

# *Living Authentically*

*Daoist Contributions to  
Modern Psychology*

*edited by*

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# Contents

Livia Kohn	
Introduction: Mental Health in Daoism and Modern Science	1
<b>PART 1: Fundamental Concepts</b>	
Xichen Lu	
Ancient Daoist Philosophy and Authentic Living	25
Robert Santee	
The <i>Zhuangzi</i> : A Holistic Approach to Healthcare and Well-being	39
Stephen Jackowicz	
The Somatic Mind: Daoism and Chinese Medicine	59
Christopher Cott and Adam Rock	
“Turning the Light Around” in <i>The Secret of the Golden Flower</i>	79
<b>PART 2: Comparative Perspectives</b>	
Elliot Cohen	
Daoism, Psychology, and Psychosomantics	101
Reggie Pawle	
Immortality and Psychology in Mortal Life	123
Elisabeth Friedrichs	
The “Unconscious” in West and East	141
Donald Davis	
Daoism and Positive Psychology: Healing Self, Healing Society	158
<b>Part 3: Practical Application</b>	
J. Michael Wood	
Practical Experience with Deathbringers	177
Eduardo de Souza	
Health and Sexuality: Daoist Practice and Reichian Therapy	194
Stephan Wik	
Daoist Cultivation in Modern Relationships	219
Johannes Gasser	
Re-sourcive Pedagogy: Teaching and Education as Vital Energy Flow	234
Contributors	255
Index	257

## *Introduction*

### *Mental Health in Daoism and Modern Science*

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*There are many conceptual and practical overlaps between Daoism and modern science. The world of Dao and its material energy qi closely matches that of quantum physics. Body and mind are increasingly seen in terms of energetic networks and flowing patterns of interaction, matching the organ and meridian system of traditional China. Specifically Daoist body centers and activation methods, moreover, find their scientific matches in behavioral kinesiology and modern ways of working with the universal energy that pervades the body and all life.*

Mental health in Daoism means the complete alignment of mind and spirit with the flow of Dao 道, the underlying, creative power of the universe that—if left to its own devices—manages everything to perfection. Part of the greater universe, mental health within the individual is a dimension of bodymind energetics, attained through the perfect balancing of the dynamic vibrations of a vital energy known as *qi*. *Qi* 氣 is the material aspect of Dao, the subtle matter-cum-energy that makes beings appear in physical form and come to life. Working with a model of dynamic processes—expressed in terms of yin-yang and the five phases—rather than of solid, stable entities, the Daoist understanding of mental health goes far beyond its Western counterpart, which tends to see it primarily as the ability to function consciously and competently in the world. In this respect, it is much like “health” in Chinese medicine: the integrated balance of physical well-being, personal happiness, good fortune, and harmony, it is much more than the mere absence of physical symptoms.

Daoists see body and mind along the same continuum of *qi* and tend to work with one through the other, yet they make a clear distinction between them. In addition, they also distinguish body and mind on the cosmic and personal levels—the pure body-form and spirit human beings receive from Dao versus the personalized body-self and mind they create through reactions to

sensory stimuli and social adaptation. Much of Daoist practice, then, leads to a recovery of the original connection to Dao in the purer dimensions of the bodymind. It is an unlearning of personality structures, a reprogramming of interaction patterns into modes of greater harmony and enhanced purity. The practice, moreover, works closely with energy centers and pathways within the bodymind—the inner organs and meridians at the core of Chinese medicine as well as specific locations of cosmic power and divinity. Also, it does not stop with rectifying obvious dysfunctions, but goes beyond the attainment of mental balance toward a sense of at-oneness with creation and the transcendence of immortality.

However alien the Daoist vision may seem, in recent years many of its aspects have begun to play a role in modern science and psychotherapy—usually without any direct influence from the Chinese tradition. Thus, the world of quantum physics replicates much of the vibrational understanding of the universe described in terms of Dao and *qi*; energy medicine sees the body as a tensegrity system of multiple yet completely integrated energetic forces and finds repeated validation for things like prayer and the laying-on of hands; energy psychology makes use of internal energy systems from various cultures, including Chinese organs and meridians, and reports great success with tapping and subtle suggestion techniques; behavioral kinesiology makes use of energetic forces and networks as well as bodymind techniques that closely reflect Daoist models; and, last but not least, the integrated personality restructuring system of Core Health uses visualizations and suggestions along the lines of the Inner Smile meditation together with a vision of living life in complete harmony and inner peace.

In all these respects, as well as in many others outlined in this book, Daoism can contribute deeper dimensions of understanding mind, body, and universe while providing enhanced methods and systems of practice based on thousands of years of experience and experiment.

### *The World of Dao*

Daoists see human beings as an integral part of nature and the greater universe, which functions in perfect harmony and is fundamentally good. Created in a series of transformations without a radical break from the pure, formless Dao, the universe manifests itself in a wondrous combination of manifold forces that ideally work together to constitute a cosmos of perfect goodness.

The goodness of the cosmos is all-pervasive and part of the inherent make-up of human beings. However, it is not necessarily a moral goodness that can be expressed in sets of rules and enforced by laws and other restraints. The goodness of the cosmos goes beyond human morality because it is cosmic and natural, and both cosmos and nature are cruel and unjust at times; they do not have a set of values that can be defined or to which they can be held. As

the *Daode jing* 道德經 (Book of the Dao and Its Potency) says: “Heaven and Earth are ruthless; they treat the myriad things like straw dogs”—the universe is not ethically good and treats all things as though they were without inherent value. The cosmos thus functions naturally in its own way, without guidelines, standards, and values, to the highest possible good of all (Kohn 2004, 13).

The natural goodness of the cosmos, which is present everywhere all the time, is intuited by human beings as a sense of well-being and inner harmony which they feel deep within and activate spontaneously, without thinking. To reach it with their limited sensory and intellectual faculties, they resort to conscious patterns, organizational models, rules and regulations. Mental and social structures thus form a secondary part of the cosmic harmony which Daoists embody; they ideally increase the overall potency of life. Nevertheless, perfected Daoists try to see and go beyond these structures, transcending the patterns of organized society in a spontaneous sense of cosmic oneness.

Both these aspects of Daoist living are authentic—perfect (*zhen* 真) in the sense of matching cosmic flow: they are true to the organizational manifestation of Dao in the world as well as to its inherent suchness as creative power. They reflect the dual nature of Dao, as already the *Daode jing* says: “The Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao” (ch. 1). This distinguishes an eternal aspect of Dao that is ineffable and beyond sensory perception from visible and tangible patterns that manifest in the rhythmic changes and natural processes of the world.

The first, the eternal Dao at the center of creation, although the ground and inherent power of human beings and the world, is entirely beyond ordinary perception. Vague and obscure, it is beyond all knowing and analysis; we cannot grasp it however hard we try. The human body, senses, and intellect are not equipped to deal with it. The only way a person can ever get in touch with it is by forgetting and transcending ordinary human faculties, by becoming subtler and finer and more potent, more like the Dao itself.

Dao at the periphery, on the other hand, is characterized as the give and take of various pairs of complementary opposites, as the natural ebb and flow of things as they rise and fall, come and go, grow and decline, emerge and die. Things always move in one direction or the other: up or down, toward lightness or heaviness, brightness or darkness. Nature is a continuous flow, described in terms of yin and yang as the alternation of complementary characteristics and directions that cannot exist without each other. This becoming can be rhythmic and circular, or it can move back toward the source of life in the ineffable Dao, which at the same time is a forward movement toward a new level of cosmic oneness (Kohn 2005, 9-10).

The connection of Dao to world, moreover is expressed in terms of a vital energy known as *qi*. *Qi* is bioenergetic potency that causes things to live, grow, develop, and decline. People as much as the planet are originally equipped with prenatal or primordial *qi* that connects them to the greater universe (Dao at the center), but they also work with postnatal or interactive *qi*—through

breath and food as well as sexual and emotions exchanges—which can enhance or diminish their primordial energy (Dao at the periphery).

Qi is a dynamic, vacillating energy that flows constantly, either properly (*zheng* 正) or in a wayward manner (*xie* 邪), usually described in terms of excess or deficiency. It is the quality of flow, not the quantity of energy that determines health and happiness, thus leading to a definition of mental health in terms of energetic smoothness, inner harmony, and an intuitive connection to Dao.

### *Modern Physics*

In terms of science, the Daoist vision has much in common with modern physics whose chaos theory describes the world in terms of unceasing processes of movement, change, and transformation that yet come together in a well-functioning natural control system, marked by a fair degree of unpredictability and offering a constant chance of new possibilities and discoveries. The inherent processes of the world, moreover, are described in terms of quantum fields which, unlike gravity or magnetism, carry neither matter nor energy.

Quantum physics states that the subatomic world is in no way like the world we inhabit. Energy is not continuous, but instead comes in small units: quanta, the energy that electrons absorb or emit when changing energy levels; and gluons, the forces that hold atoms together. The most basic subatomic particles behave like both particles and waves, and many of these particles form pairs like yin and yang, where one cannot exist without the other. The movement, moreover, of these particles is inherently random. It is impossible to know both the exact momentum and location of a particle at the same time—in fact, there is an inverse relationship in that the more information one has about the former, the less is known about the latter, and vice versa (see <http://phys.educ.ksu.edu>).

Quantum physics has shown that matter is made up of vibrating energy and fields which change rapidly—trillions of times in one second. Atoms are largely empty and consist of a tiny nucleus that is ten thousand times smaller than the rest of the particle—99,999 parts being emptiness. Body and mind consist of the same vibrating atoms that are constantly oscillating, arising and dissolving; all empty, no solidity, no firmness. As a result, reality consists less of the combination of solid entities than of an interlocking web of fields that each pulsate at their own rate. These interlocking fields of vibration—described in Daoism as patterns of *qi*-flow—can come into harmony with each other and mutually support and increase their amplitude. But they can also interfere with each other and create disturbance. Since all fields are ultimately interlocked, even a small disturbance in any one of them carries into all the others. This holds true not only for the body, but also integrates the mind into a vibrational body-mind totality. Just as bodily transformations are of unlim-

ited possibilities, so the mind is ultimately non-local: it can be anywhere and exchange information with anything instantaneously (see [www.newscientist.com/hottopics/quantum](http://www.newscientist.com/hottopics/quantum)).

Another way to understand this vibrational pattern of energy fields is through sound. Sound can appear as random acoustic disturbances, such as voices, body, hand, or air movements, or again in rhythmic patterns as a note, a single acoustic frequency (Bentov 1977, 23). An experiment known both to the ancient Chinese and modern physicists is the harmony created among two string instruments. If you pluck the string of one lute, the matching string on a lute sitting next to it will begin to vibrate. Similarly, if you apply the violin bow to sheet metal with sand, you get a distinctive pattern of standing waves or nodal points that form both active and quiescent areas. These show the pattern of *qi* in the universe, the alteration between ups and downs, activity and rest.

Smooth *qi*-flow is thus essentially entrainment or vibrational harmony among different objects or parts of the same entity. Various modes are possible. Superimpose two sounds of identical wave pattern: hill matches hill, valley matches valley, and the amplitude of the original wave pattern is doubled. This is called constructive interference or the productive pattern of *qi*-interaction, leading to proper flow. Superimpose two sounds of opposite wave pattern: the exact opposite happens, they cancel each other out and the wave vanishes into a straight line. This is disruptive interference, the creation of disharmony and a destructive or wayward form of *qi*-interaction.

In the case of varying wavelengths, moreover, some phases match each other while others do not. This results in a curve that goes up and down, is far apart at one point, then meets again and parts again. A rhythmic pattern of interaction emerges, typical for the natural and human world. This, in turn, matches not only the classical view of the movements of Dao and *qi* in the Chinese universe, but also modern physics. As described by David Bohm in *Quantum Theory* (1951), living organisms are intrinsically dynamic. Their visible forms are nothing but apparently stable manifestations of underlying processes that change continuously in rhythmic patterns—fluctuations, oscillations, vibrations, waves.

The ideal of harmonious *qi*-flow and entrained vibrations, then, is a completely resonant system. The waves of one entity impinge on another so that it moves in the same frequency. This, in essence, is the Daoist definition of mental and physical health: the *qi*-vibrations of each aspect of the bodymind resonate smoothly with all others. Individuals resonate harmoniously with the people and things around them; society and nature resonate perfectly with each other. The perfection and total harmony of Dao is reached when all beings and things hum on the same wavelength and frequency, in a state of optimum transfer and total resonance.

In terms of psychology, this means that the bodymind is a conglomeration of various vibratory fields. Never can there be just one single cause for a

given symptom or mental state, but the interconnection of the whole needs to be examined. Nor can the mind be viewed in isolation, but should be seen in relation to many fields that go far beyond the individual: planets, earth, society, family, and so on. Disease and disorder may be related to the out-of-tune behavior of one or the other sector in the flow of vibration, but they affect the whole and can be approached from many different angles. Corrections come accordingly in various forms—mental and physical—and should have an effect on the entire system, applying a strong harmonizing rhythm to any given part of the vibration pattern. Eventually the flow moves back into its harmonious rhythm and health results.

### *Body and Mind*

The Chinese generally do not radically distinguish between body and mind, seeing them both essentially as *qi*, with the caveat that the mind vibrates at a subtler and faster level. Still, it is a gross simplification to assume that they see body and mind as one and the same: they make a clear distinction between the two in idea as well as language. As Maxime Kaltenmark points out:

Chinese terminology reflects subtle differences between states of a more or less ethereal quality, but of one and the same principle lying at the foundation of all the complex functions of man. The gross conditions of the body are as much included as are its finer essences and the higher mental states which make up holiness.

This, then, is the reason why one can say that the Chinese do not make a clear-cut distinction between what we call body and mind. Their outlook is in general much more oriented towards life as an organic whole and ongoing process. (1965, 655)

The main distinction is accordingly less between body and mind in the Western sense than between states that enhance primordial *qi* and favor ultimate realization of Dao versus those that do not.

There are accordingly two sets of terms for body and mind: the body-form (*xing* 形) and the body-self (*shen* 身) plus the spirit (*shén* 神) and the mind (*xin* 心). Both body-form and spirit are part of original Dao, pure and potent, connected to cosmic flow, ultimately impersonal, and essentially without end. Body-form is a replica of the universe, the material appearance of things, their being as entities quite distinct from other objects yet wholly integrated into the greater universe. Cosmologically, the body as form marks the beginning of the created world. “Before body-form, there is the One,” says the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Book of the Prince of Huainan; 1.9b) of the Han dynasty. In later philosophical discourse, *xing erxia* 形而下, literally “below the forms,” designates the created physical world, while *xing ershang* 形而上, “above the forms,” stands for the realm of metaphysics and abstract speculation. In the Daoist vision, it



moreover incorporates all kinds of cosmic forces: various souls, the five phases, the seven stars of the Dipper, as well as numerous celestial palaces, networks, and deities (see Kohn 1991; see also Huang 2010).

The spirit, on the other hand, is like Dao. The seventh-century philosopher Li Rong 李榮 says in his commentary to the *Xisheng jing* 西昇經 (Scripture of Western Ascension): “Spirit serves to give life to embodied beings. Without this, there would be no life. . . . It is only upon borrowing spirit that embodied beings can come to life. Spirit uses them as a habitation in order to attain completion. Without the joining of the spirit and embodied beings, there would be no life nor completion” (4.14b; Kohn 2007, 96; see also Assandri 2009). Matching this, the eighth-century *Tianyinzi* 天隱子 (Book of the Master of Heavenly Seclusion) says: “Spirit arrives without moving and is swift without hurrying; it transforms along with yin and yang and is as old as Heaven and Earth” (sect. 8). The *Neiguan jing* 內觀經 (Scripture of Inner Observation), also from the mid-Tang dynasty, provides more detail:

Spirit is neither black nor white, neither red nor yellow, neither big nor small, neither short nor long, neither crooked nor straight, neither soft nor hard, neither thick nor thin, neither round nor square. It goes on changing and transforming without measure, merges with yin and yang, greatly encompasses Heaven and Earth, subtly enters the tiniest blade of grass. Controlled it is straightforward, let loose it goes mad.

Clarity and purity make it live, turbidity and defilements cause it to perish. Fully bright, it radiates to the eight ends of the universe. Darkened, it confuses even a single direction. Keep it empty and serene, and life and Dao will spontaneously be present. (2b; Kohn 2010, 101)

Oneness with spirit, then, means its liberation (*shenjie* 神解) and the attainment of spirit pervasion (*shentong* 神通), which manifests in the emitting of a bright radiance and the attainment of supernatural powers. Perceiving fully with spirit instead of the senses, Daoist immortals (as much as enlightened Buddhists) are omniscient and can penetrate all phenomena with equal ease.

In contrast to these pure dimensions of the human bodymind, body-self and mind are conscious constructs, largely defined in terms of afflictions. Already the *Daode jing* says: “The body-self is the reason why I have terrible vexations. If I didn’t have a body-self, what trouble would I have?” (ch. 13). Li Rong cites it in his commentary and explains:

Having a body-self means having vexations and adversities. Frustrated by sight and hearing, tortured by taste and smell, one is subject to pain, irritation, heat, and cold.

As soon as there is a body-self the hundred worries compete to arise and the five desires (of the senses) hurry to make their claims. (Kohn 2007, 100)

This defines the body-self as an artificial creation, a conglomerate of the senses. It encompasses the various human sensations and feelings together with the judgments and evaluations attached to them and their resulting pas-

sions and emotions. Understood as the personal body or extended self, it is both a physical and a psychological entity inasmuch as people identify with their body image, their sensory impressions and desires. It is not part of the original human make-up: at birth there are just body-form and spirit. Only when a sense of personal identity is established through the senses and social positioning, it becomes a body-self. The Daoist quest, then, in essence means to diminish the power of the body-self in order to retrieve and enhance the original purity of the body-form. Realization of the Dao, therefore, mean a “depersonalization,” a change of body identity from person to body as form.

The same relationship also holds true for spirit and mind. The mind is the ruler of the emotions and close to the idea of the heart, which is also the physical organ it resides in. It is judgmental and evaluative, given to flights of fancy, and subject to sensory impressions and desires: for cosmic purposes this kind of mind is entirely useless. On the other hand, the mind can become the vehicle of spirit, a psychological force that allows the purity of the cosmos to flow through it. This is often described as “no-mind,” a state when the perception of oneself as a limited entity is replaced by an almost mystical sense of oneness with all, an openness to cosmic flow, a detached yet positive relationship to the world.

The Daoist path to full mental health thus consists of two major stages. First there is a de-personalization, de-emotionalization of the individual: make your body-self no-self and your mind no-mind (*Xisheng jing* 5.1a). After this, the purified bodymind merges with the cosmic forces of body-form and spirit, leading to oneness with Dao and cosmic consciousness. Doing so, adepts recover their birth right as integral parts of the natural and supernatural world, foregoing all claims to be anything in and of themselves and never limiting pure spirit for mere emotional and egotistic purposes. “The world is me—I am the world.” Far from being an expression of personal empowerment, this position heralds the complete abrogation of all active molding, of all outgoing force, of all purposeful deliberation and human thinking.

### *Energy Medicine and Psychology*

Among Western science, the close integration of body and mind, combined with the vision of the human bodymind as interlocking energy fields that can function at different levels of purity, is most prominent in the emerging field of energy medicine. Recent research in biology, physiology, and physics has opened up many new venues of looking at the bodymind and begun to create a language that will eventually allow science to integrate Chinese concepts, demystify the phenomenon and experiences of *qi*, and make the Daoist perspective more widely accessible to the general public.

The most important new concepts emerging from this research are measurable biomagnetic fields and bioelectricity. Biomagnetic fields are hu-

man energy centers that vibrate at different frequencies, storing and giving off energies not unlike the bodymind in the Chinese system. Their energetic output or vibrations can be measured, and it has been shown that the heart and the brain continuously pulse at extremely low frequencies (ELF). It has also become clear through controlled measurements that biomagnetic fields are unbounded so that, for example, the field of the heart vibrates beyond the body and extends infinitely into space, verifying the Chinese conviction that people and the universe interact continuously on an energetic level (see Becker and Sheldon 1985; Gerber 1988; Seem 1989; Targ and Katra 1999).

Similarly, bioelectricity manifests in energy currents that crisscross the human body and are similar to the meridians of acupuncture. Separate from and, in evolutionary terms, more ancient than the nervous system, these currents work through the so-called cytoskeleton, a complex net of connective tissue that is a continuous and dynamic molecular webwork. Also known as the “living matrix,” this webwork contains so-called integrins or transmembrane linking molecules which have no boundaries but are intricately interconnected. When touching the skin or inserting an acupuncture needle, the integrins make contact with all parts of the bodymind through the matrix webwork. Based on this evidence, wholeness is becoming an accepted concept, which sees the bodymind “as an integrated, coordinated, successful system” and accepts that “no parts or properties are uncorrelated but all are demonstrably linked” (Oschman 2000, 49, citing E. F. Adolph).

The bodymind as a living matrix is simultaneously a mechanical, vibrational, energetic, electronic, photonic, and informational network. It consists of a complex, linked pattern of pathways and molecules that forms a tensegrity system. A term taken originally from architecture where it is used in the structural description of domes, tents, sailing vessels, and cranes, tensegrity indicates a continuous tensional network (tendons) connected by a set of discontinuous elements (struts), which can also be fruitfully applied to the description of the integrated system (Oschman 2000, 153).

The vision of the body as an energetic network and of the mind as a key factor in human energetics is thus becoming more familiar in Western culture. Without specifically speaking of yin and yang, the five phases, inner organs and meridians, energy medicine yet adapts an understanding of body and self that has been at the root of Daoist ideas and practices for millennia.

Energy psychology, on the other hand, takes the extra step and works with traditional models, seeing the body as consisting of “various interrelated energy systems (such as the aura, chakras, and meridians), which each serve specific functions” (Feinstein et al. 2005, 197). According to this understanding, the visible and measurable material body is supported by an underlying network or skeleton of living energy that forms the foundation of all bodily systems (see also Pert 1997; Gach and Henning 2004; Gallo 2004.).

Supported increasingly by electromagnetic measurements, followers of this new method distinguish seven major aspects of this energy network:

- the meridian system defined as the energy bloodstream, which “brings vitality, removes blockages, adjusts metabolism, and even determines the speed and form of cellular change” (Feinstein et al. 2005, 198);
- the chakras, energetic vortexes adapted from Indian body geography, which are concentrated centers of energy that supply power to specific organs and resonate with universal principles, such as creativity, love, survival, and transcendence;
- the aura, a fundamental energy shield surrounding people that was studied extensively in the seventies (e.g., Krippner and Rubin 1974), that is now seen as a protective energetic atmosphere that surrounds the person “like a space suit” and serves to filter outside energies (Feinstein et al. 2005, 200);
- the basic grid, a sturdy fundamental energy net that can be compared to the chassis of a car;
- the Celtic weave, a spinning, spiraling, twisting, and curving pattern of energies that creates a “kaleidoscope of colors and shapes” and functions as an “invisible thread that keeps all the energy systems functioning as a single unit” (Feinstein et al. 2005, 201);
- the five rhythms, matching the five phases and their related organs, senses, muscles, and so on, which establish a person’s primary rhythm and provide the basic blueprint of personal and interactive functioning;
- the triple warmer, adapted from Chinese medicine and reinterpreted as an energy line that “networks the energies of the immune system to attack an invader and mobilizes the body’s energies in emergencies” (Feinstein et al. 2005, 202), which is the key factor in the stress response according to this energetic vision;
- and finally, the radiant circuits, an adaptation of the eight extraordinary vessels, now described as primary to the body’s system in terms of evolution, “operating like fluid fields and embodying a distinct spontaneous intelligence” (Feinstein et al. 2005, 203).

On the basis of this vision of the human body, practitioners of energy psychology propose that people should enhance their “energy aptitude,” perform daily exercises to harmonize the energies, and use specific tapping techniques to release tensions and emotional trauma (Kohn 2008, 26-27).

Energy aptitude means the ability to work effectively with one’s internal energies. It has four components: a careful awareness of one’s energetic patterns, the ability to influence these patterns in a beneficial way, the faculty to perceive energies in other people and outside objects, and to join or transform these outside energies in a beneficial way (Feinstein et al. 2005, 204-5).

Daily exercises include many moves familiar from Daoist practice: they involve pressing key acupuncture points while breathing deeply and visualizing energies flowing through the body. Like traditional Chinese and Indian exercises, they make use of various bodily postures and involve self massages of key areas, such as the face, the scalp, and the abdomen. In some cases, meridian lines are opened through placing the hands at either end and allowing the energies to flow, in others simple bends stretches in conjunction with conscious breathing and mental release serve the purpose. While these are all similar to practices already advocated in Daoism, the closest exercise is the Auric Weave, a passing of the hands over the energy lines of the body, which is known as Dry Wash in traditional China and practiced as Marrow Washing in modern qigong (Feinstein et al. 2005, 233-35).

The third and most important clinical application of energy psychology lies in tapping techniques that ease stress, release trauma, and heal ailments. Also practiced under the name Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), the method has patients measure a problem on a scale from 1 to 10, then imagine the feeling associated with the issue, create a positive affirmation (“Even though I have . . . , I deeply and completely accept myself.”), and repeat the affirmation while tapping a set of eight acupuncture points. The points range from the center of the forehead through the face, neck, and upper torso to the sides of the hands. After completion, patients re-measure the feeling, then repeat the technique—often with a slightly modified affirmation (“Even though I still have a remnant of . . .”)—until it goes down to zero. Not only are urgent issues immediately relieved with this method, but even long-standing issues resolve with persistent tapping (Craig 2007).

The technique in this precise form is not found in traditional documents, but there is a Daoist method practiced today that involves tapping the three energy centers in head, chest, and abdomen as well as the third eye while chanting an incantation to the powers of chaos underlying all creation. There are also multiple qigong tapping routines that help recover health and stabilize energy (Johnson 2000, 703-7). Daoist materials, moreover, frequently require practitioners to “drum” certain areas of the body, most commonly the chest or abdomen, while holding the breath, thereby releasing stale or wayward *qi*, the traditional way of referring to past trauma, unwanted emotional baggage, and physical obstructions. Self-massages that involve tapping energy channels on arms and legs as well as around eyes and ears, moreover, are common and considered essential to establishing physical and mental health (Kohn 2008, 79-80).

### *The Daoist Bodymind*

The Daoist bodymind closely connects to the greater universe. Like the body in Chinese medicine, it centers around the five inner (yin) organs of liver, heart,

spleen, lungs, and kidneys, which form part of an intricate inner-body network encompassing transformative (yang) organs, the senses, extremities, fluids, tissues, and so on. Cosmologically, moreover, the organs and their correlates match the directions in space, the seasons in time, as well as all sorts of natural and celestial phenomena—including planets, sacred mountains, musical tones, colors, and many more.

Beyond this, the five inner organs are the energetic centers of an expansive network of *qi* conduits, meridians that connect them to the extremities on both sides of the body. They are also the seat of various physical aspects of the person (body fluids, tissues, senses, tastes, and so on) as well as of his or her mental dimension (psychological factors, emotions, virtues, etc.). The Daoist vision of the bodymind works with all these and in addition proposes three major energy centers and four essential energy lines. These form a vertical-horizontal network at the very root of the human being, created when Heaven and Earth first provide the person with primordial *qi*.

The three energy centers are commonly known as cinnabar or elixir fields (*dantian* 丹田). Located in the head, solar plexus, and lower abdomen, they each house the three treasures: spirit, *qi*, and essence (*jing* 精)—the latter signifying a denser energetic potency that makes up bones, brain, teeth, and nails and, in its fluid form, transmits the very power of life in male semen and female menstrual blood. Matching the three cosmic levels of Heaven, Humanity, and Earth, the three elixir fields are also known as the Heaven Palace, the Scarlet Palace, and the Earth Palace; as the residence of body gods, they have the more mythological names Niwan Palace, Purple Palace, and Yellow Court (Neswald 2009, 37–38).

The upper elixir field in the head is the place from where celestial energies are accessed or through which, at the stage of immortality, the spirit embryo passes to ascend to the otherworld. The central field is placed in the solar plexus, between the nipples and also called the Cavity of *Qi*. Holding *qi* for dispersal in the body either through ordinary activity or for immortality cultivation, it plays a key role especially in women's practice, strengthening and enhancing life energy. The lower field is commonly placed about 1.3 inches beneath the navel, in the center of the abdomen. Also called Ocean of *Qi*, it is the point where adepts find their center of gravity, their reproductive power, and their stability in the world (Kohn 2005, 59).

Connecting these three energy centers are four major energy conduits or extraordinary vessels. Most important is the Penetrating Vessel (*chongmai* 冲脉) which runs right through the center of the body. It begins at the perineum, a small cluster of muscles located between the anus and the genital organs, passes through the three elixir fields, and ends at the crown of the head, a point known as Hundred Meeting in medicine and as Heavenly Pass in Daoism. Connecting the kidneys and stomach, as well as the main energy centers, it is considered the main conduit of primordial *qi*. Adepts use it to send healing and

spiritual intention into the depth of the elixir fields, thus opening their centers and connecting to the primordiality of the cosmos.

The second major energy line is the Belt Vessel (*daimai* 帶脈). It runs around the abdomen a few inches below the navel, connecting the Ocean of Qi in front with the Gate of Destiny in the kidney area in the back and linking the vertical meridians and the major storehouses of *qi*. Next are the Conception Vessel (*renmai* 任脈, yin) and the Governing Vessel (*dumai* 督脈, yang), which run along the front and back of the torso respectively, reaching from the pelvic floor to the head. They are of great importance both in all levels of Daoist practice, serving to mix *qi* and blood and to guide the *qi* along the major centers of the body.

The Conception Vessel begins at Meeting of Yin at the perineum, passes through the front of the body along its central line, and ends at the mouth. A carrier and major supporter of yin-*qi*, it supports uro-genital, digestive, and thoracic aspects of the body and, together with the spleen meridian, controls pregnancy and menstruation. The Ocean of Qi in the lower abdomen is actually one of its points as is the navel, known as the Tower of Spirit, and the center of the chest, here known as the Ocean of Tranquility. Two further points on this energy line are the Central Court, which matches the solar plexus and thus the middle elixir field, and the Purple Palace, which here refers to the heart.

The Governing Vessel also begins at the pelvic floor, then passes along the back of the body, moves across the top of the head, and ends inside the mouth at the upper gums. It transports and aids yang-*qi* and has many points connecting to channels and inner organs. Its twenty-eight points include also the more spiritual points Gate of Destiny at the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lumbar vertebrae, Numinous Terrace at the 6<sup>th</sup> thoracic vertebra, as well as the Jade Pillow at the back of the skull (see Kaptchuk 1983; Larre and de la Vallée 1996).

The two meridians connect in the mouth as well as internally, descending back to the pelvic floor and forming a continuous, intricate inner loop. Rather than using this path, however, adepts tend to activate them as one straight circle of *qi*-flow. They place the tongue at the roof of the mouth as a bridge between the meridians, then inhale deeply into the abdomen to enhance their Ocean of Qi or lower elixir field. From there, they breathe out, envisioning their *qi* flowing downward to the pelvic floor and reaching the perineum.

Focusing on the coccyx, they inhale the *qi* up along the spine, passing through all the various points along the Governing Vessel. Reaching a point below the neck, they begin to exhale, carrying the *qi* further up along the back of the skull, across Hundred Meeting at the top, along the forehead and to the nostrils. From here they inhale again, envisioning the *qi* flowing down along the Conception Vessel and through the Ocean of Qi into the pelvic floor, thus establishing a cycle of *qi* throughout the torso, which is known in Daoist practice as the microcosmic orbit (*xiao zhoutian* 小周天) (Neswald 2009, 35-37).

Daoists activate these three energy centers and four lines to reach a state of energetic perfection where primordial *qi* flows freely through the body and

energizes every aspect of life. They are exceedingly conscious of personal energy management, both within the self and the environment. They exert strong control over housing, sleep gear, clothing, food, and social contacts and make sure to be active in self-management, working with physical movement, healing exercises, breathing, meditation, emotional modification, and the pursuit of classic virtues, such as honesty, wisdom, and benevolence. Their efforts overall reduce stress and strengthen the adrenal glands, which in Chinese and Daoist medicine are part of the kidney complex and thus the seat of vital essence. As a result, they prevent stress and disease and do not suffer from the common signs of aging. They create a happier and more wholesome life for themselves while contributing to a saner and more harmonious society.

### *Behavioral Kinesiology*

The closest modern match to the complex energy centers and lines of traditional Daoism is found in behavioral kinesiology. In theory and practice it supports everything Daoists have been saying for millennia about the nature of bodymind, self, and society. It also emphasizes the very same measures—social, physical, and psychological—people should take to enhance their well-being and find perfection within this world.

Kinesiology is the science of movement: how to move the body and use its joints, tendons, and muscles to create maximum efficiency and best performance. It is best known from sports culture and studied widely in departments of physical education at Western universities (Luttgens and Wells 1989). Behavioral kinesiology adds the dimension of personal perfection into the mix: the attainment of health, the extension of life expectancy, and the realization of virtues and inherent goodness in self and society. In other words, it is the study of how we can realize ideal health and harmony by living and moving most efficiently in our bodymind.

The key factor in behavioral kinesiology is the thymus gland. Located in the solar plexus, it was acknowledged by the ancient Greeks as the central seat of vitality. “Thymus is the stuff of life, vaporous breath, active, energetic feeling and thinking, material very much related to blood” (Spencer 1993, 47). The gland, although known to exist, was ignored in Western medicine for the longest time as not having a specific function, since it—like essence in Chinese medicine—grows during puberty, is reduced in adulthood, shrinks to a miniscule size during sickness, and shrivels up completely after death (Diamond 1978, 10). More recent studies have shown that the thymus gland, like the middle elixir field, is the center of immunological surveyance and works to produce lymphocytes, i.e., the white blood cells responsible for the immunological reaction in the body. Connected energetically to all the different organs and extremities of the body (1978, 28-29), it prevents disease and cancer if kept strong.



Not only the middle, but also the upper and lower elixir fields have a match in the West. The upper field is obviously the brain with its major center of mental and emotional processing. Reactions in the brain divide into two types: good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant. Usually the bad, unpleasant emotions are afflictive, negative, and destructive; they tend to cause people to withdraw or move away from the object or circumstance that caused them. Good, pleasant emotions are beneficial, positive, and engaging; they make people approach and seek out the object or circumstance that caused them (Goleman 1997, 34).

In terms of brain chemistry, withdrawal reactions are located in the right frontal cortex, while approach reactions are activated in the left frontal cortex. People are born with a tendency toward one or the other dominant activation: those with more right frontal cortex activity are more emotionally volatile, get sick more easily, have a harder time recovering, suffer from numerous ailments, find much difficulty in their communities, and die earlier. People with dominantly left frontal cortex activity are more positive, do not submit to stress, will not catch colds even if exposed to germs, and live longer and happier lives. The dominant mode of reaction can be changed through learning and systematic training, notably through detached awareness and mindfulness practice, such as advocated by traditional Buddhists and Daoists alike (1997, 68-69; Begley 2007, 226-33; see also Kabat-Zinn 2005).

The lower elixir field, the center of transformation in Daoist practice, in Western physiology matches the abdominal brain, the seat of inherent, spontaneous intelligence, in the vernacular described as gut feelings or intuition. A popular medical idea in the late nineteenth century (see Bedell 1885), it has re-emerged in recent research as the seat of an active enteric nervous system that governs the well-being of the person (McMillin et al. 1999). Its activation is best known from Zen Buddhist practice, which requires a tightly held up-right posture as well as conscious breathing and control over the diaphragm (Sekida 1975, 84).

Behavioral kinesiology claims that all illness starts at the energy level (Diamond 1978, 25). This matches the traditional Chinese contention that an imbalance in the bodymind system manifests on three levels. First, there are the initial "signs" of an illness, which may be very subtle and perceived merely as a slight irregularity by the patient. Second, these signs grow into specific "symptoms," detected by the physician in a thorough examination. If left unchecked, these may further develop into a full-fledged "syndrome," which creates invasive disharmony both in the body and the social life of the patient (Kohn 2005, 63).

It also claims that the musculature of the body is immediately in contact with, and responsive to, any energy changes in the entire system and that, therefore, health and well-being—and, by extension, the benefits or harm of certain substances and the truth or falseness of a given statement—can be verified in a so-called kinesiological muscle test. In essence, this consists of the

subject standing with one arm held out straight and a partner or tester trying to push it down. If the thymus gland, and thus the immunological system, is working well, if health is strong, if the examined substance is beneficial, or if the statement thought about is true, there will be a bounce or spring in the arm and it will not budge. In the opposite case, the muscles are weakened and the arm will be pushed down easily (Diamond 1978, 14-21; see also Levy and Lehr 1996). Just as a weak muscle signals energetic imbalance in this system, so the Daoist understanding claims that strong, vibrant muscles mean the presence of proper *qi*-flow and health. Acupuncture, meridian-based massages, and tapping as well as Daoist visualizations and meditative energy-guiding accordingly enhance energy flow and immunological strengthening as well as increase harmonious living in self and society.

Another Daoist practice that finds a match in behavioral kinesiology is placing the tongue at the roof of the mouth. Modern kinesiologists call this the “centering button,” a place that opens the body’s central power lines and releases stress (Diamond 1978, 31). In addition, matching traditional Daoist exercises, kinesiologists have found that when there is too much synchronous activity on either side of the body, it will suffer a cerebral-hemisphere imbalance and weakened muscles, a state they describe as “switching” (1978, 40). In other words, the subtle energy lines of the body need to be activated by using the opposite arm and leg as much as possible, creating a sense of good body coordination. The lines are also impacted by any kind of metal that may be placed in the body’s center and prevent proper energetic integration (1978, 43). Positive energy is further enhanced by wide, open gestures, such as the spreading of arms in a blessing or the welcoming of loved ones at a reunion (1978, 49)—movements often seen in Chinese exercises where the *qi* is gathered or spread by opening the arms wide.

In other words, the muscles of the body provide a clear indication of physical and mental health and serve as a major way of enhancing overall well-being, which in turn has a direct impact on social and political harmony in the world.

Specific practices to stimulate the thymus gland and thus increase the vitality of the individual as outlined in behavioral kinesiology, moreover, closely match the repertoire of traditional Daoists. They include

- deep abdominal breathing and control of the diaphragm;
- self-massages of the chest and front line of the body (Conception Vessel);
- tapping of major energy centers, especially the center of the chest (middle elixir field);
- upright posture that allows for an equal flow of energy all over the body;
- conscious and careful movement that alternates the body’s two sides, ideally to melodious music;

- careful selection of food, avoiding processed, preserved, or chemically altered items;
- wearing of loose and pure clothes, using natural fibers;
- environmental care, providing good air, light, housing, and natural settings (Fengshui);
- emotional refinement toward feelings of love and caring, and the pursuit of virtues;
- support for peace in the world and the creation of a harmonious society, since energy flows between people and is enhanced or reduced depending on each person's management (Diamond 1978).

Within this overall framework, John Diamond has a few specific recommendations. Most generally, he suggests that one should find a “homing” thought, a mental vision of oneself in a pleasant and stress-free situation, such as in nature, on a beach, or with loved ones, and practice smiling both inwardly and to others, to create an internal harmony and relax the facial muscles (1978, 47, 49). He also emphasizes the energetic benefits of beauty, as found in poetry, music, painting, art, and natural landscapes and suggests that one should regularly take so-called energy breaks by reciting poetry, looking at nature, viewing a painting, or walk about with the arms swinging (1978, 39). All these are practices Daoists have embraced for centuries, living in beautiful natural settings, pursuing arts and music, and practicing calming meditations (1978, 124).

In addition to widely recognized pollutants, such as denatured food, neon lights, smoking, and various irritating chemicals, Diamond also advises against contact with ugly sights and shrill or intensely pulsing sounds since they lead to “therapeutic weakening” (1978, 62). This, too, matches traditional Daoist rules against energetic pollution through encounters with dirt, death, or violence. Diamond especially singles out the weakening agents of aggressive art work and advertising as well as noise pollution through traffic, television, and rock music (1978, 65-66). In terms of practical objects, he suggests avoiding the use of sunglasses, wrist watches, nylon hats, wigs, and high heels as well as of metal chairs and seat cushions, mattresses, sheets, and clothing made from synthetic fabrics (1978, 74-77). While many of these guidelines involve physical objects and bodily practices, they all connect to the realm of the mind and have a powerful psychological impact. Working through the body on the mind, and through the mind on the body, thus forms a fundamental pattern in the Daoist way to mental health.

## *The Daoist Way*

The Daoist way, then, proceeds on three levels that can be described as healing, longevity, and immortality. They signify three stages of perfection and empowerment along the same continuum of *qi*. They begin with what Daoists call the “normal mind,” a state of internal stress and tension that comes when people, through interaction with the world on the basis of physical needs and sensory exchanges, develop passions and desires, intellectual distinctions and judgments and thus establish an identity in terms of body-self and mind. Having overshadowed their inherent purity of body-form and spirit, their primordial *qi* is no longer complete, so that, over time, they decline energetically and are subject to mental and physical ailments.

Healing, then, is the basic recovery of smooth *qi*-flow with medical means such as acupuncture, massage, herbal formulas, food cures, rest, and so on, from a level of severe imbalance to a more harmonious state, closer to matching the flow of Dao on the periphery. Psychologically it involves the reduction of toxic emotions, associated physically with the five inner organs, to appropriate reactions. As a result, for example, aggression—associated with the liver and the season of spring—is replaced by courage while fear, linked with the kidneys and winter, gives way to caution.

Longevity, next, comes in as and when people have become aware of their situation and decide take the healing process into their own hands. Having attained a basic state of good health with the help of medical means, they proceed to increase their primordial *qi* to and even above the level they had at birth. To do so, they live an overall relaxed and natural lifestyle, follow health-enhancing diets, supplement their food with herbs and minerals, and undertake breath control, healing exercises, self-massages, sexual hygiene, as well as various forms of meditations and visualizations. At this level, a key practice is the Inner Smile which brings divine light into the five organs and transforms emotional reactions into altruistic patterns and goodwill, expressed in terms of the five Confucian virtues, so that courage evolves into benevolence and caution into wisdom—joined further by social responsibility, propriety, and honesty with self and others.

Sitting upright with eyes closed, practitioners place the tongue on the roof of the mouth to connect the energy lines as in the Microcosmic Orbit. They begin by first relaxing the forehead and envisioning a smiling energy as it flows between the eyebrows to the nose and cheeks, warming the whole face. Taking the smiling feeling lower, they smile into the neck and throat where stress tends to accumulate and allow this area to open. Next, they smile into the throat area to the thyroid and parathyroid glands, which frees the ability to speak and communicate. From here, they let the *qi* flow down to the thymus gland, the seat of love and enlightenment, and allow it to moisten and grow bigger. From here, practitioners allow the smiling *qi* to flow to the five inner organs in turn, envisioning them with their respective colors, appreciating

them for their work, and allowing toxic tendencies emotions to leave and positive attitudes to enter. The practice concludes with the collection of smiling energy in the elixir field, where it is centered by being spiraled thirty-six times in an outward direction (women counter-clockwise, men clockwise), then twenty-four times the other way.

This and other practices, including also visualizations of oneself in a larger, cosmic environment and—classically—placing of deities in the body and ecstatic excursions to the stars, ensure not only that people attain their natural life expectancy and maintain mental harmony, but they also lead to longer years as well as an enhanced subtlety of perception, fully matching people with Dao at the periphery and bringing them closer to its potency at the center of creation.

Immortality, third, raises the practices to a yet higher level. To attain it, people have to transform all their *qi* into primordial *qi* and proceed to increasingly refine it to ever subtler levels. This finer *qi* will eventually turn into pure spirit, with which practitioners increasingly identify to become transcendent spirit-people or immortals. The practice that leads there involves intensive meditation and trance training as well as more radical forms of diet, healing exercises, and the mental guiding of *qi*. In contrast to health and long life, where the bodymind system is harmonized and made gentler yet remains fundamentally unchanged, perfected toward its original nature and matching the flow of Dao in the world, immortality means the overcoming of the natural tendencies of the bodymind and its transformation into a different kind of energetic constellation. The result is mystical union with Dao as creative force and the attainment of cosmic consciousness, apparent in telepathic and shamanic powers. It eventually leads to a bypassing of death and the taking-up of residence in heavenly paradises.

While the ultimate goal of Daoist practice is this transformation to transcendence or immortality, practitioners have always embraced all the different levels and increased their mental acuity and spiritual subtlety to find a closer connection to Dao and enhance quality of life. Mental health relevant to living in the world appears dominantly on the middle level, where the individual is still fully part of the world but his or her toxic emotions are transformed into virtues and self and mind are lessened to again let body-form and spirit shine forth in their original purity.

### *Core Health*

Among psychological practices today, this structure and its related methods appear most clearly in a system called comprehensive kinesiology or “Core Health,” developed by Edwin Carlson in an expanded application of behavioral kinesiology. He follows in the footsteps of David R. Hawkins (b. 1927), a psychiatrist who studied with John Diamond and first developed large-scale ex-

periments with kinesiological testing. Examining thousands of subjects in many different cultures, Hawkins verified that the body reveals facts beyond conscious awareness and control and established a universal scale for the moral and spiritual potential of the world at large. This scale places people's responses in a range from 20 to 1000, with a watershed—the realm of courage—at 200. Anything below means people work entirely toward survival and generate wide ranges of negative emotions, such as fear, worry, anger, hatred, greed, and pride—feelings that pull the person away from their inner truth and what Daoists would call their authentic spirit. Above 200, more intellectual and spiritual values dominate, including trust, goodwill, forgiveness, love, and reverence to the point of sagely qualities such as serenity and bliss—attitudes that support the spiritual unfolding of higher values (see Hawkins 2002).

Hawkins himself experienced the ultimate realization of the human self and mind in a state of complete clarity and stillness. He describes it as follows:

That which is the Self is total and complete. It is equally present everywhere. There are no needs, no desires, or lack. . . . A glance at the body reveals it to be the same as everything else—unowned, unpossessed by an individual, equal to the furniture or other objects and merely part of all that is. There is nothing personal about the body and no identification with it. It moves about spontaneously, correctly executes its bodily functions, and effortlessly walks and breathes. It is self-propelled and its actions are determined and activated by the Presence. (2002, 4)

Ed Carlson, in turn, developed specific methods to release toxic patterns and reach this cosmic state, closely resembling Daoist ways. He begins by encouraging people to remember a “perfect moment,” a time when they were fully at one with themselves and the world was good. Mentally reliving their perfect moment, people experience a first glimpse of wholeness. He then encourages them to release toxic emotions, focusing first or all on anger—at others, self, and God—in a process he calls “Heart Forgiveness” (Carlson 2007). Practitioners begin with a basic relaxation, then visualize the subject of their anger. They see their heart as having lips and being able to communicate, so that it can tell the subject of their anger just how hurt they were. Next, they see their heart as having arms while visualizing the original purity in the other's heart and move forward to let the two hearts embrace. From here, in a practice closely reminiscent of the Inner Smile, they see a spark of original purity light up inside their heart and spread divine, cosmic radiance through their organs, body, and auras. Kinesiological testing before and after the practice shows just to what degree this process releases toxicity and negative internal patterns.

Moving on from there, Carlson further guides practitioners to expand energetically into the greater universe, rising in an almost ecstatic excursion beyond their home, city, country, and even the planet into the vastness and stillness of the galaxy. Coming back from this extraterrestrial journey, they compress back into their bodies but maintain that sense of cosmic vastness and ultimate oneness with forces far greater than themselves. An overall sense

of peace and inner stability results, leading to a life filled entirely with perfect moments, to full authenticity of living, and the “seven fruits of the spirit,” which closely resemble Daoist virtues: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and in-powered self-control. Like advanced Daoists, the people shaped by this modern system are free from toxic emotions and neurotic patterns and rest peacefully in their destiny which forms part of the larger cosmos. By just being who they are, they make the world a better place.

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