn't cultivate with an aim to produce these things. Rather, as with all types of spiritual gong-fu you just let them appear whenever they finally do, and you shouldn't try to force them into manifesting. Furthermore, you must remember that even to attain these minor achievements requires a great deal of merit on the path that you must accumulate from performing countless selfless good deeds for others. If you only possess knowledge of the method for cultivating the transformation bodies, but lack the requisite store of merit, then you'll have no hopes of attaining these fruits regardless of how much you may want to achieve them. And even if you have the merit, if you use thoughts or try to push your chi to attain these bodies, the possibility of success will remain out of your reach as well.

The really big reason that these bodies will remain out of reach for most qualified spiritual practitioners is because their achievement requires sexual restraint—the non-leakage of jing. For instance, in order to cultivate the yin shen you have to practice emptiness meditation and refrain from losing your jing in order that jing can transform into chi and then shen which are the materials of which this sort of body is born. If you can do this, then the stages of transformation to be expected in forming the yin shen run approximately as follows:

At puberty, sexual desire is aroused. When the primordial life force is transformed into procreative energy, it begins to leak out of the

body. The leakage of life energy is the primary cause of aging, illness, and premature death.

If the leakage is stopped and the procreative energy is drawn back into the body, the energy will be transformed into the primordial vapor of the Tao. When there are no openings for the vapor of life to escape, it will circulate through the Microcosmic Orbit in the body. In the Hui-ming ching, this circuit is called the Dharmic Wheel.

With time, enough vapor will gather to form a bundle of energy in the lower tan-t'ien. This bundle of energy is the spirit-fetus.

The spirit-fetus is nourished by the primordial vapor until it is mature. This process is called the incubation of the fetus.

When the spirit-fetus is ready to be born, it will exit the body at the top of the head. Manifesting as multiple entities, the spirit becomes omniscient and the practitioner can see the past and the future.

Initially, the spirit-child hovers around the head of the practitioner. But as it matures, it will travel farther and farther from the shell that conceived it. In its journey to the different realms of existence, it will learn how to return to the Tao.²³

Another point to remember regarding these phenomena is the fact that modern science is very materialistic in its views of spirituality and spiritual experiences, and so it won't yet recognize them because most scientists can't see them. Scientists always try to attribute spiritual gong-fu to some sort of biological activity so that they can actually dismiss and explain away what they themselves have not yet cultivated. For instance, now scientists have localized various centers in the brain that become activated when we have religious experiences—such as the "God module"—and so they've come up with a way to attribute much of spiritual experience to biology once again.²⁴

Scientists—who typically lack any cultivation experience themselves—don't even comprehend that the first principle of cultivation is to forget the physical body. Only in forgetting and detaching from the physical body can you climb the ranks of spiritual attainment. Yes, you transform your body because of spiritual practice, but if you can generate all these other bodies which are separate from the physical body, do these studies apply to these other physical natures?

²³ *Cultivating the Energy of Life*, Liu Hua-Yang, trans. by Eva Wong, (Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1998), pp. 18-19.

²⁴ See, for instance, Vilayanur Ramachandran's research on the "God module" as well as Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newberg's research on the biology of the religious experience.

When you learn how to detach from the physical body and stop identifying with it, this detachment will eventually make your spirit quite independent of the biological machine. That's why your jing can transform into chi and chi into shen, which is because you stop identifying with the body and let its natural energies circulate as they should. A perfectly healthy body and healthy mentality will be able to achieve these things quite readily, but because our minds have become too complex, we must first unlearn and unclutter our wrong mental habits in order to make any sort of positive progress in cultivation attainment.

If you can totally let go of your body and refrain from interfering in its internal alchemical processes, this "detachment" or "unmindfulness" is what can create a new spiritual life, and that life will have nothing to do with this or that center in the brain. We have to remember that the ranks of spirituality have little to do with the physical nature for as a simple example, when you can generate the yang shen emanation body which is totally independent of your physical body, what does that have to do with the "God module"?

While all this new scientific research is commendable and actually quite excellent, once again it only applies to adherents within the Stage of Wisdom and Merit Accumulation who never really gain any sort of respectable celestial spiritual achievement, and it never touches upon the real gong-fu of the spiritual path.

THE TIME REQUIREMENTS BEHIND THE PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE SPIRITUAL PATH

The cultivation school of Taoism emphasizes the physical body and gong-fu attainments of the spiritual path so much that it has even catalogued the time requirements necessary for all the major physical processes of spiritual transformation to occur. In other words, the Tao school has determined the time requirements necessary for cultivating your jing, chi and shen, as well as the time required for effecting other spiritual transformations on the cultivation path. If you cultivate correctly, these transformations are bound to transpire in an orderly, naturalistic, and therefore predictable sequential fashion. This is why we can attach time requirements to the various stages of cultivation practice. Being a form-based cultivation school, this is exactly what Taoism has done.

What people always fail to deeply realize is that these sequences of transformation and processes of spiritual attainment *represent nondenominational states of spiritual gong-fu*. They don't just belong to one spiritual school or tradition because they happen to everybody who cultivates correctly no matter whether they

are male or female, black or white, young or old, American or French, educated or not, fat or thin, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist or Muslim!

There are no barriers to spiritual attainment at all, so forget about any claims of exclusivity bantered around by this or that religion saying that it's the only one whose adherents will be "saved." The fact that there's no barrier to spiritual attainment which is why you'll find similar types of experiences within the spiritual records across the world's religions. Why else would you have this sort of broad track record? When we look at this sort of past history and compare individuals, the only question becomes who's stage of attainment was higher or lower?

Even if you never heard of the words "jing" or "chi" or "shen," your body will still undergo various transformations involving these substances as you make progress on the path of cultivation attainment. Your body will still undergo these transformations, but different spiritual and cultivation traditions will indeed describe these events in different fashions, or even overlook them all together. Furthermore, you must know that there are definitely minimum time requirements for achieving the transformations involved with this sort of physical gong-fu. No matter what school you belong to nor what path of spiritual practices you follow, you will not be able to alter these time requirements in any major significant way. Just as the time it takes to bring water to a boil follows certain laws of physics, there are limits to how fast the physical body can become transformed because of the laws of biophysics and biochemistry.

To start out, someone who engages in the correct sort of emptiness contemplation can reach the stage where his or her jing transforms into chi after about three months (one hundred days) of devoted cultivation practice. This one hundred days is called "laying the foundation" for the path, and this achievement initiates the process of "cultivating the chi and mai." It's not just the Tao school which has discovered this particular length of time, for as the Hatha Yoga Pradipika of Indian yoga says,

The yogi who has perfected himself in the yamas [the first stage of the yogic path] will purify his nadis [chi channels] in three months [of meditative practice].²⁵

From this quote we know that the yoga schools also recognize the necessity for (1) having jing transform into chi, as well as the necessity for (2) at least one

²⁵ The Yoga of Light, Hans-Ulrich Rieker, trans. by Elys Becherer, (Dawn Horse Press, Middletown: California, 1971), p. 75.

hundred days of meditative work to achieve this particular transformation. In Buddhist Thailand, all young men are required to become celibate monks specifically for this three-month period of time. The reason they become monks for three months of spiritual training is in hopes that they can at least attain the stage of jing transforming into chi during this period of separation from the rest of the material world.

Unfortunately, most people today are ignorant of the significance behind this time period, as well as the spiritual goal of this period and the proper practices necessary for accomplishing this feat. Nevertheless, the purpose of this period is so that one will be unhampered by worldly concerns when trying to lay a hundred day's foundation for the cultivation path.

During this one hundred day's period of laying the foundation, you cannot engage in sexual intercourse, you cannot masturbate, you cannot let your sexual fluids leak through wet dreams,²⁶ and you should not even think of sex. If you even start to think of sex, it will start a ball rolling that will be hard to stop so any thoughts of a sexual nature must be cut off with one stroke. That's why men during this period should seclude themselves away from women, television, radio, newspapers or anything that might spark a fire.

When you even think of sex it moves your jing and chi, and being unsettled they cannot become involved in higher spiritual transformations. As you'll eventually find out through your own spiritual practice, all proper forms of spiritual progress happen due to mental peacefulness and tranquillity. Otherwise, without mental peace your jing will become unsettled and you'll lose it, and lost jing will no longer be available for the necessary transformation into chi. Without this transformation, you cannot live a long life, or create a new life through self-rejuvenation.

Not only must you refrain from losing your jing during this period and refrain from stirring your jing with sexual thoughts, but you must also ignore any sensations of the physical body that occur during this time period of transformation because physical sensations will also tend to impel you toward the act of leakage. You can only accomplish unmindfulness of sensations by practicing detachment and cultivating mental emptiness. If it weren't for the difficulty of accomplishing this basic foundational task on the spiritual trail--which is emphasized in every single genuine cultivation school--most people would definitely succeed at achieving high states of

²⁶ Methods for eliminating nocturnal emissions are found in Lu Ku'an Yu's *Taoist Yoga* (chapter 10) and Nan Huai-Chin's *To Realize Enlightenment* (pp. 2-3).

spiritual samadhi. At the very minimum they would get much healthier and enjoy all sorts of benefits, which the Tao school has summarized for us:

If the generative force is gathered for a hundred (successive) days, sixty-four chu of vitality is gained and a unit of positive principle is produced; this is like 'adding fuel' to feed and prolong life.

With the same determination, if the generative force is gathered for another hundred days an additional sixty-four chu of vitality are gained while the positive principle is increased to two units; the body now becomes very strong and all ailments vanish.

If the gathering of generative force continues for another hundred days an additional sixty-four chu of vitality are gained with the positive increased to three units; all cavities in the body are cleared for rejuvenation [the chi mai become clean], and the practiser's steps are light and quick with clear sight and good hearing.

With continuous advance for another hundred days, another sixty-four chu of vitality are gained with the positive principle increased to four units; the practiser now feels very comfortable like a wealthy man who has all the means to enjoy life; his skin is lustrous and his white hair turns black (as before).

After another hundred days, a further sixty-four chu of vitality are gained while the positive principle increases to five units; his spirits are very high and new teeth grow to replace the fallen ones.

After yet another hundred days, another sixty-four chu of vitality are gained with the positive principle increased to six units; he enjoys the cream of life while restoring (his body) fully to its all-positive state in early infancy and regaining the circle of t'ai chi (or Supreme Ultimate) wherein real positive vitality and essential nature unite to emit the light of vitality which is the light of true nature in the precious cauldron (in the head) [the chi masses so that internal light is seen] and that of true life in the stove (in the lower abdomen) [tan tien or hara]. Students should ponder over all this carefully.²⁷

Actually, a healthy young girl before her first menstruation (at around age fourteen), or a healthy young boy before his first sexual impulses (at around age sixteen), only need about seven days to accomplish the transformation of jing to chi if they are given proper instructions and taught how to properly practice meditation. Mature individuals, on the other hand, almost always require about one hundred days of celibate meditation practice (and most likely more), and this celibacy

²⁷ *Taoist Yoga*, Lu K'uan Yu, (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1984), p. 19.

necessitates a mind of freedom through emptiness rather than a mentality of tight suppression.

This, of course, is the general principle of mental practice throughout the cultivation path. As to men in their later years, they must first practice meditation to renew their vitality in order to experience a return of their jing. After their jing starts to once again accumulate and get full, then they can practice to achieve this one hundred days of spiritual transformation.

Women have a slightly different path than men when it comes to accomplishing this basic step of spiritual transformation. When women are at an age where they still experience their monthly menstrual period, they must first practice to achieve the stage where their menstruation actually stops—which is called “killing the dragon,” “regaining one’s virginity,” or “returning to the stage of a maiden.” Afterwards they can practice for the one hundred days in order for the true transformation of jing into chi to occur.

This doesn’t mean there is no transformation of jing to chi before the menstrual period stops, but that the full achievement level of this cultivation stage happens when this event occurs. In modern research on natural psychics, the Chinese have discovered facts that seem to confirm these high level teachings because most young girls start to lose their psychic abilities after their first menstruation.²⁸

When a woman is past menopause, the process is a little different once again. In this case a woman must first cultivate to the point where her body experiences renewal before the transformational stage of jing to chi can transpire. That is, she must cultivate so that her menstrual period returns once again—which will indeed happen since meditation will make her younger if performed correctly—and then she must continue meditating and go through this level of experience so that her menstrual period stops again. At that point she can initiate these one hundred days of transforming her jing into chi.²⁹

Healthy young women who cut their fat intake by too much or who engage in strenuous physical exercise are often known to stop menstruating. However, these

²⁸ China’s Super Psychics, Paul Dong and Thomas Raffill, (Marlowe & Company, New York, 1997), p. 79.

²⁹ Unfortunately, very few cultivation books discuss the details of women’s gong-fu and the necessity of these achievements. Further details of this process, with instructions, can be found in Douglas Wile’s wonderful selection of translations, Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Yoga Classics Including Women’s Solo Meditation Texts (SUNY, Albany: New York, 1992). To date, this contains the best set of translated references on this matter.

cases of anovulatory cycles, which can occur as the result of nutritional deficiencies, excessive stress, serious illness or xenoestrogen exposure, are not to be confused with the stage of "stemming the red tide" which naturally occurs through the proper devotion to spiritual practice. There are even some women who are perfectly healthy and yet rarely experience menstruation at all. While rare, this can actually be an extremely fortunate karmic inheritance, and due to the merits this entails we say that the woman has achieved a Kuan Yin cultivation body.

During the one hundred days practice of "laying the foundation," practitioners should be careful about their food intake because if they eat strong meats and certain grains (such as corn, millet, wheat and so forth), they will feel heavy and uncomfortable, sometimes as if poisoned. That's because the body is trying to clean itself during this process of transformation, and the process of digestion diverts their chi and other internal energies from the higher level transformations of the spiritual path. Furthermore, since jing is transforming into chi, chi itself becomes the body's main source of internal energy during this period and when the chi starts to become full, a practitioner won't feel like they need to eat much food anymore. Hence eating extra food at this time, because of the force of habit, would be a serious cultivation error.

This doesn't mean you have to fast during this stage of practice. Rather, it just means that you must watch your nutritional input and cut down on excessive, unnecessary food intake (especially cold foods, sugary foods and wheat products). Naturally you are permitted to use herbal medicines and other special substances at this stage of practice, but you shouldn't rely on them either during this period of time. If they bolster your internal protective chi to the detriment of the chi needed for internal transformation, then they will actually inhibit the transformative process of cultivation which is designed to occur at this period of time.

In cultivation you must always be balanced in what you do, and you have to accomplish this balancing act yourself. No one can balance your body for you, and so it's up to you to learn how to adjust your mental and physical states during all these processes of transformation. The best advice I can supply you is what my own teacher told me, which is that emptiness and detachment are the principles to follow at every step along the way. Even at the very highest stages of accomplishment, they are the answer to the question on how one should practice. So if today you feel uncomfortable and can let it go, then although it may tug at you mercilessly, just forget about it and you'll wake up tomorrow with a totally different transformed situation.

That's how you can pass through the one hundred days of practice—one day at a time, and every day a day of not clinging. Yes it's difficult but you can do it. The rule of spiritual cultivation is mental emptiness at each and every stage of the path. You only use a method, such as mantra recitation, to try and reach a stage of emptiness because it's that stage of emptiness which is important, for that's what brings about all the spiritual transformations of the path. So then you must try to remain in that state for as long as possible, even forgetting about (letting go of) the practice you used to get there.

This is why Saint Anthony the Great said, "The prayer of the monk is not perfect until he no longer realizes himself or the fact that he is praying."³⁰ You try to reach a point where you can forget both your body and your mind, and then all sorts of spiritual progress can be had. That's the common principle of spiritual practice for all sorts of religions. Therefore by cultivating a state of presence with open awareness that's not involved with your body or sensations, and by staying in *That One*, the cultivation path can soon be accomplished.

The cardinal rule during this period is that one must refrain from losing their jing, and must therefore cultivate a state of nonconceptuality (emptiness) in order to succeed in this task. The purpose of the one hundred days is to gain a foot hold, so to speak, in cultivating mental emptiness and without this emptiness practice it'll be very hard to withhold your jing. Even to think of sex would be a violation of cultivation discipline during this period because as the schools of sexual yoga say, "If your mind moves then your chi moves, and if your chi moves then your jing has moved as well."

The inherent concept behind not disturbing your jing, chi and shen is the idea of maintaining harmony and balance through peaceful tranquillity. When an individual achieves this state of mental harmony and tranquillity that we call emptiness (since the mind of bothering thoughts is "emptied"), then the transformations between their jing, chi and shen will proceed with ease and reach a natural, inherent balance. This idea of harmony or balance permeates all the concepts and stages of cultivation throughout, and is one of the ways in which cultivation concepts extend to and connect with the entire world at large. Thus Confucius wrote in the Analects,

Before one's mood of pleasure or anger, sorrow or joy, is released, one's mind is in a state of equilibrium. When those feelings have been released and are at an appropriate degree, they are in a state of

³⁰ How to Meditate: A Guide to Self-Discovery, Lawrence LeShan, (Bantam Books, New Yor, 1988), p. 58.

harmony. This equilibrium is the great basis of all human activities, and this harmony is the universal path for all to pursue. We must devote ourselves to achieving this state of equilibrium and harmony and to establishing the proper order between Heaven and Earth. Then all things will be nourished and flourish.³¹

The Tao school and yoga schools always warn people not to let their "elixir" leak, yet if you forcibly restrain yourself from losing jing and don't cultivate the mental harmony of emptiness during this transformational period, this restraint just amounts to a contrived mechanical activity. At this point, the transformation of jing to chi won't occur in even the slightest degree.

Look at all the religious celibates around you who haven't broken these rules of discipline, and yet have achieved nothing at all in their spiritual practice! Why? Because while they may not have lost their semen, they have never cultivated the prajna wisdom of emptiness. Therefore you shouldn't go about trying to forcibly repress, restrain or suppress sexual desires during cultivation. You don't give into them, but you liberate them through emptiness.

You should never give free reign to lustful desires in spiritual cultivation. Don't ever make that mistake, such as saying you should just be natural and follow your inclinations. To succeed in the transformation of jing to chi you certainly mustn't engage in sexual activities, and yet you must accomplish this restraint in a unique spiritual way. Success all has to do with your mind, not just with the act of physical refraining. Mentally, you don't want to curse yourself or feel guilty when sexual thoughts arise because they naturally arise due to our human condition and to the habits of countless past lives previously lived as human and non-human beings. Rather, you succeed in this practice not just by physical restraint, but *by not dwelling* in lust or sexual desire when they arise.

That's the meaning of remaining in natural harmony with the Tao. If you remain in a state of presence, whatever that arises never touches you or even gives you the chance to sink in the hooks of attachment.

Since the Tao is formless, remaining in harmony with the Tao is to give such feelings no mind and to liberate them through mental formlessness. All desires are equally liberated this way, and in being resolved through emptiness, they totally disappear. When sexual desires do happen to arise, then you simply cultivate

³¹ The Complete I Ching, Alfred Huang (Inner Traditions International, Rochester: Vermont, 1998), p. 449.

emptiness so as to let them pass away, and then they will transform spontaneously because transient thoughts, emotions or sensations just cannot stay.

In all of reality no experiential realm can stay, and so neither can sexual desire. No experiential realm can stay because everything is always being transformed at each and every moment. Being transformed, it changes into something else, and so the original state cannot last. That's why both good fortune and bad fortune never last, and why you don't have to push away your thoughts in spiritual cultivation for they will leave you quite naturally.

All you have to do when engaged in spiritual cultivation is bide your time peacefully in the state of "Now! Awareness" without letting sexual desire grab onto you, knowing full well that sexual desires will pass if you don't cling to or mentally abide in that state. This is how you should always conduct your spiritual practice.

This topic is something you must definitely consider when you view aged monks and nuns (of any religious school) with "dried up" or "sunken" faces who through their sheer willpower may have restrained themselves from any sort of sexual activities, including masturbation. They may not have lost their jing because of this forceful restraint, but they certainly have not achieved even the rudiments of true spiritual progress. They haven't achieved any part of the spiritual stage of jing transforming into chi because they failed to cultivate mental emptiness and mental unmindfulness of (detachment from) the physical nature during their practice.

As a result of this failure these practitioners, even though they are "living the holy life," can never give birth to the stage of inner light, or warming, which is naturally to be expected on the spiritual path. What they did was use pressure, strictness and force of will to suppress or deny sexual urges instead of letting the vital forces within have free range to circulate and become transformed. That's why they never achieved any samadhi in their spiritual practice, for they failed to follow the genuine principles of spiritual practice.

Christian priests or monks who practice "giving every thought over to God" so that they achieve a state of selflessness will succeed on the road of spiritual practice. Just as in the Middle Ages, they must practice emptying themselves of selfishness and egoity so that it is only God who is expressed through their actions and behavior rather than their personal "small ego." That's the meaning of the practice of charity and humility in Christian theology. Charity means to give everything over to God, including your thoughts, so that nothing ego-centered remains. Cultivating "humility" meant abandoning selfishness, namely letting go of

ego-centered thoughts to attain emptiness. As John of the Cross wrote in The Ascent of Mount Carmel, "When one is brought to nothing (nada)—the highest degree of humility—the spiritual union between one's soul and God will be actualized."³²

Of course, these are just the Christian ways to describe emptiness cultivation, as are the words "put yourself in the presence of God." The medieval Christian practice of *lectio divina*, which was to read a passage of scripture, reflect upon it and then "rest in the presence of God,"³³ produces the exact same result as well. So in Christianity we have charity and humility practice while in Judaism we have the approach to *ayin*, or nothingness, but it all emptiness cultivation just the same.

Whether you use rosary recitation to quiet the mind and achieve emptiness, whether you use centering prayer, whether you use the practice of *lectio divina*, the entire purpose of the process is exactly the same. As Azriel of Gerona (for Judaism) even said about praying, a true prayer is one where "we have directed the words to the nothingness of the word (*efes davar*) ... You should know that one who prays must push aside every hindrance and obstruction and restore each word [of the prayer] to its nothingness [emptiness] (*afiasato*). This is the meaning of *efes*."³⁴ In the Babad school of Hasidism it is even said, "This is the foundation of the entire Torah: that *yesh* (the apparent somethingness of the world) be annihilated into *ayin*,"³⁵ which means that the purpose of Judaic cultivation is to attain the state of emptiness. Cultivation schools all agree on this approach because it is the standard, nondenominational approach to spiritual progress. We may dress this approach up with the Torah, the Buddhist scriptures, Tibetan Tantra and all sorts of other coverings, but the spiritual path is the same.

Now these descriptions of the Christian path basically ask you to remove things from your mind in order to attain a state of emptiness. Those priests who simply hold onto their thoughts and emotions, however, will never taste this state of spiritual grace but will just remain ordinary human beings dressed up in the garments of the holy. What's the Christian method of cultivating samadhi like? Christianity's Epistle of Privy Counsel tells us,

³² The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism, Daniel Matt, (Castle Books, Edison: New Jersey, 1997), p. 184.

³³ Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel, Thomas Keating, (The Continuum Publishing Company, New York, 1992), p. 29.

³⁴ The Problem of Pure Consciousness, Robert K.C. Forman, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1990), p. 134.

³⁵ The Problem of Pure Consciousness, Robert K.C. Forman, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1990), pp. 133.

This work can well be likened to a ‘sleep’. For just as in sleep the use of our physical faculties is suspended so that the body may have its full rest and replenish its natural powers, so in this spiritual sleep the wayward questionings of our imagination, so undisciplined and fantastic, are fettered and made powerless. Now the blessed soul can sleep quietly and rest in the loving contemplation of God just as he is, and thereby nourish and reinforce its spiritual nature.

So keep a tight rein on your imagination when you offer up this naked, blind awareness of yourself to God. And make quite sure, as I am always saying, that it is naked, and not dolled up in some particular attribute of your being. For if you do ‘clother’ it in some way—for example, with your own self-worthiness, or some other human or creaturely quality—then you will at once feed your imagination, and give it the opportunity and strength to drag you down to trivialities of every kind, chaotic beyond belief. Be on your guard against this trick, I beg you.³⁶

Thus no matter what the religion or spiritual tradition, the method of cultivating emptiness is always the same. If you start down this road of “religious practice,” then your jing will transform into chi and you’ll be able to experience all sorts of spiritual transformation.

If you really cultivate properly so that your jing transforms into chi, then whether male or female your physical body will become soft and warm, your face will become shining, full, and bright, and you will always show a joyous personality and demeanor. All this will happen because you’re always detached from your body, and thus its internal energy currents can flow freely without obstruction and it can thus naturally transform itself into the best possible physical vehicle it can be. In fact, being empty and joyful during this stage, without attaching to the body or other phenomena, *is exactly the proper way to spiritually practice!* Being joyful and free is the proper way to practice because only this state can seamlessly transform into the visaya of the first dhyana.

On the other hand, if a person who’s cultivated for years still has cold or clammy hands and feet, or a rigid and hard demeanor, we can surmise that they haven’t succeeded too well in their cultivation at all. If they’ve cultivated for many years and still have cold and wet limbs, beware of any claims they may make as to any very high stage of attainment. It’s probable that their chi routes haven’t opened

³⁶ *The Cloud of Unknowing and Other Works*, Clifton Wolters, (Penguin Books, London, 1978), p. 179.

all the way through. Then again, having warm hands and feet doesn't guarantee this accomplishment either.

As Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching says, "When people are born they are supple, and when they die they are stiff. When trees are born they are tender, and when they die they are brittle. Stiffness is thus a companion of death, flexibility is a companion of life."³⁷ This aptly summarizes the cultivation teaching that people who correctly cultivate the source of life should, over time, become warm, soft and flexible for if they haven't, then they haven't yet mastered this low level of practice. This is what you should expect about their body, *and their personality as well*. It's also the reason that meditation can end up renewing one's health and vigor.

If for a period of time you are able to maintain an empty mind which doesn't dwell in the discriminatory activities of the "sixth consciousness," it's absolutely for certain that your jing will transform into chi and you'll actually be able to banish disease and sickness from your physical nature. To say it another way, when you return the sixth consciousness to its pure roots, then the direct knowing state of your fundamental nature will become unhindered in revelation, and your body will experience all sorts of natural purifying transformations. This will happen because your jing will transform into chi, your chi will become full, the fullness of chi will eventually open up all the body's chi channels, and then the circulation of the chi throughout these meridians will proceed harmoniously in further transforming the body. Naturally the opening of your chi channels and reactivation of your vital energies is sure to drive internal sickness away.

When this happens the Tao school, and all cultivation schools for that matter, say that your "depleted energy will be restored and lost years will be recovered, the life span will increase and the practitioner will become an immortal." So even if you don't believe in meditation for the goal of spiritual attainments, you should still consider it for health reasons. Meditation will not only produce a more youthful physical state, but beneficial spiritual and mental by-products as well. With cultivation practice you'll end up getting everything with one stroke!

Spiritual practice, you must note, will actually produce the most supreme results for your physical *and* spiritual nature, and the results will be cumulative across lifetimes whereas in the grand scheme of things, the results of physical exercise last only for this one lifetime. Thus there is a famous saying in the martial arts circles that correctly addresses the importance of meditation as compared to physical activity:

³⁷ The Essential Tao, Thomas Cleary (HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco: California, 1991), p. 57.

To learn external martial arts gong-fu without practicing internal cultivation, you will regret this for life. But if you learn internal gong-fu without mastering the martial arts, you will enjoy countless wonderful benefits.

DEVIANT ROADS OF JING AND CHI PRACTICE

There are several extremely deviant forms of practice cultivators sometimes latch onto because they misinterpreted these stages of jing transforming into chi, chi into shen and so forth along the spiritual trail. Most of these deviant practices have occurred because people don't honestly understand what real jing and chi actually are, and so they've mistakenly identified these spiritual essences with their grossest material equivalents and fallen into all sorts of deviant by-roads as a result. For instance, the Tao school says that one should "return the jing to renew the brain," but this is actually referring to shen in the brain rather than to the semen of the physical body. You would die if your semen were somehow drawn into your head. However, people misinterpret this phrase and take it to mean that you should try to forcefully suck or push your jing or chi up your tu-mai (spinal) chi channel, or that you should try to suck the jing and chi from a partner into your own body during sexual intercourse.

To address this common error we must first understand that Taoism, as in Esoteric Buddhism and certain forms of Indian Tantric yoga, has several schools of dual sexual practice. In these schools, people commonly identify jing with semen or vaginal secretions whereas these substances are simply a form of turbid jing rather than the jing essence and vital generative energy which is contained in each and every cell of the body. They don't understand that when sexual thoughts stir inside, that has already disturbed your jing!

This scattering of vital energy is the real scattering of jing rather than just the scattering of semen. Our vital energy is our real elixir, and this is what you don't want to have leaking away. If scattering this jing is already wrong, then leaking jing through nocturnal emissions, masturbation, and so forth is even more wrong. But people only focus on this physical side without realizing that the precepts on discipline--on not leaking jing--apply to the concept of vital energy in total.

When individuals in these side schools are about to reach sexual orgasm, they know that spiritual teachings say you should prevent the loss of jing, and so

they try to suppress their ejaculations in order that they don't "leak their jing." Of course when you try to physically suppress an orgasm or ejaculation over and over again, this type of restraint can definitely lead to health problems. It can lead to an oppressive feeling in the chest, and medical problems involving the prostate and bladder, or even cancer.

The problem goes even further than this in that people are not transforming their seminal jing at all with these practices. Rather, they're just suppressing the transformation of jing to chi and preventing it from coming about. Furthermore, they're concentrating on the coarse seminal jing within the physical body rather than the jing in every physical cell, which is what actually has to undergo the process of spiritual transformation. So they're mistaking a high level concept with its lowest form of physical manifestation.

Another sexual cultivation school mistakenly maintains that men, during sexual intercourse, should try to retrieve the yin forces of women to supplement their internal yang natures. Similarly, women should absorb the yang of male partners to supplement their internal yin chi. Rather than independently striving to achieve an internal balancing of their own internal yin and yang forces, as we see emphasized in the teachings of Nagarjuna's original Esoteric Buddhism, these individuals go looking for ways to steal energy from another person. Thus instead of trying to suppress orgasm or ejaculation, men try to suck energy from their female partners during sexual intercourse and women similarly try to suck energy from their male partners.

This is the mind of stealing rather than the mind of spiritual cultivation, and it doesn't even make any sense in the first place. If you're told you need another's body to make progress in spiritual cultivation, then how can cultivation be anything other than an artificially constructed path? This type of attitude and behavior just doesn't make sense.

This type of mistaken practice is called vajroli yoga, and even the Siva Samhita and Hatha Yoga Pradipika incorrectly teach this sort of thing, which was explained by Robert Svoboda in his Aghora, at the Left Hand of God:

To learn Vajroli you must first thoroughly clean out your body ... The urinary passage is cleansed by sucking water through the penis into the bladder and through the ureters into the kidneys and then releasing it ... After you have been able to suck up water through the penis and hold a bladder full of water for three hours, you proceed to use milk, to cool the genital organs. Then ... clarified butter to lubricate. Honey next; it is very sticky and hard to make flow upward. Finally you do it with mercury, which is extremely heavy ... When you can hold a

bladder full of mercury for three hours without spilling a single drop, you have reached the level of the first qualification [for Vajroli]. A woman prepares for Vajroli in exactly the same way.³⁸

Don't believe everything you read here because mercury, for one thing, is toxic to the body. Aside from that, the topic is something you have to be very careful about. Once again I have to tell you that no Buddha, Bodhisattva or *real* master would ever try to suck energy from another person, even if it was offered. Whenever anyone teaches methods like this, you can be sure they are teaching deviant paths.

The true idea behind the teachings of yin and yang energies is that *you master the yin and yang forces within your own body*, as you often see in the medieval European prints of alchemy topics. When you can balance these internal yin and yang forces through the practice of meditation, which produces an internal uniting of the yin and yang, *then* you can succeed in cultivation. But this balancing is not something you have to try to force into happening, for it happens naturally and spontaneously through the practice of non-effort. In fact it only happens through the practice of no-effort!

This is the true way of Tao *for the Tao is totally natural and would not be the Tao if it involved a secret technique or artificial process*. Theoretically, the Tao should be achievable even if you didn't know about any artificial means of practice at all, and that's why the practice of mental resting—the method of no method—can actually result in the goal of self-realization. This type of practice is the only one that's authentic in a soteriological sense.

While there are all sorts of available artificial cultivation techniques to help you with this or that problem on the spiritual path, the principle of mentally letting go and refraining from attachment is something you must always remember in your spiritual practice. The practice of sucking energy from someone else to supplement yourself is not something natural whereas the Tao is perfectly natural. The Tao embodies the idea of universal compassion and giving rather than taking. All you need do is rest the mind and stay in the present moment, and then all these transformations will occur spontaneously as they should.

The conclusion from these incorrect by-roads and sideways paths is that in considering the transformation of jing to chi, all these schools mistakenly take jing to be the man's semen or female's sexual fluids. They make the mistake of fixating on this specific form of jing when this isn't even the true, purified jing of the road of

³⁸ *The Alchemical Body*, David Gordon White, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996), p. 201.

cultivation. Yes, jing is indeed related to the semen and vaginal-ovarian secretions, but this isn't the "good stuff" or pure jing of the physical body. It's just a form of turbid jing, though undeniably the most noticeable form of jing that we possess in our bodies. You should recognize, however, that the jing sexual fluids are like shit, phlegm, pus, and farts in that they're poisons once released from the body. That being the case, why would you want to suck them from another body into your own?

You can look at the faces of people who try to suck energy from their partners during sexual intercourse and immediately know that it's a wrong method, not to mention a harmful technique. The history of the Tao school is littered with the bodies of people who actually died from this technique. Even if you were successful in using vajroli mudra techniques to retrieve someone else's energy and bring it into your own bladder, consider that from there you still couldn't transform it into chi! And if you believed that the hormones within such secretions would help you, it would be better to just go for a hormone shot rather than to practice a mind of thievery and try to steal someone's life force for your own benefit. Such practices truly land people in the hells; these teachings on internal supplementation by taking energies from another during sexual intercourse can't be anything but evil.

All the practitioners of these pathways are therefore wrong because of either ignorance or incorrect motivation. To succeed in cultivation you need merit, and if the idea is to help yourself by harming another through stealing, then how can you possibly achieve enlightenment in this way? That's certainly not the path of spirituality, and therefore it's certainly not a path with merit that would enable you to end up living longer. As I correctly said, there are many stories of individuals who engaged in these sorts of practices and after researching the stories, you'll find they a consistency in that most died quite horrible deaths with blood streaming out of their eyes, nose or ears. The Wu Liu school of Taoism doesn't actually say that jing is semen, nor do the actual teachings of yoga or Esoteric Buddhism, but unfortunately some people mistakenly take this as the meaning of these schools and then fall into all sorts of "devil's practices" such as this.

Shakyamuni Buddha said that if your jing, chi and shen are not fine-tuned and balanced, then you won't be able to attain samadhi. Hence this underlying process of physical transformation is indeed a necessary process on the spiritual cultivation path, and it will definitely occur when you cultivate correctly. In a word, the hurdle to achieving these spiritual attainments is to triumph over sexual desire. That's why Buddha said in the Surangama Sutra, "If you do not stop sexual desires while you want to attain samadhi, it's like trying to steam sand to make rice. Even if you steam

sand for hundreds of aeons, it will always remain sand." Specifically, Shakyamuni Buddha told his cousin Ananda,

You should teach worldly men who practice Samadhi to cut off their lustful minds at the very start. This is called the Buddha's profound teaching of the first decisive deed. Therefore, Ananda, if carnality is not wiped out, the practice of dhyana is like cooking gravel to make rice; even if it is boiled for hundreds and thousands of aeons, it will only be hot gravel. Why? Because instead of rice grains it contains only stones. If you set your lustful mind on seeking the profound fruit of Buddhahood, whatever you may realize will be carnal by nature. If your root is lustful, you will have to transmigrate through three unhappy ways ... from which you will not escape. How then can you find the way to cultivate the Tathagata's nirvana? You should cut off both the sensual body and mind until even the very idea of doing so ceases; only then can you hope to seek the Buddha's Enlightenment. This teaching of mine is that of the Buddha whereas any other one is that of evil demons.³⁹

What Buddha said is that if you want to use the physical body and the mind of sexual desire to attain the miraculous fruit of enlightenment, it's impossible. The physical body--in fact any body of form--won't take you to enlightenment and sexual desires won't either. There's actually no such thing as spiritualizing lust.

If you want to achieve self-realization, you must cut off the sexual desires of both the body and mind, and you must even go a step further so as to become free of the idea of cutting off sexual desires. It's like forgetting both your body and mind, and then forgetting the act of forgetting so that nothing is left. It's like a fire that burns away impurities, and then burns itself out so that even the fire (as an impurity) is no longer left. That's how prajna wisdom liberates you from defilements, and then abandons itself for the attainment of full liberation.

THE REAL TRANSFORMATION OF JING TO CHI

To truly achieve the transformation of your jing to chi, you have to refrain from both sexual activities (for a short while at least) and the mind of sexual desires which will stir up your hormones, jing and chi. How do you do this, how can you stand this?

³⁹ The Surangama Sutra, trans. by Lu K'uan Yu, (B.I. Publications, New Delhi: India, 1978), p. 152.

By cultivating a mind of emptiness—a mind that detaches from any physical sensations which arise on the path. Whatever you do, you must not fall into the illusive traps of the sixth (discriminative) consciousness, or body consciousness. Furthermore, to truly cultivate the stage of jing transmuting into chi, you must come to recognize what the real jing of the body is.

The real jing, or pure jing, *is found in every cell of the body*, and it includes our hormones and a form of sentient matter—which allows matter to connect with consciousness—that science has not yet discovered. When you can transform *this* jing into chi—which includes all your hormones and endocrine secretions—then there will be no more sickness in your body or mind and you’ll reach a state of pre-cursor samadhi called “ching-an.” So when you accomplish the real stage of jing transforming to chi, at that point you will feel no sickness and no pain both in your body and mind. The body will feel very soft—almost as if your bones no longer exist—which is why Lao Tzu said, “Can you concentrate on the chi and become soft and tender like a baby?”

As the chi starts to spread throughout the body, it’ll definitely feel as if your bones have disappeared. The best way I can describe the feeling is that the body feels like an empty sack with nothing inside. You will still feel the skin of your body as a sort of outer wrapping layer, but the inside of the body feels like it’s entirely missing. It’s really a delightful feeling, and your limbs will immediately become softer and more flexible when you reach this stage of transformation. You’ll also feel what we can describe as a light mental peacefulness when the jing starts being transmuted into chi.

Men who have reached this stage of cultivation practice will often notice their penis spontaneously retracting or their scrotum becoming tighter to mark the fact that the jing is in the process of transformation. For males, a tight scrotum is a typical sign of a very healthy condition.

The stage of ching-an, meaning lightness and peace, is the real stage of cultivation where jing starts transforming into chi, and we’ll discuss it in great detail in the samadhi lesson of this series. At this point of transformation all the cells of your body will become able to breathe because your chi mai will have opened. In addition, the body’s life force will start arising and you’ll be able to almost stop your external breathing by achieving the state that Taoists call “hsi.” Patanjali, of the hatha yoga tradition, correctly notes that hsi, or kundalini, is the point between the

in-breath and out-breath. As the Hatha Yoga Pradipika states, “Just as a door is opened with a key, similarly the yogi opens the door to liberation with kundalini.”⁴⁰

In Taoism, this state of hsi, or kundalini arousal, is also called the state of embryonic internal breathing. It’s also referred to through the phrase, “The absence of fire is called energy” because “fire,” in this sense, means desires. So once again we find reiteration of the fact that it’s the pacified or empty mind which can cause the real chi of the body to arise, and when this initially happens the body’s coarse function of respiration will calm down and then seemingly stop.

This stage of embryo breathing—where you external respiration stops—initiates a stage of tremendous physical transformation wherein your mental busyness will stop, kundalini will arise, and of course your jing will continue to transmute into chi because the real chi will finally blossom forth. Buddha said, “Life is just between the inhalation and exhalation of the breath” to denote this stage of practice, and accordingly the major spiritual traditions all emphasize this stage of physical-spiritual transformation.

When you practice meditation correctly, you will definitely reach this state of external respiratory cessation because when the true chi of the body becomes aroused--which is the true kundalini force or prenatal vitality--then every cell of the body will become able to breathe. As a result there will be less need for the usual activities of coarse external respiration. Furthermore, with your breath being empty, the mind’s discriminative thoughts can now come to a halt as well.

Why will the discriminatory thoughts of your sixth consciousness calm down? Because mind and the “inner breath” of chi are linked; the chi supports coarse thoughts like a horse supports its rider. When therefore your breath, which is linked to your chi, comes to a halt, your ordinary mind of discriminations can come to a halt as well and this is what permits the entry into spiritual samadhi. The two-way causal link between your chi (breath) and thoughts is one reason that mental calming or breath calming practices are traditionally used as exercises in many spiritual traditions.

When you reach this state where your in-breathing and out-breathing seem to cease, then your internal body workings will become more efficient in terms of their oxygen utilization and carbon dioxide output. Oxygen needs will decrease because at this stage of physical transformation, the workings of the body will start to become

⁴⁰ Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Swami Muktibodhananda Saraswati (Bihar School of Yoga, Bihar: India, 1993), p. 375.

more and more independent of anything external. At this stage of spiritual progress the internal workings of the body will really start to open up. They will start to depend more upon the activities of our internal "life energy," or chi, and upon the hormones of our bodies. That's also why you won't feel as hungry as before or want to eat anything at this stage of cultivation because you'll already have everything you need. Thus we can now understand the Tao school's famous saying, "when your chi becomes full you won't think of eating."

You won't be able to achieve this stage of spiritual cultivation unless all your chi mai have already been somewhat opened due to prior meditation practice. If your chi channels weren't somewhat cleared and opened, then you wouldn't be able to reach the point where your external respiration slowed to a seeming halt because the body just wouldn't allow it to happen. That's why you can be fearless when this happens, because the body wouldn't let it happen if it wasn't supposed to happen! Thus now you can be fearless as the kundalini in this stage continues the task of cleaning the chi mai, for as the Hatha Yoga Pradipika of yoga states, "What other methods are there to cleanse the 72,000 nadis of dirt besides the practice of arousing kundalini?"⁴¹

When you reach this stage of cultivation, you'll also start to become able to recognize or verify the existence of all your various internal chi channels and nadi. If you ever previously doubted that these things really existed, then now's the time when you will experientially recognize you were previously in error. This is the stage where you'll discover various chi mai channels such as the tu-mai, jen-mai, and other energy meridians that are spoken of in current acupuncture and yoga texts. You'll also discover other cultivation phenomena as well, such as the chakras and elixir fields. After you reach this point where your jing transforms into chi, next you'll start entering the stage where your chi starts transforming into shen, which is an even more difficult stage to accomplish. That's when you're entering the stage of true samadhi, or genuine spiritual attainment!

Taoism says that it will take an additional ten months of devoted practice, after the initial one hundred days stage of laying the foundation, so as to *fully accomplish* the stage of transforming your jing into chi. The first hundred days is just laying the initial foundation for the transformation of jing into chi, but the total transformation will require about an entire year of practice. That means there is a second stage of jing to chi transformation and it will actually entail some chi to shen transformation as well. Taoism calls this the stage of "pregnancy" because ten

⁴¹ Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Swami Muktibodhananda Saraswati (Bihar School of Yoga, Bihar: India, 1993), p. 402.

months are involved, and this ten-month time period has obvious similarities to the time period required for the gestation of an infant.

The “pregnancy” stage of spiritual practice also has this name because all your chi mai are opening and transforming during this period. In becoming free of obstructions they’re becoming purified, and so at this stage your body is becoming purified and experiencing renewal. Your physical nature is becoming young again so that it starts resembling the body of a healthy baby, and so we can say that you’re creating an entirely new life due to this process of internal renewal.

The final end goal after these various stages of accomplishment, from the Taoist point of view, is being able to “emanate your shen” so that your spirit can achieve an immortal body that can travel the spiritual realms of the universe and congeal into an external physical body of form. But even if you never achieve this stage, your entire body will have become renewed due to this stage of cultivation. In terms of the larger picture of the spiritual path, however, even though these things sound quite wonderful they are still just rudimentary or preliminary stages of spiritual accomplishment. There’s far, far more to go before anyone can reach spiritual enlightenment.

This process of emanating the yang shen, which is the assumption of a tangible form outside the physical body, needs some further explanation. The Tao school explains that when chi congeals it can become form, and when it disperses it can become chi once again. Shen, or spirit, is what guides this process. This is something we previously covered in the explanations that it is shen which gives birth to jing and chi, and so by cultivating your shen through cultivating the emptiness of wisdom awareness, you can therefore accomplish all these transformations.

That’s all it takes—you have to learn how to constantly cultivate the awareness of a moment of mind. So while the path of spiritual cultivation is often described as a process of cultivating one’s jing, and then chi and then shen, it’s more accurately described as a process of cultivating empty awareness which accomplishes all these transformations naturally. The cultivation form schools, like Taoism and yoga, typically describe the spiritual path in terms of the sequences of cultivation gong-fu going forwards, and so people commonly put this main principle aside and push for step-by-step gong-fu advancements rather than focus upon the process which gives birth to it all.

Can we find any stories of yang shen emanations in the world’s religious traditions? Most of the cases of “bilocation” and “body doubles,” such as the stories

of the Christian monk Padre Pio, are definitely cases of the projection of the yang shen. Here are just a few illustrative instances of this sort of attainment from the Hindu tradition:

An army colonel approached the gate of the army camp and found [the master] Maharajji lying on the ground directly in front of the gate. When ordered to move, Maharajji replied that it was God's land and he was with the CID (Central Intelligence Department). The colonel became outraged and told the guards to move Maharajji and jail him in the army stockade. Some hours later the colonel, after having been out, once again approached the gate. Again he found Maharajji lying before the gate. The colonel started to yell at the guards for failing to carry out his orders, but they assured him that they had done as he had directed. A check of the stockade revealed that Maharajji was still there. After that the colonel became a devotee.⁴²

A devotee who was attending Maharajji was once thinking of how Maharajji could be in more than one place at a time. Three times Maharajji said to him, "You go out and see what's going on in the other rooms." Finally the devotee went out into the hall. There were six rooms in the house and he saw Maharajji coming out of every one of them.⁴³

My mother once saw Maharajji in two places at once. She was in Bhumiadhar walking toward him when suddenly she saw another Maharajji, the same as the first. One was sitting on the roadside, the other in the forest. A few moments later, one form disappeared, and she spoke to the "remaining" form of Maharajji.⁴⁴

Once I was having lunch in America with a Nobel Prize winning physicist. He asked me about Maharajji and I proceeded to share a number of stories with him. He found it all fascinating and could allow for the truth of all of it, until I got to the stories of how Maharajji could appear in two places simultaneously. To this the physicist replied,

⁴² Miracle of Love: Stories About Neem Karoli Baba, Ram Dass, (Hanuman Foundation, Sante Fe: New Mexico, 1995), p. 116.

⁴³ Miracle of Love: Stories About Neem Karoli Baba, Ram Dass, (Hanuman Foundation, Sante Fe: New Mexico, 1995), p. 170.

⁴⁴ Miracle of Love: Stories About Neem Karoli Baba, Ram Dass, (Hanuman Foundation, Sante Fe: New Mexico, 1995), pp. 170-171.

“That’s impossible. The basis of physics is that something cannot be in two places at once.”

“But you see,” I said, “Maharajji did it anyway.”⁴⁵

Now before you go jump on a plane and immediately fly to meet someone who can exhibit this sort of attainment, please remember that the achievement of the yang shen doesn’t mean that the individual has attained Tao, or even broken through the skandhas of form and sensation! We could fill an entire book with stories of various monks, masters, sadhus and gods—chosen from a wide variety of the world’s different religious traditions—who accomplished the yang shen emanation and who could project one or more body doubles (including bodies having other physical shapes), but accomplishing the yang shen doesn’t mean that someone has reached the highest stages of samadhi, and certainly not enlightenment. It only means that someone has reached a certain stage of chi-shen cultivation. Nevertheless, it is comforting to know that many religious traditions have stories of practitioners who were able to reach this stage of practice, including even the Zen school.

In the chronicles of Zen there is a famous story of a Chinese monk named Te-shan, who was a popular lecturer on the Diamond Sutra. He was enraged at the new idea being touted in Southern China that Zen was a special transmission outside the scriptures, and set out on a trip to the south with the intent to debate the most famous Zen master of the time and set things straight. On the way to the monastery for this debate, he happened to stop by a tea stall on the roadside being run by an old woman. When he asked for some refreshment, the old woman said that it was free if he could answer her question on the Diamond Sutra. If he couldn’t answer, however, then she wouldn’t give him any refreshments at all.

Te-shan fancied himself a great scholar of the Diamond Sutra, so naturally he consented to this bargain. The woman asked him, “In the Diamond Sutra it says that ‘past mind cannot be grasped, future mind cannot be grasped, and present mind cannot be grasped.’ That being the case, with what mind will you accept (grasp or hold) this tea if I give it to you?”

Te-shan considered himself a great expert on the Diamond Sutra, but was utterly stumped by this simple question, and so he had to go hungry and thirsty. But as a result of this encounter, when he finally did make it to the monastery, his mind was sufficiently humbled and he thereby became open enough to achieve an

⁴⁵ Miracle of Love: Stories About Neem Karoli Baba, Ram Dass, (Hanuman Foundation, Sante Fe: New Mexico, 1995), p. 171.

awakening into the direct nature of the Zen transmission at the hands of the temple’s enlightened master.

Scholars, who know nothing of the expedient means used by the Bodhisattvas and who have no experiences of yang shen emanations, always say that this old tea lady was a Zen expert, which is why she could stump this famous dharma master. Actually—and this is the first time I have spoken of this secret—she was a yang shen emanation of an already enlightened being (to be precise, a “hua-shen” transformation body) who knew the precise time and expedient wisdom way to intervene with Te-shan in order to shatter his beliefs and help this ardent practitioner.

There are many other stories of such events happening in the history of various religions—of heavenly emanations, of Bodhisattva or a particular master’s emanations and so forth—so we won’t go into them here. When spiritual adherents sometimes see a vision in the sky of some religious figure, this is usually a certain lower stage type of projection body as well. Most people who see such things immediately jump to the conclusion that it’s the spiritual body of the holy person in question. However, anyone with a sufficiently high stage of achievement and mind of compassion can project these bodies in various forms that appeal to a particular audience in order to help them. The form they may choose in which to appear will all depend upon their wisdom and skill-in-means that takes into account the karma of the audience.

When people die they also typically see higher stage spiritual beings who can assume the appearance of whatever religious figure the individual has been brought up with, and so this is another example of Bodhisattva compassion to help sentient beings who lack cultivation wisdom. Whether it is an actual Jesus or Krishna or Kuan Yin or another who appears to people upon their death is not the important thing. What’s important is that a higher spiritual being, of whatever true identity, has made an appearance in order to comfort and help a practitioner.

There are other cultivation situations however where it seems like we’re talking about a yang shen cultivation achievement, but which constitute a different phenomenon entirely. It’s easy to get confused on these matters, and so we should turn to a gong-fu demonstration witnessed by Swami Rama to make this clear. What Swami Rama witnessed in the following example may seem like a yang shen emanation, but was actually another of the various types of gong-fu you can cultivate when you finally achieve samadhi:

My grandmaster said, "I am going to give you wisdom. I am going to demonstrate for you." He said he could leave his body and enter someone else's body and then come back to his own body again. He said he could change his body at will. The thought flashed in my mind, "He wants to cast off his body and wants me to immerse it or bury it," but suddenly he said, "It's not that." He was replying to my thoughts. He instructed me to go inside the cave and again check if there was any outlet or hidden door, but I had already lived in that small cave for more than a month, and I thought there was no point in checking the cave again. I did as he ordered, and as I had seen before, it was a small rock cave with only one entrance having a wooden portico outside. I came out and sat under the portico with the lama next to me. He told us to come nearer to him and hold a wooden plate which was like a round tea tray. When we held the tray, he said, "Do you see me?"

We said, "Yes."

In my ignorance I said, "Please don't try to hypnotize me. I won't look at your eyes."

He said, "I am not hypnotizing you."

His body started becoming hazy and that haziness was a human form like a cloud. That hazy cloud human form started moving toward us. Soon in a few second's time, the cloud disappeared. We found that the plate which we were holding started becoming heavier. After a few minutes, the wooden plate again became light as it was before. For ten minutes the lama and I remained standing holding that plate and finally sat down waiting in great suspense and awe for something to happen. After ten or fifteen minutes, the voice of my grandmaster told me to get up and to hold that wooden plate again. When we held the plate, it started becoming heavier and again the cloudy form reappeared in front of us. From the cloudy form, he came back to his visible body. This amazing and unbelievable experience was a confirmation. He demonstrated this *kriya* once again in a similar manner. Perhaps that day will never come when I can speak about this to the world. I would like to do so, because I feel that the world should know that such sages exist and that the researchers should start researching such secret signs. Miracles like this show that a human being has such abilities and in the third chapter of the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali, the codifier of yoga science, explains all the *siddhis*. I do not profess or claim that such *siddhis* are essential for self-enlightenment, but I want to say that human potentials are immense, and as the

physical scientists are exploring the external world, the genuine yogis should not stop exploring the inner abilities and potentials.⁴⁶

This particular demonstration can be compared to the fire and water samadhi attainments, and to the "rainbow body" realization we find so cherished in Tibetan esotericism. The reason we can make these comparisons is because it's basically a demonstration of the mind's ability to control the four elements of the physical nature. Nonetheless, it isn't the yang shen attainment which can instantly appear and disappear at will, coalescing into form and dispersing into chi instantaneously throughout the universe. In other words, it's a gong-fu achievement of the physical body that you can definitely cultivate within the realm of the lower samadhi-dhyana, but it is not a practice that cultivates toward self-realization. In fact, this is an example of genuine gong-fu that can really happen and yet this individual hasn't achieved the Tao.

Lots of dragons and asuras who spiritually cultivate also have this ability, so it isn't anything spiritually unique. If you can dematerialize your body at will, meaning that all its component pieces can be disassembled like this, it certainly means that all your chi channels and chakras are open. If they're all open and can be emptied like this and yet the person still doesn't have Tao, it only goes to prove that Tao has nothing to do with form phenomena!

This particular example does serve to show that the physical body is really composed of immaterial energy, and that if you cultivate the mind and body you can gain tremendous control over the physical nature. Of course most people don't realize that such things are possible, but even those who do know of these things don't realize that it's best to train for them in certain particular environments (such as dry, high altitude locations) because of weather and feng shui conditions. That's why practitioners in certain environments can more easily achieve this type of gong-fu than others; much has to do with the location of the practice rather than the spiritual lineage or tradition.

Now don't think that this is the only way to transport the physical body across vast distances because there is also the yang shen emanation body that you can project to appear in different locations. Furthermore, there are even more advanced yogic gong-fu techniques which simply involve displaying or transporting your real physical body without moving it, and this method is achieved through a sort of space warping.

⁴⁶ Living with the Himalayan Masters, Swami Rama (Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy of the U.S.A., Honesdale: PA, 1986), p. 424-426.

This particular "space warping" gong-fu doesn't involve disassembling the body into component pieces, and is only achieved through very high enlightenment attainments as was demonstrated in the Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra. In that sutra the enlightened layman, Buddha Vimalakirti, invited an incredible number of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other enlightened beings into his small room, and miraculously there was enough space inside his small cell to fit thousands of beings inside without hindrance to one another:

At that time the rich man Vimalakirti said to Manjushri, "You have visited countless thousands, ten thousands, billions of asamkhyas of countries. What Buddha lands have the finest and most beautiful lion seats, those endowed with the best qualities?"

Manjushri replied, "Layman, to the east, beyond countries numerous as the sands of thirty-six Ganges, lies a world called Sumeru Shape. Its Buddha is named Sumeru Lamp King, and he is there now. This Buddha's body is eighty-four thousand yojanas in height and the lion seat (he sits on) is eighty-four thousand yojanas high and adorned in the finest fashion."

The rich man Vimalakirti then exercised his transcendental powers and at once that Buddha dispatched thirty-two thousand lion-seats, tall, broad, adorned, and pure, and had them brought into Vimalakirti's room, where the bodhisattvas, major disciples, Indras, Brahmas, Four Heavenly Kings and the others saw something they had never seen before. For the room was broad and spacious enough to hold all these thirty-two thousand lion seats without the slightest crowding or hindrance. The city of Vaishali and Jambudvipa and the other of the four continents too seemed in no way cramped or inconvenienced, but all appeared just as usual.

At that time Vimalakirti said to Manjushri, "Sit down in one of the lion seats! The bodhisattvas and other distinguished persons should also sit down, but when they do they should assume bodies suitable to the size of the seat."

The bodhisattvas who had acquired transcendental powers thereupon immediately transformed their shapes, making themselves forty-two yojanas tall, and sat down in the lion seats. But among the bodhisattvas who had newly embarked on their course or the major disciples, there were none who could climb up into the seats.

At that time Vimalakirti said to Shariputra, "Sit down in a lion seat!"

But Shariputra said, "Layman, these seats are too tall and wide—we can't climb up in them!"

Vimalakirti said, "Ah, Shariputra, if you will make obeisance to the Thus Come One Sumeru Lamp King, then you will be able to take a seat."

The bodhisattvas who had newly embarked on their course and the major disciples accordingly made obeisance to the Thus Come One Sumeru Lamp King, and after that they were able to seat themselves in the lion seats.

Shariputra said, "Layman, I have never seen such a thing! A little room like this and still it can hold seats as tall and broad as these! And the city of Vaishali is in no way crowded or obstructed, nor are any of the towns or villages of Jambudvipa or of the other of the four continents cramped or inconvenienced, or the palaces of the heavenly beings, dragon kings and spirits!"

Vimalakirti said, "Ah, Shariputra, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas have an emancipation that is called Beyond Comprehension. When a bodhisattva dwells in this emancipation, he can take something as tall and broad as Mount Sumeru and put it inside a mustard seed without enlarging one or shrinking the other, and Mount Sumeru, king of mountains, will still have its original shape. Moreover, the Four Heavenly Kings and the gods of the Trayastrimsha heaven (who live on Mount Sumeru) will not even know or realize where they have gone to. Only those destined for enlightenment will be able to see that Sumeru has been put inside a mustard seed. This is called dwelling in the doctrine of the emancipation Beyond Comprehension.

"Or again, this bodhisattva can take the waters of the four great oceans and pour them into the opening that holds a single hair, without the fish, turtles, sea turtles, lizards, or other sea creatures being in any way troubled, and those great seas will still have their original form. And the dragons, spirits, asuras, and others (who live in the sea) will not know or realize where they have gone to, and these beings will not be at all troubled.

"Or again, Shariputra, this bodhisattva who dwells in the emancipation Beyond Comprehension can slice off the thousand-millionfold world, grasp it in the palm of his right hand like a potter's wheel, and toss it beyond lands as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, and the beings in that world will not know or realize where they have gotten to. The bodhisattva can then bring it back and put it in its original place, and none of the people will have any idea they have

gone somewhere and come back, and the world will have the same shape as before.

“Again, Shariputra, suppose there are beings who want to live in this world for a long time but are qualified to enter enlightenment. This bodhisattva can stretch seven days into a kalpa, so that to those beings they really seem like a whole kalpa. Or if there are beings who do not want to live in this world for long and they are qualified to enter enlightenment, this bodhisattva can squeeze a kalpa into seven days, so that to those beings it seems like only seven days.

“Again, Shariputra, the bodhisattva who dwells in the emancipation Beyond Comprehension can take the magnificent adornments from all the Buddha lands, gather them together, and show them to the beings living in a single country. Or this bodhisattva can place all the beings of a single Buddha land in the palm of his right hand and fly with them all around the ten directions, showing them everything, and yet never move from his original spot.

“... Or he can go down into the lower region, past Buddha lands numerous as the sands of the Ganges, pick up one Buddha land, and lift it to the upper region, above Buddha lands numerous as the sands of the Ganges, as one would lift the leaf of a jujube tree on the point of a needle, and that land will be in no way troubled.⁴⁷

“Or, Shariputra, the bodhisattva who dwells in the emancipation Beyond Comprehension can use his transcendental powers to make himself appear in the body of a Buddha, or the body of a pratyekabuddha, or that of a voice-hearer, an Indra, a Brahma king, one of the Four Heavenly Kings, or a wheel-turning king. Or again he can take all the voices uttered by the beings in the worlds of the ten directions, high, middle, and low-grade sounds, and transform them all into the voice of the Buddha. He can make these voices discourse with the sounds of ‘impermanence,’ ‘suffering,’ ‘emptiness,’ or ‘non-ego,’ or expound all the various other doctrines preached by the Buddhas of the ten directions, and cause those doctrines to be heard everywhere.

“Shariputra, I have just now briefly described the powers possessed by this bodhisattva of the emancipation Beyond

⁴⁷ At one time, one of Shakyamuni Buddha’s students, who was famous for his superpowers, noticed that a city was facing destruction because of its past karma. To try and prevent any calamity from happening, he actually transported the city into the heavens through the method mentioned here. Three days later, knowing that the danger period had passed, he came back to return it to its original position. But after returning the city, he found that its evil karma could not be averted because all the inhabitants had killed themselves through a civil war.

Comprehension. If I were to describe them in full, I could go on for a whole kalpa and never have done."⁴⁸

I have actually seen an example of this warping myself, just as Milarepa demonstrated this power to one of his students during a hail storm by hiding inside an empty conch shell on the ground yet without getting smaller or having the conch shell getting bigger. But the reason I bring up this phenomenon in detail is because I don't want you to get fixated on thinking there is just the one type of "spiritual transportation" I originally mentioned, otherwise you may start to think that all spiritual gong-fu must work according to the transporter principles featured in Star Trek movies.

When you train to gain mastery of the body's four elements, there are all sorts of physical attainments you can achieve such as this. The great Tibetan master Gampopa many times demonstrated the ability to turn his body into a pillar of fire because he had mastered the fire element samadhi, and that type of attainment is a similar offshoot of what we've seen above. It's not the yang shen emanation. Rather, it's just a gong-fu attainment demonstrating mastery of the physical body. To provide even more comparisons for this higher type of attainment, we can once again turn to the Surangama Sutra which records the story of the Bodhisattva Candraprabha, who first entered dhyana through the water element samadhi practice:

When I achieved this contemplation, I succeeded in realizing only the sameness of the element of water (everywhere) but failed to relinquish (my view of) the body. I was then a bhiksu practising dhyana and when my disciple peeped into the room, he saw that it was filled entirely with clear water, without anything else. As he was an ignorant boy, he picked up a broken tile, threw it into the water with a splash, gazed curiously and left. When I came out of my dhyana state, I suddenly felt pain in my heart. ... I thought, "Since I have realized arhatship [realization], I should be free from all causal ailments. Why today, all of a sudden, have I pain in my heart; is it not a sign of my backsliding?" When the boy returned and related what he had seen and done during my meditation, I said: "When next you see water in my room, open the door, enter the water and take away the broken tile." The boy obeyed, for when I again entered the dhyana state, he saw the same broken tile in the water; he then opened the door and removed the tile. When I came out of dhyana, my pain had vanished. Later, I met countless Buddhas before I encountered Sagara-varadhara-buddhi-vikridita-

⁴⁸ The Vimalakirti Sutra, trans. by Burton Watson, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1997), pp. 76-80.

bhijna Buddha (under whose instruction) I succeeded in relinquishing (the conception of) body, thereby realizing perfect union of this body and the fragrant oceans in the ten directions with absolute voidness, without any further differentiation. This is why I was called “a son of a Buddha” and was qualified to attend all Bodhisattva meetings.⁴⁹

As we can see, there are all sorts of samadhi attainments you can master when you set out on the road of spiritual attainment, but most of them belong to the realm of yoga attainments rather than to the gong-fu of enlightenment. Don't make any mistake on this point. As Candrabhadra Bodhisattva pointed out, these achievements aren't the ultimate thing because you must discard the view of the body if you want to achieve enlightenment. That's why all the Zen masters seem so ordinary and don't display anything special at all, for this is the highest form of practice.

This is also why even the rainbow bodies so highly admired in Tibetan Buddhism are ultimately not anything so special. They still belong to the lower stages of gong-fu where people are cultivating form rather than prajna wisdom; the monks who set out to attain these achievements are cultivating physical transformations rather than the self-nature. As Candrabhadra Bodhisattva reminds us, the great Buddhas and Bodhisattvas don't rely on these types of body attainments and so you have to think to yourself, “If they don't rely on these, then these transformations can't represent the ultimate achievement.” If they were the ultimate achievement or if they were quite important, then why did Shakyamuni Buddha rarely discuss them?

Returning to our main dialogue, if you combine the two time periods of laying the foundation (for one hundred days) and pregnancy (for nine months), which involves cultivating your jing and chi, it will roughly require about one year of correct, devoted meditation practice to just start being able to cultivate your shen. That's why yet another sequence revealed by Taoism says that it initially takes *one full year to transform your body's chi, and then another year to transform your body's blood, a third year to transform your mai, four years to transform your muscles, five years to transform your bone marrow, six years to transform your tendons, seven years to transform your bones, eight years to transform your hair, and nine years to fully transform your physical shape and all its internal structures*. These are, in fact, the correct consecutive sequences of physical transformation and the appropriate time periods it takes to achieve them.

⁴⁹ The Surangama Sutra, trans. by Lu K'uan Yu (B. I. Publications, Delhi: India, 1978), pp. 131-132.

From modern science we know that we create a new stomach lining every four to five days, our skin is replaced every month, our liver has the remarkable ability to regenerate itself because its cells are completely turned over every six weeks, the raw material of our DNA is replaced every six weeks, and the atoms in our skeleton are replaced every three months. Even though we have all these figures and yet more readily available, none of this takes into account the time really required to rebuild and rejuvenate the body along the lines of perfection inherent in cultivation science. The transformations required to totally change the body in line with the energies released through cultivation take years, and there is no way to speed this type of gong-fu because it has to occur in an orderly, step-by-step fashion with a minimum period of time required for each stage of transformation.

Of course, these various physical transformations only apply to those who *work hard* at their cultivation *and who cultivate in the proper fashion without encountering any major obstacles*. If you want to achieve these physical changes, you'll need to accumulate sufficient merit and wisdom as I have stressed over and over again. Merit and wisdom are the necessary bedrock of successful cultivation practice. Nevertheless, all sorts of psychic abilities and unusual gong-fu will begin to appear at the very earliest stages of proper cultivation practice which will suggest, but not guarantee, your budding proficiency on the road of spiritual development.

It's important that you mustn't ever get carried away by these signs of cultivation progress when they occur. Small psychic abilities cannot and do not possibly indicate the Stage of Seeing the Tao nor entry into the phase of True Cultivation Practice. Actually, in many cases they actually occur as a sort of illness because your chi mai are obstructed and your chi starts impinging upon the back of the brain. That's one reason some people mistakenly believe that they hear voices inside their head, and why some start to see or know small things about the future. It's because the chi is obstructed in the chi channels at the back of the head, and practitioners start to enter a dreamy state called the shadow side of clear consciousness.

Of course if the chi channels do open up through this region so that the chi can travel through to the brain, it's common for people to start experiencing some minor degree of emptiness. It's not a genuine emptiness at first, but more of a physical-borne emptiness due to the biochemical physics involved when chi flows impinge upon nerves and brain tissue to silence numerous miscellaneous thoughts. Past this stage of initial achievement, you still have to cultivate prajna wisdom in order to attain a genuine state of emptiness and samadhi.

When we read accounts like the following, written by a highly educated cultivation practitioner, we can recognize from this information that the changes he

experienced due to his spiritual practice were a result of the clearing of his chi mai and the subsequent circulation of chi to his head. The new chi flow produced a moderate stilling of his sixth consciousness as well as a variety of physical transformations to his body:

About a month or two later, in January 1972, something else quasi-physical shifted. This was somewhat like the previous change, in that it had a physiological character. But this took place inside the back of my neck. It felt as if a series of tubes running down the back of my neck [the chi mai, or chi channels]—inside the back of my head—also became utterly silent. This transformation started on the left side [the side of the body associated with chi rather than the right side associated with blood]. Over several weeks, one by one, all the activity inside these little tubes inside just ceased. There was a kind of a click of a rapid “zipping” sensation, as the nerve cells or whatever became silent [the chi channels cleared all the way through and chi began to flow without frictional obstruction]. As in the bodily shift, it was as if there had been this very faint level of activity, again somewhat like faint pins and needles, within these tubes running down my neck. They had been a quiet but constant background noise inside my head. But when one of these tubes became silent, all that noise just stopped entirely in that portion of my skull, and it became perfectly translucent. As with the change in my body surface, I had never before noticed the faint activity in my neck. It was just part of what it felt like to be me. I only noticed the interior noise or activity in these tubes in comparison to the silence that “came into” each of these tubes.

One by one, from left to right, these tubes became silent. Each one shifted without warning. It was as if they went *zip*, and then it was absolutely quiet in that area: absolutely no pins and needles, background noise or sensation was there. It was as if these sections of my brain had become a vacuum or transparent. Absolute emptiness inside.

As each one of these tubes or brain sections became silent inside, that section as if disappeared entirely. That is, after, say, the first three had made this shift, they as if joined together, and became one extended silent piece of the back of my head, not three discrete, quiet tubes.

The transformation from one side of my upper neck to the other took several days. I know that because I remember telling several friends about this strange sense of having one side of the back of my head silent, and the rest noisy [only the set of chi channels on one side of the brain had opened up]. It made me a little dizzy, because it felt as

if I was listing over. The left was quiet inside, almost light, the right was noisy.

At the time, I did not know what to make of this shift occurring. I had never heard of anything like this, from my teacher, my reading, nor from anyone else. Nor since this time have I ever met anyone or heard of anyone who has had a shift involving something like these tubes [chi channels]. At first I thought I was getting ill. I wondered if maybe I had cancer or some brain disease which was systematically destroying bundles of nerves. But this did not seem convincing since this was neither unpleasant nor painful, and it had no ill effects.

One by one these tubes continued to become quiet [they became unblocked, so the "noise" of frictional chi flows ceased], from left to right. It took a few weeks for the process to complete itself. Finally the last one on the right went *zip*, and that was it. It was over.

After the last tube had shifted to this new state, I discovered that a major though very subtle shift had occurred. From that moment forward, I was silent inside. I don't mean I didn't think, but rather that the feeling inside of being me was like being entirely empty, a perfect vacuum. Since that time all of my thinking, my sensations, my emotions, etc., has been a silent background. It is as if what was *me* was now this emptiness. The silence was now me, and the thoughts that went on inside have not felt quite in contact with what is really "me," this emptiness. "I" became this silence inside, my thinking has been as if on the outside or somehow in the middle of this silence without quite contacting it. So too, when I saw, felt or heard something, that too has been not quite connected to this silence within me. What is "me" is now this silence; everything else feels somewhat different than this silence within, or a different kind or separate.

It may sound as though I went mad on that day. I know that "separate from everything" sounds very unpleasant, a distancing, or even some sort of mental illness. But this does not strike me as a form of madness. I do not feel emotionally unconnected to things. In fact I feel more "connected" than I used to. And I certainly do not believe that I am psychotic. In fact, I like to think I am fairly well put together. The feeling is not one of psychosis or emotional distancing, but almost like a deep shift toward [a] new sense of what I am. This shift inside now allows me to feel quiet inside, even while I think, act, whatever.

As for external changes, I had told my friends about this tube business as it was happening, so when it was over they were probably looking for some external signs of change. Whatever the reason,

several of them said that for several weeks after this tube thing had ended, I looked unusually happy. That may have been due to the fact that I was happy and excited because this seemed so important. I am not sure how much to attribute to the excitement about this shift, and how much to attribute to the shift itself.

Over the long term however, it is difficult to clearly attribute any particular personality changes to this inner shift. I have the sense that it has made me somewhat freer, allowed me to do things with less effort. But it is hard to know how much to attribute to *just* this change.

The only external change I can directly attribute to this phenomenon was that, immediately following this transformation, my visual perception changed. The day after the last tube had become quiet, there were huge thunderheads in the distance, rolling in over the sea, high and gray-white. When I looked at them over the hills, the whole scene—hills, brush, and white-gray clouds—seemed to be more three-dimensional than ever before. It was as if my vision had more physical depth to it. Perhaps we could say that before I was not the witness to all my seeing, and thus not sure what this new sense of vision "means" or why I experienced it. I have not seen it described in any of the literature. This change was very noticeable. This increased depth in my vision has remained with me ever since that time [we'll see this in another case later involving an individual named U.G., and it was caused by the opening of the occipital region of the brain and transformations in the eye organ itself due to a purification of the form skandha].

It also caused one other change, to my sleep life. Before this time, when I had slept, it had been very hard for me to wake up. But ever since that time, it is as if I do not quite go to sleep. I sleep with most of me, I feel, but this quiet part, this part that doesn't change, does not sleep. And so when I sleep it's as if I'm not entirely asleep. This significant change this has brought is that first, I need less sleep than I had. I am not certain that I can attribute this to just this shift. But the second I can: it takes virtually no time for me to wake up, either in the morning, or when one of my children comes into the bedroom in the middle of the night. It is as if I hear him or her walk into the room, and I am already awake. That is actually a pretty useful aspect of this experience: I am just ready for things, even at the depths of sleep [because of a partial transformation of chi to shen].⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness, Robert K.C. Forman, (SUNY Press, Albany: New York, 1999), pp. 141-144.

This yin aspect of our clear consciousness sometimes results in psychic impressions, and sometimes it gives rise to mental aberrations. Both of these possibilities are problems on the cultivation trail, and they're not typically solved until the chi mai at the back of the brain open up to allow the chi to pass through them without obstacles. Most people who are going through this particular stage of transformation usually feel some sort of pressure or other sensations at the back of their head due to the chi flows impinging on the area. Some people don't feel any sensations at all, but do develop these minor psychic impressions. Others pass through both these stages without incident, such as with this practitioner, and thereafter experience a minor stage of “physical emptiness” due to the new chi flows interacting with consciousness. With further cultivation, the resultant emptiness that is experienced can be transformed into a wisdom or cultivation emptiness. That's a stage involving further chi transformation and detachment along with the transformation of chi into shen.

THE REAL TRANSFORMATION OF CHI TO SHEN

The next stage of cultivation--where your chi begins transforming into shen—is a process that focuses on the region of the brain, and this is an area of the body where the chi mai are very difficult to open. To have chi transform into shen means, at its core, that you open up all the chi channels in the brain. It's only when you truly open up the chi channels in the brain, including the set of twelve cranial nerves, that you'll really attain superpowers of the genuine type. Before you complete this stage of attainment, you'll often feel headaches. After you open all these chi channels, however, your head will always feel empty and clear.

Most people use less than one percent of their brain capacity but when you open up all the chi channels in the head, then you'll finally be able to utilize your whole brain at which point your wisdom and superpowers will become immeasurable. You'll break through the limits of the normal worldview you've constructed throughout your life due to normal sensory stimuli, and totally break through what psychology calls “premature cognitive commitments.” You'll begin to free yourself from the realm of form and start to abandon attachments to the egoistic “five perspectives” that bar people from becoming enlightened.

What are these five perspectives? They're the sticky mental attachments of clinging to the body as the self, of clinging to rules and rituals as the path of spirituality, of clinging to extreme one-sided views, of clinging to false or misguided

views, and of holding biased views which means to take your own opinions as supreme and ignore anyone else's.

People don't realize just how much their sensory perceptions determine their worldview. As an example, in this century a famous experiment was conducted where kittens were brought up in one room decorated only with horizontal stripes, and another batch was raised in a room only with vertical stripes. When they grew up to be adults, these cats could not see anything other than the horizontal or vertical worlds to which they had become accustomed. They had not developed the neuronal connections in the brain to make the other vertical or horizontal world a perceptual possibility.

In life we commonly blind ourselves with this same type of perceptual commitment, especially due to religious indoctrination or the scientific indoctrination that only some particular theory is right. In this way, we not only blind ourselves from the truth but also severely limit the horizons of what we will allow ourselves to experience. There are certain types of fish which, when separated from each other by glass partitions in an aquarium, will also demonstrate this perceptual error. Even after their partition is removed, they still commit to a world that is only as large as their now-gone partition previously allowed, which demonstrates the same type of mental patternings we also impose upon ourselves.

In life people commonly construct for themselves a certain type of cognitive reality, a certain world of form with conceptual boundaries which they never go beyond, and our nervous system learns to reinforce whatever it is that we've accordingly structured. Thus it's very painful when we finally start working on opening up the cranial nerves and neuronal connections that have played a part in forming our solidified worldview. If we can accomplish this, however, then we can become mentally open, detached and free of prejudice whereas other people will remain constrained by their habits, past environmental imprintings, and by their body sensations.

This is why a cardinal rule of cultivation is to forget the physical body and its sensations. You have to forget that you carry a body at all, and you have to stop viewing the world as if you were a body or self! You have to detach from the body and recognize the bodiless awareness that appropriates the physical nature as simply one of its functions. And the only way to do this is to cultivate an empty mind state of presence.

Now when you finally open up the head region through meditation, you'll definitely become young again. You'll be able to see the world in ways other than how you've been previously programmed—including by social, cultural and religious indoctrination—and will become mentally accepting of all sorts of experiences that you'd normally close yourself to because of the naturally constricting processes of age and prior conditioning. Of course we're not just talking about going past social conditioning here, because when you open up the head you'll acquire all sorts of psychic abilities as well. At this stage of spiritual transformation you'd truly be renewing your brain as well as the mental processes that close down and deteriorate because of age.

Most people in the world never cultivate, and so they never make any progress towards opening up the chi channels of the brain. Thus by the time they reach middle age their mental powers have already started becoming weaker. As time goes on, it becomes harder and harder for them to ever break free from these ever more increasing limitations. That's one of the reasons older people have trouble dealing with change, for their minds just aren't open enough to accept anything new whereas the people who cultivate to open up the brain can break through these various barriers and always remain flexible. Yet before this happens, cultivators will often experience painful headaches or feel very uncomfortable in this region when the chi is working to open up these mai.

Of course you shouldn't jump to the conclusion that experiencing headaches indicates you're transforming your chi into shen, for headaches can be caused by food allergies, emotional problems, and all sorts of other causes. In most cases for cultivation practitioners who've somewhat opened their chi mai, headaches are usually caused by what Chinese medicine calls a "wind invasion" of the head. So if you haven't previously manifested the signs of jing transforming into chi as well as the previous signs of ching-an, to jump to the conclusion that you're opening up your brain channels and therefore suffering headaches would be just kidding yourself.

It's typical that people fervently desire cultivation progress to the extent that they usually assume they're at a much higher stage of accomplishment than actually exists, but this sort of conclusion would really be taking things to extremes. What I must emphasize is that it's really extremely difficult to open up the twenty four cranial nerves (two sets of twelve) in the head region, but when you do this they start acting as a set of mini-antennae that can allow you to know many different types of things across the universe.

Hearing this however, don't overemphasize the importance of the physical brain because the brain organ is only a component of our body consciousness. It's still only a portion of our physical nature, an experience of the aggregate of form. From the standpoint of cultivation, the physical organ of the brain is only a switchboard for the omnipresent mental functions of contact and feeling, and our discriminatory sixth consciousness isn't fixed in the region of the head at all. It's not constrained within the body, or confined within the body. In actual fact, it's non-local. It's everywhere, but people who study science and even the Consciousness-Only School of Buddhism always make this mistake.

We all concentrate our thinking mind in our head due to incorrect habits, but as Buddha correctly taught, *the sixth consciousness is not fixed in the head!* In fact, modern neuroscience has finally caught up with Buddhism and agrees with this conclusion, for its current view after loads of research is that "the brain alone does not have cognition, does not cognize, but it has the capacity to function, and its function is this illuminating element that allows consciousness."⁵¹ In other words, it's not the brain that causes consciousness. Rather, the brain is simply a type of switching apparatus that allows the function of consciousness to connect with the physical nature. As to the exact means behind how this happens, you have to cultivate to find out for yourself.

I'm cheating when I tell you ahead of time that the mind does not reside in the physical body. Rather, we purposefully restrict it there out of habit, and thus we remain in the state of nonenlightenment although self-realization is always right there. When we can break the strictures of habit, that's when we can finally make progress toward achieving the prajna wisdom that will lead us to seeing the Tao. That's why breaking free of the five ego perspectives gets us halfway toward seeing the Tao. How do we do finally cultivate the wisdom that's necessary for seeing the Tao? By letting go of the body, by cultivating body unmindfulness, by turning awareness away from sensations and seeking the empty source of knowing. If we abandon the view of having, holding or being a body, and let go of our thoughts so that our mind is everywhere, then in very short time our wisdom will grow like a bonfire and we'll be able to make fantastic spiritual progress. That's the method, but the habit of clinging is very hard to break.

As to the gong-fu involved in opening up the brain, if you can't achieve this gong-fu yourself then there is really no way to explain it to you because you couldn't possibly understand. In fact, many people would use any explanations I provided to

⁵¹ Two Views of Mind: Abhidharma and Brain Science, (Christopher deCharms, Snow Lion, Ithaca: New York, 1998), p. 106.

cheat both themselves and others, and so there is a necessity for brevity on this particular point of cultivation even though it only corresponds to a very low stage of achievement.

What I can say is that this stage corresponds to some of the processes involved in the prayoga stage of the peak (also called the summit) in the Mahayana Path of Preparatory Yoga Practices, and is also the point where you "return your jing to renew the brain." Thus it's a stage where the chi truly begins transforming into shen, and where you have started to enter the realm of the miraculous.

When we talk about these preliminary stages of successfully transforming the chi and mai of the physical body in spiritual cultivation, they all ultimately come down to transforming the region of the brain. Furthermore, you can only do this through meditation rather than through ingesting special minerals, drugs, herbs or nutrients or by using any of the advanced electro-devices people are currently inventing as adjuncts to higher mental development. As to the specific details involved in this set of transformations, all I can say is that at the point when your chi successfully transforms into shen, then you will be able to connect with the entire universe in a most miraculous fashion. Otherwise your mental powers will always be confined to, or constrained within your brain as it is with normal everyday individuals.

A conclusion you should naturally reach from this review is that despite all the popular self-help courses you might attend on this topic, you can never truly utilize the full inherent capacity of your brain power unless you open up all your chi mai in your head, and you can only do that through imageless (formless or emptiness) meditation. That's what will give you all the special paranormal abilities and wisdom attainments that people always long for whereas playing with your chi and mai won't do this at all. That sort of play may trick you into thinking you've got superpowers, but they're not the real thing. As to the specific details, the Zen and Esoteric master Nan Huai-Chin notes,

Very few can achieve genuine rotation of the river chariot [a certain Taoist stage of cultivation] and circulate *ch'i* among the eight extra meridians [of the body]. Even fewer really understand the stage of separation and unification of body, mind and the origin of Nature. Therefore, even if one sincerely wants to teach this, a student with the ability to receive this supreme instruction is rare. After this stage, a person goes beyond earthly things and enters into the metaphysical realm. Even if a teacher wished to describe this in detail, a student with

the wisdom and experience to receive these instructions beyond the realm of the human world would be exceptional.⁵²

At this stage, the Wu Liu school of Taoism talks about finally being able to “emanate your shen” or “send forth the yin shen (yin spirit)” when you reach the stage of chi transforming into shen. This at first is a “yin shen” emanation body which, with more advanced cultivation practice, can later develop into the yang shen body that has a tangible form when desired. The common stories, found in many traditions, of a spiritual master appearing in two places at once (bilocation) are examples of the yang shen emanation.

Even animals can cultivate to achieve the yin and yang shen attainments as is also attested to in the stories of many spiritual traditions. This is also something you’re likely to personally encounter as you climb past a certain rank of the spiritual path. But since their physiology is different, their means of cultivation differs from humans as well. For instance, in order to be able to assume the shape of a human being, as fox spirit stories often recount, foxes need to practice their yang shen emanation skills using a human skull. Dragons, on the other hand, need only sufficiently cultivate their chi and mai, especially in the region of the head. Because dragons have a difficult time transforming the chi channels in their heads, it’s very easy to spot them when they assume human form if you develop the ability to feel or see the chi channels in another body.

For human beings, the yin shen attainment is similar to the “astral body” spoken of in New Age texts, the “dream body” we experience within dreams, the “du-yin trance body,” the “bardo stage body” (intermediate yin body) experienced after death, the “inner chi” body (kosha) of Hindu yoga, or the “illusory body” attained through the visualization methods of Tibetan esotericism. Don’t look to make a one-to-one correspondence between these various phenomena, however, for there are definite differences between each of these different types of manifestation. For instance, the yin shen emanation is much clearer and more distinct than the dream body, and is more controllable as well. What we can say, in terms of commonality, is that these bodies are invisible to the uninitiated, and all can be attained at various stages or through various means of spiritual cultivation practice.

In yet another scheme of delineating progress on the spiritual path, the emanation of one’s shen can be roughly compared to the stage of cultivating through the skandhas of form and sensation, but this is true *if and only if* the individual has

⁵² Tao and Longevity: Mind-Body Transformation, Nan Huai-Chin, trans. by Wen Kuan Chu (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1991), p. 79.

other special accompanying spiritual attainments as well. Therefore, you shouldn't be so presumptive as to identify the yin spirit emanation with this much higher accomplishment as we are normally wont to do in spiritual practice. In fact, there are some people who practice Taoism or yoga and think that emanating your shen is the ultimate goal of practice, but from the standpoint of enlightenment we can say that it's only equivalent to achieving the state of a ghost (because it's only the result of cultivating your chi)! You can even achieve these various sorts of emanations without truly mastering even the first or second dhyana, so you must be careful about making grand conclusions about these small matters.

There are many books published today involving the fact that people can experience their yin shen leaving their body without them having cultivated these various stages of spiritual progress. For instance, it can occur as a result of physical or mental illness, during particularly stressful situations, in a medical emergency, or in a near death experience. After people have a near death experience, for instance, its chi circulation often improves because their chi body was able to detach from its physical nature, and with that often comes attendant powers. This is why, upon returning, such individuals sometimes experience clairvoyance, healing powers and future out-of-body experiences. However, these abilities usually constitute coarse low level phenomena and are not the proper means of spiritual cultivation.

Because the yin spirit can leave the body when the connection between the mind and body grows weak, the projection of the yin shen can happen spontaneously for some physical natures in spite of the lack of any previous cultivation experience. Does that therefore mark it as a true spiritual attainment? Of course not. In fact, if it happens frequently it can even be very detrimental to one's spiritual progress, and it is not encouraged! One shouldn't therefore jump to conclusions and consider this the same achievement as the Buddhist description for breaking through the skandhas of form and sensation.

The only thing that these projection experiences prove is that we all possess an inner body of chi that can be guided by our shen. Cultivation science goes one step further to state that this inner body can be further cultivated so as to become an outer tangible body activated at will. In some cultivation schools you are told to cultivate this yin emanation specifically, and yet other schools do not emphasize it but simply mention that it spontaneously occurs.

Even though this type of body may seem more real than your physical body, if you ever identify this emanation as your true self, then you're really off the true path of cultivation. It, too, is simply another body of form. Unfortunately, this sort of

mistake is where Taoist practitioners commonly go astray, and where countless Hindu masters go wrong as well. This is still just another type of spiritual body—and there are yet other higher bodies we haven’t mentioned--whereas the true self is formless. So anytime someone achieves a higher stage “body” on the path and then identifies with it as the self, they’ve made a cardinal error on the road of cultivation.

There are many situations on the road of cultivation, such as with the yin shen emanation body, where different spiritual schools end up using a very similar vocabulary but are actually describing very different spiritual phenomena, and of course this can lead to confusion as well. There are also cases where entirely different sets of vocabulary are used to describe the same cultivation phenomena without this commonality becoming readily apparent. For instance, the Kshurika Upanishad of Hinduism states, “As a migratory bird, imprisoned by a net, flies up toward heaven after the threads of the snare holding it captive have been cut, so the soul of the adept, liberated from the bonds of desire by the knife of yoga, escapes forever from the prison of samsara.”⁵³ This may appear to mirror Buddha’s description of breaking through the skandha of sensation, but the two passages represent entirely different phenomenon.

To be perfectly honest, Buddha’s simile of a bird escaping its cage to denote freedom from the sensation skandha refers to a mental state wherein the subtle, incessant clinging to all our emotions and physical sensations is finally abandoned. It refers to a tremendous mental freedom rather than some sort of illusory or yin shen body. Whether a master today cultivates the first, second, or even the third dhyana, he is still usually clinging to the sensation skandha. He usually incorrectly cultivates his samadhi by forcefully holding to the habit of sensory contact, and so in error he usually measures his success by noting the sensations of the body. It’s this habit of contact—of identifying with body sensations and taking form to be the self—which actually prohibits the advancement of true spiritual progress.

As yet another example, there are other schools of Taoism that use the words “po” and “hun” in order to represent projections of your chi and shen. With ordinary people, the chi and shen are not unified, and so the most ancient texts of Taoism said that people have separate po and hun spirits. Those who cultivate successfully, however, can indeed recognize their chi and shen and the fact they become unified through the process and practice of spiritual cultivation.

⁵³ Yoga and the Hindu Tradition, Jean Varenne, trans. by Derek Coltman (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1976), pp. 67-68.

There are even people, such as witch doctors, shamans and chi-gong practitioners, who can use their chi and shen to perform special paranormal abilities. They can do this because they've cultivated one of the Desire Realm samadhi that are prior to the first dhyana. If you search the Buddhist sutras you'll find that Shakyamuni Buddha mentioned four samadhi prior to the first dhyana, and that's where a lot of these powers come from. There's the (1) Desire Realm samadhi, the (2) Not reached samadhi samadhi, the (3) Intermediate (Middle) samadhi, and the (4) samadhi that is similar to samadhi. The real first dhyana is not that easy to attain, so you shouldn't talk about the four dhyana so casually.

The Russian monk Rasputin is an example of someone in this category who could play with his chi and shen and use them to do paranormal tricks. Lots of chi-gong (qi-gong) people do the same thing, and so can some martial artists. Such individuals can utilize their own dirty, polluted chi to perform special tricks, and because their shen is strong some can even utilize low level spirits or ghosts to perform certain tasks for them. This low-level mastery of chi or shen is one reason why witch doctors and shamans can sometimes accomplish paranormal feats. None of these activities involve the ultimate truth, however, but they do serve to point out that there are many deviant roads of cultivation practice that can lead to all sorts of strange phenomena. The really sorry thing is that most of these individuals don't know how they can perform their supernatural feats, and in particular don't even realize that they are on a wrong road of practice.

A common phenomenon can be arrived at through different sources, so always be careful of your assumptions and refrain from jumping to conclusions regarding spiritual matters. Nostradamus, as another example, was someone who could see parts of the future because he was somewhat to a first dhyana attainment, and yet in terms of cultivation, you can also say that his cultivation went astray. Nevertheless, his skrying was able to produce results because he was indeed able to tap into the powers of the mind. As to why he could see the future in the first place, and why he had to rephrase what he saw, these are explained in my other book on how you can change your karmic fortune and destiny.

As to the "thought-born body" mentioned by Buddhism, which is an attainment gained when you break free of the skandha of sensation, we must remember that this is a very different thing than the yin-shen emanation achievement. Buddha said that when you break free of the pulls of the senses, "It's like the end of a nightmare. Your mind detaches from the body. When you look back at your face, you are free to go or stay without hindrance. This is called breaking through the skandha of sensation."

Though it sounds very similar to the yin shen attainment, we have to say--without discussing the other gong-fu involved—that it is a much more advanced phenomenon than the yin shen emanation mentioned in Taoism. This differentiation is due to the fact that the thought-born body has many more capabilities, is completely under your control, and corresponds to other more highly advanced cultivation attainments involving detachment. To confuse the yin shen with the thought-born body would be to mistake a semblance dharma for the real thing, and yet if no one told you this, there would be no way for you to know because the descriptions sound so similar.

The yin and yang shen emanation bodies are much more capable than your physical body but their degree of capability hinges entirely upon your stage of prajna wisdom. As for the yin shen alone, when it initially is born you can't let it travel very far because you can't control it very well, and thus there are all sorts of dangers involved in letting it go astray. If you let the yin shen or the yang shen travel very far at a time when your physical body isn't being properly protected, you can even return to find that your physical body has been buried or cremated. That's when you'll unfortunately land in the dilemma of having to find a new physical body you can use. Various stories from both India and China tell of certain masters who projected their spirit to travel the cosmos, and had to search for new bodies upon their return because their students failed to properly protect their empty physical shells.

Before a practitioner develops the full ability to travel the spiritual realms with their shen, the initial stage of chi to shen transmutation is very critical, and can easily be interrupted. Because it's a quite fragile stage of attainment that can be lost through a variety of reasons, this cultivation stage involves the task of carefully guarding the immortal (yin shen) fetus carefully. Thus this particular stage of cultivation is called the stage of "suckling the baby."

Another reason for the name of this spiritual stage is to remind you that you need the equivalent of a mother's vigilance over her baby in order to successfully progress past this stage of attainment, for it's very easy to lose it. Thus we have a great necessity for protecting the chi to shen transformation, and this stage is therefore called the stage of "suckling the baby." While the chi is still transforming to shen at this stage, it's actually the beginning stage of the transmutation of shen into emptiness. Most masters, when they're ready for this stage of attainment, actually seclude themselves in the mountains for a three-year period of retreat. That's how long it will take for this transformation to really complete itself.

As stated, this special achievement of being able to master your shen emanation, which is “attaining the yin shen,” is found in a variety of cultivation schools. One need only glance at collections of alchemical pictures from Medieval Europe to see that this same stage of spiritual achievement exactly matches what is taught in the Eastern traditions.

Another point you must note is that perfecting or mastering this stage of achievement requires real patience and forbearance because the maturing process requires a long time to reach stability. Taoism, in fact, says it takes approximately three years of continuous cultivation practice for the yin shen attainment to transform into a yang shen attainment, and that’s where *patience and forbearance* come into play. In Buddhism we therefore have a stage of intensified yoga practice called “forbearance” whose characteristics roughly but not exactly correspond to these Tao school specified achievements.

Naturally my discussions can’t possibly mention all the particular intricacies of these stages of achievement with their correspondences, nor reveal all the other various phenomena possible at this level of practice. They’re only geared to portraying the general outlines of this particular spiritual scenario which is the stage where you’re cultivating the transformation of chi into shen.

In Buddhism, the stage of fully transforming your chi to shen is something that could definitely be achieved within the realm of the second dhyana attainment, although of course it can be partially achieved at lower levels still. As to the first dhyana, it’s possible to attain it if you work at successfully transforming your jing into chi through the practice of emptiness meditation accompanied by the discipline of no-leakage. As for the stage of transforming shen into emptiness, this is the major goal within the realm of the third—and to some extent fourth—dhyana achievements. As to the fourth dhyana, in this realm you can totally abandon all thoughts so as to become truly pure and clear, so this is really a spiritual stage wherein you’re able to cultivate some true emptiness, or true selflessness and non-ego.

Another way of saying this is to describe it from the opposite angle, meaning that in the fourth dhyana you’re working on wiping out the concept of having a self in order to free your heart from all disturbances. If you cultivate emptiness sufficiently, then you’ll even forget emptiness and experience the Tao, which is a pure experience of the true nature of your being. That’s when your prajna wisdom understanding becomes fully alive wherein you can truly awaken to the path.

As to the Taoist stages of “pregnancy” and “suckling the baby,” it’s true that you’re working on cultivating your chi and shen in these stages. However, you mustn’t jump to the conclusion that by successfully cultivating your shen, and thereby attaining the yin shen (or even yang shen) attainment, that you have therefore reached the second or third dhyana. That’s because you can always go down a side trail to produce these attainments without truly reaching the more advanced states of meditative concentration. Furthermore, you mustn’t take the various Taoist time frames necessary for transforming the body and connect them with any definite time period requirement for attaining the dhyana concentrations. The Taoist time periods are largely concerned with the gong-fu attainments of the physical body that can only happen as fast as nature allows, whereas your prajna wisdom attainments can quickly outpace these various physical transformations. With great prajna wisdom you can produce many mental achievements well in advance of the standard time periods required for the physical cultivation path.

While the samadhi and dhyana attainments do indeed involve transformations of the physical nature, namely the production of certain specific states of physical bliss, they are actually defined mostly in terms of mental attainments. That’s why they are called “states of concentration” or “mental absorptions” rather than stages of physical transformation. All that Taoism has done is catalogue the various physical transformations and physical characteristics that typically accompany these advanced spiritual states, which is something you find in the school of Esoteric Buddhism as well.

The physical body always undergoes transformations in a step-by-step fashion that matches the progress made in achieving higher mental states, but all these various forms of physical gong-fu require years to attain, even if you become enlightened. In other words, even if you become enlightened, it will require years for your physical nature to become fully transformed because there is very little you can do to rush the process. For someone with great prajna wisdom, however, the mind attainments can be achieved quite quickly.

Twenty five hundred years ago, Shakyamuni Buddha had no access to China or the terminology the Chinese used for their spiritual traditions, yet he also talked about this practice of emanating the shen so as to “become an immortal” and live an extremely long life. For instance, in the Surangama Sutra he introduced many special types of gong-fu phenomena and particularly commented upon ten classes of Indian seers, or immortals. These cultivators can live extremely long lives because they have reached this stage of being able to constantly renew their bodies.

They can do this because they’ve achieved some degree of being able to transform their chi into shen.

Why can these rishis live extremely long lives in the human realm, perhaps for thousands of years? Buddha said it’s because *they can solidify their false thoughts*, which was his way of referring to shen! Buddha said that such individuals incorrectly cultivate an advanced state of mental concentration, and by holding onto that concentration, they can in turn live earthly lives of indefinite length. In other words, they don’t cultivate the correct spiritual awakening. They don’t cultivate samadhi correctly but they can produce this physical result and accomplish this feat because of their gong-fu accomplishments.

Even though certain cultivation practitioners can attain this accomplishment, remember that it still doesn’t constitute the Stage of Seeing the Tao. It still isn’t enlightenment to your real fundamental nature. Basically it’s largely a physical gong-fu attainment, and so it’s not a stage of accomplishment which will free you from the cyclical rounds of birth and death, or purify your mental habits and desires. As a result, Shakyamuni Buddha spoke of these individuals and warned his attendant Ananda, “There are people who practice certain way-ward meditation trails. They cultivate their false thoughts and can solidify them into form. Basically they’re cultivating their mind but they don’t have the correct view [because they lack prajna wisdom]. Because of their cultivation method they can thereby live extremely long lives, but their cultivation is not correct.”

Take a moment to step back and realize what Buddha was saying. Here are these people who can practice meditation, attain all sorts of superpowers and live almost endless lives. Definitely they’re obtaining some type of spiritual result, or fruit, otherwise they wouldn’t be able to do these things. In spite of their results, Buddha said quite clearly that *their cultivation is incorrect*.

All these various practices *belong to the category of “cultivating life” instead of cultivating the self-nature*, and thus they are not the complete pathway to Tao. These practices may certainly lead to spiritual accomplishments--meaning they’ll produce certain definite and undeniable end results--but they won’t lead to the accomplishment of self-realization in themselves. For the same reason, there are even those (in Tibet) who have succeeded in cultivating the “rainbow body” of Esoteric Buddhism, but this is still only a stage of cultivating life rather than cultivating to see the self-nature. It’s still only an accomplishment at the lowest spiritual rank of the skandha of form! Thus even this accomplishment, which many in

the Tibetan tradition mistakenly consider an extremely high attainment or even the end of the cultivation trail, must still be considered an “outside path.”

To seek for this type of attainment does *not* correspond to seeking for enlightenment into the fundamental nature of self and phenomena. And why not? *Because it's looking for the Tao outside of the mind!* With these warnings in mind, be careful as to where you may waste your many years of cultivation efforts because Tao does not lie in body or form or phenomenal attainments. You can indeed turn a rod of iron into a pin by rubbing it down for twenty or thirty years, but to seek such a small gain from so great an effort would constitute a colossus of stupidity

While the body gong-fu attainments can be important milestone markers or spiritual achievements on the cultivation path, they're not all important because they're still just impermanent achievements. If you don't achieve the Tao, then even if you attain the yang shen achievement, then after a very long time you are still bound to lose it.

There are also many other types of bodies you could cultivate on the spiritual trail but I won't go into these because the Diamond Sutra warned: “Tao is nowhere to be found in any type of form! If you start seeking the Tao in any form, sound or appearance, you're on a false road of attainment.” Thus cultivating the path to enlightenment means *you must abandon the idea of possessing any body at all, and this is the very foundational requirement for spiritual practice*. In meditation training, you have to learn how to detach from your body and disassociate from all the sensations it gives rise to because this is the only way in which to detach from its chi flows and coarse thought.

Most people never succeed at cultivation because they always identify with the sensations produced by the physical body, and never learn to dissociate from them. As the great Jewish sage Maimonides said in his Guide to the Perplexed, “The multitude cannot at first conceive of any existence save that of body alone; thus that which is neither a body nor existent in a body does not exist in their opinion.”⁵⁴ That's why people think of God as a person, and why it's hard for common people to realize that the body and its sensations—even one's thoughts—are not the true self. A true master who learns this, however, can happily suffer any bad fortune if it arrives, knowing that it is not the true individual and knowing that it will go away. If he cannot change it, he can simply let it play its course and then move on. This is

⁵⁴ The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism, Daniel Matt, (Castle Books, Edison: New Jersey, 1997), p. 165.

the proper way to cultivate, especially when it comes to the body whose sensations are like a shadow or dream.

No matter how long they may last, nor how painful they may feel, the body sensations we feel due to the body consciousness will always change and be replaced by others. They are effervescent. They are not the true self and never touch that true self which knows them, but which isn't even the thought that knows them. The true self is that *real one* which knows all the things produced by the body, but which is actually separate from the body. The body may be in pain, but that true one is never in pain. It's never in pain because it is separate from this illusive body. Just as the Bible says, “Like a weaned child is my soul within me.” (Ps 131:2)

Just as the size of a window frame conditions the size of any view you can see from it, in order to experience true emptiness you have to abandon the view of the body in order to arrive at an experience of the unconditioned. If you substitute one form for another, however, then you're still involved in the lowest levels of spiritual cultivation. You cannot cling to the body, or sensations, or emotions, thoughts, conceptions, light, awareness or anything else because the real mind—the real you—knows them all as just flowers floating in the sky. That's the rule. In cultivation you must always practice the discipline of no-effort and no-clinging when it comes to jing, chi, shen or any other spiritual substance. So even when you successfully reach the stage of cultivating your shen, you shouldn't cling to any of the results it can produce.

THE REAL TRANSFORMATION OF SHEN INTO EMPTINESS

If you want to continue cultivating properly so that your shen becomes full and reaches the next spiritual stage of matching with true emptiness, this constitutes an even more advanced level of spiritual refinement. In light of the difficulty of this achievement, even the physical correspondences to this stage require many years of continued cultivation practice.

This stage of spiritual cultivation is usually called “facing the wall” in deference to the famous Indian Zen master Bodhidharma and his own Zen spiritual practice in China. Bodhidharma traveled from India to China and settled in Shaolin Temple where he silently sat facing a wall and meditating for nine years. Through his practice, he thereby set a wonderful example for the type of diligent effort required for genuine achievement in Zen and all other schools of spiritual practice, and

various traditions have commonly borrowed from his story to indicate the effort required to achieve this stage of spiritual perfection.

The true stage of "facing the wall" is where you're really cultivating to abandon all mental defilements so as to reach true emptiness rather than some mental, conceptual image of emptiness. It's a true emptiness where even the substances of jing, chi and shen no longer matter. In this stage we have a process involving the transformation of shen to fully empty awareness, and the physical process of transforming the physical body that fully matches this mental achievement requires about nine years of practice. Of course these nine years encompass all sorts of transformations, some of which we've already gone over. Your blood will change, your tendons, hair and muscles will change, ... all sorts of mundane and esoteric transformations will occur during this stage of practice.

At this stage of practice you're cultivating to gain a true experience of emptiness rather than the samadhi approximations of emptiness, and so we can say that your cultivation is starting to reach truly lofty levels. If you're really successful at cultivating emptiness, then you might finally attain the state where you can let absolutely everything go of all conceptual constructions so as to "see Truth," "see the Path," "see the Tao," or "awaken to the Tao" which is the stage of attaining the "clear light" as described by Tibetan Tantra.

If you can accomplish this stage of Hinayana awakening—wherein you abandon the concept of being a limited ego or self—then the long period of "breaking emptiness for the return to Tao" would correspond to the fourth Mahayana Stage of True Cultivation Practice. But remember that you can only get to this point if you've already seen the Tao.

The Zen school describes the state of seeing the Tao, or awakening to the fundamental nature, as being like "10,000 miles of clear, cloudless sky." In Confucianism, this stage equates with "illuminating one's illustrious virtue." In orthodox Buddhist teachings it's equivalent to breaking through the skandha of conception because your sixth consciousness has been purified and calmed; mental disturbances have died down and the discriminatory mind returns to its wordless, original source. This is the actual Stage of Seeing the Tao wherein "the mind is like a clear mirror which reflects all things without leaving any traces."

The Taoist description of this stage also says it resembles a clear mirror that can perfectly reflect everything with clarity without becoming sullied, for Chuang Tzu says, "the Perfect Man employs his mind as a mirror." This is a stage of emptiness

and bright clarity—when you have existence there, then there is existence, and when you have emptiness there you have emptiness. It’s all perfectly reflected in the mind, all perfectly clear to self-cognizance but you let it all come and go without imposing clinging or interference. It is as the Complete Enlightenment Sutra said: “Don’t try to put an end to your false thoughts nor try to destroy the false states of mind which arise. When experiencing false thoughts, do not impose comprehension, and do not attempt to distinguish the real in this non-comprehension.” The mind is tremendously clear and free and boundless and simply reflects all things that arise within its purview.

Since emptiness is rather ordinary, we also say of this stage that “the ordinary mind is Tao.” The true mind is empty and always there, thus it is perfectly ordinary because there is nothing special to it. It only reflects what’s presented to it, yet because it reflects without adding anything we say it has direct vision or direct perception. So while the ordinary or “true” mind is empty it’s capable of prajna wisdom knowing, and yet we will never ever recognize this if we don’t practice meditation due to our normal habits of mental grasping and clinging. We never recognize it in our day-to-day affairs due to incorrect usage of the mind.

When the sixth consciousness of internal dialoguing has been pacified at this stage of unimpeded penetrative understanding, and wandering thoughts have disappeared, you can only compare this state of freedom from thoughts to the endless expansive realm of empty space because there is nowhere the mind does not pervade. This stage of spiritual progress therefore provides some small inkling of the omniscient penetrative abilities of Buddhahood, which are the abilities of complete spiritual enlightenment.

Of course after this attainment you still have some lingering attachments to the belief in being an ego or self, which is a mindset called the seventh consciousness. If you can purify this consciousness of all its self-centered references, then you will be able to respond naturally to all situations without having to make any intervening inferences of mentation, and thus there won’t be any intercessor between you and the truly Real. Seeing the Tao, which means understanding the Tao, can be accomplished when you purify both the sixth and seventh consciousnesses and “see through” or thoroughly comprehend all eight consciousnesses even if the first five and eighth consciousnesses haven’t yet been transformed. That’s your task after seeing the Tao, which is the stage of proving your understanding..

It’s at this stage where we say you are truly “saved” or “liberated,” which actually holds from the very beginning since you are actually the Tao from the start. Nevertheless, even at this stage of spiritual cultivation there is still much more spiritual work to accomplish. At most we can say that this stage involves abandoning your deliberate mind, and thus freeing yourself from the notions of an inherent ego around which most of our thought deliberations are centered. So the stage is one of formlessness, emptiness, selflessness, or non-ego, and yet this isn’t the end of the spiritual cultivation path. Rather, it’s just the beginning of the journey because now that the previous obstructions are gone and you’re oriented yourself correctly, the Stage of True Cultivation Practice can finally begin.

With all this as a background, finally a short synopsis of the overall spiritual path, from The Broad Treatises on the Sequence of Attaining Enlightenment, will make sense: “First, stop all wrong deeds [the Stage of Merit and Wisdom Accumulation], then destroy the ego [the Stage of Seeing the Tao], and finally eliminate all wrong views [the Stage of True Cultivation Practice]. Knowing these things, one has gained good skills.”⁵⁵

You could also describe the stage of seeing your true nature by saying, “the mind is like crystal clear water.” Water always reflects images without itself becoming tainted or impure, and the mind is similarly formless or empty of change despite whatever appears on its surface. Remember that whatever appears in the mind isn’t the mind, for your true mind is that vast emptiness which has the function of knowing thoughts and emotions and etceteras, and which you must turn around to realize in spiritual cultivation. The problem with people is that we’re all focused on what appears on the screen in front of us rather than focused on realizing the realizer, so that’s why spiritual cultivation is all about turning away from the body and thoughts to understand the source of direct perception. The “face of God,” or our original nature, isn’t all the thoughts which flit in front of our internal mental screens, but the empty vastness that possesses the function of prajna wisdom for perceiving the screen’s contents.

Reflections don’t stick to the surface of water or to mirrors, and so they reflect perfectly without become entangled in phenomena. At the stage of emptiness wherein you see the Tao, you similarly experience phenomena as reflections without entanglements, and you experience emptiness as emptiness because there’s no conception of emptiness. You can rest in emptiness and since you’re detached from the body, thoughts, sights, sounds, and so forth, then they don’t affect you. You

⁵⁵ The Way to Buddhahood, Master Yin-Shun, trans. by Wing H. Yeung, (Wisdom Publications, Boston, 1998), p. 43.

finally experience your true mind in a direct connection without any obstructions, and this isn't a samadhi or special dhyana achievement! But because you have no conception of the matter, we say you have achieved no-mind. If you're familiar with a lot of Zen vocabulary, at this point you'll begin to understand what some of this terminology really means although of course you still have to achieve it.

On the spiritual trail, most people cultivate the samadhi and dhyana with this one target of purifying the mind so that they can jump out of mentation entirely and finally reach this stage of self-realization. If your prajna wisdom is so high that you don't need to cultivate the samadhi and dhyana to achieve this, then that's even better, for the target is to achieve the event of self-realization where you can see into the true nature of your mind and phenomena. This is Tao, this is enlightenment, this is contacting God-stuff, this is Brahma, this is realizing your self-nature, this is seeing fundamental mind, this is awakening to your original essence, this is knowing God's face. Phenomena are not there—let alone an ego--and so now you know from experience that the ground state of the universe is empty. It's empty and formless, and yet gives birth to empty forms which are all one thing. They're all empty themselves and they're all causally linked to one another without independence.

At this stage of achievement, you can directly perceive what's the true nature of the mind and phenomena, and so this stage of spiritual cultivation is called Seeing Your Original Nature. Whether you describe this stage as water cleared of sediments, gold cleansed of impurities, or the sky cleared of clouds, you must always remember that these mundane similes are trying to indicate something truly transcendental. It's something inexpressible, beyond description or compare.

The true mind is not some form phenomena, and so it doesn't have anything to do with the jing, chi, chakras, mai, kundalini, shen or whatever. It has nothing to do with the physical nature, so how will cultivating the physical body ever get you to this stage of self-realization? The physical nature is not an impediment to the Tao, for it's simply a reflection of your karma, and yet you do have to evolve through the spiritual transformations, or experience certain physical purifications, in order to be able to realize the Tao. Otherwise self-realization is just not possible.

Self-realization isn't possible without a degree of mental and physical purification because the normal mind stream—which is connected to our physical nature because of the mind-body connection—just isn't pure enough. For instance, if your chi mai aren't open, there is no way you'll possibly be able to see the Tao yet if you just drop every mental concern and remain quiet in the present moment, then your chi mai will open naturally and you'll eventually be able to realize it. Another

way to open the energy meridians, such as the sushumna central channel which is important to samadhi attainments, is to peacefully match your thoughts with your breath and then the mai will also spontaneously open. You don't even need to perform any special breathing exercises to do this. Just calm your mind and match this peacefulness with your breathing, and then the central channel will open automatically.

The point is that you can realize the Tao suddenly, but you can only suddenly realize the Tao only after a previous series of gradual purifications. If you didn't need this prior preparation, then everyone would awaken to the Tao with one word or phrase. Since that doesn't happen, you have to recognize that you must train through the Path of Preparation in order to make the mind and body a fit vehicle for realizing the Tao. Of course even if you don't realize the Tao, you must also know that the Tao is always there whether you realize it or not!

Sometimes people can obtain a chance peek at the Tao due to these practices, like "a blind cat who bumps into a dead rat" "or a surfacing turtle who just by chance sticks his head through a hole in a piece of wood." However, without stable gong-fu from having purified the physical nature, these sorts of attainments will be momentary, shallow and fleeting. Furthermore, any view of emptiness you can catch in this manner--without having truly mastered any deep cultivation practice--will be like the limited expanse of the sky that you might see from a worm's hole. That's how restricted and limited it will be.

After stabilizing such achievements, however, then you will have a better idea as to how you should properly cultivate "emptiness" and "no-thought" which marks the initiation of genuine spiritual practice, for these are the practices that truly put you in line with the "true mind of God." Stable cultivation practice doesn't mean you will never experience any discriminatory thinking anymore. It just means that you won't "drop into" this type of mentation by abiding in, or clinging to this state. Thoughts will still be born. It's just that you won't abide in this sort of mind. As the Sixth patriarch of Zen said, "No-thought means that when involved in thought, the practitioner is not attached to it." The Sixth Patriarch did not say that thoughts are wrong. Rather, he simply said that one should remain detached.

If we review the transformational stages of physical gong-fu outlined by the Tao school, it's easy to see where people, in their quest for an immortal life, typically go wrong. The stage of "suckling the baby" should actually be interpreted as the constant nurturing of one's spiritual progress. It should not be seen as a reference to the creation of a new body such as the yin shen or yang shen. Otherwise, people

easily mistake the spirit form attainments as the ultimate end points of the path--which many often do--or make the mistake of starting to push around the substances of jing and chi in the body, and activate this or that microcosmic or macrocosmic circulation, in order to create something physical like an oyster's pearl.

The new body you create in Taoism is actually your own physical nature which is being transformed, rejuvenated and purified so that the mind stream becomes more purified, thus enabling you to see the Tao. The emanation body is just an offshoot of this process rather than the entire purpose and end goal of cultivation practice. If you were to try to produce something like a chi fetus pearl within the body, then you must recognize that even the oyster's pearl is considered a pollution or irritation of its muscular tissue!

The reason that several schools of Taoism actually tell you to aim for immortality via a spiritual body crystallized from chi is because their proponents didn't go far enough in their cultivation, and thus this sort of error has been passed down hundreds of years to our present generations. Nevertheless it's one of the cardinal tenets of the Tao school, that life can be forever. As often happens, people who didn't go far enough in their spiritual cultivation confused a form attainment with the fundamental nature and ground state of being. To some extent they assumed rightly that the human physical organism has an unlimited potential that rivals the longevity of Heaven and Earth and that if you can tap into this potential, then you will be able to supplement its shortcomings and live a greatly extended life. This is the scientific idea behind the Taoism of Immortality seeking, but this really isn't seeing the Tao.

If you view things with logic, it's easy to realize that there will be many cultivation phenomena that arise on the spiritual path, but that the path itself is not to be found in any phenomena whatsoever. With this in mind, you shouldn't set out to purposefully produce an emanation body as your targeted goal in spiritual cultivation. It's just another body, and we know that cultivating any body, or any type of form, is not the spiritual path. Swapping one hat for another is still wearing a hat. Thus this sort of emphasis is a lamentable misdirection, but this mistake is quite common.

Contributing to this problem is the fact that people often mistakenly emphasize that jing *must transform* into chi, chi *must be* refined into shen, and so forth on the spiritual trail. In employing this mode of explanation, they subconsciously think you need to attach force to the process of cultivation and force these sorts of transmutations. From this mental assumption, they thereby fall into all

sorts of mistaken practices. They forget that cultivating shen or clear awareness gives rise to chi, and chi gives rise to jing, so the real way to cultivate spirituality is to cultivate one's shen, which is empty calm awareness that doesn't involve any pushing.

In cultivating the empty awareness of prajna wisdom knowing without attachment, we accomplish the cultivation of jing, chi and shen naturally. That's why we can honestly say there is a Zen path without any stages, and that you need only cultivate your bright awareness in the present moment of mind. As the Surangama Sutra tells us: "People fail to realize that this body of ours, as well as the mountains, rivers, space and earth, are all within the wondrous true mind." Thus if you cultivate the stillness of clear and peaceful shen without form, yang chi is sure to arise and all these transformations will happen spontaneously and effortlessly. Where, then, do you have to force any transmutation into transpiring?

In cultivating formless open awareness, you'll initiate all these internal transformations which you'll eventually feel inside and then you'll be practicing living Zen rather than dead tree Zen. Dead tree Zen is any sort of cultivation that suppresses the joy of life. It's when you get stuck in a realm of mental stillness and purity, but cannot manage to transform your physical nature because your emptiness realm is a forced production, and is thus stagnant and stale. Since it's produced by restraint, your internal chi flows cannot flow smoothly and thus no internal transformations take place. So dead tree Zen is to produce a state of forced quietism, or enforced stillness, which produces a sort of dull clarity. While it seems to be a state of emptiness and spiritual progress because a degree of clarity is indeed there, it doesn't belong to the true path of cultivation.

Why do people cultivate dead tree Zen? There are lots of reasons ... ignorance, lack of good instructions, lack of a good teacher, and so forth. One reason in particular is because when the body really starts to transform, all sorts of feelings and sensations arise inside. These are a distraction to the practitioner, who therefore tries to suppress them and in clamping down on them, still cultivates clarity but disables the physical body from transforming. The solution is not to make the initial mistake of being bothered by these sensations, but to recognize that they are not you but simply images that appear in the mind. If you can let go of them while they proliferate en masse, then they will finally reach a crescendo (marking a stage of transformation) and then die away.

On the correct spiritual path, you must remember not to drop into attaching to physical sensations because clinging to the results of the body consciousness is not

the road to enlightenment. All day long we identify with the input fed to us by our body consciousness, and our habit of attachment and self-identification with these feelings has become so great that we take the body consciousness to be the mind solely due to the force of habit. But these are incorrect habits of identification.

From a physiological standpoint, we must remember that there is yet another reason why the path of emptiness is stressed as the spiritual route to enlightenment. The largest majority of people who cultivate belong to advanced age groups of ever declining vitality, and because of their elder years they have much less jing than younger spiritual practitioners. Because older individuals have lower levels of active physical jing--since it declines or “dries out” with age--it makes sense for older adults to cultivate various meditation methods that involve shen, such as seeing the light of the mind.⁵⁶ By initially focusing on shen, or empty awareness, this will in turn cause them to regenerate their jing and chi, and it’s a much better practice than working on methods that involve circulating the chi and breath. It’s much easier for older folks to make progress with this sort of exercise because they are less disturbed or bothered by distractions anyway, so the initial route of cultivating emptiness directly is a good one for most seniors to try.

Young adults, on the other hand, naturally have much stronger urges and desires in life due to larger and more virile quantities of jing and chi. This is why people often describe young adults saying, “their blood is hot.” With such factors impelling them, it is much more difficult for the younger generations to sit still and meditate, and so the sequence of exercises that helps jing transform into chi and chi into shen is usually stressed for this group of people. It doesn’t have to be this way. It’s just a form of expedient teaching.

The big point is not to make the mistake of thinking that emanating your spirit (shen) is an attainment you must strive for on the cultivation trail, nor assume that this event is even something that *must* happen. In fact, for those who tread the highest wisdom route to Tao, it’s not necessary nor an absolute fact that an emanation body will appear at all before one’s enlightenment. However, *it is indeed necessary and absolutely true that your physical body will become more purified on the road of cultivation*, and this in effect is the meaning of cultivating a new life.

Purifying your physical nature is also a way of cultivating away your bad karma, and thus purifying the physical body forms an excellent basis for bringing about better behavior. After all, if you change your chi flows and purify them, you

⁵⁶ See *Twenty-Five Doors to Meditation: A Handbook for Entering Samadhi*, William Bodri and Lee Shu Mei, (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1998).

purify the consciousness habits with which they are connected, and thereby change your behavior, your karma and your fortune. However, in terms of the great wisdom cultivators, namely the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who assume human form, they don't actively work to pursue an emanation attainment until after they get Tao, for they resort to cultivating great prajna wisdom instead! If this attainment happens along the way then fine, but they don't go specially seeking it because they know that only prajna wisdom is important. This is an important fact you must think about. If you really think that emanating your shen is such a great attainment, then why didn't Shakyamuni Buddha or the Zen masters ever emphasize it?

Thus I tell you truthfully and without bias; I've given you all the reasons: you should never deviate from proper spiritual practice and try to purposely emanate a yin shen, or astral body. Unlike what a lot of modern schools teach, you should never push nor train to have an out-of-the-body experience. The yin body is just a type of mental projection, and it still involves an "I" to which we mentally grasp. How can it therefore be a path of true cultivation practice? To think it is the Tao is to mistakenly seek the Tao in form when we already know that the Tao is beyond the ego and is formless.

If you waste time on trying to cultivate such non-essentials, you might not even get around to the real heart of the matter. Additionally, you might even end up hurting yourself! You can actually end up becoming mentally unbalanced if you try to cultivate some sort of out-of-the-body experience. What can happen is that you might even leave the body when you don't want to, and then the process is out of your control. If that happens, it's easy to fall into the realm of the ghosts or asuras after you die.

What happens in cultivation should always happen spontaneously. The results of practice should naturally and peacefully occur and if various form phenomena such as this must be "pushed" or artificially forced to appear during the path, *then you should recognize they're not the pathway to Tao.* This is exactly why most people never succeed in seeing the Tao because they're indoctrinated into believing that these various gong-fu achievements are The Way. People therefore want to feel the circulation of their chi, see their chakras open, or experience all sorts of other sensational items.

This is how people commonly go astray and miss the spiritual path entirely. They misapprehend various phenomena by taking them as another body, and thus *they mistakenly take the mental reflections of the six sense objects as the nature of their true mind.* Sensations generated by the physical nature are the biggest fixation

obstacles initially encountered in cultivation practice, and so it's very hard for people to free themselves from the pulls of the body consciousness. If you can do this and make your mind independent of your body, then you can eventually succeed in seeing the Tao.

Rather than learn mental detachment, which is the practice of nonabiding in any mental state that arises (thoughts, sensations, emotions, and spiritual visaya), people usually end up taking their perceptions and cognitions as the nature of their mind rather than as recognizing them for the transient passing-byes that they are. They are not the mind. They are just the intangible, effervescent scenery that arises within the mind, and no matter how hard we concentrate on them it is impossible to give them solidity.

No matter how much we reinforce thoughts or sensations, we cannot impart them with any degree of permanence, truthfulness or reality. All we do by becoming entangled with mental involvement is deceive ourselves and become enshrouded by our own perceptions and cognition. We screen ourselves from our inherent always-there ability to recognize our self-nature, and thus we remain blinded in spiritual ignorance. That's why there are so many different spiritual schools and spiritual ladders in the world, for they are all geared to freeing ourselves of this self-pollution.

This explains why people don't recognize the essence of their fundamental nature which is always there, completely empty and clear. We take our thoughts to be our real selves when they're just intangible pass-me-byes. All we ever do is mistakenly take transient shadows for the light, misidentifying random thoughts as our true being and spiritual foundation. That's why people seem to practice wholeheartedly but never discover their original, luminous, self cognizant spiritual essence! They have to let go of these things and recognize what they are appearing within. That, in truth, is cultivating spiritual awareness. So all the book reading and prayers and ceremonies and samadhi you may cultivate are all geared to helping you attain this.

How terrible it is to see people waste their time because they don't know the true principles of spiritual practice. They want to practice correctly, but always forget the true principles of practice, and never search them out each and every time they meditate. That's why they don't make progress, for they sit down and fall into the same mental rut over and over again, all the time thinking that they're cultivating emptiness without ever questioning if this is really what they're doing. Every time you cultivate you must remain aware and unattached, and question each and every moment if you're really letting go. Only if you constantly question yourself and investigate the mind will you be able to stay out of a pit of habitual wrong practice.

You can cultivate bliss, illumination and no-thought all you want, but if you don't practice penetrating-observation-into-the-mind, it is still considered wrong practice.

What you *do* do in real spiritual cultivation is work on cultivating what we call emptiness, unmindfulness, nonabiding, detachment, selflessness, egolessness, nonclinging or not dwelling—which are all synonyms for the same thing—along with your prajna wisdom awareness. And the way that you cultivate emptiness is by increasing your skill and proficiency in the various dhyana and samadhi, for mastering these realms of meditative cultivation is the preparatory means for the actual event of self-realization.

It takes quite a while to open up the body's central energy channel (called the sushumna) to attain stable proficiency in the various samadhi, and thus the Tao school accordingly says that it takes several years to complete these various foundational requirements of the path. However, you must remember that the only purpose of these transformational changes is to better enable you to see the Tao, which is to realize your true mind or fundamental nature, and you can do this instantaneously without any gong-fu if you just mentally drop everything this very moment. So while these spiritual stages represent the preparatory work for attaining the Tao, someone who can drop everything can bypass them and get the Tao directly!

In other words, cultivating the body is *only a means in practice rather than the purpose of cultivation practice*. The ultimate purpose of spiritual practice is to let you see your fundamental face and experience unrestricted union with your root source of being. This achievement of "seeing God" or becoming seamlessly "one with God" doesn't lie within any form or body you can think of. If you can abandon thoughts and form, then in that moment you can be face to face with your original nature. In actual fact, that's the Zen means of achievement which is termed the method of no-method since there's no actual technique involved. The Zen technique also emphasizes effortlessness, and now you can see why that's the case as well.

The problem is, realizing the Tao or seeing the Path means realizing who's doing all the perceiving, and for ordinary people this particular prajna wisdom realization is most easily achieved only if they can first master the samadhi attainments. Thus most people who need to lay a foundation for the Tao follow various Hinayana roads of meditation. If you can master the samadhi or dhyana, next you must turn around to recognize who's perceiving the calmness, stillness or emptiness of these samadhi realms ... who's the one ultimately experiencing this? If you can trace awareness back to its ultimate source, then you will have truly found the one thing that you are.

Thus the only reason we set out to calm the mind by achieving the samadhi and dhyana on the cultivation trail is not because they are an end in themselves, but because it's hard to recognize your fundamental nature in the presence of miscellaneous thoughts and sensations. Cultivating these purified mental realms is an easy way to learn how to drop attachments to the mental pollutions which screen recognition of our fundamental nature. The path to Tao specifies how to detach from most mental phenomena, through samadhi and dhyana attainments, only so that you can ultimately catch a glimpse of your fundamental spiritual nature. In a sense, the realms of samadhi and dhyana are just play things, but in terms of the mundane they're wonderful and miraculous playthings. From the standpoint of the Tao they don't really exist, or we can simply say that they're just other mental functions.

If you cultivate totally naturalistically, and obtain the ability to emanate your shen as we've described, can you still go astray at this point? Yes, as there are always misguided routes you can take at any stage of spiritual cultivation. For instance, in the Surangama Sutra Shakyamuni expounded upon fifty great errors of cultivation practice that occur when you arrive at very advanced levels of cultivation progress!

One such error is that a large number of yogis, sadhus, and monks in every religion tend to reach the point of emanating their shen and then call it quits, thinking they're done with the whole spiritual path altogether. They fall into this trap because they now have achieved a bit of emptiness attainment and can travel in and out of the heavenly realms at will. They visit the Heavens and think, "Wow, I've made it to the Heavens. This is it, I don't see anything else, I'm finished." However, this is considered only a low stage Hinayana attainment, for they're just stuck at the level of many other heavenly beings who have also ceased making further spiritual progress. In fact, the yin shen is severely limited as to the purity of the realms it can possibly reach, so even from the materialistic point of view it cannot possibly represent the final stages of cultivation practice.

So while being able to emanate one's shen does often correspond to progress in emptiness achievements, it's not the full picture. Even so, many, many practitioners who reach this point still delude themselves and stop their cultivation efforts because they think they're finally enlightened or have reached "nirvikalpa samadhi." A Zen master would nudge you every which way to get you to this point of achievement, and then they would hit you and slap you even harder in order that you go further. They want you to drop your fixation with any stage of incomplete progress

and work hard to proceed all the way to complete enlightenment. Thus it is that the path of cultivation contains pitfalls at every stage of practice.

How do you then guide yourself on the path if there are all these possible pitfalls? You guide yourself according to the teachings you first learned in the Stage of Wisdom and Merit Accumulation, and which you continually study at every stage of the path. Furthermore, you guide yourself with very advanced texts like the Surangama Sutra as well as the various prajna wisdom sutras—such as the Diamond Sutra, Vimalakirti Sutra, Lotus Sutra and Complete Enlightenment Sutra--that talk about emptiness. Even this set of lessons has its own small usefulness in helping you sort out the proper road of spiritual practice, but you have to go beyond its short introductions in order to make this information your own.

In cultivation, the true style of spiritual practice is emptiness at each and every step of the way, and so you ultimately guide yourself at every step with this principle of prajna wisdom. Prajna wisdom leaves the empty nature of things as it is and doesn't need to disintegrate this empty nature before it can penetrate it. Just reflect it and that is enough.

As to your physical form, it takes at least nine years to fully transform the body during this highly advanced stage of “facing the wall,” and in actual fact, the total process for mastering emptiness takes much longer. That's why the true emptiness attainments, where you break emptiness for the return to Tao, correspond to the Mahayana fourth stage of Exercising Cultivation Practice. Within this stage of returning to emptiness to combine with the Tao, you're getting rid of all your subtle mental obstructions, and in terms of physical attainments, you're fully mastering the ability for your yang shen to appear and disappear at will.

When a yang shen appears then your shen spirit has solidified, and when it disappears the yang shen has instantaneously become chi. That's why we say it corresponds neither to a stage of emptiness nor existence, for it can be either one whenever you wish. A famous Confucian of the Song dynasty, Zhang Dai, mentioned something along similar lines, which he discovered through his own cultivation efforts:

The cosmos is a body of energy. Energy has the properties of yin and yang. When energy is spread out, it permeates all things; when it coalesces it becomes nebulous. When this settles into form it becomes matter. When it disintegrates it returns to its original state.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The Complete Book of Zen, Wong Kiew Kit (Element, Boston: Massachusetts, 1998), p. 38.

While this isn't the same phenomena or stage of achievement at all, it illustrates that even the Confucian school recognized that energy could coalesce to become form, and then disperse into invisible energy once again. In fact, this is the process behind the creation of the material phase of the cosmos. However, scientists relying on limited instruments and rigid mathematics can only study this outer material form stage rather than the precursor stage of energy that comes prior to and after form throughout the infinite cycles of universal undulation. Even so, with Einstein's equations that matter and energy are interconvertable, modern science has finally caught up with a standard cultivation doctrine.

TIMELINES FOR THE VARIOUS SEQUENCES OF TRANSFORMATION

Taoism is a most useful cultivation school—perhaps the most useful—for explaining spiritual evolution according to the various physical transformations that can occur along the cultivation path. Furthermore, it is especially useful for having identified the general time sequences of these processes, and for having linked itself with the Chinese medical field as one of its outer garments. In review, we must remember that the various time sequences of cultivation transformation run generally as follows:

<u>Time Required</u>	<u>Name of Cultivation Stage</u>	<u>Biophysical Transformations Involved</u>
100 days	“Building the Foundation”	Initial transformation of jing to chi
10 months	“Pregnancy”	Completing the transformation of jing to chi, Starting the transformation of chi to shen
3 years	“Suckling the Baby”	Completing the chi to shen transformation, Starting the transformation of shen to emptiness
9 years	“Facing the Wall”	Completing the shen to emptiness transformation, and starting to abandon emptiness for the Tao
Indeterminate	“Breaking Emptiness and Returning to Tao”	Achieving a state of neither existence nor non-existence (emptiness)

We can also summarize this set of sequences by saying:

It is said that “Building up the foundation in one hundred days” is the preliminary stage required for transmutation of *ching* into *ch'i*, and that “pregnancy for ten months” is the preliminary stage necessary for the transmutation of *ch'i* into *shen*. “To suckle for three years” is the beginning of the transmutation of shen into void or emptiness. Finally,

"facing the wall for nine years" is the last step required for breaking up the empty space.⁵⁸

As Taoism always emphasizes, if you cultivate correctly, not only will your internal esoteric substances of jing, chi and shen transform according to a well established, sequential process of alchemical reactions, but your corporeal, physical body will transform along with these spiritual changes as well. In general, the physical body will transform according to the following general scheme we previously mentioned which correlates to the transformations expected between jing, chi, and shen:

After one year of practice, your chi will be transformed.

After two years of practice, your blood will be transformed.

After three years, your mai (blood vessels, nerves and energy channels) will be transformed.

After four years, your muscles (flesh) will be transformed.

After five years, your bone marrow will be transformed.

After six years, your sinews and tendons will be transformed.

After seven years, your bones will be transformed.

After eight years, your hair will be transformed.

After nine years of cultivation, your entire bodily form (shape) will be transformed.

No matter how smart you are, no matter how wise you are, no matter what substances you might wish to ingest to speed up this process, no matter how high your stage of spiritual attainment, *there is a limit to how much you can rush this process of physical transformation. Because these transformations involve the physical body, there is a natural limit as to how much faster you can make them transpire.*

The reason you can't rush this process is because it invariably requires a specific amount of time—given our human bodies—in order to change the physical structures of this human body. Even a fully enlightened Buddha has to wait roughly this same amount of time for these transformations to become complete, just as a child cannot speed up the time required to pass through puberty. Of course with prajna wisdom these physical changes might happen a little bit more quickly and they will certainly occur with less side troubles, but all true cultivators have to pass through them nonetheless.

⁵⁸ Tao and Longevity: Mind-Body Transformation, Nan Huai-Chin, trans. by Wen Kuan Chu (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1991), p. 85.

In fact, the Tao school has also stated that men and women experience the normal process of aging in a specific sequence of cycles; women experience a natural seven-year life cycle, whereas men experience eight-year cycles. All the changes and transformations of the physical body occur according to these cycles. For instance,

The Nei Jing [Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine] speaks of women's development in seven-year stages.

At seven years, the kidney (Jing) is ascendant: The teeth change, and the hair grows.

At fourteen years, the dew of heaven (Jing) arrives: The conception meridian flows, the penetrating extra meridian is full, the menses come regularly, and the women can conceive.

At twenty-one years, the kidney (Jing) plateaus: The wisdom teeth come in and growth is at its peak.

At twenty-eight years, the tendons and bones are strong, the hair is at its growing peak, and the body is strong.

At thirty-five, the Yang brightness meridian weakens, the face begins to darken and hair falls out.

At forty-two, the three Yang meridians are weak above (in the face), the face is dark, and the hair begins to turn white.

At forty-nine the conception meridian is deficient, the penetrating extra meridian is exhausted, the water of heaven is dried up; the earth road (the menses) is not open, so weakness and infertility set in.

A similar process of eight-year transitions is described for men:

At eight years, the kidney (Jing) is full: The hair is grown, and the teeth change.

At sixteen years, the kidney (Jing) is abundant: The water of heaven (Jing) arrives, the Jing Qi is able to flow, the Yin and Yang are in harmony, and the man is fertile.

At twenty-four, the king (Jing) plateaus: The tendons and bones are strong, the wisdom teeth come in and growth is at its peak.

At thirty-two, the tendons and bones are at their strongest and the flesh is full and strong.

At forty, the kidney (Jing) is weakened, the hair falls out, and the teeth are loose.

At forty-eight, the Yang Qi is exhausted above, the face darkens, and the hair whitens.

At fifty-six, the liver (Jing) is weak, the tendons cannot move, the dew of heaven is used up, there is little semen, the kidney is weak, and the appearance and body are at their end.

At sixty-four, the hair and teeth are gone.⁵⁹

There is yet another Taoist sequence of transformations we could reference which explains the physical changes you will experience from bigu, or fasting cultivation practice. Bigu is the cultivation ability to live without food and is called “inedia” in the Christian cultivation schools. The story of the female adept Giri Bala, in Paramhansa Yogananda’s Autobiography of a Yogi, also illustrates that the phenomenon is known in Hindu spiritual cultivation as well. In modern China there has been a resurgence of interest in this phenomenon, and the Human Body Science Laboratory of Beijing Teacher’s College has even studied individuals who practice bigu. Recently an excavation of the Mawang mound in China even unearthed two bigu texts that explained that three types of bigu were possible: (1) eating and drinking nothing at all, (2) drinking water and eating some light fruits or medicine, and (3) just drinking water without food.⁶⁰

While I want you to know about the sequence of expectations for this sort of stage of cultivation, it’s best not to complicate matters too much and go into them here.⁶¹ The principle you must understand is that there are always many alternative ways of describing the sequences of progress in spiritual cultivation, whether from a mental or physical standpoint. Thus this additional descriptive sequence of physical transformations is just another way of slicing the same cake in a different fashion.

A famous Taoist practitioner who succeeded in enlightenment, Lu Ch’un-yang, summarized this whole process of Taoist cultivation in a Chinese poem that’s come to be called the “Hundred Word Inscription.” While in English it amounts to more than a hundred words, the “Hundred Word Inscription” still aptly summarizes the sequences of Taoist cultivation and the overall process to spiritual attainment:

To nurture the vital energy, the chi, keep watch without words [false thoughts will thus settle by themselves]

To subdue the mind, act without acting [don’t cling to forms and phenomena including your actions, and when not acting, don’t cling to your non-acting either]

⁵⁹ The Bridge Between Acupuncture and Modern Bio-Energetic Medicine, Stuart J. Zoll, (Haug International, Brussels: Belgium, 1993), pp. 129-131.

⁶⁰ China’s Super Psychics, Paul Dong and Thomas Raffill, (Marlowe & Company, New York, 1997), p. 119.

⁶¹ See How to Measure and Deepen Your Spiritual Realization, by Nan Huai-Chin and William Bodri. This book is also often referred to as Measuring Meditation.

Recognize the patriarch [the true you, the source of mind] in movement
and stillness
There is nothing to be concerned about: who else are you seeking?
What's true and eternal must respond to beings
To respond to beings you must not be deluded
When real nature remains, vital energy returns by itself [when you
cultivate properly, all the expected transformations between jing,
chi and shen will happen naturally without any need of extra
intercessionary effort, and hence you will spontaneously reach the
dhyana attainments]
When real nature returns, the elixir spontaneously forms
In the vessel [the physical body] the fire and the water are matched
Yin and yang are born in succession
Universal transformation rolls like thunder [after remaining in samadhi
for a long while, all your energy channels will burst open like the
peel of thunder]
White clouds cover the peak in the morning [the great bliss crown
chakra on the head will fully open]
Sweet dew [the endocrine hormones] sprinkles down on Sumeru
Drink for yourself the wine of immortality [the supreme worldly dharma]
As you roam free [in true mental emptiness], no one will know
Sit and listen to the tune of the zither without strings [stay in this state]
Clearly comprehend the workings of creation
It's all in these twenty lines
A true ladder straight to Heaven [Tao].⁶²

TRANSFORMING THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF THE PHYSICAL BODY

Taoism is not the only cultivation school that offers a form-based means for describing the experiences of the spiritual path. There's also yoga, Esoteric Buddhism, and even the Grecian-Persian-European method of elemental-planetary labels for delineating the various internal alchemical changes which occur along the cultivation journey. Another competing but simple descriptive mechanism is the five elements scheme, used by many ancient cultivation schools, that refers to physical body transformations involving the five fundamental components of all matter: the earth, wind (air), fire, water, and space elements. Using these five elements alone, it's remarkable how one can also do a very good job in describing the sequences and processes of the cultivation path.

⁶² To Realize Enlightenment: Practice of the Cultivation Path, Nan Huai-Chin, trans. by J.C. Cleary, (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1994), p. 158.

The various cultures of the world typically use different names for the five elements, but the correspondences between these schools are usually very tight. Some cultures (such as the Arab and Greek) only recognize four rather than five major elements making up matter. For instance, Plutarch in his *Moralia* records that the ancient Egyptians identified the four elements of water, fire, earth and air with the gods Ausar (Osiris), Set (Typhon), Auset (Isis), and Heru (Horus). Ancient cultures often referred to only four elements rather than five because they failed to emphasize the fifth element of space. Despite this sort of difference, the general principles on how these cultures use the five elements remains generally the same.

The major principle behind the five elements schema is that the entire universe, including the physical body, is composed of these five great elements, each with their own independent domain, and that the path of spiritual cultivation--as far as it concerns the physical body--involves the progressive transformation or purification of these elements. The questions in cultivation are: how do you purify these elements, in what particular order do you proceed in purifying the elements (if there is one), and why should you do this in the first place?

In general, the various cultures of the world take the earth element to represent the aspect of material solidity, meaning the supporting structure of physical matter. In terms of our bodies this means substances such as our hair, nails, teeth, bones, skin, flesh, muscles and marrow. As to the fire element, it represents the factor of heat and warmth that we find in life and nature. Anything to do with movement, change and expansion represents the wind element, which is therefore called the "wood" element in Chinese. Our respiratory functions correspond to the wind element, but so does the factor of human growth since it represents the wind factor of expansion, transformation and movement. As to the water element, it represents the principle of cohesion between objects as well as the factor of liquidity as one would naturally expect. Our body's saliva, tears, blood, semen, hormones and urine all belong to the realm of the water element.

The final element of space represents physical emptiness, which is the physical space that separates objects and defines them as being apart from one another. Sometimes space is referred to as emptiness, and sometimes it's represented as "ether" in Hinduism or "metal" in traditional Chinese philosophy. The reason "metal" is used to denote the space element is because both metal and space are very strong; given enough time, the idea is that space, like metal, can destroy absolutely everything. Space is everywhere, and without grasping it is able to accomplish everything.

For the purposes of cultivation you shouldn't hold too tightly to this set of correspondences because sometimes these elements will assume other definitions as well. The final meaning all depends upon their usage. For instance the traditional meaning of these elements from Buddhism is:

That which, by conglomeration, causes the solid nature of the body to develop, is called the earth-factor. That which calls the cohesion-function of the body is called the water-factor. That which digests what is eaten, drunk or consumed for the body is called the heat-factor. That which performs the body's function of inhalation and exhalation is called the wind-factor. That which causes hollowness to develop inside the body is called the space-factor. That which causes name-and-form to develop (mutually supported) like reeds in a sheaf is called the consciousness-factor, associated with the five defiled mind consciousness bodies and defiled mind consciousness. Without these conditions, the arising of the body does not occur.⁶³

What really matters to the process of cultivation is that our chi (also known as prana) corresponds to the wind element of the physical body. The water element corresponds to our jing and mai as well as our blood, hormones and other internal liquids. Our body's warmth and the kundalini phenomenon correspond to the warmth element, which is one of the reasons that the Tibetans call kundalini the "tumo heat" while the Indian yoga schools refer to it as the "gastric fire." In its initial phases, the Christian Church also calls it "incendium amoris" while the Sufi tradition calls it the "fire of separation."

Kundalini represents the real chi of the body and is therefore often identified with the source of life. However, due to the popularization of yoga texts among people lacking any real cultivation background or understanding, this phenomenon has become greatly misunderstood. It is actually a state of comfortable warmth conjoined with bliss rather than a state of fierce hotness as normally represented. If you were to ask for a description of the true kundalini or "clumsy fire" (zhuo huo in Chinese), we'd have to say that it's a soft comfortable feeling like Springtime. It isn't hot and fierce, but warm and soft because the body is healthy.

When someone talks about the fierce hotness of kundalini they're actually talking about the friction felt when the yang chi is still cleaning the chi mai. This is more properly called yin kundalini whereas its true nature of warmth and bliss is its proper yang aspect, which is rarely discussed. Life can actually be defined as a

⁶³ The Salistamba Sutra, N. Ross Reat, (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1998), p. 45.

combination of consciousness, warmth and duration, and you can reawaken this inherent life force of warmth when your external breathing comes to a stop because of meditation.

When people refer to the fact that kundalini "burns," they're actually referring to the preliminary friction encountered when the body's chi channels first try to open up. Properly speaking, this isn't kundalini at all. Rather, it's really just a manifestation of friction akin to the arising of an internal infection. For instance, this is what the Japanese scientist, Hiroshi Motoyama, experienced after several months of pranayama practice that served to "ignite" the kundalini, or "ascending" chi:

During continued practice, I began to notice some new sensations. I had an itchy feeling at the coccyx, a tingling feeling on the forehead and at the top of the head, and a feverish sensation in the lower abdomen. I could hear a sound something like the buzzing of bees around the coccyx. In ordinary daily life my sense of smell became so sensitive [because the olfactory chi mai were opening and attendant nerves being stimulated] that I could not endure offensive odors. These conditions continued for two or three months. One day, when I was meditating before the altar as usual, I felt particularly feverish in the lower abdomen and saw there was a round blackish-red light like a ball of fire about to explode in the midst of a white vapor. Suddenly, an incredible power rushed through my spine to the top of the head and, though it lasted only a second or two, my body levitated off the floor a few centimeters. I was terrified. My whole body was burning, and a severe headache prevented me from doing anything all day.⁶⁴

When the real kundalini arises, a cultivator should try to keep away from food and any thoughts that might transform into sexual desire. They shouldn't try to match any thoughts with their body when sexual desires arise, but should strive to remain pure like a newborn baby. If they eat overly nutritious foods or nutritional supplements at this time, they're likely to overly stimulate themselves leading to sexual excess and all sorts of other problems. In Chinese history, various Tao school practitioners, as well as kings and high officials, made this same mistake in the past, and shortened their life spans as a result. As the Taoist Classic, The Secrets of Cultivating Essential Nature and Eternal Life (Hsin Ming Fa Chueh Ming Chih), explained regarding sexual desires

⁶⁴ Science and the Evolution of Consciousness, Hiroshi Motoyama and Rande Brown, (Autumn Press, Brookline: Massachusetts, 1978), pp. 240-241.

When the eyes see the opposite sex thereby giving rise to (evil) thoughts, the heart moves in sympathy and arouses the genital organ, if the practiser then tries to gather the alchemical agent, the impure generative fluid will produce an illusory agent. This illusory agent is likened to a football which, being kicked continuously, will lose air and shrink. Likewise as thoughts increase the evil fire which becomes more intense, the genital organ will be aroused more frequently. If you wrongly think that the alchemical agent is being produced and strive to gather it, your efforts will be sterile, and you will only harm yourself. Your body seems to be strong (so long as this evil fire lasts) but your health suffers from the consequences and will really decline. Frequent arousal of sexual desire is likened to putting straw on the head while going to extinguish a big fire; you will only injure your own body, and will not only fail to achieve immortality but will also run the risk of shortening your life.⁶⁵

Sexual desire is something to stay away from at this stage of cultivation because of the retrogressing and damage it can cause. So any stimulating foods that might arouse sexual desire should be avoided such as onions, garlic and leeks. Rather than eat too much food, a person at this stage should also just drink water and perhaps their first morning urine. After they've gone without food for many days and cleaned their entire body and intestines, then they can switch to a different sort of Taoist practice if they like.⁶⁶

As to the earth element of our body, the earth element corresponds to the densest parts of our physical structure such as our bones, hair, nails and teeth. Finally, the space element refers to all the intracellular spaces in the body, as well as the much larger empty spaces that separate our joints and internal organs. Together these five elements are said to compose everything there is concerning our physical structure.

During the process of spiritual cultivation, you already know that the physical body will undergo tremendous transformations. These various transformations

⁶⁵ Taoist Yoga, Lu K'uan Yu, (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1984), p. 55.

⁶⁶ Upon reaching this stage, some who follow Tao school teachings can eat a special form of sticky rice. After this rice passes through the body, they can also eat it's feces. Naturally your stool is normally not fit for consumption because it will make you sick, but in this special case this type of diet can actually help your cultivation. If your stool is watery after this kundalini stage purification-fasting period, however, then a person can eat the feces of their master whose gong-fu is much higher than their own. It's hard to say how many days of fasting are necessary to reach this stage of internal cleanliness which makes this practice possible, and unless you have an enlightened master to guide you and have reached the appropriate stage, you should only consider this information for documentary purposes.

represent physical purifications that correspond to the progress you make in spiritual development. If you achieve these transformations you’re making progress, and if you don’t achieve these transformations then you haven’t yet reached that particular stage of spiritual attainment. Read that again: *if you achieve these physical transformations then you’ve reached that stage of spiritual progress, and if you haven’t experienced or achieved these transformations, then you haven’t reached that corresponding degree of spiritual advancement.*

No matter what cultivation school or religion you may practice, the physical body will definitely undergo these transformations as you scale the ranks of spiritual progress and if you don’t experience these transformations, then it’s actually because your practice is deficient. There is no other explanation, and there is no denying this fact. That’s why it’s important to publicly reveal these phenomena as one of the many independent measuring schemes of your spiritual progress.

The form-based cultivation schools of the world--such as yoga, Esoteric Buddhism, Taoism and modern science—especially emphasize these physical yardsticks because that’s the basic nature of schools. In short, they emphasize physical rather than mental transformation which is why their adherents have a tougher time achieving great spiritual illumination. The Tao school has described one mechanism for cataloging these transformations, but this is not the only mechanism possible.

We can also describe these transformations by referring to the gradual purification of the body’s five elements, and many of the world’s cultivation schools have chosen this route. They describe the spiritual path in terms of a progressive purification of the five elements that compose the physical nature, and so this is another way to measure spiritual progress that we should consider.

Through Taoism we know that an individual first starts out on the spiritual path by cultivating their jing, chi, shen, and then by achieving a profound state of genuine emptiness. If we translate this process into the system of the five elements, it means that a meditator first cultivates the wind, water, fire, earth and then space elements within their physical and esoteric structures. That’s the typical order of sequential cultivation practice: *one first purifies the wind, then water, fire, earth and finally space elements of the physical body.*

Some spiritual schools explain this same sequence using the names of planets (such as Mercury, Mars and so forth) having elemental correspondences, and some describe it in terms of various mythical gods or literary figures as we find

in Medieval Christian alchemy. Nevertheless, this same general sequence of cultivation is what’s usually experienced throughout the world’s cultivation schools.

We can more readily understand the five elements method of describing the cultivation path when we examine the various transformations that occur, as catalogued by Taoism, when an individual devotes himself to an intensive path of meditation practice. As Taoism states, after one year of successful practice, the chi of your body can then start to be transformed. This, as we know, corresponds to the wind element of the physical nature.

After several more years of devoted practice an individual’s blood, mai and muscle fibers can be transformed which correspond to the body’s water element. After about seven or eight years of practice, the individual can finally work on truly transforming their bones and hair—the earth element—and then finally the entire body itself along with all its inter- and intracellular spaces (the space element) can be transformed. We’ve left out the fire element in this sequence because it doesn’t correspond to a physical structure, but all the other sequences are correct. As to the fire element, we’ll get to it in a minute.

The first question to ask, however, is why does this entire process first start with the transformation of the wind element? The simple answer is the following: *because it’s the easiest of the five elements to transform*, and this is why most spiritual schools emphasize breathing practices for beginning cultivation practitioners.

Breathing exercises, such as the pranayama of yoga or the chi-gong practices of the Tao school, are targeted at igniting your vital energies so that they arise, and this is cultivating the chi and then warmth elements of the physical nature. Hence the reason most cultivation schools start with this form of practice is because the wind element of the physical nature is the easiest of its five elements to transform, and from this you can ignite the warmth element. If you cultivate the breath you can readily affect your chi, and in turn you can cultivate consciousness since chi and consciousness are linked. Cultivating the breath is therefore considered the easiest inroad into the overall process of achieving results in spiritual cultivation. As even modern psychology explains,

Since our brain is fully saturated with blood at all times, and our blood chemistry is affected by our breathing style, it follows that our pattern of breathing affects our consciousness and thus our conscious states. In other words, by affecting blood chemistry, our breathing style

changes our neurology and consequently our attitudinal state [and consciousness].⁶⁷

Of course the science behind spiritual results is more complicated than this, but this is a very good way to understand the power and reasonings behind this form of cultivation practice.

There are all sorts of ways people use to ignite the warmth element of the body, including pranayama and even dancing. As anthropologist Richard Katz has documented for us concerning the Kung tribe in the Kalahari Desert, many of its men practice a very crude form of forced chi circulation through the act of dancing. By this they awaken and ignite a force called "num" [the raw kundalini energy] in order to reach a state called "kia." Num is said to reside in the bottom of the stomach [the hara, or region of the lower elixir field in Taoism] and the base of the spine, and when activated works its way up your backbone until it enters the brain. One healer of this tribe explained, "In your backbone you feel a pointed something and it works its way up. The base of your spine is tingling, tingling, tingling. Then num makes your thoughts nothing in your head."⁶⁸ As the dancers explained,

You dance, dance, dance. Then num lifts you up in your belly and lifts you in your back, and you start to shiver. Num makes you tremble; it's hot. Your eyes are open, but you don't look around; you hold your eyes still and look straight ahead. But when you get into kia, you're looking around because you see what's troubling everybody. Rapid shallow breathing draws num up. What I do in my upper body with the breathing, I also do in my legs with the dancing. Then num enters every part of your body, right to the tip of your feet and even your hair.⁶⁹

Of course the best and highest kundalini practice doesn't involve force at all. Furthermore, once initiated, the phenomena should be maintained all the time for a period of months until the purificatory process is completed. Nevertheless, these pranayama results are typical for most purificatory forms of breath yoga. As the Hatha Yoga Pradipika of Indian yoga comments, "At the first stage you perspire, at the second stage your body trembles, and at the third stage your prana reaches the center of the head."

⁶⁷ Instant Rapport, Michael Brooks, (Warner Books, New York, 1989), p. 25.

⁶⁸ Boiling Energy: Community Healing Among the Kalahari Kung, R. Katz, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1982), p. 42.

⁶⁹ Boiling Energy: Community Healing Among the Kalahari Kung, R. Katz, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1982), p. 42.

If you get quick progress on the cultivation path then you'll likely be encouraged further on the spiritual trail, so it's logical to initially teach people breathing cultivation exercises because they usually produces the quickest results possible. Being quite simple about it, that's one reason why most schools push practitioners toward breathing practices. Of course the other big reason for this preference is the fact our chi (the wind element) and consciousness are interlinked, and chi is linked to our breathing.

The linkage is the following: if you pacify your breathing then you can pacify your chi and in turn your mind stream, and since this is the main objective of most spiritual practice, most schools therefore teach you to achieve this objective through the angle of cultivating the breath. From any humble inroads you make because of chi cultivation achieved through breath work, a spiritual student can then move forward from this foundation onto more difficult cultivation tasks.

Since cultivating your chi can produce substantial changes in the physical body that appear along the proper lines necessary for cultivation success, it's quite understandable that most cultivation schools will instruct their practitioners to practice various pranayama or breathing exercises. Breathing practices will quite readily affect the wind element of our body (the chi), from which positive gong-fu transformations will easily be initiated, and so this explains why breathing exercises are commonly stipulated as the initial road of practice in many spiritual traditions.

In short, cultivating the wind element is perhaps the easiest way to enter into an experience of mental "emptiness," but the initial result of such practices isn't the real emptiness of spiritual cultivation. Instead, the type of emptiness you can initially achieve from cultivating the breath represents only a minor form of mental stilling. However, if a practitioner learns how to let go of that initial mental calming and seeks to learn what stands behind it, then they can pass onto higher stages of cultivation.

To make things more complicated and yet still illustrate the point, the Tao school says that "cultivating life" requires you to restore your lost jing and energy, and it also says that "refining life" will require the use of fire to refine these substances. Fire cannot exist without air (the wind element), so successful cultivators will never be able to bypass cultivation of the wind element if they want to cultivate their internal life. To cultivate the kundalini or fire element, you must have already ignited transformations affecting the wind element of the body. That's why various spiritual schools use various breathing practices at the initial rungs of cultivation practice.

Kundalini cultivation, which is often referred to as cultivating the body’s warmth element, is actually just a type of breathing practice that jointly involves the wind and fire elements of the body. Remember here that for life to exist there needs to be warmth, consciousness (which entails chi, the wind element, or movement) and duration. Kundalini cultivation, for the purposes of cultivating the spiritual life, is what links the warmth and wind element involvements within this trio. So from this shortest of discussions we can already correct many modern misconceptions about kundalini and its importance in the overall cultivation scheme of things. We can now recognize that kundalini cultivation is just a cultivation practice that focuses on physical form, whereas the greatest of cultivation methods focus on prajna wisdom instead.

In our earlier descriptions of the Tao school, I didn’t discuss many details on the state of “hsi” or “tai hsi” which occurs when the external breathing stops due to real achievement in spiritual practice. I only mentioned that Patanjali of the Indian yoga tradition defined pranayama as the gap between your inhalation and exhalation.⁷⁰ I also said that this gap of respiratory pausation corresponds to what the Tao calls hsi. This particular gap of no-respiration is the place where the real chi or real prana of the body arises, and so this is why Shakyamuni Buddha also commented, “Life is just between the inhalation and exhalation.” The Tantraloka of Kashmir Saivism also says, “Do not worship the Lord during the day. Do not worship the Lord during the night. The Lord must be worshipped at the point of the meeting of day and night.”⁷¹ In other words, the proper thing to cultivate is the junction.

What all these schools are trying to tell us is that there is definitely something wonderful, something of extreme importance about this particular state of respiratory pausation. In fact, when you analyze the purpose of various breathing practices in the world’s spiritual traditions, you’ll find that their main purpose is to help you clear your chi channels and to train you to encounter and then naturally dwell in that pausation gap for a prolonged period of time without strain. The reason you want to do this is because *that’s when the real chi of the body will become activated*, and when the real chi (life force) of the body becomes activated, that’s when all sorts of spiritual transformations can start to take place.

The yoga schools usually train you to achieve this gap of respiratory cessation by having you practice various breath *retention* exercises that can be quite

⁷⁰ Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Swami Muktibodhananda Saraswati (Bihar School of Yoga, Bihar: India, 1993), p. 135.

⁷¹ Self Realization in Kashmir Shaivism, John Hughes, (SUNY Press, Albany: New York, 1994), p. 39.

forceful in nature. Nevertheless, they can indeed help you to clear your chi channels of internal obstructions. So while the point of these practices is to train you to become able to reach the point where you’re not externally breathing anymore, most people miss this critical principle entirely. They miss the whole point of these exercises. This type of cessation is the important thing, and is called the “fourth type” in Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras. Actually, it’s the most important type of cessation:

Different techniques [of yoga] involve holding the breath within (after inhalation), or without (after exhalation), or the suspension of the breath, with conscious effort. There are different types, too, some prolonged, some subtle (short) – different also in regard to the place where the breath is held, the duration of the retention, and the number of times it is practised.

There is a fourth type which is the spontaneous suspension of breath, ...

Then, the veil of psychic impurity and spiritual ignorance that covers the inner light is thinned and rent asunder.⁷²

In all schools of spiritual cultivation—no matter what they are—when you are meditating you must reach this point of breath cessation *naturally without force* because it’s the very beginning of a new spiritual life. The Tao school even calls this point of cessation the beginning of “internal embryo breathing” because it sets into motion an internal circulation of chi while external respiration ceases. Since a baby in a mother’s womb doesn’t engage in external respiration and yet lives in peace, then when you activate this stage of hsi and initiate your internal chi circulation, the result is that you’ll be able to survive without external respiration as well. That’s why this stage is called internal embryo breathing.

This is actually the stage when the true kundalini is initiated, whereas what people usually identify as “kundalini” is just the frictional phenomenon you typically feel when your chi first begins to clean your energy channels. The entire point of the various yoga pranayama practices is to help you clear your nadi and mai so that you can more readily enter into this particular stage of attainment naturally. But you don’t need to practice these exercises if you want to reach this stage, because it can be reached even more simply through spontaneous mental resting!

Get this—if you just learn how to combine your breath with your thoughts and watch them so they’ll calm down together, then over time your chi mai will all open

⁷² The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Swami Venkatesananda, (The Divine Life Society, Himalayas: India, 1998), pp. 243-245.

up and you’ll reach this stage of respiratory cessation quite naturally. That sort of result is inherent in Zen school practice, and if this sort of practice can be inculcated into a society’s culture, in time a people will become more wise and successful in spiritual cultivation and all their other mundane efforts.

The Gherand Samhita says “When the nadis [mai] are full of impurities, vayu [chi] does not enter them,”⁷³ and thus the first stages of successful meditation always involve opening the chi channels and clearing them of obstructions. This is the basic physical task you must accomplish within the Stage of Preparatory Yoga Practices. How do you clear the mai, which correspond to the water element of the body? By cultivating the chi, which is the wind element! When you cultivate the wind element, you’ll naturally end up cultivating both the body’s water and fire elements.

While all the chi mai channels of the body are important—just as all our nerves and lymph and blood vessels are important—you must understand that the most prominent chi channel of the body is the central channel called the sushumna. This channel is emphasized in most cultivation schools because if it is blocked, you cannot enter into samadhi. Thus the Hatha Yoga Pradipika says,

The vital air [prana] does not pass in the [sushumna] middle channel because the nadis are full of impurities. So how can the state of unmani arise and how can perfection or siddhi come about? ... Therefore pranayama should be done daily with a sattvic state of mind so that the impurities are driven out of sushumna nadi and purification occurs. ... By proper practice of pranayama, all diseases are eradicated. Through improper practice all diseases can arise ... According to some teachers, pranayama alone removes impurities and therefore they hold pranayama in esteem and not the other techniques.⁷⁴

It’s clear from this yoga quotation that the purpose of various breath retention exercises is to help you purify your body’s chi channels so that you can *naturally* reach a stage of cessation wherein your breathing peacefully stops without the use of effort, and you thereby enter into samadhi. The only reason you practice forceful breath retention techniques in spiritual training is to help speed the purification process of opening your chi channels, but that’s not the actual true practice of

⁷³ Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Swami Muktibodhananda Saraswati (Bihar School of Yoga, Bihar: India, 1993), p. 140.

⁷⁴ Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Swami Muktibodhananda Saraswati (Bihar School of Yoga, Bihar: India, 1993), pp. 140, 144, 160, 200.

pranayama. *You're only really practicing pranayama when you reach this stage of natural respiratory cessation, and can dwell within it for a prolonged period of time.* That's the true form of pranayama practice, which is to reach a state of respiratory cessation with internal embryo breathing going on inside.

This is when you're really cultivating the true chi of the physical nature. This is when it becomes truly active. The chi or wind element that is initiated at this time is the body's true life force. Because your life force has awakened at this time and becomes active, you don't need to resort to external respiration when it's initiated and roused from its slumber. Doesn't it make sense that you'd have to in some way cultivate your life force if you want to climb the ranks of spirituality? This is where this requirement is actually satisfied, and most people try to get to this state by cultivating various breathing exercises!

To this end, most people in the yoga schools practice kumbhaka, which is a forceful retention of the breath involving conscious effort and willpower. However, we must emphasize once again that the real yoga kumbhaka is kevala kumbhaka, meaning that *the respiratory cessation becomes spontaneous*. This is the point which the Taoists call "hsi," which is when the kundalini starts to arise and you gain the genuine chance to enter into samadhi.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika confirms this in saying, "When exhalation and inhalation both cease (and the movement of prana ceases), the enjoyment of the senses is annihilated, and when there is no effort, then a changeless state (of mind) occurs and the yogi attains samadhi." It also tells us that the method which brings about the arousal of the kundalini is the mentality of non-clinging we find in meditation, for "The yogi who has raised the kundalini and has freed himself from all clinging karma will reach samadhi naturally."⁷⁵

Unfortunately, because so many yoga practitioners attach themselves to artificial techniques requiring force, then in not knowing of any other routes of cultivation they begin to think that this forceful means of practice is the one and only true means of spiritual practice. Founding all their practice upon this particular misconception, it's understandable when their latter practice goes astray or reaches a limit as to its highest stage of attainment.

While such artificial cultivation techniques do indeed result in a more healthy physical body, they don't necessarily lead to realizing the true Tao as it is. Rather, by

⁷⁵ The Yoga of Light, Hans-Ulrich Rieker, trans. by Elys Becherer, (Dawn Horse Press, Middletown: California, 1971), p. 147.

themselves they usually just lead to phenomenal rather than mental attainments, or just the lowest of samadhi attainments. After all, the effect of air moving in and out of the body is only a type of movement, and where is there any chi accumulation, alchemical refinement, or spiritual immortality in this?

To really attain the highest of spiritual perfections, you absolutely must choose the route of cultivating prajna transcendental wisdom, which means mastering the empty universal awareness present in a moment of mind. On the other hand, what you really want to do with forceful breathing techniques is ignite the inherent, internal potential energy of your body that comes along with life. When you can ignite this inherent life force, or kundalini, then you can also start down the road of achieving genuine spiritual results, but nevertheless the highest road of practice is to cultivate prajna wisdom. What are the five types of prajna again?

The wisdom of *prajna* contains five meanings. One is the *prajna* of the character of reality, which is realization of the knowledge of the fundamental substance of the life of myriad beings in the cosmos and the root source of the essence of mind. Second is the *prajna* of states, which comes from the different states produced by the basic capacity of the essence of mind, and includes the various phenomena of the spiritual world. Third is the *prajna* of words, which is literary and linguistic genius deriving from the philosophy produced by wisdom. Fourth is the *prajna* of expedient means, referring to the methods of applying wisdom, including the domain of learned knowledge. Fifth is auxiliary *prajna*, which is the totality of the virtue deriving from the preceding five ways of transcendence.⁷⁶

This doesn't mean that cultivating the breath is wrong, for it's a wonderful way to practice. This little dialogue only serves to emphasize its importance in the overall scheme of things. Remember that all types of successful cultivation, even in the Zen school, will end up initiating the kundalini phenomena. Since all practitioners must pass through this stage of achievement, there is nothing wrong with cultivating the breath as long as you know what you're doing. It is a wonderful way to practice, and quite suitable for most spiritual practitioners. But you have to know how to practice correctly. As the Netra Tantra (8:12-13) of Kashmir Shaivism says,

If when breathing in and breathing out you maintain a continual awareness on the center between the incoming and outgoing breath,

⁷⁶ The Story of Chinese Zen, Nan Huai-Chi, trans. By Thomas Cleary, (Charles E. Tuttle, Boston, 1995), pp. 53-54.

then your breath will spontaneously and progressively become more refined. At that point you are elevated to another world. That is pranayama.⁷⁷

On the negative side, the prolonged use of forceful form school techniques may lead to various harmful attachments, and they can even end up producing misleading "semblance dharmas" rather than the genuine stages of cultivation gong-fu which are desired. Semblance dharmas are artificial cultivation attainments that mimic the real spiritual attainments because they look almost exactly the same, but which are not the real thing. Many in fact, are unnatural in that they can only be maintained through force. Since the Zen school, as well as the *authentic* schools of Taoism and Esoteric Buddhism, avoided the use of any artificial cultivation techniques, they usually bypassed this problem of creating forced semblance dharmas. Nevertheless it's a principle you must become aware of.

In aiming directly for mind-only (nondual) attainments, the practitioners of these authentic cultivation schools—but not what's come down to us today--reached the highest stages of practice possible and they also attained the true gong-fu which corresponded to these levels. They were successful beyond compare simply because they let everything happen naturally without force. They didn't have to make any prior assumptions about what the end points of spiritual practice looked like, and so they didn't attempt to try to bring these end goals into the path in order to try to force them into transpiring.

The simplest way is usually the highest and most direct way in the practice of spiritual cultivation. However, people usually go searching for something more complicated because the highest methods are so simple and thus "boring." Because they're so simple, people always doubt that they really work. People usually think that adding something extra is the way to Tao and thus they always end up deviating from the genuine and direct path of spiritual attainment which is always simpler than they can imagine. That's why they always turn to and emphasize things like forceful kundalini cultivation. All you have to do is learn how to calm your mind and match your thoughts with your breath and the same cultivation stage will be achieved quite naturally.

Since kundalini isn't a physical structure of the body, Taoism doesn't usually emphasize it in the cultivation trail, at least not in the same way as the yoga and Tantric schools. However, by no means is kundalini absent from Taoist discussions. The Taoists indeed recognize this phenomenon because they refer to it as the "clumsy fire," "spirit energy," "spirit snake" or "spirit power," and so we know that kundalini is also to be found in the Taoist tradition.

⁷⁷ *Self Realization in Kashmir Shaivism*, John Hughes, (SUNY Press, Albany: New York, 1994), p. 41.

It's even found in Egyptian culture through a story of the god Osiris whose body was sealed in a coffin, thrown into a river, and then grew into a marvelous fragrant tree [the chi channels of the body including the spine] that a king used to build his palace. When Isis, the godly wife of Osiris, came and found the tree, she nursed the baby of the king in a pot of fire [the kundalini purification] to make the baby immortal, and when discovered turned into a bird that fluttered around the pillar that had been carved out of her husband's casket [the chi ascends up the tu-mai chi channel in the spine after the kundalini is ignited].

The truth of the matter is that Taoism, like Buddhism, doesn't overly emphasize kundalini because it's just an ancillary phenomenon of the path, and only corresponds to an initiatory phase of cultivation. It's just one of several initial signposts that marks the beginning of spiritual transformations along the spiritual path. In terms of the four stages of earnest prayoga endeavor in the Path of Intensified Preparatory Practices, *it only corresponds to the first phase of “warming”* and in terms of the Tantric schools of esotericism, *it's not the only means of spiritual practice but just a convenient means of initial cultivation practice*. The esoteric schools have many methods you can employ for reaching samadhi but these are all just practice methods rather than enlightenment teachings. They are just methods of convenience to help you calm your thoughts and get your foot in the door of correct spiritual accomplishment.

Instead of the kundalini phenomenon, the really important transformations in cultivation deal with prajna wisdom and your personal behavior in thought, word and deed, for these are the crucial things that matter on the spiritual trail. This is how you measure someone's real rank of spiritual attainment—by his or her behavior. But kundalini arousal—which is the activation of the body's prenatal chi—does indeed occur in the various sequences of cultivation attainment no matter which spiritual tradition you follow, and for us it corresponds to cultivating the fire element of our physical body.

As we're discussing the cultivation pathway from the viewpoint of the five elements, we can say that you first cultivate the wind element of the body through various breathing exercises of pranayama. If you're successful at these practices—because you've simultaneously cultivated the mind of emptiness and didn't let your jing leak away—then you can eventually activate the fire element of the physical nature which will, in turn, bring about even more physical-spiritual transformations.

A contemporary account of the kundalini phenomenon, from the perspective of the Hindu yoga schools, also confirms the role it plays in the early purificatory process of the cultivation framework:

Often, when Kundalini first becomes active, you feel heavy-headed and sleepy. This is a result of the movement of prana [chi], and it is a sure sign that the Kundalini has been awakened. As Kundalini moves up through the sushumna, She transforms the body and makes it fit for spiritual sadhana; it is only after the body has been purified that the Shakti can work with full force. The basis of all disease and pain is the impurities which block the flow of prana in the nadis. These blockages are caused by imbalances and disorders in the three bodily humors—wind, bile, and phlegm—due to undisciplined habits of eating and immoderate living. In order to purify the nadis, Kundalini inspires the various hatha yogic movements or kriyas, which take place in the physical body. In the form of prana, She penetrates all 720 million nadis, consumes all the old decaying fluids, then releases vital energy into them all. As the nadis become filled with prana, the body becomes rejuvenated from within. It becomes strong and firm, with all the suppleness of a child.

Sometimes during this process, latent germs of diseases may be brought to the surface, and as a result, the person may start to suffer from that disease. However, this is happening to expel this disease from the system permanently, and there is nothing to be afraid of. During the days of my wandering around India, I contracted chronic dysentery because I was traveling from place to place and eating whatever food was given to me. During one period of my sadhana this intensified so much that I began having forty to fifty stools every day. After a while I lost my strength and could not even get up to go to the toilet. Some of my friends were about me, but I wasn't at all frightened. Later this stopped automatically and permanently.

The purification of the nadis is purification of the entire system. The same blockages which cause diseases also give rise to such feelings as aversion, hatred, lethargy, dullness, and greed, and these qualities also disappear when the nadis are washed by Kundalini. When the nadis are cleansed, the nadis are purified. The mind is intimately connected to the prana. When the prana becomes uneven, the sense of duality arises, and the mind keeps weaving new webs of thoughts and fantasies. To control the mind, to make it still and even, yogis try to control the breath. This is why they practice so many

different kinds of pranayama, or breath control. During the process of Siddha Yoga purification, natural pranayama begins to take place. The prana and apana (the outgoing and ingoing breaths) become even, and eventually the breath begins to be retained within. This is called kumbhaka. Shaivism says that to keep controlling your breath is not true kumbhaka. In true kumbhaka, the prana and apana become one. At that point, prana does not go out, nor does apana come in. When the prana stops, the mind becomes still, and you experience supreme tranquility. Great beings are in this state of inner stillness.⁷⁸

When you're cultivating your kundalini, then because you're cultivating your real chi you are very near to accomplishing the stage of chi transforming to shen and as we know, shen is related to the “clear mirror” or clarity-awareness aspect of samadhi. So just as Tantric yoga and Esoteric Buddhism maintain, we can therefore verify that cultivating the kundalini energy, or real chi, is a precursor step to genuine samadhi achievements. The Tao school prefers to refer to activated kundalini energy as the state of tai hsi, and Taoism also states that this state of tai hsi appears when you're on the very border of samadhi attainments. Hence we have a variety of cultivation schools all confirming the same sort of principles about this cultivation phenomenon.

If we want to talk about transforming the earth element of the body, we must recognize that this is an even more advanced stage of practice as well as a more time consuming process than cultivating the fire element of kundalini. This is so because it involves transformations of the densest portions of the body, namely the hair, nails, teeth and bones. When some high stage cultivators die, they sometimes ignite their bodies into flame or dissolve their body into light, leaving bits of their hair and nails behind as relics for their students. In other cases, some masters leave the empty shells of their bodies behind, but the bodies remain uncorrupted and don't decompose due to all the cultivation work they've done in purifying it. When this happens we can recognize that these practitioners had definitely transformed their chi channels, and in evidence of this fact their bodies will usually produce pebble-like sariras if they are cremated.

Christianity calls this phenomenon “incorruption.” When a spiritual practitioner really purifies their chi channels, then after they die the body can resist decay for ages. Since this only occurs when the physical body and its chi channels have truly been transformed, this is one type of physical proof for the actual effectiveness of

⁷⁸ Kundalini: The Secret of Light, Swami Muktananda, (SYDA Foundation, South Fallsburg: New York, 1994), pp. 28-29.

spiritual cultivation. The bodies of the great Tibetan master Tsong Khapa, the contemporary Hindu Swami Paramhansa Yogananda, the Chinese master Han Shan, and various Christian saints such as St. Francis have all exhibited this phenomenon of incorruption. In Catholicism particularly, this phenomenon of "bodily incorruptibility" is a well-known saintly quality characterized by the fact that the human cadaver doesn't even exhibit rigor mortis, and after many days the body still hasn't decayed. So we know from this that it is common to many spiritual traditions, and the reason is because it's a nondenominational stage of definite spiritual cultivation.

Why is this possible? There is no special mystery behind this phenomenon because it's all due to the personal work of cultivation practice. It's due to the fact that the person who died had cultivated very hard through the practice of meditation, and was subsequently able to transform their chi channels and the physical body's five elements. As to whether they ultimately reached a high stage of samadhi, or even enlightenment, is another question entirely.

The point, however, is that this result of spiritual practice is a nondenominational finding. No matter what school, sect, religion or tradition you follow, the process of spiritual cultivation is a nonsectarian science and if you can purify your chi channels and the body's four elements, then this phenomenon of incorruption is bound to occur. If it doesn't occur, it simply means that you are cultivating incorrectly or haven't cultivated far enough; it doesn't mean that the information is invalid! So when someone exhibits a body of incorruption after death, it simply means that they were able to purify their physical nature while living through some form of advanced spiritual practice.

As to the sariras produced when a cultivation master's body is cremated, a very high stage practitioner doesn't have to leave behind any sariras (or even exhibit body incorruption), but these pebble-like materials are more often produced than not. In most cases, the presence of sariras upon cremation suggests that the person definitely accomplished something with their spiritual cultivation, and the lack of sariras often suggests the reverse. However, this is a very tricky matter to approach in terms of ranking someone's level of spiritual achievement, and you're best advised to steer clear of such prognostications. And yet, if someone who claimed they were a master died without leaving any of these pebble-like materials upon cremation, one might wonder whether they should have been doubting him all along in the first place, especially if the clues were there that something was amiss.

If someone claims they're a master and their hands are cold and clammy, their face is sunken without energy, or their body seems rigid and stiff with bones inflexible and unresponsive, one should definitely harbor these initial suspicions. There are more than a few stories of students who expected their dead teacher's body to be resurrected or simply resist the process of decomposition because they honestly believed he was a high stage cultivation practitioner. Unfortunately, in all of these cases the embarrassed students quickly found themselves cremating the body in secret after their master died. Because his body was no different than any other, they often discovered to their embarrassment that he'd been cheating them, or they had been cheating themselves for many years. Hopefully when this happens people can face up to the fact and increase the level of their own wisdom.

{photograph of sariras}

Now after cultivation of the wind (chi), water (mai, blood and hormones), fire (kundalini) and earth (muscles and bones) elements of the physical body, we can finally make inroads into cultivating the space element of the physical nature. Actually, the transformation of the *entire* bodily form, and not just the joints and empty spaces within the body, is akin to the cultivation of the space element, and it takes about thirteen years of practice before you can really start to truly tackle this aspect of cultivation transformation. Why does it take so long to be able to enter into transforming the body's space element? Because this element is so subtle, which accounts for its difficulty of transformation.

The school of Tantra sometimes has individuals engage in sexual cultivation saying its purpose is to help the practitioner gain control over the chi of this particular element. However, in order to even engage in such practices and have the hope of any success, a person must have already attained all the preliminary stages of samadhi leading up to this level. I once saw my teacher emanate hundreds of celestial soldiers from the lower portion of his belly region, effectively using up a large store of his accumulated jing-chi, in order to help prevent two nations from fighting. The countries didn't fight, but afterwards one of them suffered a severe earthquake whose destructive influences were the equivalent of the normal ruin caused by war, just as the Spanish flu of 1918 killed millions more people than were killed in the preceding World War I. After this sacrifice, all the chi between my master's joints was greatly depleted, and I was extremely curious as to how he would renew himself. It was only after a female Buddha consort appeared and helped him that he was able to restore this vitality quickly. Hence I know that this sort of technique can help the qualified somewhat replenish their energies in certain cases.

You now have all the necessary background information to understand why the practices and transformations of the cultivation path usually proceed in a particular order. The reason is because the sequence of cultivating the wind, water, fire, earth and then space elements *is actually the most natural sequence to follow to successfully accomplish the task of spiritual cultivation*. In the process of spiritual cultivation, it just wouldn't make sense to waste efforts and first try to transform the densest, most difficult portions of the body for these are what would definitely offer the most resistance to change. Our bones are so coarse and heavy that they're the last things to remain even after we die, so they are not the logical first step of transformation to run after on the path of spiritual cultivation. The heat element, or kundalini, would be difficult factor to first cultivate before any others because it's hard to ascertain or grab hold of its true nature; if you cannot realize the nature of a phenomenon, then it's hard to transform it as well. What's therefore left are the wind and water elements of the physical nature.

The wind and water elements of the body are the easiest to initially transform through the process of spiritual cultivation, and so that's where the emphasis of spiritual cultivation initially lies. These two elements correspond to our jing, hormones, chi, chakras and mai which is why these phenomena are usually accentuated at the earliest stages of the path. This is also why their descriptions are commonly found across a variety of spiritual traditions, for they are only the lowest level phenomena of the path. Some traditions don't proceed very far toward the highest stages of spiritual development, but because these phenomena are so low, almost any genuine path is bound to encounter them.

As I've often stated, these phenomena don't amount to very much in themselves, but people always make the mistake of attributing to them a priority and importance they really don't deserve. That's especially the case with the New Age spiritual schools of the West which take a little bit of information from this school, and a little bit from another school, and throw it all together without any cohesive structure or accurate understanding. If you wonder why the New Age schools never get anything right, it's because they keep mixing all this information without any overall comprehensive understanding, and there is no comprehensive understanding because the teachers of these schools never reach these stages themselves.

Anyway, there's no secret behind the typical sequential process of spiritual transformation that people usually experience on the cultivation path. This sequence is just the easiest one to naturally complete on the path, or it's the easiest one to naturally bring about through cultivation exercises. Of course this is just a general

rule, for the end results of spiritual practitioners will always be biased due to their differing stores of karma, merit, wisdom and past life cultivation efforts. For instance some people, due to their high prajna, can realize the state of non-ego directly without a lot of these intervening stages of physical transformation, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Nevertheless there are some individuals who can succeed at Zen meditation quite quickly, and then must continue meditating in order to fully transform their physical body.

What you must remember here is that this sequence of wind, water, fire, earth and space transformations isn't an artificially contrived set of transformations which transpires, but something which happens naturally when you simply rest the mind. If you cultivate mental emptiness then these things will naturally happen. Even Hasidism recognizes this for as Dov Baer, the Maggid (Preacher) of Mezritch explained, “transformation is possible only through ... *ayin* [emptiness].”⁷⁹

Thus if you learn the meaning of true mental resting, and stay in that state, these things will definitely happen. On the other hand, *if they don't happen then it's because you haven't realized the real meaning of mental resting*, which is to experience the absence of discriminative thought. “Resting” is what makes the path something with validity rather than something artificial born of false constructions. This is also one of the reasons why spiritual cultivation is a science—human being science.

The ease of bringing about these transformations in this special sequential order is the main reason why most cultivation schools advise students to start out on the road of practice using breathing exercises such as the pranayama techniques of yoga, the bottled wind methods of Tantra, the anapana and breath mindfulness practices of Buddhism, and various other practices for “following the breath.” Methods that cultivate the breath have the side benefit of effecting the chi, and thus they can help cultivate the wind element of the body, which kicks off the entire process of spiritual cultivation. Of course there are also reasons for cultivating breath from the standpoint of lessening one's miscellaneous thoughts, but from the standpoint of the five elements view of cultivation, the reasoning is just this simple.

With prolonged chi practice, and factoring in the condition that you mustn't lose your jing during this process, eventually the process of cultivating the breath will enable the mai to open and the chakras to form, and an inner realm of light to appear. People tend to think that chakra formation is in the realm of chi cultivation,

⁷⁹ The Problem of Pure Consciousness, Robert K.C. Forman, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1990), pp. 145.

but the opening of the chakras actually belongs to the stage of cultivating the chi channels (the mai). Chi and chi channel cultivation are actually related but different phenomenon. You have to cultivate both on the road of spirituality and thus a famous cultivation saying runs, "If your inner channels are not opened through, but you say you have attained samadhi, this is impossible." To attain samadhi, you not only have to have transformed your chi, but your chi channels as well.

If your chi is cultivated and your channels open, only then can you reach the stage where the breathing stops which the Esoteric school calls "breath in the jeweled bottle" or "bottled breathing." This is akin to the embryo breathing of the Tao school called tai hsi, or the kundalini arousal of the Hindu schools. In Buddhism we simply refer to this as cultivating the body's wind element. Only after this stage can you finally talk about cultivating the bliss nature of kundalini as well as the various samadhi realms of spiritual knowing. In other words, when your meditation work reaches the proper temperature, the fire of samadhi will be born and you'll achieve all sorts of spiritual gong-fu. All this can transpire after you successfully cultivate the fire element of the body.

After achieving samadhi you can go on to achieve yet other physical transformations, such as transforming your bones and the other dense physical structures of the body, but these require a much longer period of time than what's required for the initial transformations of the spiritual path. That's why the stage of laying the foundation takes about three months of devoted cultivation practice to transform your jing, and the stage of pregnancy takes about ten months of practice to transform your chi, whereas the subsequent transformations of the path require much longer periods of time.

All together you'll require about one year of devoted practice to really get started on transforming your jing and chi, for the task isn't completely finished at the one-year mark. Rather, this one-year period is just used to indicate the approximate time required to really get a handle on completing this task, and to really enter into the true spiritual path. It's in these periods that you have to *saturate yourself* in, and never deviate from emptiness meditation in order to complete these higher stage transformations of the path. That's the only way that your entire body will become transformed and turned into a suitable physical vehicle fit to support your spiritual attainments.

With continued practice past the stage of kundalini cultivation into the samadhi attainments, you can eventually begin to experience true mental emptiness, and this will correspondingly start to cultivate the body's space element. That is, it

will cultivate the emptiness aspect of the physical nature; it will address the emptiness nature of phenomena. However, you shouldn't make the mistake of assuming that physical emptiness and mental emptiness are the same thing, for mental emptiness refers to a mind absent of phenomenal marks or characteristics. Physical emptiness is, of course, just an empty space having form whereas mental emptiness is formless.

From yet another angle, we must also recognize that all five elements in the human body correspond to different types of chi, and in these correspondences the space element corresponds to the “vayu wind” of Hinduism and the “all pervading chi” in Esoteric Buddhism. Since chi is still a substance belonging to the realm of form, we can once again infer from this that empty space doesn't have the same meaning as mental emptiness. Both have to be cultivated on the cultivation trail. In particular, the task of cultivating the empty space of the body is a very difficult task that can only be fully achieved after a long period of time. The reason is because the form of chi corresponding to our body's space element is very, very subtle. Being very subtle and refined, it is accordingly very difficult to cultivate and that is why it takes so many years to address it.

The process of spiritual progress, from the viewpoint of cultivating the five elements, is therefore really this simple. Or you can say that it's really this hard, for it all depends on how you look at the matter. But since it's a natural process which spontaneously arises when you rest the mind in its natural state—the mind's original nature—the best way to describe matters is to say that “cultivation is this simple.” After all, there's no doubt that if you just drop everything and truly rest the mind from attachments, letting it return to its natural state without interruption, all these things will just spontaneously occur. All you have to do is just keep at the practice of abandoning your normal clinging to mentation! As Zen Master Pao Chih said,

If you only learn to cultivate unmindfulness at all times whether you're walking, standing, sitting or reclining, then you may fail to leap over to true Reality only because your strength is insufficient. But if you continue practicing in this way for another three, five, or ten years, you will surely awaken to Tao in the end.

While many may feel that the descriptive technique of the five elements is a little too simplistic for the cultivation path, in actual fact this is one of the techniques that should be heavily relied upon in Western spheres because of the tie-ins with modern science. As science gets more advanced over the next two to three hundred years, it will slowly adopt many principles from this simplistic framework, and thus I always

recommend that Westerners start using the five elements in their cultivation discussions.

YET ANOTHER MEANS FOR DESCRIBING THE CULTIVATION PATH

The normal sequence and process of spiritual cultivation practice can also be described in yet another scientific fashion. First you must cultivate your wind element, or chi, by mastering mental peace and stillness. When your mind reaches a state of mental calm and peacefulness through meditation practice, this empty imperturbability corresponds to a state of yin. Any state of yin at its extreme always gives birth to a state of yang, and so from cultivating stillness eventually your prenatal yang chi will begin to stir, and then arise. This yang chi will then work to clear your chi channels of obstructions, and this will naturally bring about this entire series of transformations.

In other words, just detach from all phenomena, *both internal and external*, and then you'll gradually learn to be able to perceive the true empty nature of your mind, which is clear and pure without any obstructions. It's always shining, and due to this shining, when it's not disturbed after a long time chi is developed. That's why the extreme of yin will give birth to yang in the physical body.

Let's give a physical example of this process, namely how the stillness of yin gives birth to yang. For this example we'll turn to a chance observation by the naturalist Viktor Schauberger, who through a stroke of luck was able to observe the following:

One hot summer's day I sat at the edge of [a calm] lake, debating whether I would go for a cooling swim. I had decided to do so when I noticed that the lake water had begun to swirl about in strange whorls. Trees, which had been carried down into the lake by avalanches, branches and all, freed themselves from being stuck in the sand and began to perform a spiral dance, which swept them faster and faster towards the center of the lake. There they suddenly stood up on end and were dragged down into the depths by such a powerful suctional force that their bark was stripped off. This is similar to instances where people have been carried aloft by tornadoes fully clothed, only to be cast down to Earth again stark naked. Not a single tree ever reappeared from the depths of the lake.

Shortly thereafter the lake was calm again as if its hunger had been satisfied by the victims it had sucked into its maw. This, however, was merely the calm before the actual storm. Suddenly the lake-bottom began to bellow. All at once a water-spout as tall as a house shot up into the air from the middle of the lake. This turning, twisting, funnel-shaped, up-surge of water was accompanied by a thunderous roar. Then it collapsed. Waves struck the shore, which I had to leave as quickly as possible because the water level in the lake suddenly began to rise uncannily. What I had just witnessed was ... [the power of a yang type spiral force generated from stillness resulting in] the renewal of water in lakes without affluent streams.⁸⁰

Buddha often described how the universe was also born from emptiness, which has parallels to what Viktor Schauberger had observed. At first space was empty, and over a long period of time it began to become filled with a great universal wind that turned round and round. This was probably what science now calls a virtual particle soup. Eventually this universal wind congealed or liquefied into vast streams, which we call the water element. The rest of the birth of the universe—from the space element into the wind element into the water element—proceeded onwards from these humble beginnings.

If you look at the wonderful pictures of spiral galaxies now available because of the Hubble telescope, you’ll also see another confirming example of this same sort of principle. The main point, however, is that *the extreme of yin gives birth to yang, and thus the extreme of mental stillness gives birth to the transformational changes that are the key to spiritual advancement, or cultivation.*

As an interesting literary aside, we can also bring up how the Tao school of China viewed the origins of the universe and earth, and without questioning the accuracy of this view, will discover this same notion that formlessness gives birth to form:

The learning and thought of the Taoist School on the beginning of the universe and the world is also the cultural thought of the original China itself; the term “*yu chou* (universe)” was not used prior to the Chou and Ch’in dynasties, and there was only the concept of “Heaven and earth” which was sufficient to represent the later meaning of the universe. It was considered in the Taoist School that before Heaven and earth separated, there was only a state of chaos (*hun tun*). They

⁸⁰ *Nature as Teacher*, Viktor Schauberger, trans. Callum Coats, (Gateway Books, Bath: U.K., 1998), pp. 34-35.

were not concerned with whether or not there was a creator nor did they ask whether this state was a cause or an effect.

This chaos [formlessness] cannot be called either a material thing nor a spirit but rather as stated in the *Lao Tzu*: "The form without a form, the name without a name." According to the "Appended Remarks" of the *Book of Changes*, as well as the Yin Yang School which maintained primitive theoretical science, this chaos is the phenomenon of the *yin* and *yang* before they were separated in a composite state.

Later, based on the principles of the eight trigrams, it was called "prior to the first drawn line" and "before the six lines of the diagrams moved." It was conceptually referred to as "prior to the separation of Heaven and earth" before the division of Confucianism and Taoism into two schools, and in the *Lao Tzu* it is spoken of as: "There was something undefined yet complete, born before Heaven and earth."

The "undefined yet complete" referred to in the *Lao Tzu* does not allude to purely physical effects but rather the effects of physical material as it is conceived within the chaos, and after some time, this chaos splits into *yin* and *yang* and initiates the beginning of Heaven and earth.⁸¹

From these analogies we can find outer physical correspondences to the inner processes of cultivation transformation: from the mental stillness of emptiness you'll end up cultivating the body's water element, or *mai*, meaning that chakras will naturally form *without the necessity of any directed effort*. That's the way it should be, and that's the way it always is because adding thoughts to the equation only inhibits the formation process. When you continue with this method of cultivating mental peacefulness, which we also refer to as emptiness or the lack of wandering thoughts, your mind will eventually become so clear that you will be able to return to your original nature and see the Tao. That's why Lao Tzu said, "Returning to one's root is called stillness. This is what is meant by returning to one's destiny. Returning to one's destiny is called eternal. Knowing the eternal is called illumination."⁸²

You never have to specifically force anything into transpiring for this natural process of transformation to come about, nor do you need to guide this process in any way whatsoever. It's natural, so where is guidance necessary? You don't have to consciously guide the growth of your height, or your progression through puberty,

⁸¹ *The Story of Chinese Taoism*, Nan Huai-Chin, trans. by William Brown, (Top Shape Publishing, Reno: Nevada, 2002).

⁸² *Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching*, trans. D .C. Lau, (Penguin books, Harmondsworth: UK, 1963), p. 72.

or the beating of your heart, do you? Remember that the spiritual path is genuinely genuine—more genuine than anything you can imagine—because it’s a totally natural process. It’s not artificial. If the spiritual path involved some type of contrived effort or artificiality, it wouldn’t be Tao and if you’re not getting any natural results, it’s because you’re cultivating incorrectly. Remember that any artificial sort of Tao would constitute a false path, a constructed path with a counterfeit outcome.

All you have to do on the true path of spirituality is cultivate mental emptiness and then this entire sequence of physical transformations will all spontaneously transpire. If your mind can become empty, then yang chi can be born. It’ll naturally arise when you give it a chance by remaining empty and thereby not interfering with the natural chi flows of the body, which normally happens when you think too much (because thoughts and chi are linked). The true route of spiritual practice is to refrain from interference by leaving your wandering thoughts alone, and refraining from trying to control them. In abandoning your thoughts, that’s how you achieve all these things and eventually “become one with God.”

The Complete Enlightenment Sutra warned us about the correct cultivation practice for spiritual progress: “Don’t try to put an end to your false thoughts nor try to destroy the false states of mind which arise. When experiencing false thoughts, do not impose comprehension, and do not attempt to distinguish the real in this non-comprehension.” As Guifeng also said,

Consciously examine very closely, observe perceptively very intently. If habit energies arise, they will cease on the spot; do not follow them and you will avoid falling into the emotional indulgences of ordinary human beings. Do not destroy them either and you will avoid falling into quietism. The all-at-once teaching of the school of completeness is after all like this; just accord with original nature and conscious cognition will be uninterrupted.⁸³

Just to know you have false thoughts is enough, so you need not follow them to make them disperse. They will disperse naturally if you let them alone. When you let thoughts disperse, this is what we call “liberating the mind” because by doing this you finally achieve emptiness. In recognizing (through awareness rather than thoughts) that all your experience is illusion, that recognition is the right way to spiritually practice. It’s to become detached without performing any special techniques of cultivation.

⁸³ Taoist Meditation: Method for Cultivating a Healthy Mind and Body, trans. By Thomas Cleary (Shambhala Publications, Boston: Massachusetts, 2000), p. 30.

Knowing of false thoughts, you must immediately detach from them and become spiritually awake without the use of any expedient methods. Thus in true cultivation you can immediately succeed without need of any gradual steps. The proper road of spiritual cultivation—no matter what the religious school or tradition—is to therefore try to freely maintain an open inner awareness without playing with your idle thoughts, and then they in turn will spontaneously settle. When they settle your mind will become empty, calm, peaceful or still. Where there is stillness or peace there is yin, and when yin reaches its zenith by becoming extreme, then yang will be born and bring about the ten thousand and one transformations!

If you follow this cultivation route correctly, you will eventually experience the activation of the fire element, or kundalini, which corresponds to the warming stage within the Mahayana Path of Intensified Yoga Practices. So cultivating one’s kundalini *does not* constitute any stage of extremely high cultivation practice. It’s still *just a preparatory stage of cultivation practice*, and it doesn’t even reach to the Stage of Seeing the Path! What it will do is help complete the cleansing of your chi channels and produce an actual inner light that you can (psychically) see within your body. That’s one reason why Patanjali says, “Breath-control (pranayama) removes the covering concealing the inner light.”⁸⁴ If you use this chance to turn inward in your spiritual practice, then you can eventually attain the high mental states of samadhi.

This process is something most spiritual practitioners don’t recognize because they’ve been exposed to too many incomplete teachings about kundalini, as well as to the biographical accounts of lower stage cultivators who thought this phenomenon was all supreme, but who didn’t know the correct principles behind genuine spiritual practice. Believe it or not, most cultivators don’t know the proper principles behind spiritual practice because they lack good teachers to guide them, or because they know the principles but mistake semblance dharmas for the real thing and minor phenomena for major ones.

As a perfect example, you can look around today and notice that almost everyone knows the word kundalini, but what people think they know about kundalini is usually completely wrong. Even after the stage of kundalini cultivation we still have to cultivate the earth and space elements of the physical body. Nonetheless these are rarely mentioned at all, nor is the fact that you are still experiencing transformations of the wind and water elements at every stage of the path! These

⁸⁴ The Philosophy of Yoga, Georg Feuerstein, (Inner Traditions International, Rochester: Vermont, 1996), p. 104.

elements of the physical body require much time and patience to purify, and so people always end up going through multiple cycles of wind-water-fire-earth-space element purification on the road of cultivation. It's not like you purify them once and you're done. Rather, you're always proceeding through multiple refinings to higher and higher stages of purification.

MAPPING THE FIVE ELEMENT SCHEME TO THE ESSENCES OF JING, CHI AND SHEN

If we wish to match the cultivation of the five elements with the transformations of jing to chi, chi to shen, shen to emptiness, and emptiness to Tao, it becomes a little tricky in places because there is a lot of overlap in these stages. Because of this the correspondences between these two descriptive schemes aren't so clear cut. Once again, you can't be too mechanical about this process of making one-to-one correspondences on the cultivation trail for the various reasons I've previously cited. Rather, the important thing is to understand the general principles behind these stages and how they compare to one another in the overall sense.

For those who insist on playing with correspondences, however, we can roughly equate the stage of jing transforming to chi with cultivating the wind and water elements of the human body. As to the stage where chi transforms into shen, this has strong parallels to the stage of kundalini, or fire element cultivation, although cultivating your shen is much farther advanced than kundalini cultivation. Then again, when you're cultivating your shen, your body will most likely have reached a state of samadhi wherein it will be experiencing the physical bliss and warmth of yang (rather than yin) kundalini.

The stages of shen transmuting to emptiness and pure emptiness cultivation, which require much longer periods of time, can make inroads into cultivating the earth and space elements of the body so as to resultantly effect changes in the body's entire physical structure. If we wanted, we could even find parallels here to the successful cultivation of the yang shen body which can appear with a solid tangible structure, and which can disappear into space at will. Since the details behind this particular set of correspondences entail a much higher degree of sophistication, space limitations don't allow us to go further into this matter.

Actually, the overall task of making direct correspondences between cultivation schools is never very simple. This is because the cultivation stages between different systems usually overlap, and this problem of overlap doesn't allow for clear delineations between various cultivation stages as described by different

parties. In addition, various schools delineate the borders of common phenomena differently, and there are an entire host of other challenges as well.

If we look at the descriptive scheme of the five elements for illustrative purposes, it's hard to draw borders and boundaries around these various stages of cultivation because we can *say you're always cultivating the wind, water, earth, fire and space elements of the physical body at every step of the path*. There is always some sort of refining of each of the elements going on, and then refinings once again at higher and higher levels so that the work of transforming the body's five elements is never really finished.

The Tao school usually says you need “nine refinings” to complete cultivation transformations, but the number nine here doesn't refer to the specific number nine. Rather, the number nine is used so as to refer to a top number--a large number of refinings. Our bodies are constantly turning over their cells with or without the involvement of spiritual cultivation such that our bodies are not the collection of atoms that they were a year ago. So what Taoism is trying to say with this number is that you're always cycling through these transformations, which affect one another in an interpenetrative, cross-referential fashion, and you have to keep to the path of cultivation so that they ultimately become complete.

When we devote ourselves to spiritual cultivation, we finally set into motion a supreme set of natural transformations that accord with increasing spiritual awareness. Spiritual authors always postulate that the ancients were more spiritually advanced than we are but never say how or why this was possible. One reason is because of this principle, and the fact that the mental life of our ancestors was not as busy as it is today. If your mind is simple and doesn't have too many desires, all these spiritual transformations will occur naturally for it's the peaceful or empty mind that will naturally activate them. That's why living a simple and stress-free life without too many worries often leads to good health and longevity.

Our problem today is that our minds aren't peaceful anymore, and it's this increase in mental busyness over the centuries—along with greed and desire--which has thus contributed to man's spiritual decline. This is actually why the great figures of the Tao school never liked giving the public too many goods or letting society progress too much in terms of material progress. They knew that this would lead to even more desires, and from there the level of spiritual awareness in society would accordingly decline even more. When we look at peaceful societies and try to introduce televisions and other modern amenities, we may think we're helping them progress, but we might actually be contributing to spiritual decline.

Now the physical body is always undergoing a series of interdependent transformations, as is the physical world at large, so it's hard to make razor sharp delineations as regards the beginnings and endings of various stages of spiritual transformation. As an example, you could say that “cultivating the space element” involves the phase of “shen transforming into emptiness,” and you could also say that it stretches from this phase of practice to the stage of “breaking emptiness so as to return it to the Tao.”

Then again, you could say that this transformation stretches from the very beginning of the spiritual path--from the very moment you first start cultivating emptiness--and this delineation would be perfectly true as well. In another instance, at the stage of cultivating your shen you're also still cultivating your jing and chi, but we call it the stage of shen cultivation because it's all a matter of predominance. Hence it's sometimes hard to pose a particular match-up between the cultivation stages of various systems, and you would be advised to stay away from making hard and fast determinations on these matters.

The important point behind this discussion actually hasn't been this matching up of spiritual stages between the five elements and jing-chi-shen complex, but to let you see that here's yet another form-based, physical means for describing the cultivation process, and to point out that this methodology is especially suited for Westerners. It's another alternative ranking system which you can use as you need. This descriptive scheme of the five elements not only explains spiritual cultivation gong-fu, but it also accounts for the rationale behind the various sequences of meditative practices used on the path. All the various schemes in existence have certain benefits and advantages, and so you're advised to use whatever scheme is relevant or useful to the purposes of your quest.

If we want to examine a typical cultivation experience involving the interdependent transformations between the jing, chi and mai, we can review the autobiographical account of the Taoist practitioner Yin Shih Tsu who eliminated all his illnesses and improved his health through the popular meditation method of shamatha-vipashyana practice (cessation and contemplation practice). Yin Shih Tsu's case summarizes the typical sequences of transformation we've reviewed as regards the early stages of cultivating the wind and water elements of the body. However, we must remember that these are only the *rudimentary* transformations of the jing, chi and mai that occur *prior* to true samadhi attainments. In other words, they're only the initial physical attainments that help you to purify the body and make it a healthier, more fit vehicle for the spiritual path.

In cultivation you purify the body in order to calm the body, and you calm the body so as to be able to forget the body and calm the mind. Thus these transformations of the jing, chi and chi channels are not really everlasting spiritual attainments because they involve our physical bodies, and you cannot carry your body with you when you die. The point is to forget the body and forget the mind so that, as the Scripture on the Western Ascent says,

Have the same mind as heaven but without knowing it;
Have the same body as the Way without distinguishing it.
After that, the Way of Heaven is fulfilled.⁸⁵

In reviewing the sequence of transformations that Yin Shih Tsu experienced, we must also remember that not every practitioner will experience this exact same sequence of events because cultivation gong-fu is an individualized affair. It indeed follows general patterns so that you'll be able to understand what happened to him, and the results of cultivation can definitely be categorized in a scientific fashion, but spiritual gong-fu typically varies on a case-by-case basis according to the efforts of the practitioner and his or her situation.

This particular case has been chosen in order to review some of these cultivation lessons, but we should note that it's not the definitive pattern. Rather, it is a typical pattern, and is used for illustrative purposes only. In fact, most practitioners won't ever even reach this foundational stage of attainment because they lack the discipline to meditate faithfully, succumb to sexual desire and lose their jing, or because they fail to base themselves on correct cultivation principles in their practice. That's why most religious practitioners never make it even this far on the path. Nevertheless, as Yin Shih Tsu recounts in his book, Yin Shih Tsu's Experimental Meditation for the Promotion of Health,

According to the T'ung Meng Chih Kuan, when the inner excellent qualities manifest in the practice of dhyana, the meditator experiences eight physical sensations such as weightlessness, warmth, coldness and heaviness which concern the body, and vibration, itching, roughness and smoothness which pertain to activity. According to my personal experience, these sensations were not all felt at the same time, but one after another. When I was twenty-eight and twenty-nine, I felt only three of them, weightlessness, warmth and

⁸⁵ Taoist Meditation: Method for Cultivating a Healthy Mind and Body, trans. By Thomas Cleary (Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2000), p. 100.

vibration. After sitting for a long while, my first sensation was that my body was as weightless as a feather. Later, I felt heat in my lower belly followed by a vibration which rose up the backbone until it reached the crown and then descended down the face (and chest) until it returned to the lower belly, to circulate again and again in the same manner. This is the flow (of the vital principle) joining up the two psychic channels called jen mo and tu mo. According to ancient medical science, there are eight psychic channels; besides the above two, jen mo and tu mo, the other six are: ch'ung mo, tai mo, yang ch'iao, yin ch'iao, yang wei and yin wei.

I practised chih-kuan for over ten years during which I concentrated on the lower belly. One day, I shifted my concentration to the 'central spot' (between the navel and the pit of the stomach) and a few days later, I noticed a profound change in my body, resulting in a free flow (of prana) through the remaining six psychic channels which I describe below.

As I now fix my concentration on the 'central spot', one evening, at the end of a meditation at midnight, I suddenly felt a vibration in my chest, and my saliva flowed freely. This happened for several evenings. Then the vibration became more intense and thrust up straight to the spot between the eyebrows where I perceived a red brightness. Then pushing up it reached the crown which it circled for a long while. I felt as if an electric shock was pulsing round in my body until it reached my hands and feet after piercing (through my limbs). This lasted a full minute and then stopped abruptly between the eyebrows.

After that, every evening, I experienced the same vibration. It seemed as if there was some mechanism revolving in the 'central spot' and rising slowly until it reached the crown round which it continued to circle. When the vibration became intense, it abruptly stopped between the eyebrows. Then the 'central spot' vibrated again, and there seemed to be an electric shock which pulsed in an oblique oval circuit from my left shoulder to my left leg, so violently that it shook my bed and mosquito-net; when the vibration became more intense, it stopped abruptly. Then I felt another vibration behind the brain, descending along the backbone to stop abruptly in the coccyx. After that, something like another electric shock descended from my right shoulder to my right leg, pulsing in an oblique oval circuit; the vibration became intense and stopped suddenly. These two oblique oval circuits, on the left and right sides of my body, showed that the four

psychic channels, ying ch'iao, yang ch'iao, yin wei and yang wei, had joined up. Thus for the first time I understood the inter-relation of the eight psychic channels and the nervous systems and realized there was nothing fictitious and unaccountable in it all.

Up to then, each time the inner vibration took place, it began in (some sort of) change in the 'central spot'. However, one evening, it started in my ears and formed a straight line across my face, swinging from left to right and back again several times before ending abruptly between the eyebrows. (at the same time) another vibration from the forehead to the chin, in a vertical straight line, made, with the horizontal line, a cross and pulsed up and down several times before suddenly ending between the eyebrows. Then another vibration descended in a curve from the crown (along the face) chest and belly to the penis. It pushed up and down, causing the penis to erect. This showed that the two channels jen mo and ch'ung mo had joined up.

One night, the heat in the 'central spot' vibrated, causing my body to bend forwards and backwards and to the left and right. These bendings were orderly and the same number each time without the least confusion. Then the vibration caused my arm to revolve backwards and forwards quickly like a wheel with the same number of turns each way. Then it reached my legs so that the left one bent while the right one straightened and vice versa. These movements could not be explained by orthodox science and were involuntary. After them my head (seemed to) swell and the upper part of my body to stretch so that I (seemed) to be over ten feet tall. (The Buddhist Scriptures call this the appearance of the great body.) Suddenly my head bent back and my chest (seemed) as large as the great void. Then with the same suddenness, my head bent forward and my back (seemed) as large as space. As a result I felt (as if) I had only the lower half of my body. Thus with the disappearance of both body and mind, I experienced unusual bliss.

Another evening the vibration in the 'central spot' circled round the spine, then round the chest under the skin, round the belly in the jen mo channel and finally round the waist, in each case first to the left and then to the right for a few ten of turns each way. This final circling of the waist showed that the tai mo channel was clear. Then the vibration descended spirally from the crown down the tai mo channel along the backbone to the coccyx, up and down for a few ten of times. Then it rose from the lower belly, went up the jen mo channel to the top of the head and descended through the occiput and down the spine to

the coccyx, up and down for a few tens of times. (The vital principle) after breaking through the jen mo and tai mo channels had risen from the coccyx along the spine to the top of the head and then descended down the face (throat), chest and belly, but now it circled in reverse most probably because these channels were free, so that it could flow either way. Thus the ch'ung mo and tai mo channels were also joined up.

Another night from the 'central spot' and beneath the skin the vibration took the form of a two-inch spiral which circled the body thirty-six times each way. It then circled round the lower belly and (the middle of) the chest, all being orderly and systematic. Next it rose to the head and descended circling the spine to the coccyx, returning up the backbone to the crown, twice each way. Then it rose up along the lower belly first by the left and then by the right ch'ung mo channels to the crown and back, twice by each channel. After that it circled the jen mo channel in the head, descended to the lower belly and returned to the crown. Sometimes it circled round the head, from left to right and then from right to left, stopping in the forehead. Another time it revolved in the left and right shoulder with the same number of turns each way. Suddenly it reached the tips of the fingers which made quick involuntary movements. Finally it descended in a rush from the top of the head, flung out both my legs and moved the toes with the same speed as fingers.

One evening the vibration began in the centre of the back and spiralled under the skin making thirty-six circles first to the left and then to the right—then again, but starting from between the loins and once more but from between the shoulder blades. All these circuits were orderly and systematic. Before it had moved to the left and right in three circuits beginning from the 'central spot', the middle of the belly and the centre of the chest, but now it started from the middle of the back, between the loins and between the shoulder blades, that is from three spots exactly behind the front ones. These involuntary circular movements were really wonderful and inconceivable. When it reached the tips of the fingers and toes, the latter stretched out to move while the legs bent and straightened alternately and the upper and lower jaws knocked against each other, all making brisk movements. When it reached the nose, suddenly the nostrils contracted and expanded. When it reached the eyes, the eyelids suddenly opened and closed, while the irises moved in sympathy. Finally it caused the ear lobes to

move slowly. All these movements to the left and right were natural with the same number of turns in each direction.

One night the vibration in the 'central spot' caused another series of systematic circuits thirty-six times to the left and again to the right, first from between the loins along the tai mo (belt) channel, then from (the middle of) the chest and finally from the middle of the belly. They succeeded each other systematically. Next the vibration made two great ovals by going up and down the left and right sides of the chest, and a second pair by going up to the head and descending first to the left and then to the right side of the back. Each pair of ovals crossed several times.

After that it moved to my limbs so that my arms swung in quick circles to the left and right while my legs bent and straightened and first the toes and then the heel of one foot kept striking those of the other. Suddenly my knees began to swing apart and close; then they bent, forcing up from the floor my buttocks which swung to the left and right. This happened three times, while my jaws, lips, nose and eyes moved more briskly than before.

Another evening the vibration in the 'central spot' spiralled in a large circle round the body sixty times to the left and again to the right and this was followed by similar circuits round the chest and belly. Suddenly each of these three circuits expanded six times in turn, all within them becoming a void for five or six minutes each time.

The vibration then rose from the central spot to the head and made four oblique ovals in turn through which it circled thirty-six times from the top of the head to the left and right sides of the buttocks and back, through the back of the head and along the spine to the coccyx and the left leg and back, and finally to the right leg and back.

Another night ... when the vibration moved down the face my shoulders and arms turned: my legs bent and straightened, opened and closed, and then with my feet on the floor and knees bent, my back arched until my shoulders touched the floor. My buttocks and waist swung to the left and right while my whole body shook: it then dropped to the ground. Next my soles rubbed together and each massaged the other leg for the same number of times. When the vibration rose to my shoulders, my hands began to massage each other, my head, neck, shoulders and arms. They then massaged me up from my lower belly to my shoulders, then right down my whole body to my toes. Finally my fists clenched and in turn parted, kneaded

and rubbed me all over. All this happened systematically and in order, was involuntary and quite wonderful.

... These involuntary movements lasted for some six months after which they gradually ceased. This was probably because all the psychic channels had by then opened and been cleared.⁸⁶

Reading this account, an intelligent practitioner might ask themselves, "Must the physical transformations involved in clearing the mai always happen in this manner, and will they always assume this same pattern?" The answer, of course, is no, not at all. For every practitioner, the purificatory effects experienced will vary due to the type of practice they follow, their age and sex and health, their stores of merit and past life spiritual achievements, and the degree of effort that they put into their spiritual practice. Everyone's spiritual results will differ according to these variations, however the changes that occur from clearing the mai, despite their variety, *will* manifest according to a set of pre-existing scientific principles and they *will* follow a predictable or general pattern of manifestation.

You can easily review the experiences of Lady Yeshe Tsogyel when she was purifying her body through esoteric practices, or the experiences of Saint Therese of Lisieux who followed the route of Christian cultivation practices, to see a variety of different purification visaya that exhibit the same common principles of manifestation.

Many individuals today report all sorts of unusual, spontaneous yoga-like postures as the chi really begins to clear their chi channels, so there are all sorts of things that can happen from meditation as our bodies begin to renew themselves by recovering lost vitality. You can experience the spontaneous movement of the hands and feet as the chi works to clear the appropriate chi channels and nerves of obstructions. You might feel involuntary contractions of the uterus, anus, penis, vagina, throat and abdomen. You might experience changes in your breathing rhythm, or even a sudden paralysis of the body. You might feel pain or sensations of hot and cold in various parts of the body, or vibrations and ticklish feelings, and even orgasmic sensations. You might see lights or hear various sounds in the head, and might experience sudden random emotions such as joy and bliss or anxiety and depression as your chi tries to perform its purificatory function. As your chi works its way through your body and various organs that are typically associated with specific emotions, you might experience various manifestations of those organ-emotional interlinkages (see the Chinese medical correspondences of the liver to anger and depression, the kidneys to fear and crying, the heart to joy and sadness, etc.).

⁸⁶ The Secrets of Chinese Meditation, Lu K'uan Yu, (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1969), pp. 193-198.

There are all sorts of unusual gong-fu that you can experience on the cultivation path. For example, when Jesus was stabbed in his side while on the cross, blood and water gushed out from the wound. This particular phenomenon indicated he had achieved a certain stage of cultivation achievement. When King Kusha copped off Indian Zen master Aryasimha’s head with his sword (and his arm immediately fell off in quick karmic recompense),⁸⁷ a milky white liquid spurted from Master Aryasimha’s body shooting high into the air. This indicated a yet higher stage of physical transformation often recorded of great monks—namely the deep transformation of the bone marrow of our body.

There are all sorts of various cultivation visaya like this which are possible on the spiritual path, and whether or not they occur all depends upon your own cultivation efforts. They are indeed achievable, but it takes disciplined practice and devotion to bring them about. It’s your cultivation efforts which determine your ultimate stage of spiritual achievement, which is why I always urge people to get into some routine of daily practice.

The important point to recognize is that these various phenomena represent a sort of detoxification and purification of the physical nature. They represent purifications of the five elements. Hence they are not totally random or unexplainable phenomena, but belong to a general class of phenomena having specific characteristics and a predictable sequence of manifestation.

A particularly excellent summary of these experiences, for those who wish to research matters in more depth, can be found in Tao and Longevity, by Nan Huai-Chin, which outlines in detail the experiences one can expect on the stages of the cultivation path. But for a brief confirming review of these matters, we can turn to the account of yet another cultivation practitioner, Ajit Mookerjee, who experienced the results of “chi-mai cultivation” which people today usually mistake for “kundalini cultivation”:

The ascent of Kundalini as it pierces through the chakras is manifested in certain physical and psychic signs. Yogis have described the trembling of the body which precedes the arousal of Kundalini, and the explosion of heat which passes like a current through the Sushumna channel. During Kundalini’s ascent, inner sounds resemble

⁸⁷ A similar story appears in 1 *Kings* 13 where a prophet from Judah, traditionally identified as Ido, went to Bethel and prophesied the destruction of the altar. When King Jeroboam heard this, he stretched out his hand above the altar and cried “Seize him” but his hand dried up and he could not draw it back.

a waterfall, the humming of bees, the sound of a bell, a flute, or the tinkling of ornaments. In closed-eye perception the yogi visualizes a variety of forms, such as dots of light, or geometrical shapes that in the final state of illumination dissolve into an inner radiance of intensely bright, pure light. The aspirant may experience creeping sensations in the spinal cord, tingling sensations all over the body, heaviness in the head or sometimes giddiness, autonomic and involuntary laughing or crying; or he may see visions of deities or saints. Dream scenes of all kinds may appear, from the heavenly to the demonic. Physically, the abdomen wall may become flat and be drawn towards the spine; there may be diarrhea or constipation; the anus contracts and is drawn up; the chin may press down against the neck; the eyeballs roll upwards or rotate; the body may bend forward or back, or even roll around on the floor; breathing may be constricted, (sometimes it seems to cease altogether, although in fact it does not, but merely becomes extremely slight); the mind becomes empty and there is an experience of being a witness in the body.

There may be a feeling of Prana flowing in the brain or spinal cord. Sometimes there is a spontaneous chanting of mantras or songs, or simply vocal noises. The eyes may not open in spite of one's efforts to open them. The body may revolve or twist in all directions. Sometimes it bounces up and down with crossed legs, or creeps about, snake-like, on the floor. Some perform asanas (yogic postures) both known and unknown; sometimes the hands move in classic, formal dance patterns, even though the meditator knows nothing of dance. Some speak in tongues.

Sometimes the body feels as if it is floating upwards, and sometimes as if it is being pressed down into the earth. It may feel as if it has grown enormously large, or extremely small. It may shake and tremble and become limp, or turn as rigid as stone. Some get more appetite, some feel aversion to food. Even when engaged in activities other than meditation, the aspirant who concentrates his mind, experiences the movements of Prana-shakti all over the body, or slight tremors. There may be aches in the body, or a rise or drop in temperature. Some people become lethargic and averse to work. Sometimes the meditator hears buzzing sounds as of blowing conches, or bird-song or ringing-bells. Questions may arise in the mind and be spontaneously answered during meditation.

Sometimes the tongue sticks to the palate or is drawn back towards the throat, or protrudes from the mouth. The throat may get

dry or parched. The jaws may become clenched, but after a time they reopen. One may start yawning when one sits for meditation. There may be a feeling of the head becoming separated from the body, or "headlessness." Sometimes one may be able to see things around one even with the eyes closed. Various types of intuitive knowledge may begin. One may see one's own image. One may even see one's own body lying dead. From some or all of these signs, one may know that Kundalini Shakti has become active. The Kundalini produces whatever experiences are necessary for the aspirant's spiritual progress, according to habit-pattern formed by past action.

Swami Muktananda, initiated by his spiritual preceptor, describes in his own autobiographical account his heaviness of head, sensations of heat and or pain at the base of the spine, the involuntary movements, flows of energy through the body, unusual breathing patterns, inner lights and sounds, visions and voices, and many other extraordinary experiences. In another recent autobiographical record, Gopi Krishna describes his experiences when Kundalini was aroused spontaneously, without spiritual preparation or the guidance of a guru.

Ramakrishna, who followed the discipline of kundalini-yoga under the guidance of a female guru, Brahmani, achieved in three days the result promised by each of the rituals. He described his experience as hopping, pushing up, moving zig-zag. He directly perceived the ascent of the Kundalini, and later described to his disciples its various movements as fishlike, birdlike, monkeylike, and so on.⁸⁸

All sorts of phenomena can appear during the various stages of chi mai cultivation, and since these changes are nondenominational in nature (although one's cultural upbringing and subconscious tendencies, or habits, can affect their characteristic appearance), then the Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist and other Eastern schools are not the sole witnesses to such accounts. As an example, most all Christian sects can trace their primary roots to Roman Catholicism, which bore the great responsibility for initially formulating the doctrines of the Church. When we find that the New Catholic Encyclopedia lists a great variety of extraordinary phenomena that can appear on the path of spiritual cultivation, we can therefore take this list as representative of Christianity as a whole.

This list of Christian spiritual phenomena, from ardent religious practitioners, includes visions, the reading of another's thoughts, incendium amoris [kundalini

⁸⁸ Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science, edited by Stanislov Grof, (SUNY Press, Albany: New York, 1984), pp. 125-127.

heat], stigmata, bilocation [yang shen emanations], levitation, compenetration of bodies, bodily incombustibility, inedia [the body becomes full of chi], bodily incorruptibility [the mai have been transformed], locutions, and so on.⁸⁹ So here we have a typical Western spiritual tradition, yet its listing of possible cultivation gong-fu acknowledges the very same phenomena experienced by practitioners of Eastern spiritual schools. Why? Because progress on the spiritual path is nondenominational. Over and over again I must tell people that their religion is not ultimate or unique.

Whether for the East or West, the various stages of spiritual attainment are the same. Since we are all human beings, how could they be different? A perfect example is the heat phenomenon involved with the purification of the chi channels, related to the "kundalini" of yoga, "clumsy fire" of Taoism, and "tumo heat" of Tibetan Buddhism. Everyone experiences some degree of this purifying (frictional) heat when their chi channels undergo a particular stage in the purifying process. That's why the Catholic saint Philip Neri often felt the heat throughout his entire body:

(I)t sometimes extended over his whole body, and for all his age, thinness and spare diet, in the coldest days of winter it was necessary, even in the midst of the night, to open the windows, to cool the bed, to fan him while in bed, and in various ways to moderate the great heat. Sometimes it burned his throat, and in all his medicines something cooling was generally mixed to relieve him. Cardinal Crescenzi said that sometimes when he touched his hand, it burned as if the saint was suffering from a raging fever. ... Even in winter he almost always had his clothes open from the girdle upwards, and sometimes when they told him to fasten them lest he should do himself some injury, he used to say he really could not because of the excessive heat he felt. One day, at Rome, when a great quantity of snow had fallen, he was walking in the streets with his cassock unbuttoned; and when some of his penitents who were with him were hardly able to endure the cold, he laughed at them and said it was a shame for young men to feel cold when old men did not.⁹⁰

The same physical phenomena appear across different schools because spiritual cultivation is actually human being science, and thus these experiences are a nondenominational affair. If you cultivate then you'll experience these phenomena

⁸⁹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 10, (McGraw Hill, New York, 1967), pp. 173-174.

⁹⁰ *God and the Evolving Universe*, James Redfield, Michael Murphy and Sylvia Timbers, (Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, New York, 2002), pp. 111-112.

no matter what your spiritual school or religion. However, if you don't cultivate then you'll never experience these things at all, and neither will you genuinely climb the ranks of true spirituality. If the phenomena don't appear, it's not that they don't exist. Rather, it's because your cultivation is wrong or just isn't good enough, or hasn't reached that stage of transformation.

The principle to recognize is that *these effects are nondenominational, and so they're due to the process of cultivation rather than to one's membership in any particular sect or religion*. Practice and then accomplishment in spiritual cultivation is the important factor, not the fact that you belong to some specific religious group. How would that accord with the stated claim that “we're all God's creatures”?

The commonality of spiritual progress available to anyone—even those who do not follow a sanctioned established religious trail—is the truth even if a religious group claims some particular position of pre-eminence. Furthermore, accomplishment in spiritual cultivation occurs no matter what one's religious school because the basic principles of spiritual practice are the same across the world's spiritual traditions, and the schools commonly borrow the same practices from one another and simply clothe them in their own local traditions.

This is what you should expect from the spiritual traditions, for this is how the world works. The task today is not to turn a Christian into a Buddhist or a Jew into a Hindu, for that will never happen. The task is to help the members of each religious group *rediscover the true path, principles and practices of spiritual cultivation we're revealing that are already inherent within their own religious borders*. Then they won't be fighting the truth of spiritual cultivation, which is to the great disservice of their adherents and mankind. If such teachings are found lacking in a particular religious tradition, then it's up to compassionate, wisdom filled leaders in those traditions to use skillful means to create new vehicles to embody these principles, for that's what spiritual progress and evolution are about. This is what it means to work for the greater good.

You must understand that these sort of gong-fu phenomena we've been reviewing aren't dished out from above as a sort of grace, but are the predictable, nondenominational results of determined spiritual effort. These possible results, and yet more, are entirely due to your own cultivation efforts, but you have to be introduced to the proper road of cultivation practices if they're ever going to occur.

As yet another example on how the same spiritual phenomena are noted across different schools, Chinese culture often describes little invisible chi flames that appear on the head and shoulders of extremely virtuous people. These little etheric projections (which ordinary people cannot see) are the end result of

successful chi mai cultivation, and this is why the Chinese say they appear “only on the virtuous.” The reasoning behind this stipulation of “virtue” is that someone who is really virtuous has a mind of purity, also known as emptiness, and it’s the empty mind that naturalistically produces chi cultivation and the natural appearance of these little chi flames.

In other words, they appear as a function of chi mai progress, and the process is as follows: you make chi mai progress when you cultivate emptiness, when you cultivate emptiness it means you are abandoning evil thoughts, and in abandoning evil thoughts we can say you become more virtuous. Hence when the chi flames appear it means that your chi has been somewhat purified because your consciousness has become somewhat purified because you have cultivated emptiness and this has lessened non-virtuous thoughts! Once you understand this sequence, you can logically understand why Chinese culture says these little chi flames occur on the shoulders of the truly virtuous.

When this phenomena manifests it’s really neat because you can look at either your left or right shoulder and see these little chi emanations appearing in the shape of flames coming out of the shoulder chakras, and you can also sense (or even psychically see) that there is a small flame coming out the top of your head. This is nothing other than the same “tongue of flames” recorded in the New Testament as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. If we turn to the country of Indonesia, we also find that the young virginal Balinese dancers wear decorative golden symbols of these flames on their shoulders in order to suggest this state of virtuous purity as well. It’s the same phenomenon, but different cultures only tell you incomplete parts of the story and since there are few cultivation adepts left in the world, there’s no one within those cultures to tell people anymore what things really represent.

All of these things refer to a definite low level stage of chi mai cultivation, and so it’s easy to find this phenomena recognized across a wide variety of cultivation schools. At a slightly higher stage of cultivation—though still in the realm of chi mai development—we later have two etheric horns shaped like cones that appear out of the sides of the head and are used as outlets for pushing dirty chi out of the body.

These “wisdom horns” can often be seen in various European statues or pictures of Moses, and are also represented by the horns of Yamantaka (a wrathful projection body of the Buddha Manjushri) in the Esoteric School. At this stage of achievement, Chinese culture says that the individual is forming “dragon bones” in the head. Here once again you therefore have independent but consistent examples

of exactly the same type of gong-fu phenomena appearing across the world's different religious and cultural traditions.

This is the way it has to be because the phenomenological results of the cultivation path—sensory, motor and psychological phenomena—are always a nondenominational affair. The arising of these phenomena always has a scientific basis behind it, and if you are a cultivation person yourself then you can quickly recognize the underlying principles of these various stages of attainment. On the other hand, if you don't cultivate then you will never achieve these states yourself and you will never be able to understand this gong-fu of others, despite however much you try. You can't truly understand these matters if you lack the personal experience of self-attainment, so it's actually a waste of time for me to describe them in much detail. This is also why it's a waste of time for scholars to try and catalogue all this material. Only people with cultivation accomplishments can themselves sort through and organize this sort of material.

It's the people who lack any cultivation progress themselves who usually pooh-pooh these things, whereas they're the ones actually stuck in ignorance. Cultivate and you'll achieve this sort of gong-fu, but refuse to cultivate and nothing transpires at all. If you don't cultivate meditation practice, however, the most you can possibly do or hope to accomplish in this life is perform lots of good deeds and purify your behavior a little bit. In this way you can definitely accumulate enough virtuous merit to be reborn in a better time and place when cultivation teachings are more prevalent, and you'll accordingly be more attracted to them. For some cultures, such as in Islam, spiritual cultivation and behavioral teachings even had to be imposed upon the people in order to uplift them and help them generate merit.

A human life is a precious thing to waste, so I always urge people not to waste this present life but to engage in some sort of advanced spiritual cultivation practice other than just attending religious services. You never know in which life time you'll get the chance to come in contact with true cultivation teachings again, or have circumstances that afford you the fortunate opportunity to cultivate. Therefore you should use this chance while you can, otherwise it will slip you by to your own great regret.

When you start opening up the body's chi mai energy meridians, there are many other changes we could describe. You can consider these changes as a result of an internal process of detoxification or purification. This process of internal detoxification means that the chi channels will start flushing out so that the filth filling them is removed, and as it's discharged it will start leaving the physical body. Along

with this process of elimination, people will start to cure long standing illnesses and all sorts of healthy reactions can come about. That’s why cultivation creates a solid foundation for long life and why it’s the basis for any type of advanced spiritual progress.

We have to purify our physical bodies on the roadway to spirituality because this means purifying the dirty karma we’ve inherited—by virtue of being born as humans—that prevents us from realizing the Tao. And yet the process of purification isn’t something to be taken as the objective of all objectives, for it only corresponds to a process of chi-mai development.

The Zen masters, for instance, didn’t even bother to report the common phenomena of this stage even though they, too, suffered from the typical skin discharges that occur on the path as the filth is pushed from the physical body due to the chi mai becoming cleansed. This is something that normally happens when poisons are ejected from the body as its chi mai are being cleared of obstructions. The Zen masters didn’t mind this as they always viewed the aggregate of form as empty; they never thought of their body as their permanent self. For example, in the past many Zen masters would simply ignore all the filth pushed out from their body as they purified it via cultivation, and simply referred to this oozing filth ejection as the “dharma milk” of spiritual cultivation.

People today engage in all sorts of “detoxification routines” to get rid of the poisons in their body, but it’s only when you practice meditation that the chi channels will really open and your chi will force out all the filth from within. Through meditation you can even push out the decrepit jing-chi that would eventually cause cancer—which usually comes out through the feet, fingers or eyelids--and thus it’s through meditation that everyone will become able to banish internal disease and extend their life spans.

Chinese medicine is apt at explaining this process in a very logical fashion, and so we can use its explanations to understand much of the low-level changes involved in the cultivation process.⁹¹ For instance, Chinese medicine commonly warns about ingesting too many tonic herbs that work to tonify your chi. If your chi is supplemented while there is an underlying internal sickness, the results can be devastating.

To expand upon this topic of tonics, I must point out that increasing your chi has the aim of increasing your yang rather than yin forces, and yin forces are cooling

⁹¹ See the various translations available of the [Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine](#).

in nature. When yang forces increase to an extreme, the natural result will be an increase in internal heat. That’s why people commonly feel warm in the belly or experience the warmth of the kundalini phenomenon from advanced meditation practice. It’s because their chi has massed and is generating some degree of internal friction.

When there is an increase in internal fire because of this, Chinese medicine states that “fire toxins” will be produced within the body and their levels will rise rapidly. Since these toxins must be expelled, they will use any of the body’s channels of elimination which are available for excretion. The skin is the body’s largest organ of elimination, so it’s common to expect “fire toxins” to be expelled from the skin, as a form of purification, when an individual starts to make progress in emptiness meditation.

Simple sitting, with a quiet mind, will eventually cause your yang chi to increase, heat to be produced (“the kundalini will awaken”), and fire toxins to be expelled from your body so that you become cleaner, healthier and purer all the way around. This is what happens due to effortless meditation—no efforts are involved because the extreme of yin will give birth to yang naturally.

The physical purification that results from this process is what actually decreases the possibility of debilitating diseases like cancer. Furthermore, because it opens up your chi channels so that your life force can circulate smoothly in the body without obstruction, this sort of practice will definitely extend your life span. What people fail to realize is that *at the beginning of the spiritual path, most of your spiritual energies are actually channeled into cleaning and purifying your physical body*. All your initial spiritual energies, once aroused, go into purifying your body which is why your chi mai have to open before you can achieve the various samadhi attainments.

Another common effect from cleaning the chi mai, due to making progress in meditation, is that the body becomes more readily susceptible to external wind invasions. In other words, in all probability the tendency to catch colds or experience headaches will increase if you don’t protect yourself accordingly. Since your body is now much cleaner and more responsive to the natural environment—having lost a thick protective layer of filth because the chi channels in the connective tissues have become purified--meditators who cultivate properly will usually start to wear hats or more layers of clothing as a protection against external wind drafts. If they don’t protect their bodies in this fashion, then the external chi will readily enter their

exposed chi channels—which are now clean due to meditation—and penetrate the body so as to cause the common cold or a headache.

This explains why there is a certain class of people in the world who are more prone to colds than others while their immune systems are at top function. This certain class of individuals has relatively clear and empty minds (as compared to others). Thus these people have cultivated a minor stage of “clean body gong-fu” due to their relatively empty, “spiritually advanced” mental states. Cultivation gong-fu such as this does indeed happen naturally, which is why some people seem to experience the results of the spiritual path with little cultivation practice at all. This usually happens when their mental state reflects a carry over from many past life cultivation efforts. Anyway, there are many people out there who readily catch colds or get “wind invasion” headaches, and it’s actually because their chi mai are cleaner than the average human being. These are individuals who should be especially encouraged to spiritually cultivate.

There are also those who, through past life merits, have inherited special physical characteristics which are extremely well suited for cultivation, especially those who inherit hollow, light and flexible bones. These people are usually more responsive or sensitive to external environmental chi, and its ability to invade their body (also because of opened chi channels) can therefore cause troubles as well. Some of these people are so sensitive that they can sense earthquakes or typhoons when they happen hundreds of miles away, and once again it’s because their chi channels have been cleared to some extent, and thus can act like little barometers. They can also tell when other people are sick just from close proximity because they can feel the sick chi in the other individuals, and can even tell which organ system is producing the chi imbalance. This is why many cultivation adepts in the past became doctors to support their living, and it is interesting to note that their successful diagnoses and cures often produced a tremendous amount of jealousy and persecution.

In some cultivation schools, especially in India, the masters purposefully divert a portion of their inner chi to protect their body from the possible “wind invasions” we’ve noted, but in the Zen school this isn’t considered correct because it constitutes a channeling of energy from spiritual to physical purposes. The Zen school agrees with Swami Sivananda who said, “A Yogi or a Jnani does not allow even a very small amount of energy in him to be wasted in useless directions,”⁹² and so Zen practitioners just put on some extra clothes to protect themselves from the wind. That’s the proper way to spiritually practice although it also calls for common

⁹² *The Shambhala Guide to Yoga*, Georg Feuerstein, (Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1996), p. 44

sense—you don't purposefully stick yourself in front of a draft, or just ignore it because "form is emptiness." If you act in this way, you're bound to get sick and you need to protect your body, rather than destroy it, on the correct road of spiritual cultivation.

Sometimes practitioners don't need to buttress their protective chi at all when they're cultivating in certain highly suitable climatic conditions. But if they do cling to this type of "holding onto chi" practice, rather than just remaining natural and putting on some more clothes, it shows that they do not really understand the higher principles of spiritual attainment. It's far better just to wear an extra protective shirt or hat rather than divert your internal energies from spiritual purposes, but so many people concentrate on wasting their spiritual energies that few rarely reach the higher stages of cultivation attainment.

People with bodies well suited to cultivation are those who definitely should be encouraged to cultivate, for they will often make tremendous strides in spiritual practice well in advance of other peer practitioners. These people can easily enter into amazing spiritual experiences by quickly picking up where they may have left off from their past lives. That's why many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who come to this world can reach enlightenment at relatively young ages, and with what seems like very little effort.

Unfortunately, most people with these "well positioned bodies" highly susceptible to colds don't realize that they may have such an inherent advantage at spiritual cultivation. They consider this sickness tendency a liability rather than realizing that their chi channels are, relatively speaking, much more open than those of regular people. Their problem is not one of reduced immunity, but of relatively open chi channels.

There is another aspect to this issue as well, which is the issue of not fearing illness when you're treading the cultivation path. Most advanced spiritual practitioners eventually discover that there are advantages to getting sick, for it's one way to burn up bad karma. The alternative to getting sick might be to suffer bad karma in another form, which might even lead to the creation of further bad karma, and that's something you definitely want to avoid. Getting sick is also seen as a challenge to one's cultivation, and so you'll always see great masters asking for sickness and trouble.

Of course you shouldn't ever strive to get sick on purpose, nor refuse to get well because of some twisted misinterpretation of this lesson. What you must do in

life is suffer sickness without complaining, do everything to get well, and try not to perform any new bad karma during the entire process. Any sickness you may suffer will then eventually go away and as you suffer it, old karma will burn away with it. Sickness can also at times be seen as an opportunity for any decrepit body chi to escape physical imprisonment, so when you are sick you should continue your meditation practice whenever you can.

Just as you might choose to jiggle and hit the side of a pot to nudge any dirt clinging to its sides and have it fall out, sickness can provide a wonderful avenue of opportunity for being able to bring your body's vital energies back into balance. For some people, the experience of a big disease also causes them to wake up and change their life style or choose a new course through life, which they might not have done had they stayed perfectly healthy.

When you actually examine people who claim they're very healthy because they never get colds or the flu, most times you'll find a body so dirty that any external wind invasion could never penetrate through this thick outer layering of polluted insulation. These people might consider themselves healthy because they never seem to get sick, but let me tell you that these are really the individuals to worry about. When this sort of individual does finally have to go to the doctor, it's usually something so serious that it's life threatening. In many cases, these individuals wake up one day to find out that they're extremely ill, and it's all because an internal degeneration has been festering unseen beneath the surface for quite some while. Therefore you must be careful about interpreting states of health and sickness in the cultivation arena.

An easy susceptibility to colds does not definitely mean that you have a body better suited for progress in spiritual cultivation, and a lower propensity for colds and flu doesn't necessarily negate this possibility either, nor does it confirm that an individual is actually healthy. You can't just throw normal medical understanding out the window and say, "this individual is a meditator, and so things are different." Then again, because the chi mai *are different* between meditators and those who don't cultivate, you can't just say that normal medical thinking applies either.

More often than not, modern doctors cannot understand the really high gong-fu stages of advanced cultivation practitioners, nor the stages of physical transformation that typically occur alongside the standard cultivation path. It may seem heresy but it's true that after you change your chi mai, your body becomes different. Rather than use the term "more often than not," in fact I *guarantee* that

modern physicians do not understand cultivation physiology, and the attendant gong-fu that goes with it.

Another situation that commonly occurs as people clean their chi mai is that they will start to lose any offensive body odors they may have developed due to diet or due to special living and working environments, such as employment in a chemical factory. For instance it's said that Americans often start to lose the smell of milk and cheese when they cultivate while other nationalities start to lose their own national, trademark odors.

The smells given off by human beings can be quite offensive and difficult to bear. Since you start to become more sensitive to these matters (as well as to the weather and events such as earthquakes) when you cultivate, many adepts--especially in India--will even refuse to meet with people who aren't vegetarians because the smell is so terrible. Some masters will burn lots of incense so they don't have to go on smelling people, and some choose to avoid large gatherings all together because of all the bad chi they would encounter, although of course there are other reasons for preferring solitude as well.

Most masters don't want to offend people by telling them they smell bad due to a lack of spiritual cultivation, and yet this is one of the reasons that most adepts don't want to sit next to various people. It's simply because their chi is so dirty, and it's hard to bear. Sometimes this dirtiness originates because the mind is unclean, which we can find with crafty business people, and sometimes it's due to the diet, or even sickness. There are all sorts of reasons, but the common cure is spiritual cultivation.

Just as we enter a pigpen or horse stable and all we can smell is pigs or horses, you have to know that most heavenly beings also avoid the human realm because the smell of humans is so terrible. When your own chi mai open up, it's really considered a sacrifice to bear such suffering and let others come close to you so that you can teach students about the cultivation path. Just being close to them gives them a chance to absorb your clean chi, and this is considered an act of charity or offering on the path.

Some individuals are actually attracted to strong human smells. Some women are attracted to the smell of unrefined male jing that you typically encounter in men's locker rooms, and some men are attracted to the musky smell of young (sexually inactive) women. In both cases this is usually the smell of untransformed jing. This "feminine smell" that we're speaking of actually can also originate due to poor health, which ties in with untransformed jing. It's there because young girls lack sufficient

internal circulation of their chi, and thus the chi tends to stagnate just like a pool of stagnant water.

These girls have relatively empty, simple and pure (“virginal”) minds, and thus their chi becomes loose and free from this unknowing form of cultivation. However, due to lack of explicit cultivation efforts, their chi doesn’t revolve or receive that extra spark it needs to really start flowing. Thus it stagnates and this feminine smell—indicative of a sort of internal stagnation rather than healthiness—appears.

This type of smell quickly disappears, however, when these girls become healthy and their chi starts to move. It can disappear due to sexual activity, when a girl uses internal breathing practices such as the “nine bottled wind,”⁹³ when she practices meditation, when she begins to engage in very active physical exercise, or when she gets really healthy for various other reasons.

The point is, many times those people with offensive smells are not sickly individuals, but individuals with excellent bodies that are highly suitable for the path of cultivation. Their chi is looser than that of the average individual and more readily available for cultivation progress, but it has not become activated; it hasn’t started to circulate in rotation. This sort of stagnant chi smell will quickly clear up when young adults engage in suitable cultivation efforts, and when these people start to cultivate then they will usually make quicker cultivation progress than others. Thus it is that these individuals, most of all, should be highly encouraged to practice meditation.

As a general rule, people with many cultivation merits are usually born with sickly bodies, or bodies that tend to get sick easily. *Without a doubt, this is a rule.* Because of this, it is especially important for these people to learn something about medicine for balancing the body, especially Chinese medicine and medical theory. The benefit of Chinese medicine is that it has a 5,000-year old history, and because of this long development period, every remedy offered by Chinese medicine always has a way to reverse the effects if overdoses of the substances are taken.

For instance, if someone were to ingest too much silver as some sort of cure, Chinese medicine would specify eating Szechuan peppers to counteract an overdose, and Francolin bird meat to counteract eating too much gold. The problem with Western medicine, as clearly seen on television or in the Physician’s Desk Reference, is that there is usually no way to reverse the effects of a drug once

⁹³ Please see Twenty Five Doors to Meditation: A Handbook for Entering Samadhi, William Bodri and Lee Shu-Mei (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1998), pp. 45-52.

taken. Medicine, in addition to logic, literature, psychology, science and cultivation itself, are the main areas that every aspiring cultivator must learn.

We’ve already gone over the possible sequences of transformation that you can experience at such initial stages of the cultivation path, and I’ve illustrated this matter with the biographical account of Yin Shih Tsu. However, no matter how many times you explain that these transformations will assume varying forms for different individuals, yet all the while never deviating from the underlying principles of jing, chi and mai transformations, people always seem to get confused by these phenomena. To emphasize these points even further, therefore yet another illustrative account of these possibilities is in order.

Cultivation experiences are the same today as they were in the past, and so the account selected belongs to a more contemporary Indian meditator who told the following story of the gong-fu transformations that occurred from his cultivation efforts:

The energy that is operating there [in cleansing the physical nature] does not feel the limitations of the body; it is not interested; it has its own momentum. It is a very painful thing. It is not that ecstatic blissful beatitude and all that rubbish—stuff and nonsense!--it is really a painful thing. Oh, I suffered for months and months after that; before that too. Everybody has. Even Ramana Maharshi suffered after that.

A great cascade—not one, but thousands of cascades—it went on and on for months and months. It’s a very painful experience—painful in the sense that the energy has a peculiar operation of its own. ... It is clockwise, anticlockwise, and then it is this way and then this way and then this way. Like an atom it moves inside—not in one part of your body; the *whole* body. It is as if a wet towel were being wrung to get rid of the water—it is like that, the whole of your body—it’s such a painful thing. ...

The whole thing was changing in its own way without my doing anything. And then the movement of the hands changed. Usually your hands turn this way. (UG demonstrates) Here, this wrist joint had terrible pains for six months until it turned itself, and all the movements are now like this. That is why they say my movements are *mudras* (mystical gestures). The movements of the hands are quite different now than before. Then there were pains in the marrow of the bones. Every cell started changing, and it went on and on for six months.

And then the sex hormones started changing. I didn't know whether I was a man or a woman—'What is this business?'—suddenly there was a breast on the left-hand side. All kinds of things—I don't want to go into the details—there is a complete record of all those things. It went on and on and on. It took three years for this body to fall into a new rhythm of its own.

... There is a record of the way the things happened to me. What value has that to you? It has no value at all. On the other hand it's very dangerous because you may try to simulate the outward manifestations. People simulate these things and believe that something is happening—that's what they do. Behave normally. I didn't know what was happening. It was a strange situation. There is no point in leaving any record—people will only simulate these things. This state [of transformation] is something natural.

(Up and down his torso, neck and head, at those points which Indian holy men call 'chakras', his friends observed swellings of various shapes and colours, which came and went at intervals. On his lower abdomen the swellings were horizontal, cigar-shaped bands. Above the navel was a hard, almond-shaped swelling. A hard, blue swelling, like a large medallion, in the middle of his chest was surmounted by another smaller, brownish-red, medallion-shaped swelling at the base of his throat. These two 'medallions' were as though suspended from a varicoloured, swollen ring—blue, brownish and light yellow—around his neck, as in pictures of the Hindu gods. There were also other similarities between the swellings and the depictions of Indian religious art: his throat was swollen to a shape that made his chin seem to rest on the head of a cobra, as in the traditional images of Siva, just above the bridge of the nose was a white lotus-shaped swelling; all over the head the small blood vessels expanded, forming patterns like the stylized lumps on the heads of Buddha statues. Like the horns of Moses and Taoists mystics, two large, hard swellings periodically came and went. The arteries in his neck expanded and rose, blue and snakelike, into his head.)⁹⁴

The Taoist, yoga, and Esoteric Buddhist schools are filled with similar records of this sort of experience because they are form schools which focus on the physical phenomena of the path, and this includes the gong-fu sequences of purifying transformations. These reports always tend to grab your imagination, and because

⁹⁴ *The Mystique of Enlightenment: The Unrational Ideas of a Man Called U.G.*, ed. by Rodney Arms, (Akshaya Publications, Bangalore: India, 1992), pp. 31-33.

of their uniqueness it's quite easy for people to mistakenly take them as the important thing in spiritual practice. While that's not true, in today's scientific world collecting, categorizing, and classifying such matters will be a proper road of investigation for quite some time because it will "legitimize the path" for the needs of the modern world, and this is something that must be done if spiritual cultivation is to become more popular, or avoid becoming extinct. The problem with cultivation becoming more popular is that many wrong notions will tend to spread, and the true teachings will become even more diluted over time.

Providing help in this direction is one of the reasons why I've bothered to write this set of lessons because the world needs proper frameworks for organizing the various cultivation phenomena and for understanding the nondenominational structure of the path. Even so, you must remember that these physical transformations are not the important core of the path. The real work of the spiritual path lies in cultivating prajna wisdom, and the real results of the spiritual path are exhibited as positive changes in your mental habits and external behavior. Emptiness is the proper path of spiritual cultivation, no matter by what name we know this path, and prajna cultivation is the best and foremost way to achieve it.

Emptiness attainments, prajna, and virtuous behavior are the real yardsticks of spiritual practice because if you succeed in transforming your behavior, then we can say you succeed even if you don't fully attain the Tao. But if your behavior doesn't change for the better after you start following a particular cultivation path, we can also say that you're not truly involved in real spiritual efforts at all. The causal factor for becoming enlightened is the cultivation of pure and faultless virtues, and this is the essential nature of the enlightened. Transcendental wisdom is strengthened by righteous deeds, and without virtuous deeds one cannot attain transcendental wisdom.

Most people in their religious traditions read the spiritual accounts of old, and because they rely only on their own limited personal experience and fail to refer to the accounts found in other religious traditions, they have no way to comprehend what's going on in these stories. In most cases they don't even personally cultivate even though that's the purpose of their spiritual tradition—to provide a means and mechanism for people to access these higher states—and thus they have no way to gain an understanding of this type of material, and yet expect everything to be self-evident. As a result, they usually just put it aside and think of all sorts of excuses to deny its relevance to one's personal possibilities. They think to themselves, "That never happened, it was just a story." Or they read about an ancient spiritual great who succeeded and then say, "That was him (or her), theirs was a special case, it

couldn't possibly happen to me." Even worse is when they believe that states of spiritual attainment are acts of grace gifted by God without any personal cultivation work involved at all. If they attach to this notion, they automatically excuse themselves from the personal need to work for these states because they believe they are out of reach "unless God so ordains them." With such an attitude, they excuse themselves from the personal responsibility of having to aspire for spiritual progress at all.

People today refuse to recognize that the path is right now, right here in front of you. Everyone has Tao, all beings are the womb of Buddhahood and you just have to clear away mental busyness so that you realize this state and actualize it. In fact, you are the "ancients" for the future generations, the ones the following ages will read about as having succeeded on the spiritual path if you work at it. All you need is for someone to teach you how to cultivate, and then to apply yourself to the required efforts. The pathway is the same, the principles are unvarying, the gong-fu is standard, there are no secrets I'm keeping from you. It's all a matter of exposure, motivation, patience and effort. With proper practice, all these sorts of results are sure to occur in time.

Why do people then fail to make progress in their practice? It's usually because either they fail to make the necessary efforts, or they don't apply the correct principles when practicing meditation. That's why I'm spending so much time and effort explaining the details of this material.

COMPARING THE WORLD'S SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

While it's popular today to hold various interdenominational religious conferences in order to bring about a better understanding and respect for the different religions of the world and their spiritual practices, this type of dialogue secretly embodies yet another type of error. These meetings usually involve just a surface tolerance of differing religious neighbors because no group wants to lose its adherents to another faction. So in effect, these sorts of meetings don't *really* foster the true type of comprehension of the spiritual path required by those who wish to become more spiritual. In reality, each religious sect at these meetings salutes one another while secretly believing it's still the ultimate one.

Don't you think that each group, even if they didn't say so, would be genuinely pleased if it "won over" more adherents from another group to increase its own numbers? I don't think they'd really be worried that they are growing at the expense

of others. If you think about it, you can readily understand that the sort of true acceptance and understanding required of spiritual cultivation never *really* happens because of these events. They’re all just for show. What you really have to understand is that the world’s various religious use different methods and dogmas and teaching styles because of differences in their highest visions, but as long as these various groups have at heart the same mind of compassion to help the world, then all of them are worthy companions.

Dogma is the most prominent feature of any religion, which is why people will always focus on differences in religious dogma rather than the underlying common cultivation principles within the path of religious striving, and thus the inherent commonalities between different cultivation paths. After all, dogma is what makes a Protestant different than a Baptist, and a Hindu different than a Muslim or Jew. Within Christianity alone, the Barrett’s 2001 World Christian Encyclopedia counts 33,830 Christian denominations, and if these denominations so disagree amongst themselves about Christian dogma to the extent that Christianity has had to split into so many different factions, how can we not say that dogma—rather than principles—will always keep separate the understanding of the spiritual path? A man summarized this mentality for us in 1905 by writing:

Forty percent of all the people in the world are Buddhists, and are of the *Opinion* that Buddhism is the only true religion.

Twelve per cent of the world’s people being Roman Catholics, are firm in the *Opinion* that the remaining 88 per cent are wrong, and sure of damnation accordingly.

Eight percent of the world’s people being Protestants believe that both the Buddhists and Catholics, and all others, are deplorably ignorant of the only true faith, which of course must be their own particular *sect* of Protestantism.

And, neither Buddhist, Catholic, nor Protestant, can convince the 2 percent of Jews that their opinion is wrong and should be changed.

This is a side-light on the inconsistency of mere *Opinion*.⁹⁵

Thus people are always polite to one another at these intercongregational events but afterwards they still go home with closed minds, and cling to their own traditions. They typically go home thinking, “That was very interesting, but thank God I’m still a --,” or “That was a very interesting view they had and a nice experience,

⁹⁵ Reason-Why Advertising Plus Intensive Advertising, John E. Kennedy, (TWI Press, Terre Haute: In, 2002), p. 5.

but ours is still the right way." If someone is the leader of a particular tradition, it is hardly likely they will penetrate into another tradition in order to confirm it, but in order to try and negate it or simply confirm the superiority of their own.

Religions (and their representatives) also evolve all sorts of protective strategies over time so that their tenets can even be insulated against naturalistic inquiry, because that type of criticism is considered especially legitimate by outsiders due to its neutral character. Is it not a very good protective strategy to hear dismissal phrases (such as "It's God's mystery") when you come upon some religious inconsistency (or falsity) and are on the cusp of dismissing it in order to make sense of it?

Thus the religious representatives at these intercongregational meetings are not really after an understanding of the spiritual path, but after a confirmation of their own doctrinal truths. Everyone thinks their own path is supreme. They are looking for a stronger commitment to their own way. There are vested interests to be protected even in the religious sphere, so don't think that the path of pure cultivation is something that will be easily accepted. Unless, of course, people can absorb the pure path into a pre-existing doctrine, and decorate it with the trappings that declare it to be home grown.

Why am I discussing this? Because if you are going to look for true cultivation guidance from organized religions, you should doubt your course of action. You should first carefully examine if an organized religion is truly set up to provide it and thus you must tap into your wisdom stores to understand if it is disposed to encourage or discourage it. Will you find organized religions explaining the principles of the path as we've discussed if it might weaken preexisting, but incorrect dogma? Will you find organized religion encouraging people to meditate and make individual efforts on the path, efforts which will eventually free people from the need for that organization's guidance?

On the road of spiritual cultivation you have to be wise as well as independent in your thinking, and carefully size up such matters when you're seeking spiritual guidance. Frankly, you will have to build your own support network for your independent efforts designed to get to the truth of the matter. Just as all Americans want their country to run well, but Democrats will not support Republicans with good ideas and visa versa when each party gets into office, you should not expect religions to be so unbiased and free in supporting the efforts of people to become spiritually liberated.

Think carefully: if the voluntary transformation of any organization involved negative changes in power, prestige or money flows for the relevant ruling councils, would it or would it not be naïve to expect lots of support for such changes? The path and practices of spiritual cultivation need the support of organized religions to keep the transmissions alive, but religions don't like their adherents losing the need for their “expert guidance.” This is funny when you consider that enlightened teachers like Shakyamuni Buddha or Socrates or Confucius decided to teach others, they never held the idea of establishing a religion in their mind. All they did was decide to talk about the path, and all the damage came from later aspirants.

Nevertheless, when totally different religious groups start to compare the resulting gong-fu of their spiritual traditions—rather than the dogma--then the intelligent among them quickly realize that there may be outward differences in spiritual dogma but regardless of tradition, the results of spiritual practice are basically the same. Different religions simply advocate different sets of spiritual exercises or routines for arriving at the same states of attainment. This is dangerous information, for it makes the entrenched elite quite fearful.

Religious dogma is just the superficial aspect of the spiritual path, and when people realize this by penetrating through to the underlying principles of cultivation practice, only then can a true respect for other religions and a genuine brotherhood of religious acceptance be born. That's when a true change in understanding can occur, for when people see the common results of spiritual practice that arise from across different traditions, they will start to realize that spiritual evolution is a scientific, nondenominational, dogma-free process.

The possibility of genuine spiritual progress is actually shared by all genuine religious paths, but the best and highest results of spiritual practice only occur to those people who practice correctly, guide themselves by the correct principles, and work hard enough to proceed high enough. That's where the arguments will eventually lie after many years, for in future people will naturally come to accept the commonality of the principles of cultivation science, as we're revealing here. However, many groups will still try to cling to the vestiges of claims that their savior completed the whole shebang rather than stopped at one of the partial stages of spiritual attainment along the way.

You have to expect this, for when a country or race loses its greatness, it still clings to the past claims of its greatness in order to comfort its own. So we shouldn't be arguing about these things, or the superiority of one path over another. My only goal is to reveal to you the various stages of spiritual cultivation, the commonality

between spiritual sects, the shared gong-fu among various religions, and the practices and principles that will get you to experience these same states yourself. In brief, spiritual evolution is a process of self-transcendence, and transcending the self means going beyond the limiting idea of being a body, ego, personality, soul, spirit or self in order to attain a state of transcendence which we call spiritual self-realization, or illumination.

Knowing this, the wisest leaders of any one tradition should begin to properly ask, "How can we make our own spiritual practice more efficient and effective for the task of abandoning ego-clinging, and for climbing the ranks of spiritual attainment? In terms of benchmarking, what is best from another school that we can borrow and use to our benefit? Which school seems to achieve results more quickly, and why? Can we borrow any of these practices and make them our own? If so, which ones and how should we proceed? How can we update our transmission to keep it in tune with the needs of the time, or even reveal whichever of these principles are already in our framework but have lost the light of day due to the ravages of time?" When this sort of benchmarking starts to occur, then you'll know that people have really started to get a handle on the cultivation trail. As Ibn al-Arabi advised,

Do not attach yourself to any particular creed exclusively, so that you may disbelieve all the rest; otherwise you will lose much good, nay, you will fail to recognize the real truth of the matter. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is not limited by any one creed, for, he says, "Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of al-Lah." (Koran 2:109)⁹⁶

Over the next few hundred years, as cultures and religions collide, this is exactly what will happen but not necessarily due to altruistic motives. In fact, the world's religions will start to adopt the best practices of other spiritual schools due to competitive pressures rather than because they represent the truth. Speaking frankly, they will adopt them because each will still wish to keep its own set of adherents and the power, prestige, influence and money flows this entails. The only way to keep adherents will be to enable them to generate the same sort of gong-fu and spiritual results that other schools will readily demonstrate.

Religions, like any other organizations, always act to protect themselves and their sphere of influence rather than to encourage their adherents on any independent path of salvation. Otherwise, what would be the need of the religion in

⁹⁶ A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Karen Armstrong, (Ballantine Books, New York, 1993), p. 239.

the first place, and what role would disenfranchised religious leaders play? Religious leaders are truly indispensable, yet they unthinkingly fear they'll lose any and all sorts of roles if they change the way things are presently done. This is why they would rather thwart change than embrace it and find new avenues for their leadership roles.

It's predictable that a great spiritual renaissance or blending will definitely occur to organized religions over the next several centuries, but not necessarily due to the compassion and wisdom of their religious functionaries. Rather, this change will come about due to competitive pressures and power seeking acts necessary for self-preservation. You must therefore come to understand that the borrowing of methods and techniques that I'm expounding upon is a legitimate spiritual activity. In fact, it has always been done! The borrowing or imitation of spiritual practices from competing traditions has occurred in the past as a standard practice, and because it's a sign of progress, it should happen whether or not it's due to pure or impure motivations.

Today the trend is unstoppable in that Westerners are coming in contact with the ancient spiritual teachings of the East, and Easterners are finally wholeheartedly instituting the modern Western discoveries of science. People are also beginning not just to give lip service to the "oneness of the path," but to see the scientific structure and nondenominational results of the path in each and every spiritual tradition. They're beginning to recognize the common principles of spirituality that have actually been instituted in these various traditions, but which have perhaps become unclear due to the long passage of time. Due to the dust of ages and the various coatings assumed by cultures and races, the vast majority of people may have lost insight into these true principles, but search every tradition and you'll find the same "emptiness principles" of spiritual practice over and over again with their common results.

On the surface, it's therefore only the dogma coatings that seem to separate the world's religions, and in truth the spiritual path is indeed only one river with many feeder streams. Another way to say it is that there are many paths up the mountain, but we can see only one moon from its peak; the cows have many different colors, but the milk is the same. With this gradual evolution and eventual borrowing of spiritual practices and teachings, hopefully will come a true respect and understanding of all the world's people and their practices. Hopefully the prejudice of denominationality will then begin to decrease.

To teach the commonality of religious practices and their aims will truly bring people closer together. Hence, if you really wish to promote a worldwide understanding between religions, you absolutely must start by emphasizing the religious commonality of spiritual gong-fu which occurs due to genuine spiritual practice, and must emphasize this genuine practice of no-thought cultivation. Christian priest, Jewish rabbi, Buddhist monk, Hindu yogi, Tibetan master, Sufi adept—they're all capable of attaining similar states of spiritual achievement, and when that happens these individuals are equivalent. Each of these traditions uses methods based upon similar cultivation principles, so each is qualified to produce a hero if each starts to emphasize cultivation practice. This is what each religion or sect should aim for.

What I'm providing with all this material is the fodder for a new study of comparative religion. This material provides the right sort of focus because it concentrates on the common denominators of spiritual experience, which are the easiest things for people to accept. Spiritual gong-fu is also the easiest thing to materialistically see and measure, and the easiest thing to reproduce. Therefore it's the easiest thing for territoriality-minded people to believe in and acknowledge. A necessary job today is to provide people with frameworks by which they can make the comparisons necessary between various spiritual paths and by which they can understand the various gong-fu results of spiritual practice.

While this "rending of the veil" may be seen as a threat by some spiritual groups and organized spiritual structures—who will fight it tooth and nail because it abolishes the idea of exclusivity-- it's only in this way that people will finally have some nondenominational understanding of the one spiritual "path to God." Everyone says this one path exists, but territoriality-minded people are afraid to actually acknowledge this when it gets down to the specific details and their own tradition comes up lacking in some manner. People like to believe in what they want to believe in rather than something else that is contrary to their own beliefs, but is proven and works.

THE ZEN SCHOOL

In these comparisons, there is one school that can serve as a guiding light among others because it advocates no fixed dharma, and that's the Zen school of enlightenment. The Zen school is not a form school, and so its practitioners have rarely made extensive records of the gong-fu phenomena that manifest during the path of spiritual practice. The Zen school seeks liberation through prajna wisdom, and so the Zen school tends to ignore the phenomenological changes of the path, but dismisses them. They're actually just ancillary phenomena which not only detract from achievement on the path, but which are destined to depart anyway since they belong to the realm of birth and death.

Being such low stage phenomena, the Zen school says that they are not worth too much comment. When a true Zen student sets their mind on the ultimate end of spiritual enlightenment, they proceed straight for the final target discriminating nothing, caring for nothing, and this is what has historically accounted for the high proportion of Zen masters who have achieved full self-realization. If you have too much dogma in the way, that can actually become an impediment rather than help.

Traditionally, the Zen masters only liked to record the higher stages of spiritual attainment, and these reports usually dealt entirely with the mind of self-realization. Usually the reports that the Zen masters left were written in just a few lines of simple, suggestive poetry. From this alone, you can get some idea of the original grandeur and purity of this school. After all, the Zen school is "the special transmission outside the scriptures, which doesn't rely on words or letters, which directly points to the true essence of mind, and thus enables people to see their true nature and become enlightened."

To ignore gong-fu phenomena is one thing, but to understand them, as is required in modern science, is yet another. So in one way, we can actually say that this purposeful ignorance is actually a fault with many Zen practitioners. Some Zen adherents think they understand all the important cultivation matters—including gong-fu visaya--without having attained any real comprehension at all. You can certainly dismiss gong-fu phenomena, and well you should, but it helps in your ability to dismiss them if you actually know what they fully entail. Then again I would be foolish to spend years studying such things without ever getting around to initiating meditation practice, and yet a large majority of people fall into this very trap. In fact, you can never understand cultivation gong-fu unless you cultivate to match the states themselves, and then and only then will the meaning of these states become clear to you.

Shakyamuni Buddha warned that when a man has been shot with a poison arrow, you don't first launch an investigation into who made the arrow, how and when it was formed, why the arrow was shot and so forth. You don't waste such time or meaningless, superficial things. What you do is pull out the arrow to save the man's life, and worry about all these nonessential questions later.

The number of questions you can ask on any topic are endless and the possible roads of investigation are infinite, so don't make the mistake of falling into this trap of focusing on trying to understand spiritual gong-fu. Just go through it, and don't hold to it or you won't advance in practice! To dwell on the task of understanding gong-fu is an intellectual's or scholar's trap that leads nowhere. It certainly doesn't help you to refine your behavior, calm your mind of worries and

afflictions, end suffering, or escape from the rounds of life and death. My advice is to continue on the path of spiritual cultivation and the higher your resulting gong-fu, the more the answers to your questions will become self-evident.

To understand many of these physical transformations, you can employ the models of the Tao school and consider our physical body as a three-tiered filtration system divided into a head, middle torso, and lower body region. If you cultivate well, various hormones will be released in your head and slowly filter down through your torso until they eventually reach the bottom of your feet. The Tao school, Esoteric Buddhism and yoga schools have carefully catalogued the course of this downward percolation, and have described many of the subtle physical and mental transformations which occur during this process—including the fact that some of these changes tend to correlate with the seasons!

The more purified the body becomes, the more it will become able to match with nature and the environment, which is to be expected since the body is becoming more natural through this process. Viewed from this angle, *cultivation can be seen as the only true way to enable mankind to really match itself with Mother Earth*. If you don't cultivate and yet try to match yourself with nature, you're just kidding yourself as to your capabilities because you'll never truly understand the Earth's cycles. Only cultivation can bring out the true, natural human being with his inherent sensory understanding of the chi flows that blanket the planet due to the seasons of the Earth and the movement of the heavens.

The problem with most people who read accounts of cultivation gong-fu is that they cannot penetrate into their significance because they fail to reach these same stages themselves; there is no possibility of truly understanding cultivation matters unless your own gong-fu matches the states described. Thus if you truly wish to understand cultivation matters, there is always the command to actually *engage in spiritual cultivation practice* rather than just remain at the Stage of Wisdom and Merit Accumulation.

You can memorize all sorts of books and religious sayings such as the Torah or even Vedic sutras, but that in itself will bring you nothing in terms of spirituality. Only cultivation practice and cultivation achievement will help you to really understand what's being said in these spiritual records of old. The rest of the efforts are just busying the mind, and furthering your status as a worldly individual. The topics you study may include spiritual materials, and people may honor you and call you saintly because of your studies, but if your personal experiences cannot match

with descriptions of these lofty states themselves, then whatever you study just amounts to empty knowledge.

The Zen school is quite wise in that it doesn't bother getting tripped up by dogma, or any sort of gong-fu phenomena, because they always sidetrack from the main issue of enlightenment. Physical gong-fu phenomena are only transformations of the realm of form, and since the body is transforming at every moment anyway, why pay any attention to these ungraspable phenomena or even put any energy into these matters? Why put any energy into something that's going to naturally change anyway despite your best of efforts to hold them? Why put any energy into something which constitutes an impermanent experiential realm when it's the unchanging realm which you seek? This is the thinking of the Zen school, which carries through to true Zen practice, and the reason its strict adherents usually make so much cultivation progress.

Unfortunately the yoga schools and various esoteric (form-based) schools, because of their emphasis on body-change descriptions, actually end up encouraging people to excessively desire these phenomena. As a result, the practitioners of these schools end up tending to cling to form and establish all sorts of bad mental habits that may even be carried over to future lives. *In fact, because their practice emphasizes taking form as the basis of the path, such practitioners usually experience all sorts of extra sufferings and hardships as opposed to the various mind-only methods of practice.*

Today you have herbal medicines, acupuncture, chiropractic techniques, deep tissue bodywork, and all sorts of other therapies that are readily accessible for dealing with any uncomfortable feelings suffered due to the physical gong-fu transformations of spirituality. The form-based paths are so much easier to tread than in the past when such things were not readily available. The problem today is not the form obstacles of the path, but rather the mental ties that bind us. Therefore you must refrain from trying to forcibly initiate and mentally guide such phenomena, which is a mistake that practitioners have been making for millennia.

Ancient practitioners only recorded their spiritual experiences as a means of autobiographical account, but that doesn't mean you have to try and imitate these things, or that the correct path of spiritual practice includes trying to force such experiences into manifestation. As our Indian practitioner U.G. once wrote, "[Here's] a record of the way the things happened to me. What value has that to you? It has no value at all. On the other hand it's very dangerous because you may try to simulate the outward manifestations. People simulate these things and believe that something is happening—that's what they do. I behaved normally. I didn't know what

was happening. It was a strange situation. There is no point in leaving any record—people will only simulate these things [to their detriment]. This state is something natural.”⁹⁷

This particular point is being emphasized over and over again because people are commonly deceived by others into following this route of forced imitation. For instance, modern practitioners of the Tao school are told to visualize that the microcosmic and macrocosmic chi circulations in the body become open, and this is only because Song dynasty practitioners wrote of their natural experiences on these matters, and later practitioners thought they had to force them into manifestation. But I tell you, this type of imitative practice is wrong as are many other low level practices of the Tao school which are too numerous to even mention.

If you practice spiritual cultivation with preconceived notions of gong-fu in mind, this is to actually tread the path of mental illness. Don't add any effort to the process, or you'll fail in your cultivation just as Mencius warned. Even the Confucian school tells us,

It is difficult to make it clear. Such vital energy [your chi] is most great and indomitable. If it is nourished with integrity without our doing anything detrimental to it, it will be omnipresent, filling the whole universe. And it must be integrated with righteousness and morality, otherwise it becomes impotent. Such vital energy results from steady accumulation of righteousness and can not be acquired through occasional righteous acts [your spiritual cultivation must be a constant affair]. If you have something on your conscience, it will become impotent [so don't get stuck in discriminative thinking, but cultivate the mind of emptiness]. So I said, 'Gaozi did not understand righteousness because he thought it something external.' We must cultivate our righteousness and keep at it. While always keeping this in mind, we must not force it to grow unnaturally, like the man from Song. He was anxious for the growth of the cereal seedlings and tried to help them grow by pulling them upward. He came home exhausted and said to his family, 'I am tired out today! I have been helping the seedlings grow.' His son went to have a look only to find the seedlings already wilted. Actually there are very few in the world who do not help the seedlings grow. There are some who think tending the plants of no help and simply leave them alone. They will not even do any weeding

⁹⁷ *The Mystique of Enlightenment: The Unrational Ideas of a Man Called U.G.*, ed. by Rodney Arms, (Akshaya Publications, Bangalore: India, 1992), p. 32.

in the fields. There are also some who are eager to help the plants grow. They pull the seedlings upward—it is not only useless, but also detrimental to the plants. [So how can chi-gong, or spinning your chi in this way or that, help you?]⁹⁸

You really should never try to mentally lead the flow of chi in the body as the modern chi-gong and yoga and Tao schools suggest. Rather you should just set out to purify or clarify your mind by letting go of any internal mental chatter. Separate yourself from the body and become dead to its senses. Just purify your mind by letting go of thoughts and your chi will automatically complete its own legitimate circulations. When that happens, become dead to them and just ignore them. In other words, you should just try to cultivate emptiness of discrimination.

If you perform this simple sort of practice and keep with it, your chi will automatically adjust itself naturally and everything that is supposed to happen on the cultivation trail will happen without any efforts on your part. Trust me! Count on it! Don't ever try to force your chi, but just let your mind dwell in spiritual reality and your chi will naturally become harmonized.

Lao Tzu, also agreed with this principle, for he said,

Attain to utmost emptiness and embrace internal stillness. While the myriad things are stirring, I contemplate the return. All things flourish and each returns to its root. To return to the root is called stillness. To know the constant is called insight. If one does not know the constant, one runs blindly into disaster.

This describes Lao Tzu's principle for the cultivation of life, for he pointed out that the origin of life is based upon stillness, and one must therefore properly cultivate by returning to the source of life so as to accord with the constant Tao. Lao Tzu's original method of cultivation is quite unlike the later Tao school practices of sitting in meditation, concentrating on the tan-tien or other points of the body, practicing the chi mai, and so on. All Lao Tzu said was that one must “attain to utmost emptiness and internal stillness.”

In short, just live in the spiritual reality of the immediate present without attachment and your chi will naturally harmonize so as to do what it's supposed to do. Do you really think you should know what it's supposed to do in order that you

⁹⁸ Mencius, trans. By Zhao Zhentao, Zhang Wenting, Zhou Dingzhi, (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing: China, 1999), p. 63.

can mentally lead it? If that's really the Way to Tao, how is that anything natural rather than artificial, and if Tao is supposed to be within everyone's grasp, who's supposed to transmit this sort of knowledge to everyone? The way to the Tao is to stay in the present moment while ignoring the bodily sensations that arise, and then all these changes will transpire naturally and you'll achieve the highest versions of these phenomena without doing any specific practice at all. Since the extreme of yin (mental peacefulness) gives birth to yang, after yang is born it will in turn give birth to ten thousand transformations!

On the other hand if you do try to lead your chi, you must recognize that this is an artificial path that is not the true spiritual route to Tao, so be clear on this point. Some schools say that you can use your concentration to push or guide your chi along various energy meridians, and at times it may actually feel as if some energetic force is passing through your chi channels in response to mental efforts. However, this is wind rather than real chi of cultivation. *This is only the reaction of the mental force which has worked to change your physical feelings*, but this is definitely not the phenomenon of the real chi passing through the energy meridians!

This sort of response is more of a forced bodily sensation than anything else, and for this reason this reaction is called an experience of internal "wind" or "fan chi" rather than your real cultivation chi. Another way of saying it is that this sort of preoccupation is just *a form of playing with your body consciousness*. Do you know what real cultivation concentration is? It's not playing with your sensations or chi mai. Effective concentration is when the concept of self and others is completely wiped out, and the mind and body no longer exist. Only then can your concentration be effective. But if you continue playing with your sensations and consciousness of any sort, how will you ever reach this point? You're just swapping one set of sensations for another, and you're still focusing on the realm of birth and death rather than the supramundane beyond it.

In Buddhism we say that one of the problems confronting cultivators is that people mistakenly hold onto the concept of a self and of the physical body as being the self. It's one of the "five errant perspectives" that comes from a preoccupation with the form and sensation skandhas, and from clinging to the inputs fed to us by our body consciousness. So we have the form and sensation aggregates, together with our body consciousness, causing us to play around with our physical forms and sensations and take them as the real us. In fact, even modern schools of self-development have started to recognize this misidentification as the following dialogue indicates:

The next layer of identity is what we call the internal body image, or identification with the body regardless of the image, attachment to the body itself. Internal body image forms the core of the identity at this level, because of identification with the actual sensation of the body, the actual feelings in the body. It forms the core of both the body image and the self-image, and you're in touch with it most of your life. The inner sensations of the body—how it feels, the warmth or cold, harshness or softness, pleasure or pain, the flow and rigidity, the tension and relaxation—all become part of the identity.

This identity with the internal body image creates attachment to the body itself, to physical existence itself. You need to understand that this is not your identity. ... You need to correct the common misunderstanding that to be your body, or to have your body, you have to hold on to it. You find out at some point when you're studying your attachment to the body, that you believe you have to hold on to your body to have it. You believe you need tensions in order to feel your body. If you were to completely relax, you would feel you were going to lose it, float away, so you grab on! That grabbing is the tension, and going deep inside that tension you will feel the actual stuff of attachment ...

So you need to come to an understanding of your relationship to your body, how you identify with your body and your attachment to your body as a result of that identification. You think your body is you, and you hold on to it for dear life, so you're never relaxed. This level includes all the attachments to all the bodily pleasures, and the negative attachments to all physical pains. It includes sexual pleasure, physical contact pleasure, movement pleasure, stillness pleasure, all the realms of bodily attachment to pleasure and lack of it. Attachment to the body then is not just attachment to the physical body, but also to what the physical body means to you, all the pleasures and the comforts and the safety you believe it gives you. There is nothing wrong with these things; it's the attachment to them that creates the misunderstanding that is experienced as frustration and hell. I'm not saying you shouldn't want all these pleasures; that's not the point. The point is, the attachments to them will inevitably cause suffering.

Becoming free from this attachment has to do with becoming free from the attachment to pleasure, all kinds of pleasure. It is the loss of attachment to physicality, to your body from the inside. It's not a matter of image here, but of direct sensation, direct feeling. This identification is very intimate; it is something you've lived with all your

life, and you always believe it's you. Ultimately it give you comfort. When you see this identification for what it is, it also will dissolve, because it isn't any more real than your driver's license identity.⁹⁹

If you attend some modern day spiritual classes to "open the chakras" or "guide the chi through chi-gong" or "master the microcosmic and macrocosmic circulations," you're definitely heading in this wrong direction. This is just manipulating or trying to measure cultivation progress through the body consciousness. Yes, you should study the principles of spiritual cultivation along with the ancient autobiographical accounts of this type of phenomenon in order to understand these various matters, but you should let whatever physical transformations that are meant to occur on the path to happen naturally if at all. Only the body itself knows what's supposed to happen at your stage of attainment, and do you think that your intelligence is superior to the inherent wisdom of your body?

In cultivating stillness, you must allow the body to recuperate itself through regaining its original pre-natal vitality, and this recovered vitality is the force that will produce all the transformations necessary on the path. But you shouldn't try to guide this force because you cannot properly guide your blood flow or lymph circulations either. The life force has its own special circulatory routes and necessary sequences of transformations which are quite impossible to fully fathom from an intellectual basis. They can only be understood from the experiential basis of spiritual achievement. Hence these various transformations are not something you can correctly guide, nor are they something you should purposely strive to bring about. *Just continue practicing correctly by forgetting your body and remaining mentally quiet without falling into mental action, and everything will proceed in the proper order and way.* This is what you want, and this is all you should expect.

The Indian practitioner U.G. was certainly correct in warning people not to try to imitate the various sorts of gong-fu that he experienced. In fact, this practice of imitation is a terrible legacy of the Chinese Tao school that has remained with us since the Song dynasty onwards. Various Taoist masters from the Song dynasty recorded such phenomena, and ever since that time, students have read their journals which contained records of natural transformations. In reading these accounts, people totally forgot about the individuality of each particular case and began to mistakenly assume that these things *had* to happen in the way described. Thus they tried to mentally imagine them into existence by meditating on various minor and major, or microcosmic and macrocosmic inner chi circulations. They tried to take some specific form results of the path into the causative process of the path

⁹⁹ The Diamond Approach: An Introduction to the Teachings of A.H. Almaas, John Davis, (Shambhala Publications, Boston: Massachusetts, 1999), pp. 72-73.

itself, and thus they got shackled by a certain expectation of results and brewed their own stew of self-delusion.

The emphasis today on visualizing chakras and energy channels or projecting astral bodies and developing ESP are other such examples of this mistaken trend. These are the *tumors* of the true school of cultivation that have come down to us. This isn't cultivation, but just using the imagination to play with internal sensations of wind. The chi-gong schools are particularly guilty of this mistake, which is to be expected since they're the most materialistic form of cultivation that survived China's Cultural Revolution. The only reason this particular Chinese school survived was precisely because of its overly materialistic basis. Unfortunately, all the higher paths of spiritual practice were destroyed by the historical madness of the Cultural Revolution, and it's only the dregs that have remained.

Chi-gong exercises are basically the lowest forms of Indian pranayama practice, and certainly won't lead you to spiritual realization despite whatever modern adherents say. The big pull of this school to the Chinese is simply the fact that they've lost everything else, and want to claim some greatness in the world in the field of spirituality, but they want something homegrown so as to regain lost face. They don't recognize that the results from chi-gong practice are the results from any sort of breathing exercises, so they're nothing special, or secret or exclusive at all. This is just the propaganda of people who don't know better, or who are trying to look rich when they're actually quite poor.

Even with these words of caution, there is no way you'll ever convince people of their mistaken notions because they just don't know enough, and are as ignorant of their history as they are of other spiritual sects. All people like to busy their minds with ideas of grandeur, and like to cling to mental things and promised glories. Throughout history, only the Zen school has been able to avoid this mess by wisely ignoring form matters entirely. As a result, it seems to be the one cultivation school that has historically produced the largest number of enlightened adepts.

The Zen school always tells its adherents to search for the true nature of the mind, and thus to ignore any transient phenomena, including the reactions and sensations of the physical state, which appear in its fields of awareness. The Zen logic is: since mind and body are interlinked, then when you cultivate the mind, the body will transform naturally without any need of external intervention. As it stands today, the Tao school, on the other hand, starts from the vantage point of purposefully cultivating the body so as to purify it, after which Taoism also insists that you must switch over to pure mind cultivation. But as a result of this initial

difference in emphasis, it’s been rare for the Tao school to produce as many men of attainment as the Zen school whereas so many Zen students—as compared to the Tao, yoga and Esoteric Buddhist schools—eventually achieved spiritual enlightenment.

Many people, if they initially take the route of cultivating the body, never come to a point where they think their job is done and so many die without ever switching over to even the least bit of prajna wisdom cultivation. What a shame, what a waste, what a deplorable state of affairs. If you’re going to put spiritual efforts into the path, do you want to repeat this mistake so that you only achieve this type of result? Why not engage in the one path that accomplishes both objectives together?

One of the best accounts of these matters that has come down to us is the cultivation story of the second Zen Patriarch Hui-ko, who reached the point in his cultivation where the chi was painfully penetrating through the bones of his skull. At this point, the pain he felt was so excruciating that Hui-ko thought he would die, but he heard a voice in the sky which said, “Bear it a little while longer; the bones in your skull are being transformed.” Despite the pain, Hui-ko therefore ignored the sensations and his problem eventually cleared up. After his skull bones had been transformed, five tiny bumps appeared on his head as a result of this successful transformation. Do you think he could have known that this was supposed to happen?

You’ll often see pictures of Taoist Immortals with a slightly protruding forehead, and this too indicates that they’ve passed this stage of chi mai transformation and cleared their energy channels through to their feet. That’s the reason they can live extremely long lives meriting them the title of being “Immortals,” as well as the reason they can be called “sages.” In fact, anyone who achieves this type of bump is said to be able to frighten away ghosts because of the light it gives off. The bump signifies that an individual has opened all their chi channels in the head, including those going down the front of the body, and that he has transformed his yin chi to yang chi. Yang chi gives off light, and this sort of yang chi light frightens away ghosts because their chi is all yin.

{picture of Taoist long life Immortal}

The important point of Zen Patriarch Hui-ko’s story is that these various transformations happen to all practitioners of every school even if they’re not mentioned, for they are a natural by-product that falls out of transforming (purifying) the body’s energy channels. In fact, these transformations *must occur* because all

spiritual cultivation starts with the arousal of the life force. If it didn't involve the arousal of our life force, how could we call it spiritual cultivation or refer to it as some type of spiritual evolution? On the road of spiritual cultivation, definitely your life force will have to be transformed.

The purification of our chi mai and physical body accordingly follows from the cultivation of our chi, and afterwards there occur yet other higher transformations on the spiritual trail that will help us maintain special empty states of mind. The fact that the internal organs of the body will become transformed and purified through the process of spiritual cultivation--as well as the tu-mai, jen-mai, left and right mai and other chi channels--is something largely neglected in our discussions because of the amount of space we'd have to devote to these matters. Yet all the body's organs will eventually become transformed into more efficient vehicles, and with a cleaner body one will become enabled to extend their life span, banish illness, and achieve highly advanced spiritual states.

Basically, everyone will experience these various transformations in a different fashion and to a different degree depending upon their accumulated merits as well as their cultivation efforts and practices. What we've gone over in our case studies and instructions simply illustrates *some* of the general principles and patterns of such phenomena, and for the detailed information on these changes you must reference Nan Huai-Chin's Tao and Longevity, which is the world's foremost conclusive text on these matters.

However marvelous these purifying transformations may seem, you must always remember that they are just transient phenomena and they represent only the lower stages of the cultivation path. In other words, they correspond to only a very preliminary level of spiritual accomplishment. Some people will start to experience a bit of psychic abilities due to these transformations, but that's nothing special in itself either. Such powers only show that your thoughts or physical body can be manipulated in certain special ways, and these powers are usually not even accurate when it comes to important matters.

If you wish to read some more contemporary accounts of typical physical reactions which occur on the road of spiritual cultivation, you can also read Dr. Lee Sannella's book, The Kundalini Experience (Integral Publishing California, 1992), which summarizes a wide variety of experiences encountered by beginning cultivation practitioners. My book, How to Measure and Deepen Your Spiritual Realization (also known as Measuring Meditation), also explains in extensive detail these various gong-fu phenomena and most of the cases in Lee Sannella's book.

These experiences, as we’ve mentioned, are yet another way of marking guideposts on the cultivation path, and you have to comprehend these various things if you truly wish to understand the nondenominational path of spiritual cultivation.