

## Taoist Meditation – An Overview

When you start to learn Taoist meditation, your first six bodies (physical, qi, emotional, mental, psychic, and causal) are in confusion, like dust in a glass of swirling water. Both your personal consciousness and Universal Consciousness itself are hidden by the stirred mud of confused Qi. The murkiness is often thick enough to cause a loss of your inner stability and sense of cohesion. You do not have sufficient internal focus present to support a strong self-image or to clear away all the supercharged emotional and traumatic ghosts from your personal past. Yet such clearing is a prerequisite for being aware of your own consciousness, let alone Universal Consciousness.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Each step thereafter should be taken only when the preceding one has been completed, or you will likely trip, possibly hurting yourself. So it is with Taoist meditation. First of all, the preparatory physical and qi practices clear, balance, and energize your distorted first six bodies.

Initially, these preparatory practices are focused on developing your energy channels to have the strength and stability to deal with releasing your repressed emotions with a minimum of shocks or aftershocks. Doing these practices, you prepare for and begin to experience the emotional distortions hidden within yourself. In the course of ordinary life, these emotionally repressed time bombs often erupt at crisis points, such as death, divorce, disease, mid-life crisis, or financial disaster. The preparatory qi practices slow down the emotional swirling of the dust, gradually building internal stability, perception, and calmness until you clearly recognize and accept your difficulties and dysfunction (that is, the dust) for what they are, without self-delusion or denial.

Next, you begin the second stage of meditation practice, the road to maturity and stillness, by learning how to quiet the dissolving dust,

clearing out and neutralizing your highly charged positive and negative attachments, past traumas, and internal demons, all of which diminish you and rob you of qi. After dissolving the distortions and neutralizing them over a considerable period of time, you begin to get flashes of Consciousness (that is, the water) itself, glimpses still mostly clouded with the distortions of your physical, qi, emotional, mental, psychic, and causal bodies.

When your most horrific inner demons have been tamed and you have accomplished emotional and mental well-being and have progressed toward emotional maturity, it is time to decide if you actually want to take on the task of recognizing Consciousness itself. The water and dust have ceased swirling violently, and the dust particles are now moving in some kind of suspension that allows an inkling that there may indeed be water in the glass. The question then arises: Do I want to discover what this water is? Or was I only interested in a little meditative experience to reduce my stress and get physically and emotionally healthier?

You now have two choices. If your primary goal was to procure physical and emotional health and restore the fractured parts of your identity, then stay with this goal without thinking you need to go any further. Just continue on with the earlier practices of your choice to keep the dust from swirling again. If, however, you want to discover the nature of your spiritual center and Consciousness, then the dissolving process must grow and intensify. Meditation becomes less casual and more serious.

Now you apply the dissolving process to deeper levels until you work at clearing out all your bodies from the physical to the psychic. You then begin to perceive, and for the first time obtain, the capacity to work with and clear out your causal body. As you dissolve and release the glitches in the sixth body, you become empowered to eventually receive the grace that allows you to recognize Consciousness itself. You now begin to experience Consciousness more and more as you progressively

become comfortable entering into and stabilizing all the various states of emptiness.

The water of Consciousness is now in slow suspension. Sometimes you can glimpse it between the suspended particles. Through continual dissolving, you may get "peak experiences" or tremendous insights. Your inner voice will be getting clearer all the time, although the danger still exists of confusing it with the voices of your neuroses. Gradually, the previously swirling water dramatically slows. Inner stillness is growing strongly within you.

Then, one day, through deliberate effort, grace, or serendipity, your mind slows and your spirit becomes extremely stable. The dust drops to the bottom of the glass; the swirling motion has stopped. From then on you experience the water-Consciousness itself-as being completely independent of your personality. Your mind becomes still and the goals of the Taoist maturity practices are accomplished. You arrive at the Great Stillness.

You are now-and with practice will continue to be aware of how living Consciousness activates and defines you, bringing whatever you are engaged in to full life. You also become clear when and how Consciousness is alive within you. You now see and understand the differences between Consciousness, the "water," and your internal conditionings and tendencies, the "red dust." Before this realization, you may have had visions, hopes, or insubstantial intellectual ideas and beliefs about Consciousness, but you were incapable of separating the water and the dust. Now you can.

The spiritual problem of the human ego's incessant need to feel good or always be right has been solved. Like the sun in the sky, you, being fully aware of your individual essence, do not have a need to feel good, only to be. From the point of view of the water school of Taoism, genuine

spiritual work (that is, becoming one with the Tao) now begins. For without knowing deeply and personally what Consciousness is, you cannot get beyond beliefs and fear.

You now are like a newborn spiritual infant, newly aware, with the opportunity to grow into a spiritual adult. You can now begin the work of transforming the dust particles at the bottom of the glass into Consciousness through the practice of internal alchemy. You must always bear in mind, though, that life circumstances can set the dust swirling again if you do not maintain your dissolving practices. You have to keep at it.

### **The Standing Mode of Taoist Practice**

The Taoist meditation practices taught may be done in any of five modes: standing, moving, sitting, lying down, or during sexual activity. The Taoist water tradition generally recommends a progression that begins with the standing practices and gradually progresses to moving, then sitting, and then lying down practices.

Each practice serves as a firm foundation for the one following, and each must be mastered in turn for its full potential to be actualized. Each practice requires more subtlety, clarity of mind, strength, and stability of awareness than the one before it. Each one requires staying focused, aware, and engaged (as opposed to becoming dull or sleepy or numb). Consequently, each successive practice is more powerful than the one preceding it.

Of the five modes, standing practice is the easiest. Its primary aim is to make the energy of the body healthy, strong, open, and clear, to open energy channels, and to calm the agitation that a tense body and central nervous system produces. As the body stands motionless, every physical imbalance and weakness will reveal itself as the seconds tick by and

gravity weighs heavier and heavier. Discomfort, gravity, and the naturally activated automatic reflexes creating the desire not to fall down will sharpen your awareness.

## Standing Meditation Exercise

### *Stand still.*

Your feet should be parallel, about shoulder width apart, arms dangling at your sides, palms facing backward. Relax your breath. Concentrate on your breath and feel its changing qualities. Is your mind calm, still, and comfortable, or is it uneasy and agitated? The whole time you stand, continue to be aware of your breath and feel how your body is changing. Note carefully how your breath goes in and out your nose. Let your breathing deepen, until it becomes slow, steady, and from the belly (see p. 108). Keep the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth. Relax any tension in your jaw until it relaxes and drops down, without your mouth opening.

### *Mentally feel your body from head to toe.*

Once your breath becomes stable and you feel yourself consciously aware of your body, go inside with your mind and let your awareness begin to flow from the top of your head downward, equally on the front, back, and sides of your body.

First scan along the surface of your skin, then deep into your muscles, and eventually down through your bones. Let your awareness go slowly down your body, spending some time on each area before proceeding to the next blocked point below. By internally scanning for and actually feeling the sensations in your body, you will gradually become aware of those places where you have tension, blocked strength, contractions, pain, anxiety, or other things that don't feel quite right, especially if you don't know what they are. Continue scanning downward until you reach

the bottom of your feet and have relaxed your body sufficiently so you really feel your feet on the ground.

***Institute qi-cultivating body alignments.***

Separate your thighs so your perineum (the diaphragm area between the anus and the genitals) feels open and un-constricted. Now bend your knees a couple of inches, making sure they do not extend beyond your toes. Relax the muscles of your lower back and hips, then tuck your pelvis slightly forward while relaxing it toward the ground, without letting your knees bend any farther. Keep your head slightly lifted. Make certain your head does not bend or tilt forward, backward, to the left, or to the right. These alignments will help your body avoid needlessly blocking or dissipating your qi. As you institute these internal body alignments become aware of how, when you gently relax into a body alignment, the quality of your attention changes. Are your body alignments enhancing or distorting your ability to have a calm, clear mind?

***Release all your tension and strength to the ground.***

With your full intention, slow your mind down and allow it to observe both itself and your body simultaneously. Then, beginning from the top of your head, let all of your tension and strength internally release and fall downward-toward the ground, and eventually through your body and into the ground-all the while keeping your head properly aligned at the same level. Notice how releasing tension from your body can also release tension from your thoughts. Often, when our central nervous system is overloaded and we feel stressed out, the place where the stress is lodged in our bodies feels strong. In reality, the feeling of strength and blocked energy are very similar. Release all your strength and tension down to the ground bit by bit. All the while keep your spine straight, head upright, and pelvis tucked under so your tailbone points to the floor. The goal here is eventually to feel the sensation of having energy falling through your legs right into your feet and then into the

ground. Again, your knees should not move forward in space past your toes. Your energy should fall *through* the knees, but your knees should not physically fall forward. Your weight should be felt in your calves and feet, not in your knees. The weight passes through the knees to the feet.

When releasing only a part of the body, lightly release all your energy to the ground at the end of the practice session. Spend a week releasing only as far down as your neck. Then spend another week releasing only your head and chest. The next week add the belly. The next week, the head, chest, belly, and pelvic area. The next week, all those plus the legs, all the way down to your feet. And after that, release all your tension and strength, all the way from the head to the feet and into the ground itself. The more you practice, the more your body and mind will relax and be at ease.

### ***Have reasonable expectations.***

As you stand, you will slowly begin to feel in fine detail where and how your body is out of balance. By releasing your tension, you will feel much better. The deadened, hard, tense, and uncomfortable spots of your body will become soft, comfortable, and fully alive again. Your blood circulation will improve. The more you practice, the more any neck, shoulder, and back discomfort will disappear. You should feel more open in every joint of your body and taller as your body opens from the inside. To the extent you feel your body dropping and relaxing, you proportionately feel and make your spine rise. As above, so below. The more you fall, the more you rise, and the more you rise, the more you fall. Standing gives you a reliable way to release the tension accumulated during the day from your body, enabling you to enjoy what's left of your day. For example, you will become aware of where and how you carry tension in your neck, shoulders, back, or any other body part. You will directly experience how deep exhaustion from stress has permeated your body. You may even recognize how your back or hips are going out of alignment, days or weeks before you need to visit a

chiropractor, so you can take remedial action before a small problem becomes a big one. Gradually, the standing practice will demonstrate to you what your natural tension limits are. Usually, most of us are quite unaware of how deeply stress has penetrated our bodies, until extreme pain sets in. Many who practice standing meditation regularly learn what it means to be fully relaxed, for every bit of tension to leave the muscles. By releasing the tensions of the body and mind, you get stronger and are better able to fight off disease.