



The Universal Healing Tao



THE DARKNESS REVIEW

A NEWS LETTER FOR UNIVERSAL TAO DARKNESS RETREAT PARTICIPANTS

FEATURING ARTICLE: VISIONARY ALCHEMY

CONTRIBUTED BY MINKE DE VOS

Dark Room Retreat, Tao Garden, Feb. 9 - 22, 2003

My senses were overloaded with busyness and impressions. I was so relieved to dive into the darkness. Ah! Nothing to do but practice and rest for two weeks in the dark. I had been on many intensive retreats, living in a retreat centre for twenty years, before but diving into complete darkness was a new adventure. I was nervous about the darkness from childhood world war nightmares. The staff took me into the dark room wearing heavy night goggles and it looked like a spooky green war zone. I calmed myself by resolving to come to peace with the darkness, to embrace the darkness in my life. My twenty-year marriage was on the rocks. My life's work, Silent Ground Retreat Centre, needed now a huge financial support to survive. I needed spiritual strength to carry it through.

My friends thought that I must be crazy to spend two weeks in the dark in beautiful Thailand, coming from the dark, rainy Canadian winter. I reassured them that this strange experiment has been recognized by many spiritual traditions as a birthing ground to awaken the inner vision of our subtle nature. The time-tested Taoist practices of Inner Alchemy give deep roots for self-development. Like a plant, seeds sprout in the darkness. For each individual the flowering process is a spontaneous, magical experience. How would you envision what your response would be?

Having missed the visual orientation of the building, which others had a week prior, my street-wise roommate from New York guided me around with my hand on her shoulder. This eased the initial trauma of immersion in darkness, like a child going into a dark, Halloween horror house. The next day I was adjusted to my new dark world. Bumping my head on the balloon markers reminded me to "lighten up". I developed eyes in my fingers and toes, feeling into the space. I befriended the darkness. I felt the presence of other people as kind and reassuring guidance. A hand would reach out to help me find the stair's handrail. A kitchen helper made sure that I had received my bagged vegetarian food by gently tapping my hand. Our antennae must have been sensitized, because we seldom bumped into each other

The darkness was soothing for my eyes and nerves. It invited me to turn my senses inward. It made the transitions between meditation and other activities seamless. It helped to maintain the inward focus throughout the day. The dark Yin environment amplified the yang light of my awareness. The mind of the Tao is said to be dark outside and light inside, not fixed on externals but aware of inner essence. Master Chia's humor and well-spaced guidance kept a good spirit for the participants to commit themselves to the process. We practiced "Laughing Baby" when Mantak Chia squeezed a laughing toy that laughed at a hilarious high pitch! We all laughed while lying down and shaking our legs and arms up in the air. The different shades of giggles and full-blown laughter textured a cosmic symphony! It was a fun way for everyone to lighten up before the sessions. It cleared the air and woke up our Tan Tiens. The room was often very still and concentrated. There was also lots of time to explore our inner reality on our own. I went into the hall before the sessions to stretch and move a bit. There were often pockets of talking. I would have enjoyed more silence, especially before the early morning practices. It is such a special time to come out of sleep and maintain the peace or reflective mood of the dream state and bring it into the meditation.



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Deep breathing into the bones helped to ground me in the body. It counter-balanced the loftiness of astral experiences. My kidneys were nourished by the earth energy. My bones became light-filled and glowing like diamonds, in contrast to the darkness, which made it easier for me to sense infrared light penetrating into my bones. I practiced long deep breathing, with over a minute per breath, like the deep sea turtle. The breath power fueled my inner lamp, which lit up my inner world.

I ate sitting on the floor, which got pretty sticky after while! One man said that we should wear bibs! Eating mainly with my hands to sense what was going into my mouth, was a sensual delight. The delicious Buddhist vegetarian cuisine could have fooled me with their “fake” meats! However, I found that the diet was too yin in such a dark, yin environment. I made a mental note of how I would work with the diet in such a retreat to facilitate sensual simplicity and yet dynamically stimulate the chi flow. I would serve less sweet, fruity and rich food and more mild, warming food to help calm the body/mind. It was challenging to keep calm when I contemplated what I could offer the group during my four teaching sessions. How to meet the needs of an unseen group? Talking without visual feedback made the voice a heightened instrument of communication. After coming out of the retreat, I was surprised when I saw how a few people had interpreted the movements I had described in the dark. They were nice variations on the theme. William Wei said that, “If you can teach here, you can teach anywhere.” I was smiling like a child, full of wonder and joy, much of the time. They say you must become like a child to enter the kingdom of heaven. I felt more and more childlike, with openness and freshness growing within me.

The retreat offered the space to process big changes in my life. I recently separated from my husband. Instead of painful feelings, gratitude and love arose for my loved ones. I was inwardly preparing myself to carry the initiative of our retreat center, Silent Ground. Instead of anxiety, I felt hope, as support and encouragement seemed to come towards me from the spirit.

A few days before the end of the retreat, I had a strange feeling about an unanswered phone call in my room. I thought that my partner would only call me if someone had died. I had a vision of death images. When I came out of the retreat I received an e-mail that my partner had sent to me on the day of the phone call. He told me about the death of a dear mentor. Instead of grieving my loss of her presence on this plane, my heart filled with peace, acceptance and gratitude. Wherever in the spiritual world “she” is, a bright star is shining and all are blessed with “her” being, I thought.

My dreams were vivid. The retreat became like one long lucid dream. The fan in my room became a waterfall in a lush garden. Visions were brilliant in contrast to the darkness. They spoke to me of the wisdom of the spirit. We were guided to sense what appeals to us, for example, what soul food we might need. I asked for this inwardly and what “came” to me was a supportive, warm hugging bear who comforted my soul. A white, three-petaled, trillium flower spoke to me of simplicity. The sparkling beauty of Venus lit up my inner world. Exploring this Shamanistic world was spontaneous. The presence of the eight forces and eight immortals was invoked by group chanting. These forces helped to restore the elixir and return it inside. The darkness dissolved a sense of separateness with our environment and facilitated a sense of merging with universal forces. It helps to dissolve identity. Emphasis on outer appearances lost its grip. By refining away the mundane from the elixir, the inner elixir manifests the true light from within. “When the outer elixir is complete and the inner elixir is perfected, one roams in the land of nothing whatsoever” (page 109 [Understanding Reality](#))

The group’s focus was on the alchemy of non-physical, energetic orgasm with unconditional love and compassion. The group’s cauldron of energy helped to stir up the alchemy process. Recall of bliss in my



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chi body made it easy for me to awaken a sense of arousal of multi-orgasmic, whole body, “cosmic” orgasm. The powerful forces that pulsate through all creation fueled the generation of unconditional love and compassion. Merging with the light of love, which binds all beings, created a sustained stillness, as if suspended in substantial contentment. My being expanded into all-embracing emptiness, full of potential. The immortal child, a condensation and personification of awareness and essential energy, became animated. When I connected to my “Immortal Fetus” its appearance was fully-grown. I mentioned this to Master Chia and he affirmed that the growth of my inner being has been going on through meditative practice over many years. He asked me to share my previous experiences with inner alchemy. The intimate communication established a respectful rapport with the group.

On retreat about twenty years ago in the Swiss Alps, an inner alchemical enfoldment spontaneously kicked off. My meditation was simply following the breath. Suddenly a volcanic power surged through my body. Fluid currents flowed in rhythmical patterns, which I now recognize as the meridians and special flows. Sometimes I felt like a “flaming ice-cube”, crystal clear and frozen in stillness with a glowing auric field. The steaming reversal of fire and water inside made me sweat, in a cold chalet, where you could see your breath! The bliss of “cosmic orgasm” made my body feel buoyant and light-filled. The boundaries between the universe and myself often dissolved, leaving vast spaciousness.

My “soul body” spontaneously extended above me. I felt a strong pull on my crown as if someone was pulling my hair. Then I felt fifteen feet high, with a grander view of the present moment. A bright light developed in my core, which I called a “diamond”. I felt like a Madonna, giving my “diamond” devoted attention with unconditional love and compassion. For about nine months it was like a fetus stirring inside of me. Currents were so strong that they moved my body involuntarily. I trusted the process like a woman giving birth. Carefully I observed the awesome wisdom and creativity of the energy. The process of freely flowing energetic openings continues. The immortal body communicates with voice and gesture. Through its presence my Higher Self can communicate with me. It becomes more and more vivid how God lives within me and manifests through me.

Body and mind are one piece. My body responded to intensely devoted meditation by stopping menstruation for about eight months, like a lactating mother. I felt very strong, transparent, youthful and blissfully high.

This flashback helped me to recall my roots and raise my inner being that had been silently growing within me. I shared with Master Chia that my soul or energy body shifted from between masculine to feminine qualities. He confirmed that this dynamically balances the soul body. They can merge as an androgynous being. The soul body resonated above me as higher octaves, an amplified form of my inner potential. Subtle visions were actualizations or embodiments of the particular archetypes, which were developing within me. They influenced my physical gestures as my arms and hands moved into spontaneous mudras. I felt like was wearing the crown of a Tibetan deity. I had many visionary experiences before so I was accustomed to their vivid, moving, “more than life” quality.

Nine archetypes brought alive the masculine, feminine and neutral aspects of myself. I felt that these personifications of virtues were encouraging signs and gifts of the spiritual world. I was in a state of wonder about what would appear next! They were gateways to acknowledge my higher purpose. “Light attracts light.” Since Taoist practice takes priority to cultivate virtues, virtuous beings or reflections came towards me. I recognized these archetypes as mentors and ideals, which I have upheld in my life. It was like they came together at a conference to communicate and support each other. I felt that all “dieties” potentially live in me. I will share them as they appeared to me.



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The Savior, Bearer of Freedom, a Christ-like figure, had wind blowing through white robes, which released past conditioning.

The Spiritual Warrior, Bearer of Courage and Discrimination, was like Joan of Arc and wore green metallic armor and brandished a sword to cut through delusion.

The Divine Mother, Bearer of Devotional, Unconditional Love, was a Madonna embracing a child.

The Teacher, Bearer of Wisdom, was like Moses, carrying the laws of the universe on a written tablet.

The Peacemaker, Bearer of Peace and Serenity, had crossed arms over the heart, closed eyes and was draped in blue and violet robes. Hands in prayer position opened like a doorway, inviting my consciousness into inner depths.

The Cosmic Jester, Bearer of Playfulness, Crazy Wisdom and Humor, wore a three-pronged golden hat with bells. He was lightly laughing as he juggled a sun and moon.

The Ecstatic Dancer, Bearer of Joy and Lively Movement, had four arms and one body from the merging of male and female deities. These snake-like arms waved streamers of rainbow light, which drew in cosmic sound and frequencies to dance to.

The Muse, Bearer of Angelic Beauty, Inspirer of Creative Arts, played joyful, celestial music on a long horn. The music called the cosmic symphony to play in all its glory. Inside my heart center she played a harp, glowing white gold and smiling with higher joy.

The Healer, Bearer of Healing and Transformation, channeled rainbow light into parts of my body needing attention. My neck shook a lot. The inner healer went there and smoothed it out and kissed it. Moving afterwards, my neck and body was wonderfully opened and released. My wish for getting some bodywork diminished.

If these animated soul gestures seem foreign to you, you might be emphasizing other gestures right now. Even if your higher guidance or “helpers” might be invisible to you, you might feel that something is supporting you in life. Who are your archetypes?

I felt grateful for the soul nourishment and empowerment that these actualizations gave me. Now I can call on these soul qualities, which were captured in these forms. After leaving Thailand I went to New Zealand, where this was tested. I went sailing in dangerous gusty winds. I was asked to lower the sail and spontaneously I envisioned a courageous figure, which helped me to let go of fear and be carefully attentive. I smiled with victory. The head sailor’s neck was knotted afterwards from the stress. I gave her a massage and she was amazed how the knots dissolved. The healing forces are there when I open to them.

The masculine and feminine qualities dynamically merged as I sent out a pearl in vertical astral flight to the North Star. A yin pearl ascended, followed by a yang pearl. These pearls, personified as two lovers, joined forces to fly up to connect with the universe through the Pole Star, a point of orientation in the universe. A golden “wedding ring” formed around them, linking their energies and spiraled down into my heart center, forming a golden ring of light there. This transformed into a six-pointed star, the yin and yang triangles overlapping into balance. The star pulsed and glowed with harmonious energy in my heart, bringing my awareness back again and again to my center.

My organs became purified, appearing as beautiful, colorful flowers and clear crystals, each showing their distinct character. My heart felt expanded like arms or antennae reaching way out to embrace vast horizons and landscapes. When we were cultivating the heart centre, I led the group in rhythmical movement of pulsing and clapping close to the heart and then extending the arms like lungs breathing out



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to touch the world. To keep the rhythm I recited one of my poems, The Rider (see below). When we ended the group clapped to my joyful surprise!

***All ablaze is the flame
in my heart on this night,
All alone in the dark I do ride.
For the shadow of death
is this cape in the wind-
just one gust doth reveal
the empowering rider within!***

Coming out of the dark womb was like coming into a dream. The night's light was eerie. My heart and

kidneys were shocked by the change and I walked a bit wobbly around the Tai Chi field. I soon gained my bearings. I felt vulnerable like a child and full of wonder at the beautiful, vivid colors of the world. A heightened sensitivity lingered on. My eyes were sensitive to the light for a few days and enjoyed the soft darkness when I closed the drapes to meditate. Meditation after the retreat continued in an open, transparent way. A vast, formless spaciousness embraced all sensual sounds and sensations. I am so grateful for this womb-like experience, which allowed seeds of positive change to sprout. I felt inspired to create a safe, supportive environment for others to open up and come into flower.

I used to hang onto a flashlight to walk in the dark. Now I take joy in feeling my way around and trusting that a higher sense is guiding me.

Kan & Li meditation in a dark room retreat facilitated the opening of my inner vision to my archetypal, universal nature. A few others spoke about visionary experiences but mostly I heard accounts of unconscious material, like fears, arising out of the dark. I sensed their liberation. Their inner light saw through the dark shadows and broke through their dense walls. When enough obstructions are cleared, the light shines on itself and reveals the super-conscious. Gentle guidance through the doorways into our inner worlds can reveal our hidden potential. This guidance I feel inspired to offer to others on the path. Through the development of our subtle vehicles we can walk about in these worlds and evolve them. I was invited to play as a conscious "co-creator" of the universe, with wonderful creative beings. Hopefully this story will encourage you to trust the wisdom of your spirit and surrender to their re-birth, born out of the pregnant void. The steam arising out our love affair with the cosmos creates artworks of goodness, truth and beauty, which enrich our lives with wonder.

Minke de Vos is a Senior Universal Tao and Inner Alchemy Instructor. She offers retreats at Silent Ground, a retreat center in British Columbia, Canada and gives workshops internationally. A three-month retreat in 2005 will include space for learning, alchemical cooking in the dark and integration through creative work. Please check out www.SilentGround.com for information on schedules and Tao Tools, CDs and videos for home practice.