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Tao And The Universe part 4 (The Sun)

Since the beginning of mankind we have observed the sky, and gradually came to understand the phases of the upper universal energy system, the lower universal energy system, and the energy of the day and the hours. In Chinese culture we use the lunar calendar which began at the new moon at the 4681 years ago, or the first year of the Yellow Emperor.

This system is the accumulation of the life experiences of many generations who followed the natural cycles. By observing the 24 climatic periods of solar energy variation, the life of the Chinese people has been enriched, as regards agriculture and spiritual activities. This solar system of the 24 periods is more closely related to the western calendar. The Chinese system of solar energy variation is defined by the route the sun travels along the "Yellow Route" (ecliptic), beginning at the fixed point of, at the Spring equinox, 0 degree; and moving eastward until it reaches 360 degrees. Each 15 degree interval is a single seasonal period, thus identifying twenty-four equal periods. Each period has a special name which describes that climatic phase of the year.

Nature of the Sun & Moon:

The sun is the symbol of plenty, the essence of Greater Yang. The moon symbolizes Yin, emptiness, or void, and the stars represent accomplishment. It is not within the nature of the sun to experience eclipses. It is the essence of fire, Yang. It contains a three-legged raven which is the essence of Yang. The moon is empty and is the essence of Yin and of water. It contains a cinnamon tree with a rabbit that pounds the immortality drug.

The moon is the daughter of cold and has a cold heart. The sun is related to heaven; the moon is related to earth. In the body, the sun corresponds to the heart, and the moon to the kidneys. The sun and moon are the eyes of heaven and correspond to the human eyes.

Yang within Yin & Yin within Yang in Sun & Moon:

The sun is red and its rays are purple. The moon is yellow and its rays are white. The subtle breath of the sun on the stomach is red and yellow. The sun has a yellow essence and a red breath. The moon is the reverse, it has a red essence and a yellow breath.

The sun is represented by the trigram Li (fire); the moon is represented by the trigram Wan (water). In Li the inner line is Yin. In Wan the inner line is Yang. This is the Yin within Yang and the Yang within Yin.

In the symbolism of the sun the raven in the sun represents the symbol of Yin within Yang. The rabbit in the moon is the Yang within Yin.

Solstice & Equinoxes:

It is the Taoist view that the sun stops in its movement on the first day of each season. The moon stops on the days of the equinoxes and solstices. These stops are called "Doors". It is the Golden Door in the Spring. This is the door of access to the sun. In Autumn it is the "Eastern Well", this is the door of access to the moon.

The next stage is "Universal Yang" in the middle of summer when the sun culminates. "Great Cold" is the culmination of the moon in winter.

Symbolically, it is thought, that through these doors the practitioner goes to be received by the lord that grants the fruits of immortality.

Gathering the sun essence at the "Golden Door" is done on the 3rd, 9th, 17th, 21st and 25th of the month in which the sun enters at the Golden Door.

The exact same practice is done for the moon when it reaches her door. The days for gathering the moon essence are the 3rd, 15th and 25th. (Please see Journal 3 for a description of these practices.)

The Cauldron and the Stars:

The cauldron has the sun on the left and the moon on the right. Above is the Big Dipper (Ursa major) constellation. Surrounding the sun, moon, and stars are all the baby angels (energies).

Sun, Moon & Stars in the Body:

The sun is in the heart since it has the fire element; the moon is in the kidneys because of their watery nature. The pole star is in the spleen which represents the center of the body. The spleen receives the essence of the pole star and it is there that the lord of the pole star resides. The Big Dipper surrounds the spleen, since the spleen stands for the center of the body. The spleen receives the essence of the dipper, and that is where the lord of the dipper resides in the body.

Sun Essence:

The best time for practice with the sun is at sunrise and sunset, when it still red in color. The sun spectrum from sunrise to 9 a.m is violet, and can be used for all organs, especially for spiritual work. You can select out any color that you need.

9-11 a.m. is blue and can be used to strengthen the kidneys;

11 a.m. - 1 p.m. is green for the liver,

1-3p.m. is orange for sexual energy,

3-5p.m. is red for the heart.

Season Sun Practice:

Depending on the season, you can emphasize practice of the sun spectrum inside the organ that corresponds to the season and its color.

1. Winter in the kidneys, blue
2. Spring in the liver, green
3. Summer in the heart, red.
4. Fall in the lungs, white.
5. Indian summer in the spleen, yellow.

Absorbing the Breath of the Sun in the Four Seasons:

In Spring, absorb the orange breath (Combination of red from the sun & yellow from the moon) of the sun before it sets. In Fall, absorb the orange twilight of the sun after it has set. In Winter, absorb the white vapors of midnight. In Summer, absorb the perfect clarity of the meridional sun of midday (protect the eyes during midday sun absorption).

These four types of breaths, in addition to the blue breath of heaven and the yellow breath of the earth, are called the six breaths.

Sun Practice:

1. Practice with the sun after sunrise.
2. Start with the Inner Smile, make the navel warm.
3. Be aware of the mid-eyebrow. Smile into your eyes. Make your eyes cool and soft.
4. Happen your eyes, look at the sun and keep on blinking the eyes. Close your eyes for a while.

The eyes should be facing the sun. (You might see a red and yellowish color.) Select the yellow color and breathe in the color through the crown and mideye brow and into the nose, eyes, and mouth (mouth closed, but feel the color penetrate into it). Feel the bone in your skull, the brain and the bone marrow. Receive the yellow spectrum to wash the marrow and help grow the marrow. Let this ray penetrate down to the neck. Some might feel numbness, like a wave penetrating deep into the bone marrow and each cell in the body.

4. Let this ray go down to the sternum and the rib cage and feel it activate the thymus, sternum, and rib cage to help strengthen the immune system.

5. Let the color flow down to the spine and feel numbness, tingling, or warmth in the interior of the bones. This feeling can spread out to the organs. Let it go down to the hips and sacrum. Feel the bones and the bone marrow activate and let it go down to the legs and bones of the feet.

The sun practice can produce the effect of a cosmic baptism being performed by the sun. Feel the sun ray baptism through your whole body.

6. Rest and let the body absorb all these cosmic nutrients.

7. After you practice look at the sun as in Steps 1 to 3 above, single out the color and picture the organs and see the organ glow with their own color.

Another Helpful Mirror Method:

Picture a mirror in front of the eyes. The mirror brightens the inside of the body, illuminating all the organs and the glands and all the body residing within.

1. Listen to the kidneys, picture the kidneys. If you can look at an anatomy book and close your eyes and still see the kidneys, that will help greatly. Once you feel or see the kidneys, look at the sun, and blink the eyes for a while and close your eyes and single out only the blue color. In the beginning you might find it a little difficult. You can use the kidney sound WhoooooOo and the picture of the kidneys to help. Feel the kidneys glow with bright blue light.

2. Look into the liver, picture the liver. If you can look at an anatomy book and close your eyes and still see the liver, that will help greatly. Once you feel or see the liver, look at the sun and, blinking the eyes for a while, close your eyes and single out only the green color. In the beginning it might be a little difficult.

You can use the liver sound Shhhhhhhh. Picture the liver to help get the color. Feel the liver glow with bright green light.

3. Look, listen, and move your tongue around and feel the heart, picture the heart. Once you feel or see the heart, look at the sun and, blinking the eyes for a while, close your eyes and single out only the red color. Use the heart sound Hawwwwvwww and the qualities of the heart - love, joy and happiness. Feel the heart glow with bright red light.

4. Look, listen, and taste into the spleen, picture the spleen. Once you feel or see the spleen, look at the sun and, blinking the eyes for a while, close your eyes and single out only the yellow color. Use the spleen sound Hooooo00o and the qualities of the spleen, the openness, fairness. Feel the spleen glow with yellow bright light.

5. Look listen, and smell into the lungs, picture the lungs. Once you feel or see the lungs, look at the sun and, blinking the eyes for a while, close your eyes and single out only the yellow color. Use the spleen sound Ssssssss and the quality of the lungs, courage. Feel the lungs glow with yellow bright light.

Season Practice:

Follow with the season practice for the particular season you are in. For the Fall season, picture the white color in the lungs. Look at the sun, blink the eyes, then close the eyes, select the white color and breathe into the lungs.

Winter into the kidneys, blue rays.

Spring into the liver, green rays.

Summer into the heart, red rays.

Drinking Nectar Drip:

The essence of the union of the sun & moon is tasted on the tongue as a nectar sweet as honey. This is the nourishment of the immortals. The preferred time for this practice is sunrise. See the union or balance of the sun (left eye) and moon (right eye) inside in the crystal chamber as red light and white light. After, form the pearl as big as an egg, and bring it down to the mouth.

1. When you can see the organs glow with bright light, you can start to drink the nectar that gathers in the mouth.

2. Look at the sun and blink the eyes, see the light or the color of the sun (the best is the violet ray).

3. Visualize the sun on the left eye and the moon on the right eye. This will help balance the hot sun energy. Focus both on the third eye, Mingtang, which is the location of pituitary gland, and also focus on the pineal gland in the crystal room, at the middle of the forehead.

4. Breathe into the crystal room. Let it form the Chi ball or pearl.

5. After some time, the Chi ball or pearl will start to drip from the glands into the crystal room. Let it drip down to the mouth, mixing with the sun essence. Separate the sun essence in the mouth from the breathing and let it mix with the Original Force.

6. Feel the light ball grow in your mouth and the throat. Close your eyes and focus on the light.

7. When you feel all the essences mix and glow like a Chi ball, swallow down to the navel or the cauldron.

Color Method of the Sun:

The divine breath or essence of the sun and moon appears in this method in the center of a cloud as five colors (colors of the five elements). The five colors are equivalent to the world or everything created.

1. After the Chi ball is swallowed (7 above) look at the sun and blink the eyes. Picture the red light of the sun.

2. The red breath of the sun gathers and descends covering the body of the practitioner. One imagines being in the light of the sun. The light travels through the body and rises together with the practitioner to the Palace of Universal Yang, the sun.

3. Gather the essence of the sun and bring it down.

4. Picture yourself sitting in the light of the five colors of the sun which have formed a halo that descends to the feet of the practitioner.

5. The five colors become concentrated and rise to the crown. The halo of five colors then penetrates throughout the mouth.

6. The cloud, visualized before, remains outside, emanating the five colors. In the middle of this cloud appears a purple breath like the pupil of an eye.

7. This purple light has ten layers blazing in the center of the cloud of five colors. The purple light, together with the five colors, penetrates through the mouth.

8. There is a counterpart moon exercise which is identical, except that the yellow breath of the moon replaces the purple breath of the sun in the center of the cloud.

Sun Essence Captured In Water:

The essence of the sun is captured in water by exposing it during the time from sunrise to 9 a.m. This is for absorption of violet which can be used for all organs, and especially for spiritual work. The time from 9 -11 a.m. is for the absorption of blue and can be used to strengthen the kidneys; 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. green for liver; 1 - 3 p.m. is orange for sexual energy; 3 - 5 p.m. is red for the heart.

A special water can be made on the first fifteen days of the month in which the sun comes to the Golden Door (which, for example, was the Spring equinox on March 20 1991). This water is called "Mineral Light Mother of Waters".

To capture this sun essence put purified, rain or spring water in a sterilized bottle out in sunlight during the corresponding phase of the spectrum for one or more days.

You can drink the water, or make herb tea or mix with food or medicine.

The 8 Articulations of Sun & Moon:

The practices for sun and moon are done according to the 8 articulations of Sun and Moon power. These are: the 2 solstices, the 2 equinoxes and the first day of the four seasons. These dates fix the time for doing the visualizations about sun & moon.

According to the ancient calendar the practice for each lasts 45 days in a continuous cycle of 360 days. (45 x 8 360). 45 days of sun practice are followed by 45 days of moon practice.

Cultural-Philosophical Considerations of the Yin-Yang Symbols

As far back as the Greeks, the Western philosophy of nature has always had a more or less abstract tendency. Clarity is obscured by complicating that which is simple. A tendency to eliminate variety pervades in an effort to bring everything under one principal.

This differs greatly from the Eastern Chinese culture. Ancient China had no aversion to variety in everything that lives. One could describe this outlook as "a delightful bath in variety"; an ebb and flow of diversity of our existence, an enormous sea of life that manifests itself in a continuous transformation process.

This ancient Chinese way of thinking finds expression in the YinYang symbol which describes all the riches of life. The symbol is represented in a full circle of the Wu Chi:

In the beginning there was Tao. The circle has always been the symbol of eternity, of the great nothingness, called the Tao in philosophy and literature. The light Yang and the dark Yin can be found within the circle as the polar manifestation of the Tao. The "10,000 things" were born from these two principals of equal value. Yin and Yang are symmetrically placed, but this is not a static symmetry:

It is a rotation symmetry that symbolizes a continuous cyclical movement:

Whenever a force has reached its maximum value, it already bears the seed of its opposite:

It dominates a flowing transition that determines the balance between all contrasts.

The medieval Confucian philosopher, Tung Tschung Schu, taught the following: "All things find their completion in Yin and Yang. These are the basic principals of man and woman, master and servant, father and son ... ° Considering this last example, one realizes that the polarity is followed by sub-polarity: in one context a thing may be Yang (man in relation to woman), in another Yin (man in relation to a stronger Yang man).

In this way human life is both: a comparison between male and female, heaven and earth, procreation and conception, creative activity and redeeming inactivity. The one without the other is not Yin and is not Yang. The symbol only has value in its whole. Whoever lives in harmony with this law, in the rhythm of Yin and Yang, is truly alive.

Similar concepts are also found in different cultures. In ancient Egypt we can find Uroboros, the snake, who bites his own tail, kills himself, unites himself, and fertilizes himself. It is, at the same time, man and woman, procreating and conceiving, devouring and bearing, active and passive, up and down. The Uroboros is the infantile stage of humanity, the state before birth of the masculine and feminine principle of Yin and Yang. In it, male and female persevere in loving embrace. We can find a similar myth of creation among the Greeks. All living creatures were originally round balls in which both sexual forces were united (hermaphrodites). These balls became guilty for their hybrid behavior toward the Gods. The Gods punished them and divided them. Now the two halves must seek each other in life. The punishment of the Gods consists in the halves mostly not finding their right other half. This is the cause of all ills.

Even with the ancient Greek philosophers of the fifth century B.C. (mainly Heraklit and Empedokles) similar thoughts are found:

He finds unity in every variety. His *panta nei* shows a deep insight into the cyclical transformation of time. Behind the eternal flowing stands a unitarian law. This great law is the unity of all contrasts. All evolutions happen in polar processes of contrasting forces. "God is day and night, summer anti winter, war and peace, abundance and hunger. " Everything for its being must have its opposite.

From this context one can understand the motto: "The struggle is the father of all things." For there is no eternal peace without struggle because tension will be followed by a total standstill like death. Therefore, being truly alive is only the rhythmical play of opposing forces which, like this, are in harmony with cosmic laws [Heraklit/Logos].

The description of the JudeoChristian paradise strongly resembles the already mentioned peaceful and harmonious state in other myths. Adam and Eve lived in harmony so long until the snake summoned Eve to eat from the tree of temptation. Thus, they fell from the state of innocence and instinctive perfection into a world of good and evil. The Christians tend to blame Eve. All monotheistic patriarchal religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism) are distorted in favor of man and male mentality. But in ancient Mesopotamia, the Earth Goddess Inanna was worshipped. Also, most Stone Age cultures were peaceful and matriarchal (Yin), e.g. Minoan Crete. They were eliminated by patriarchal battle-ax cultures like ours (Yang).

This was a brief view of the attitudes that can be found in cultures in the Western world. Here follows a short comparison between the two most important symbols of Western and eastern religions: the cross and YinYang.

Let us examine the cross more closely:

- it consists of two straight lines, each having a beginning and an end
- there is only one point of contact. They meet hard and unconciliatory. It almost resembles a piercing
- it is also a sign of the crossed swords
- duality
- in this sign you will win or lose

Let us make a comparison with:

- it is a rotating wheel; everything is round and dynamic; the circle has always been a symbol of eternity
- there is a maximum of contact between the surfaces; it corresponds to two lovers; an image of opposites embracing
- a sign of dance
- polarity
- in this sign you will live

Similar thoughts can be found with the philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson approximately 1850: "Polarity, or action and reaction, can be seen everywhere in nature: in darkness and light, heat and cold ebb and flow, breathing in and breathing out, in the rhythm of the blood in fluctuations and tones (sharp and flat), in centrifugal and centripetal forces in gravity. No sooner has one end of a needle been magnetized than the opposing force develops at the other end. When the North Pole attracts, the South Pole rejects. Everything in nature is divided so that each thing is a half which must be completed through another thing. Spirit-matter, man-woman, subjective-objective, inside-outside, up-down, movement-stillness, yes-no. "

This brings to mind electric current, which needs a negative and positive pole. As we are talking of physics, let me mention the most famous Western tribute to Yin and Yang symbols. The Bohr family has placed the Yin- Yang symbols in their coat of arms. Nils Bohr brought about the addition to the family coat of arms after a prolonged stay in China. Nils Bohr was the creator of our model of the atom and this was his way of recognizing the Eastern philosophy that helped him in his research. He acknowledged the harmony between ancient Eastern wisdom and modern Western science with the maxim "contraria sunt complementa."

Remembering The Body Temple – Healing Sounds

Our human nature makes it easy for us to forget that we are bodies. We tend to identify ourselves primarily with our thoughts, desires, goals, and other states of mind. In a single moment of haste we move as if we were no more than a bundle of competing mental intentions. The body twists with one limb this way and one limb that, without coordinating breath with action, and without making the most of the center of balance. What seems natural to the mind-to go directly to the goal-is unnatural from a holistic standpoint. When we move rapidly and thoughtlessly to achieve a goal, we disconnect ourselves from the flow of internal body energies. Our motion comes not from the waist or from the center but from uncoordinated and unsupported limbs. Contrast this hasty thoughtless motion with the meditative movements of the Tai Chi player. By nature we are bodies, but often we act as if we merely possess a body while not being wholly one with it.

Animals seem not to have this split in the wholeness of their being. Whatever it does, the animal manages to move wholeheartedly and efficiently. Animals spend much time in their lives scratching, preening, and stretching themselves. Many animal movements, on close inspection, are internal energy development exercises, a kind of animal chi selfmassage or mammalian chi kung. Recall how cats stretch their claws rhythmically or undulate their spines. Because we humans come to center our activities in the brain, we think of our real selves as inside the head, and so we neglect the conscious cultivation of internal bodily energy. We do exercise-for the sake of "the body", and we list it under physical maintenance, "keeping in shape", or necessary adjuncts to real life (which presumably takes place in the mind).

The Healing Tao proposes a reunification of our split nature: Chi self-massage contacts body energy; the six healing sounds are a subtle version function of the animals growling and chirping; the microcosmic orbit resembles the animals at rest when sunning themselves or sitting alertly, listening within; and Tai Chi is the stretching and moving animals practice effortlessly, without practicing, as it were.

Taoism cultivates the humanized (learned) imitation of nature. In the Tao, we re-learn what most animals do instinctively. Of course, people in Western culture find this lesson difficult to learn because our Cartesian philosophy has taught us to separate the "flesh" from the "spirit", the mind from the body, and the spiritual soul from the gross material world. Our Western dualism splits us in two because our doctrines emphasize the weakness of our human nature. In contrast to all the other animals, we are weak in instinctive wisdom. Yet our Western culture is not alone in suffering from this dualism. There is some consolation in learning that Eastern culture too, in its long history, has also had dualist. Certain Buddhists, for example, rejected external chi kung practices because they saw in them an emphasis of the body over the mind. These Buddhists believed the mind alone should reach enlightenment. Some Buddhists taught that we should detach ourselves from our bodies as much as possible, as if we were separate from our bodies.

Even a famous Japanese Zen Buddhist needed to learn animal wisdom the hard way. The monk Hakuin (1685-1768) became ill after his first experience of enlightenment. Soon after his first enlightenment, he tried pushing ahead with all his physical and mental powers to advance to the next stage of enlightenment. He didn't care what happened to his body, he just wanted more liberation. But then lung tuberculosis infected him along with an associated nervous ailment. The sickness cut short his practice of meditation. It became an opportunity for him to learn the interdependence of body and mind. The whole man was affected by the sickness and, along with his physical health, his mental security was in danger.

At first Hakuin tried ignoring the disease, but his whole psyche became disturbed, and his continued efforts to meditate brought him to a complete collapse. He had no choice but to seek medical help. None of the doctors he consulted could help him. Finally he found Hakuyu, an old Taoist hermit in the remote mountains near Shirakawa in the Yamashiro district. The hermit had learned medical wisdom from the Chinese Taoists and kept the works of Lao-tzu on the table of his otherwise bare hut. Hakuyu taught Hakuin a remedy which Hakuin later described in his book, "Yasen Kanna".

The hermit told Hakuin that his early meditation had forced his fire (Li) upward into his head and upper Tan Tien. To recover Hakuin would have to heat the lower part of his body by strong, deep breathing. He would have to overcome the natural tendency of fire (Li) to rise and of water (Kan) to sink. Through deep breathing he was to fill the navel and the lower body with the breath of life and permit the invigorating energy to permeate down to the soles of his feet. He was to concentrate on the "ocean of breath" located three centimeters below the navel, the center of gravity where the vital powers are collected and from which the healing of the sick organism can come.

The old hermit taught Hakuin the "butter method". The meditator begins with a mental image of a pure, soft, and sweet smelling lump of butter the size of a duck's egg, which, if placed on the head, would arouse a pleasant sensation. The meditator imagines the head becoming moist, and the cool moistness running down to the shoulders and arms, then to the two breasts and the inner organs of lungs, heart, liver, and then down to the kidneys and spleen. Pain in the loins and intestines would have to flow downward like

water until the feeling of strong, vital energy floods the entire body and warms the feet down to the toes and soles. The meditator becomes permeated with this warm energy, and then repeats the visualization until body and soul feel in harmony and vitality returns.

At the end of his story, Hakuin says that steady practice of this healing process, taught him by the hermit Hakuyu, restored his bodily powers. His illness disappeared completely, and he enjoyed good health till the ripe old age of eightytwo. (The reader can find a fuller account of Hakuin's story on pages 260-264 of Heinrich Dumoulin's A HISTORY OF ZEN BUDDHISM New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).

Hakuin's story rings a bell for students of the Healing Tao. For here a Zen Buddhist shares his experience of what we know as the Inner Smile and the Microcosmic Orbit meditation. Across the centuries, we in busy America are finding the same healing power that the spiritual athletes of Buddhism found in the Taoist tradition. The Zen Buddhists too, needed the reminder that we are our bodies.

In the 1950's and 60's, something wonderful happened in American cultural history. Diastase Suzuki and Alan Watts brought the ideas of Zen Buddhism to the United States. Their books on Oriental philosophy had a big impact on the Englishspeaking world by introducing a kind of Buddhism that was congenial to the American spirit. Yet something important was lacking in their contributions. Their writings were largely theoretical and intellectual. What they said had little connection with bodily practice. Their teachings gave little or no guidance for connecting mind and body. Zen seemed to be exclusively an attitude, an insight, disembodied awareness. In his writings, Philip Kapleau described the zazen exercises of sitting and breathing, but in general the Zen books gave no instructions, showed no path for healing the split mind/body. In fact, Zen itself seemed to be a wing in the house of the intellect. Even though Suzuki and Watts warned us not to take their verbal fingers for the moon they pointed at, we readers remained largely in the dark.

Mantak Chia has shed a profound light on Oriental philosophy. By introducing the practical exercises for cultivating chi circulation, Master Chia has filled in the missing background needed to understand Oriental philosophy as a system for healing the mind/body split. The practical knowledge was simply not available before. The knowledge had been prisoner of traditional secrecy. No wonder Suzuki and Watts taught a disembodied Zen. The real Taoist practices had been closely guarded secrets. True, some books, like THE SECRET OF THE GOLDEN FLOWER, and THE SECRETS OF CHINESE YOGA had appeared earlier in English translation, but without practical instruction these writings remained vague poetry. It was a bold step to publish the step-by-step instructions of the Healing Tao. Other teachers are now coming forward to share their knowledge of chi kung. But the intellectual-cultural breakthrough is not the important thing. Important is the potential for real healing. At what other moment in history has it been more important to practice being whole mind/bodies, to find our way back to the subtle energies of the natural environment on which we depend? For many of us, the practical recipes of chi kung have been healing sounds.

Transforming Negative Emotions VS Dumping Emotional Garbage

Our society is known for its fast pace, its stressful conditions, and its inability to handle the tons of garbage we produce daily. This includes not only trash from our homes, but also the emotional garbage produced within our bodies. Both are expensive to remove from our environment. The former requires sanitation services, while the latter is sometimes relieved by medical or psychological methods. According to an article in Newsweek magazine, a family of three will throw out approximately seven bags, or 87.5 gallons of garbage per week. Average disposal per month amounts to about 29 bags, or 379 gallons; and every year the same family of three disposes of approximately 350 bags, or 4550 gallons of garbage. Similarly, the pressures of daily living lead to accumulation of incalculable amounts of stress and negative emotion. The accumulation of stress and negative emotions is incalculable.

No community likes to have trash dumped near it, even though accessible landfills reach their limits and close, and garbage disposal becomes more expensive as trash must be hauled farther away. People often try to solve this problem by illegally dumping their garbage across state lines near someone else's home, but this is a short-term solution as lawsuits are filed and fines must be paid. Efforts to build new landfills or expand old ones are hampered by the communities that want them built elsewhere. No one is willing to stop creating garbage in their homes or inside their bodies, but they have no problem dumping it in some other state or on someone else's shoulders.

In America alone, tons of garbage are generated yearly and the cost for its removal is enormous. One can only imagine the cost to our health in trying to relieve the emotional stress that accumulates during the same period. Just as new landfills are hard to find where we can dump our garbage, new storage space for our negative emotional energy is also scarce when our bodily systems become clogged with internal trash. The only alternative to disposing of garbage from internal or external sources is to recycle it.

RECYCLING OUR NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL ENERGY

Recycling is the most important practice in energy and ecological conservation. Consider that the expense of turning bauxite into new aluminum is ten times that of reprocessing used cans, yet every three months we still throw out enough aluminum to rebuild the nation's entire airline fleet.

Glass, paper, and certain plastics can all be recycled. Kitchen wastes, dead leaves, and grass clippings from the lawn, can all be fumed into compost, but people prefer to spend money on expensive fertilizers, thereby allowing useful byproducts to become garbage. Because our society is uneducated as to how we can take care of these problems, our suffering from them is exacerbated each year. We can, however, take a lesson from Taoism on personal conservation through the recycling of emotional energy. When people know how to recycle their own garbage energy, they will start to do more conserving, recycling, and composting.

Dumping negative emotions upon our fellow human beings has become as common as taking out the garbage. Nobody wants other people to dump on them, but most of us can't prevent our own negative wastes from pouring out when circumstances force our bodies and minds to overload. Though we have psychological methods to help release built up emotional stress, these solutions are costly, slow, and not always applicable to problems which may arise in the future. Preventative measures, such as Taoist meditative practices, offer a much longer lasting approach to personal health and energetic conservation. The focus of these disciplines is to recycle emotional garbage into energy that enhances our life-force, rather than release it from the body.

GARBAGE ENERGY COMES FROM OUR LIFE-FORCE

Most available therapies teach people how to get in touch with their feelings and to release their negativity through various means, such as shouting or crying out, to give that energy its fullest expression as they let go of it. Certainly it feels good to release negativity rather than carry it around with us, however, our negativity is also a form of energy which comes from our life-force. This means that if we go through the full expression of our negative emotions, too often we deplete the most vital energy source of the human body.

Additional drawbacks are the illeffects of negative energy traveling out of a person and into another person. Likewise if you withhold negative emotions for too long, they eventually explode outward at some unexpected moment. Its like trying to hold several ping-pong balls under water at the same time; even

dually some escape to the surface. These pent up emotions can manifest themselves as physical illness, emotional disorders, or violence to oneself or others.

Dumping emotional garbage can diminish our life-force energies to a point where any personal crisis that arises cannot be dealt with effectively. If we, instead, learn to transform our negative emotions, not only will we have more positive energy, but there is far less chance that we will accumulate negative energy as emotional garbage again in the future.

In Taoist theory we regard all positive and negative internal energies as parts of our life-force. When we become angry, it means that some of our life-force has been stored with negative charge, thereby empowering the reaction of anger. To prevent future responses of anger, we can locate the source of that energy and transform it so that whenever we are confronted by upsets in our lives, we can apply more effective emotional responses, such as patience. If someone or something triggers a response of anger, frustration, sadness, or depression, it is simply because we have not prepared ourselves by transforming our negative energies into positive life-force. Tremendous amounts of life-force can become negative emotional energies if we allow it to happen, just like a disease spreading throughout the body.

THE TAOIST WAY TO TRANSFORM STRESS INTO VITALITY

There are a few basic Healing Tao practices that people can learn easily to transform any stressful energy. There are many other approaches. Some emphasize positive thinking without actually transforming the negative energy, while others simply try to release the negative emotion (as stated earlier). Taoists do not judge these methods, but instead offer a time-proven approach which begins with energy transformation through the basic exercises of the Inner Smile and the Six Healing Sounds.

THE INNER SMILE

1. Understanding the Body

One should first learn about the internal organs and glands, which the Taoists say are capable of generating and storing positive or negative energies. A simple anatomy book will be of great help. When people are sick from a problem within their organs, certain emotions will arise. For example,

- a. When someone is sick or weak in the lungs, you may notice the emotions of sadness or depression.
- b. Overheating or congestion of the liver can cause anger or a very moody attitude. Weakness in the liver can cause a drop in productivity and a lack of control or balance.
- c. When the heart overheats, it can cause impatience, hate, and cruelty to arise. Weakness in the heart can cause a lack of warmth and vitality.
- d. Weaknesses in the spleen, stomach, or pancreas can cause worry, anxiety, and a lack of stability.
- e. Weakness in the kidneys can cause fear and a lack of will power and ambition.

2. The Basic Inner Smile

- a. Once you know the general locations of the organs and glands, close your eyes and smile to them, beginning with the pituitary and pineal glands in the head.
- b. Smile down to the thyroid, parathyroid, thymus, and heart. Feel love and happiness grow from the heart's center.
- c. As you smile to the lungs, feel courage arise.
- d. As you smile to the spleen, stomach, and pancreas, feel openness and fairness.
- d. As you smile to the liver and gall bladder, feel kindness.
- e. As you smile to the kidneys and the bladder, feel gentleness.
- f. As you smile to the sexual organs, feel creativity.

When you smile to the organs, negative energies will gradually change into positive life-force. If a loved one becomes sad or angry, smile as you surround this person with your accumulated love and gentleness. This will help those around you to transform their energy, although the real work must be done by themselves. Eventually you will learn how to use the inner eye to get in touch with your body. You will also

learn how to feel good emotions and how to maintain their energies within the organs by smiling into each organ and gland as you transform any negativity you find within each.

THE BASIC SIX HEALING SOUNDS

The Six Healing Sounds help us to emphasize the good vibrations of the organs by strengthening their positive energies. They also heal the organs while balancing their individual functions with the rest of the internal system. Each sound can be performed from any position, but serious practice is usually initiated from a seated position. The most important aspect of practice is to feel any negative emotional energies so that you can transform them in a loving, gentle way into positive life-force. Once you have acquainted yourself with the organ that correlates with the sound you are performing, you may begin.

1. The Lungs' Sound

Place your tongue behind your closed teeth, and with a long, slow exhalation, create the sound, "SSSSSSSS" (like the sound of steam coming from a radiator). During each resting period (as you slowly inhale), smile to the lungs. Picture them surrounded by white light, and concentrate on feeling the good virtue of courage, which is directly related to the lungs' energy. (This will help to enhance the positive energy of the lungs.)

2. The Kidneys' Sound

Form an "O" with the lips, as if preparing to blow out a candle, and with a long, slow exhalation, produce the sound, "WO000000." During each resting period, smile to the kidneys as you picture them surrounded by a bright blue color. Feel the virtue of gentleness, which will enhance the good energy of the kidneys.

3. The Liver's Sound

Place your tongue near the palate, and with a long, slow exhalation, produce the sound, "SHHHHHHHH." During each resting period, smile to the liver, picture it surrounded by a bright green color, and feel the virtue of kindness. This will enhance the good energy of the liver.

4. The Heart's Sound

With your mouth wide open, exhale a deep breath slowly, and produce the sound, "HAWWWWWWW." During each resting period, smile to the heart and picture it surrounded by the color red. Feel love, joy, and happiness in order to enhance the positive energy in the heart.

5. The Spleen's Sound

Again place your tongue near the palate, and with a long, slow exhalation, produce the sound, "WHO000000" from the throat, like the sound of an owl. (This is more guttural than the Kidneys' Sound.) During each resting period, smile to the spleen, and picture it surrounded by a bright yellow color. Feel the virtue of fairness, which will enhance the good energy of the spleen.

6. The Triple Warmer Sound (Practice lying down if you can.)

With your mouth open, exhale slowly as you produce the sound, "HEEEEEEEE." During each resting period, try to imagine a huge rolling pin flattening out your body from your forehead down to your toes. This will balance all of the energies activated by the other sounds and help to relax the body thoroughly.

With daily practice, you will find that negative emotional energies have little or no room to grow. It always helps to spend some time sorting out emotional trash. See what can be recycled internally, just like paper, glass, and plastic from your home can be recycled. You will feel much better as you learn to transform negative energies into positive life-force, rather than dump them out on those you love.

NOTE: More advanced techniques include the Healing Light and Fusion of Five Elements meditations. For further details on the basic techniques described here see the book "Transforming Stress Into Vitality."

Utilize your tools

Probably the strongest reason that one searches for and discovers the path of Taoist practices is that it allows you to transform your stressed daily life into more useful energy. You are given many levels of practical tools with which you can work. The more you practice them, the easier it becomes to integrate these methods of transformation into your daily life. Isolated practice time is still important, but other avenues can be taken that are useful and interesting.

Master Chia gives us an example of using our time efficiently when he points out that just one minute of smiling down while standing in a bank line, or while on public transportation, can add up to many extra useful minutes of practice.

Observe your approach to all your commonly performed tasks. There are many chores you do in an unconscious fashion. Examples of these include bathing, driving, doing laundry, and all household tasks. You can use Iron Shirt and Tai Chi principles to guide your every waking moment, (and perhaps this awareness might then flow naturally into sleeping moments as well.)

I have begun, over these last few years, to smile more and pull energy up through the orbit in some activities that, in the past, were truly not my favorite things to do. For instance, I would often observe myself cursing at my sewing machine, which seemed to be battling with me in my efforts to create a costume. I concentrate now, far more often, on using my scapulae to push the cloth through the machine. I let the costume create itself from my intentions that come from primary energy that I can find located at my navel. The job becomes more pleasant, and in fact, the time passes more quickly. I'm finished before you know it.

I rake the leaves or use any lever, (like a broom or mop or vacuum deanery, with a respect to the flow of energy from the earth through my back leg root. It then travels over my spine and goes through my scapulae into the stick. I am propelled forward without gripping and overusing my muscles. I use the "fourwheel drive" mechanism of my torso, in one piece, instead of pushing or pulling my force in scattered directions. This is true energy conservation!

One thing I've noticed that is really a challenge, is to keep smiling down while I am behind the wheel in every day traffic! I have a tendency to drive as if I'm a professional racer. I observe myself needing to keep in front of the crowd of cars. I witness myself cursing at the slow-pokes, and steaming when cut off by other racers. I use my fusion as often as I can to try to transform my anger into a kindness that will cool the adrenaline that runs MY engine! I tuck in my "turtle neck" and smile when I observe these behavior patterns. I surround the car with an extra bubble of cosmic energy. I force myself to change old, habitual patterns. Practice can indeed, lead toward vast improvement and, perhaps, even what I might call, perfection!

Now that I've supplied some of these personal samples, perhaps you will also look for some opportunities to allow more Healing Tao tools to grow into your habitual way of living. Submitted only to "Healing Tao Journal"

Controlling Menstruation And Ejaculation

Experiences with "Slaying the Red Dragon" and "Halting the Fiery Stallion"

After many years of diligent practice and experimentation, my husband Christer Ekstrom and I would like to share our experience with controlling menstruation and ejaculation, as the ancients called "Slaying the Red Dragon" and what I call, "Halting the Fiery Stallion". For the past eight years we have been dedicating most of every year to a tenhour day retreat program to cultivate higher Taoist Disciplines and related practices, resulting in long periods of success in controlling the generative functions. Our intention is to share how we have utilized the Taoist Disciplines and their impact on our life.

Our monastic-like lifestyle stands in contrast to the commitment most people are willing to make. Some of our students, however, feel empowered by our lifestyle enough to keep up consistent practice of one to three hours daily and come to retreats regularly, giving them encouraging results.

BACKGROUND AND BENEFITS OF CULTIVATING SEXUAL ENERGY

"Taking Hold of the Sword or Reins"

Traditionally, the major religions and esoteric disciplines have recognized the need to conserve our generative force to fuel spiritual development. Many required celibacy of monks and nuns. The Healing Tao System offers practical ways of conserving this energy plus enhancing sexual and spiritual fulfillment.

Sexual energy is the most powerful resource we have in the body. The loss of this energy through menstruation and ejaculation is one of the biggest leakages of our energy. It is astonishing to most people that one ejaculation generally loses an equivalent amount of energy as 72 hours of hard physical work, like chopping wood or jogging, or 36 hours of concentrated mental effort, like solving mathematical problems (according to Yogic Philosophy). It is generally more difficult for women to control menstruation than men ejaculation. Men can resort to the "Three Finger Lock" to obstruct ejaculation, the like of which women cannot do. A woman's cycle is related to the moon's cycle and can be influenced by the cycles of women who live close by.

We must defy a collective belief that regular menstrual cycles and ejaculation are "normal" and healthy in order to discover new choices for our bodies and minds. These choices require proper training so that energy is channelled and not locked up, ready to explode.

The aroused male sexual energy is explosive and also difficult to harness so it requires determined training. In some cases, training without the stimulation of a partner makes this practice easier to master. A man needs to train his sensitivity in order to draw up, relax and harmonize his breath before "the -point-of-noreturn" comes.

Most men we have talked to have generally experienced a drop in energy following ejaculation. Some men might feel this as relaxation due to the release of tension or pressure that was built up. Blowing the nose can also give relief. The relaxation brought about through concentrated, loving play is enhanced by nonejaculation, and the loss of energy is significantly reduced.

The body continually produces semen and if one doesn't channel it, an urge for sexual activity and "spilling the beans" is bound to arise. Through Healing Love Practices, the semen is re-absorbed and the sexual energy retained and circulated.

The option of reducing or eliminating unnecessary loss of energy and discomfort through menstruation comes as a relief. From experience I can say that the more I take care of myself, the better results I have. First the agony of pre- and postmenstrual syndromes decreases, then the length of flow shortens and the length of cycle extends.

The conservation and transformation of sexual energy and it's circulation in the Microcosmic Orbit vitalizes and rejuvenates the body, improves health, and relieves genital problems. This ancient foundation for growth and self-healing enhances personal empowerment, heightens orgasmic fulfillment and spiritual love, and deepens the harmonious exchange between partners.

It's re-direction is a beneficial alternative to releasing or repressing it, so energy can work for you creatively, developing ourselves physically, mentally, and spiritually, leading to higher pleasures and states of consciousness.

Tapping this powerful well of prime life-force is a key to leading a successful life. Yes, we can become like "Stars", who raise the audiences excitement and everyone gets "higher". A "Star" has charisma which is the overflowing of sexual energy or highly charged personal power. Uplifts our pro-creative forces and our fellow beings are also lifted.

Conservation of our inner and outer resources is an important personal and global issue. The Healing Tao System gives us tools to effectively conserve our personal essential resources. The indiscriminate loss of internal power, especially sexual energy, causes a weakening of the immune system

and degeneration of the body. Many cases of highly sexually active people, who are also weakened by drugs, alcohol, and/or junk foods have been hit with Immune Deficiency Syndromes, like AIDS. The best of our body goes into creating sperm or eggs to insure the healthiest possible offspring. Tapping this procreative power helps to clean out bodily and psychic pollution and build the immune system which can help us deal with the stress and illness afflicting modern life.

The ancient traditions are not empty promises. Now we can also attest to their validity. Although these time-honoured practices are based on universal principles, we now face new conditions and obstacles.

A major hurdle we have observed and deal with continually, is modern man's stiffer, denser, and more polluted bodies. But we have tremendous healing power within us and more improved healing methods.

Another problem is getting to practice. Instead of being distracted by the "ten thousand things", there are ten billion things today. Though our life-style may seem far removed from "outer" business, we need to continually elbow space for practice and guard that space from the endless list of projects and desires. It is a space that closes quickly if we are not determined to create and maintain it.

The more space I make for practice, the greater the results. This fires my enthusiasm to apply myself even more. The developed scientific observation of today gives us the potential to investigate our spirit, diagnose our needs, and recognize the importance of self-cultivation, which can spur our motivation to practice.

We find that just one-hour a day of meditation maintains basic upkeep while more time and effort are necessary to develop our full potential. It is like the difference between just sweeping the floor and home improvement. With each additional hour, the benefit multiplies. With three or more hours daily, we start to shift into a new gear.

GAINING CONTROL THROUGH DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNAL POWER : HOW WE GAIN AND LOOSE ENERGY.

“Piercing the Sword, Tugging the Reins.”

Our time-tested experiences will demonstrate that, in addition to sufficient sleep and a diet and lifestyle which supports self-development, developing internal power through Sexual Energy Techniques, Chi

Kung, and Meditation, can enable one to control menstruation and ejaculation.

On the other hand, if one externalizes one's energy in a multitude of concerns like social interaction, work and entertainment, internal power is dispersed. Energy is also lost through talking, strong emotions (especially negative ones), the senses, and improper diet (ie. overeating, imbalances or junk food).

We like to let our light shine and be active in the world. Through cultivating the connection between our "inner universe" and the "outer universe", we receive energy and have more to give to others. When we cease to be a problem for ourselves, energy is liberated for service, and psychic space is opened for deeper insights.

Abundant energy and self-discipline are needed for body, mind, spirit development. The traditional religious guidelines are based on basic energy conserving and raising principles: celibacy, tantrum sex or Healing Love, moderate diet and fasting, silence, prayer or meditation, chanting or singing, body and mind disciplines, and living according to precepts and virtues. Through silence, the tension and energy commonly released through talking can be transformed; an intuitive sensitivity to oneself, others, and the world can be cultivated. Through meditation or prayer, energy is internalized and directed to the mind's attention. For example, through visualizing a deity above the head, energy, and Ching Chi (sexual energy) is drawn up there. Mental disciplines or study of scriptures orient the aspirant, bringing clarity of understanding, so energy is not dispersed through misdirection and ignorance.

Body disciplines, like breathing exercises, movement, or postures develop a more complete kinaesthetic body awareness, giving the aspirant grounding and good vehicles to carry him through his development. Put the mind into the body and healing energy goes into the body. Deep breathing is a fundamental way to fill up the tank of Chi or "Breath of Life". It is the fly-wheel for all energies circulating through the body. since it can be controlled consciously, it serves as a link between mind and body. For these reasons we put great emphasis on Breath Training. Beyond mobilizing breath and chi, we clearly see that chanting inspiring texts or singing nourishes and refines the soul and uplifts the spirit.

Fasting accelerates the opening and purifying of our body/mind, liberating energy normally tied up in digestion, giving the body a holiday to rest, revive, and heal. I find I do better eating generally a third less than men. If I eat under full satisfaction I feel more alert and lively. This keeps the pineal gland more active, stimulating hormone production. Some say the secret of long life is moderation. Apparently, overindulgence can cause a downward pressure which can activate sexual drive and night emissions. It can also result in heavy menstrual flow.

Self-discipline is a key factor in building will power and controlling bodily functions. It comes naturally through making friends with myself and testing myself out of self-love. It enhances centeredness, direction, freedom, and responsibility in my life. Curbing my sensual desires gives me a greater sense of selfmastery.

It seems that one needs energy to uphold energy. It is essential to conserve our bank account of Jing Chi, or principal energy in the kidneys, instead of living on credit. Ejaculation and menstruation are big spenders. This is why we find it so important to "pack the kidneys", so our reservoir of "priming water" doesn't dry up.

After menstruation the kidneys are hungry for deep breathing, drawing in and absorbing external energy deep into the body. "Packing" is also beneficial before menstruation to "fill up" that reservoir of Jing Chi, an essential ingredient for transmuting sexual energy. The more sexual energy is transformed, the less one loses during menstruation. For men it is important to replenish kidney power after ejaculation.

Through internal power, the martial artists of the past could resist blows or heal their wounds very rapidly through wrapping them with chi. To cleanse and close up the internal wound during menstruation I draw in Earth and Heavenly energy; gently hold and spiral healing, smiling energy in and around the Ovarian Palace, Uterus, and Kidneys; and breathe out impurities and excesses into the earth.

During the first years at our retreat center, Silent Ground, singleminded Zen practice was our central focus. This built up a lot of internal power which was bound to open up the body-mind and uplift sexual energy. Our life is very rhythmical which also strengthens the chi body.

Through the intensity of the retreat, my menstruation was every three months. Taoist Disciplines became an integral part of life. For the next four years, my cycle stopped for six to twelve month stretches and would occur on our "holidays" when we travelled and changed our practice and diet.

This demonstrates that "nonmenstruation" is reversible by reducing or stopping the practice. Another possibility is consciously reactivating the pro-creation process. Apparently the cession of the procreation ability comes at a very advanced stage and is very rare.

When I externalized my energy more into teaching, travelling, and physical work, with less time for practice, and ate a richer, more complex diet, my power noticeably decreased. My menstrual periods were every six to eight weeks, with especially light flow during the time we fasted. Even with a full time practice and teaching schedule, with a diet of heavier, more varied and yin foods, my menstruation was not significantly reduced.

Christer saw my energy decline in my duller eyes, emotional touchiness, slower work, and weight gain. Although we generally integrate "practice" into our life, formal, concentrated practice time helps to maintain this mindfulness. When this time dwindles, the harmony of our relationship is also affected. When we resumed our retreat and ate carefully, the openness and strength of bodymind gradually built up.

The cessation of menstruation and ejaculation we take as an objective sign for the progress of our practice and chi development. Some inner signs of progress we have noticed are heightened presence of mind, more concentration in inner and outer work, quickness, and clarity. Calmer and more positive emotions prevail. There is less need for sleep and a more vivid dream life. Outer signs are brighter eyes, clearer skin, and greater immunity to infections. The body feels more open, sensitive, strong, and flexible; lighter yet more rooted; is better aligned with softer muscles, and feels less pain when massaged. Keeping good posture becomes effortless as the chi holds up the body.

When my menstrual cycle is reduced, I look and feel young, healthy, and energetic, yet in no way lack femininity.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

"Becoming a Knight or Spiritual Athlete"

To master the mind, one masters the body. To master body, breath, and energy processes, one masters the mind. Through mindfulness and full concentration on what one is practicing or doing, we become knights defending the castle of the mind from the bombardment of concerns and automatic impulses. The victory of unifying the mind in a continuous stream brings joy, contentment, satisfaction, and deeper meaning to what we attend to. Our activity becomes more creative and constructive.

We aspire to be professional "spiritual athletes". We challenge our limits. An important difference to common sports activities is that the energy is turned in the opposite direction. Through internalizing force in spiritual activity, power multiplies. Through exertion, although this takes great concentration and will power, much energy is released in physical manifestation. This can lead to burn out, which sometimes causes reduced menstruation, since the body cannot afford to lose more energy.

I find that control of sexual energy goes hand in hand with general mindbody control and fitness. It can also be possible that some highly trained athlete's have reduced menstruation because their energy is re-channeled into a focussed, determined goal, and the body is purified through vigorous exercise. Exercise can feel refreshing due to the mobilization of breath and chi, increasing circulation and digestive fire. Both

mind and body require exertion until one "sweats" through the concentration and the challenge. Those who have pleasure in "working out" and in the refreshing relaxation following, can probably appreciate the benefit of our working style.

By way of example, for a two-hour session of bone breathing and steaming, our effort was to keep still and not let the mind wander, but stay nailed to our chosen practice, diving into it, drawing in chi with the breath. My whole being felt empty, yet full of substance, light and buoyant as a balloon.

After such an intense session of penetrating ching chi, or sexual energy, and yang chi, or universal energy, into the bones, I sometimes sweat in certain areas, like the thymus gland, that night. Eliminating impurities, excess fat and protein from the body is one function of menstruation. Some women experience irregular or longer periods when they first embark on Taoist practices, change their diet, or fast, which increase the body's cleansing process. Then after a few periods it often gets considerably lighter as the body starts to tonify. During a "healing crisis" it can get worse before it gets better, so don't worry and carry on

This feels like the holding and releasing of a posture, where the "stress" transforms into expansive energy. We consciously "pull up" sexual energy over a thousand times a day. Even at mealtimes we pull up sexual energy and mix it with the saliva, earth, cosmic, and universal chi and swallow down this enriched food, to feel it's vitality spread from the navel! Pumping up our posture and chewing extensively in silence, all keeps up the energy high.

SUCCESSFUL RESULTS THROUGH HIGHER TAOIST PRACTICES

"Transforming the Dragon or Stallion"

With consistent practice of the primary practices like the Microcosmic Orbit, Healing Love, and Iron Shirt Chi Kung I, plus a moderate, wellbalanced diet and a strong will to keep physically and mentally healthy, one can hope to reduce menstruation and ejaculation. In order to gain more complete control and transformation we find it necessary to progress to higher level practices like Fusion, Kan and Li, Bone Marrow Nei Kung, plus a cleansing, terrifying diet and a lifestyle which supports dedicated practice.

A more demanding commitment seems difficult to some people who hear of a schedule like ours, but actually they find it carries them and makes them feel better about themselves. I can only encourage you to keep at it if you want greater results and higher states of wellbeing!

Through Healing Love, Sexual Energy Massage, Chi Weight Lifting, and Chi Kung, sexual energy is released into the body, stimulating the pineal and pituitary glands. They are energizing and strengthening for the body, nourish the brain and senses, and brighten the crystal room.

In meditation, as in love making, the mind becomes concentrated. This heats up the kundalini, which rises up to the pineal gland, creating an orgasmic feeling. Sometimes all the hormones crystallize in the crystal room and drip down as blissful, sweet nectar, melting into my body. The Egg Exercise and Chi Weight Lifting is not just a good "workout" for the internal organs, glands and fascia, but a good test for one's internal strength. I find it gives a tremendous boost to the extension of the soul body.

These practices helped to train my body so that before menstruation the sexual energy would rush automatically like a torrent upwards, to conserve as much energy as possible.

Our successful control of generative energy comes with increased purity of body channels and development of virtues, our higher bodies, and our faculties.

The transformation of emotions and growing of virtues is a key ingredient in the spiritual re-birthing process. One literally "makes love" within oneself. The Fusion practice helps me to refine desires and control the mind. It strengthens the organ's individual character and creates a favourable, harmonious inner weather condition to grow the soul body. This strength, balance, and contentment of character gives me the will power needed to exercise a healthy restraint and prevents extreme cravings for superficial excitement. With the formation of the pearl, a merging of consciousness, energy and compassion, the foundation of inner alchemy is built.

In the Kan and Li practice the menstrual cycle lengthens as the Sexual Palace begins to empty, by lifting the denser sexual energy into the cauldron. There it is steamed, spreading its power into the body and brain and nourishing the developing soul and spirit body. For further information on the depth of this work, read pages 128-32 in Master Chia's book "Taoist Ways to Transform Stress into Vitality". This refining, purifying process of uplifting lower, denser energies to higher centers results in increased control of sexual functions. The purification and mixing of energies occurs at higher and higher levels.

In the higher Taoist practices the sexual energy is the essential ingredient, along with the universal force, in the alchemical process of transmuting ching chi into life force energy. The more this resource is poured into the cauldron of transformation, the less is available to pour into "the bottomless pit".

The generative force becomes engaged in "giving birth to oneself". Through sex we came here and through the transformation of sexual energy into spiritual energy, we can return to the source. Through "internal intercourse" we can experience "cosmic orgasm" or the bliss of unification with the Godhead.

For optimal growth and transformation of sexual power in the higher practices a reduction of food is appropriate. Reducing this coarse form of energy enables the body to eliminate and recycle excess. Once the "food fog" is lifted, after about three days of fasting, our subtle bodies become more apparent. The "higher bodies" incarnate more fully, like emptying sand out of your shoes and stepping in. Often while fasting Chi sweeps and shakes through my body in a thorough cleanup.

It has become more natural to eat small amounts of pure, simple vegetarian food as our energy becomes more refined and harmonious. We become more sensitive to coarser energy and find some food repulsive. Just as dirt shows up more on a clean wall, our bodies often are upset when we eat restaurant food after many months of careful eating, although our bodies gradually adjust to it.

By reducing the amount and variety of foods and emphasizing whole grain, a greater utilization of creative energy is facilitated, making it easier for us to keep focused, balanced, and strong. Energy from other sources like the moon, sun, earth, and trees fills the vacuum if we allow it. Drawing from a blossom is like sipping sweet nectar.

My body becomes lighter and I sleep less. Sometimes only four hours a night for months on end, waking in a dream (lucid) or from a dream about every hour and still feeling refreshed during the day.

During the years of practicing Zen meditation, I had a sense of a diamond inside. The Fusion practice

has polished it and it has grown into a more vivid soul and spirit body. The Kan and Li practices has sent it travelling and scanning the heavens for what it needs for further growth.

New life is growing in me and the sexual energy is nourishing an invisible child. Just as a nursing mother's energy feeds her baby, her body will not allow it's loss through menstruation. In quietness my body matures. The Taoists have given us superb tools which will bring surprising results when they are used to their fullest. They offer the means to make it all the way in one lifetime.

To be continued in the next issue:

Pace And The Journey to Vitality

The Healing Tao has had great significance in my life. I have a number of chronic autoimmune illnesses, and had suffered a severe exacerbation of Crohn's disease and arthritis in the months preceding my first class. Like many others, I was familiar with Tai Chi, but not much else of Taoist practices. I sought to incorporate Tai Chi as a meditative practice as part of my search for healing. I attended my first Healing Tao Retreat this summer, six years after learning Tai Chi and the Microcosmic Orbit meditation. As Master Chia admonished us to practice regularly, it was natural for me to reflect upon my own gradual pace, moving from a state of disability to one of vitality. It took me many years of serious illness to discover that I played a significant role in my state of disease, and that I alone could make a commitments to changing these patterns. It was a path of discovery unsupported by medical practitioners, the work environment, or much else in our social structure. Some inner knowing drove me to continue a quest for healing, though I was alternately told that my determination was self-indulgent or that my expectations for vitality were misplaced because I had complicated chronic conditions. Patients (who should resist living up to the meaning of that term) are told before diagnosis that it's all in their heads, and told after diagnosis that they ought to learn to live with whatever disease the experts have named.

A strong life force may push us to persevere in a search for healing. Nevertheless, those discouraging voices predominate, and are internalized without our awareness. So the first contact with a practice that feels good and is healing presents a paradox that takes time to come to terms with. When first practicing the Inner Smile and Microcosmic Orbit, the message from the body contradicts the permeating belief system of the culture, and we are trained to discount the body's communication. In fact, our energy is so much in our heads that our bodies must resort to pain and dysfunction to get our attention. True healing requires a strong inner commitment, for which there is little external reinforcement. This first paradox, experiencing the impossible, must be resolved by a strengthening of this commitment to self.

Cultural taboos also make it difficult to observe the relationship of negative emotions to illness. Physical illness is sanctioned in many ways. Inner exploration and selfunderstanding are not. Ours is a culture that does not accept the reality of things that cannot be seen and touched, and that wants to understand things first with the mind. This creates a barrier to really experienceing the energies that the Healing Tao teaches us to work with. All these things take time to integrate and overcome.

I have come to believe that each of us has an intuitive sense of the pace at which we can move, and will adjust our practices accordingly, whether consciously or not. One of the wonderful features of the Healing Tao is that whatever groundwork is laid, it remains in place, awaiting the next stage of development.

The Healing Tao practices as set forth by Master Chia are powerful, with tremendous potential for healing disease and dysfunction of all kinds. The most difficult thing for people who have lived with illness and disability is to develop the prerequisite self-committment needed to embrace these practices. From my own experience, I am aware of the need for great tolerance, encouragement and gentleness in helping people cross this barrier. It is a role where great service can be done, and it is my hope to see increasing numbers of Healing Tao Instructors pursue it.

On the Road to Mastery

A curious phenomenon I've noted and long felt inspired to write about is the process of mastering the work. I suppose what I'm about to write could be applicable to most kinds of learning. The concepts are quite simple, yet they are worthy of mention. Regarding the Healing Tao, there are thousands of individuals worldwide who have learned Healing Tao practices from Master Chia and his instructors. But I wonder how many of them actually KNOW those practices experientially ...how many of them have been inspired to pursue what they've learned on the road to mastery?

Learning a technique can be very different from knowing a technique. I say "can" because for some the learning is only a confirmation, or structuring, of what is already known. But for most the learning is just a first step, an introduction to something new and potentially valuable. In order for that potential value to be realized this learning must be embodied as an ongoing experience.

A large part of the appeal of the Healing Tao practices lies in the fact that they are, as Master Chia teaches them, easy to learn. A Healing Tao weekend workshop is vastly easier than twenty years in a cave or even six months at a distant monastery. The work is here, now, easy, inexpensive, and convenient, relatively speaking.

But again easy to learn and easy to know are two different things entirely. All too often workshop participants report powerfully positive experiences at the time of learning only to report weeks or months later that the quality of their experience has diminished. More often than not, I believe, this is due to lack of practice. However, many people get this cause and effect backwards, attributing their lack of practice to less inspiring experiences around the work. Again it is more likely to be the case that it is the lack of practice which results in a diminished experience of the work.

One of the premises of the Healing Tao is that each of us can and should take responsibility for our own destiny. This can begin with assuming responsibility for creating our own experiences through this work. We have the capacity to manage and master our own energy, to take the reins of our physical and psycho-spiritual growth potential. But there is some effort required. How much effort is required depends very much on the clarity of our attention and our capacity to follow through on our intention.

In other words nobody can "meditate you," or know Iron Shirt for you, or perform for you your Orgasmic Upward Draw. And if they could and did it would contradict the very possibilities that the Healing Tao offers to each of us in the form of personal empowerment and psycho-spiritual autonomy.

Well, so much for identifying a possible problem. I could continue at length (book length) about the causative underlying factors behind this problem. Suffice it to say here, simply, that for most of us there are internal dynamics and/or external circumstances which CAN discourage us from practicing as we ought to for good results. Many individuals are able to prioritize the work regardless of any discouraging factors. However, for those of you who can't, some helpful suggestions follow.

1. Keep your goals realistic. It can take much time and practice before reaching the level of proficiency of the instructors) you may have been working with, especially if it happens to have been Master Chia himself. In fact be process-oriented rather than goal-oriented. Allow yourself to reflect on how the Healing Tao touches, or can touch, your life throughout your day. Instead of confining Healing Tao practices to a singly block of time each day, notice how those practices can effect your thoughts, feelings, and behavior throughout the day. This will enable you to attach greater value to the work.

2. Accept the fact that your experience of these practices will vary, sometimes it will be stronger, sometimes weaker. That's the way of the Tao, nothing is constant. With continued practice your experiences may become more manageable, but there will always be a flux.

3. In any given practice session, allow yourself to develop momentum slowly. If you think you're too busy or distracted to do a full round of meditation, Iron Shirt, or Healing Sounds, then just COMMIT YOURSELF to doing the Inner Smile, or the first posture, or the first sound. Doing the beginning of a practice will help you to shift gears and become more receptive to what the practice has to offer to you. You may realize in that moment that your other distractions or business can be dealt with just as well at another time.

4. Experiment at doing the practices along with Master Chia. Many of the guided audio cassettes and video tapes are excellent in that regard. If you're a new student, or if you're trying to resurrect an unpracticed curriculum, doing the practice as Master Chia guides you can remove the burden and distraction of recall. That's why they are called "guided" tapes. Master Chia's voice, even on tape, can be powerfully inductive in helping you to embody the work for yourself.

5. Finally there is nothing quite like doing these practices with others. If you can arrange to join with or take the initiative to assemble a practice group, it will be most helpful to your maintenance of and progress in the Healing Tao. Practicing with others really seems to concentrate attention, intention, and energy. And working with a support group can help you to validate any concerns or experiences that you may have in the course of your practice.

In closing let me say that Master Chia and his instructors are genuinely interested in having each of you practice, pursue, and derive benefit from the Healing Tao System. And to that end we remain available for coaching, guidance, and consultation. You need only consult the directory in this journal for the instructor nearest you and we'll be glad to help as best we can.

The Gentle, Easy Way to Pack Your Iron Shirt

"Can you maintain undivided concentration until your chi is as supple as a baby's?" Tao Te Ching
Of all the chi cultivation methods taught in the Healing Tao, the Iron Shirt packing technique is the one most often abused -- with potentially dangerous side effects. At summer retreats, nothing pains me more than to watch students packing their breath in Embrace the Tree posture. Their faces turn beet red from holding their breath too long. Their mouths are clenched in a grimace, as their brains overheat from excess warm chi rising up from a pounding heart. The air finally bursts from their stressed lungs in a huge sigh of relief. A student, gasping to recover, feels a vague pride at having suffered through his daily dose of bitter medicine.

If this describes you, read on. You are NOT properly practicing chi kung ("energy mastering exercise") -- you are butchering a very gentle internal art designed to build power over time. Iron Shirt chi kung can and should be a pleasurable way to cultivate your chi without strain on your lungs or heart. The worst types are those who pack and squeeze as many extra breaths into their body as possible. I know this personality type well, as it once described me.

For the first two years after I learned Iron Shirt I, I took great pride in swallowing an extra twenty breaths and forcing them from my lungs into my organs and fascia. My whole chest and face glowed red hot. The more intense it felt, the stronger I thought my chi was getting. More likely it was a case of my over inflated energy causing my ego to balloon as well. Then one day after practice, I noticed a mass of little red dots spread all over my chest. The blood vessels were beginning to pop. That shook me up. I stopped all packing immediately. But the red dots didn't disappear, and six years later many of the blood spots remain, grim reminders of youthful excess.

1. Breath Packing Does Not Have to Strain Your Body

It took me those two years of practicing the wrong way before I finally gave up and realized that THE BREATH PACKING PROCESS SHOULD BE DONE WITHOUT ANY STRAIN TO YOUR BODY. If you are straining yourself, you are probably creating subtle injury to your lungs, diaphragm, heart, or blood vessels. If you have any heart weakness or irregularity, there is a danger of aggravating it with breath packing and you should do the postures with NO packing.

What is it about packing that makes it so powerful? There are three simultaneous processes that deliver a triple whammy:

- a. Squeezing muscles compresses the fascia, draws blood to a local area.
- b. inhaling air injects oxygen, which is converted into available energy by the body. Holding the breath causes you to burn reserve chi stored in body cells.
- c. Mental concentration directs the chi from the organs, blood, and oxygen to the local point being squeezed.

At what point does holding your breath strain your body? If you feel any dizziness, or your lungs are straining for oxygen, or your heart is pounding, or your blood pressure is rising to your head, you are probably stressing yourself. If you find yourself obsessed by the thought, "can I breathe now?", you should be breathing air.

2. Single Biggest Danger of Packing is Failure to "UNPACK"

Packing is an intense contraction of your physical and energy body. It needs a counterbalance of relaxation and expansion. Failure to relax the muscles squeezing the chi into the bones and fascia sends a negative message to your body. Most people are unaware they've left instructions for the body to remain "uptight". Excess packing tension is also imprinting psychic stress on your energy body. This may show up later as a blockage in your meditation if it goes uncorrected.

Master Chia had warned me years ago that I was packing too hard, but I ignored his warning. The same warning is issued at workshops today, but with the number of students multiplied a hundred fold, it simply is not possible for many students to get the repeated feedback they need. Other students are so out of touch with their bodies that they actually don't know when they are stressing it. The net effect is the same -- Master Chia's warning not to hold the packed breath if strain is felt goes unheeded.

3. Packing is Historically an Advanced Method

In China, the Iron Shirt methods were historically used by more advanced martial artists seeking to make their bodies invulnerable to blows. There was a lot of secrecy, so that your potential opponents wouldn't get the benefit of this powerful internal technology. It probably originated in the Shoaling Temple

schools, which make it a Buddhist chi kung practice, as they often used more force on the body than the Taoist methods, which stress effortlessness.

There are hundreds of schools and thousands of different chi kung forms in China, so many of the Buddhist and Taoist methods have been borrowed and mixed together in endless combinations over the centuries. Master Chia has taken this training method for fighters and adapted it for purposes of fighting off illness and accelerating development of the energy body.

According to one friend who studied in China, oriental martial artists do not try any powerful packing of the breath until they have undergone preliminary warm-up exercises and supervised body training for at least two years. This is to ensure their body will be able to handle the additional chi pressure that is created in all the organs without negative side effects -high blood pressure, heart stress, chi imbalances, etc. This body training also insures that they will be able to relax and "unpack" the effects of doing the Iron Shirt chi kung.

So what is the lesson for those Americans, who are in lousy shape physically, if they want to learn Iron Shirt chi kung? You might start by attending a healing Tao summer retreat, where you could receive more intensive instruction. Unfortunately, due to the nature of weekend workshop teachings and lack of follow up correction by a qualified instructor, many students do not properly learn Iron Shirt chi kung.

Master Chia has often said you cannot hope to learn the Iron Shirt chi kung in a weekend workshop. The basic principles of chi kung are taught there, but its difficult to absorb them on a body level. Individual feedback is essential from a qualified instructor after you have practiced a bit. The summer retreats offer a better chance to practice daily, get your structure and rooting tested, and take the time to learn to pack your breath gently, without strain.

4. Gentle "Pulsation Packing" is Easier

Today I often do Embrace the Tree, but I rarely use any physical packing of the breath. I stand in the posture, and I go deep within the energy channels of my body and the earth, and pack the chi using my mind only. This is the true goal of Iron Shirt chi kung -- to increase your ability to breathe internally. I'm completely relaxed, and enjoy it immensely. Not only is there no feeling of strain or forcing my body, but I use the process of pulsing the breath to gently release stress from my body into the earth.

I call this pulsing of the breath "pulsation packing". It is the same as regular Iron Shirt packing, only more gentle. You frequently release the breath before any strain can build up. I inhale, gently squeeze a point for 2 to 5 seconds, exhale and completely relax. This is repeated at the same point 5 to 15 times. After pulsation packing at the perineum, I would then move to the sacrum, kidneys, chi ball, and chi belt, repeating the same process at each point.

This warms and opens each point without straining the body. I NEVER PACK ABOVE THE WAIST, FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT SO MUCH CHI IS GENERATED BY THE PULSATION PACKING IN THE LOWER TAN TIEN THAT THE CHI NATURALLY OVERFLOWS AND FILLS THE UPPER BODY. The idea is to pulse your breaths and squeeze the muscles as delicately as you would do a tai chi movement. Or pretend you are a young baby doing Iron Shirt -- can you squeeze your muscles with the same soft delicacy, letting only your chi be firm and strong inside?

5. Gentle Packing of Lower Body A Simplified Sequence

I advise most of my students to develop the lower half of their body first -- feet, legs, perineum, kidneys, naval -- before even trying to build up chi into the upper body. I personally never physically pack breath into my upper body -- if the spring below is gushing forth, it will naturally pulse above into a full fountain.

The only packing I do in my upper body is with my mind. It is too easy for stress to accumulate in the chest and shoulders without further squeezing and packing them physically. If you are already carrying a lot of stiffness and tension in your upper body, you should especially avoid tightening those muscles. If you lead an extremely active physical life and your upper body is very loose, your body may tell you its o.k. If you listen carefully inside to what your body says, it usually includes the message: Be Gentle, Don't Hurt Me!

This lower body approach helps keep your mind calm and brain cool, but warms up your lower tan lien, which is the key to good rooting. I tell students to follow this sequence for the first six months, with heavy emphasis on bone breathing, long, slow breaths, keeping the brain cool, and extremely gentle squeezes in the lower body followed by total release of all muscle tension:

a. Set your structure for standing. Begin with arms hanging relaxed at the side in standing position. Focus on standing with proper structural alignment: weight on center of foot; sacrum sinking, jade pillow rising; spine, bones and joints clearly aligned.

b. Begin bone breathing, earth to navel. Put you hands over your navel. Slowly inhale as with your mind you draw chi from the earth through your bones and meridians up to your lower tan lien. Slowly exhale

from your navel back down to the feet into the earth. After a few minutes, your mind will get very cool and calm, and the navel will start to tingle.

c. Visualize all the channels and points you wish to strengthen. As you breathe, see the key energy points of Iron Shirt and just mentally spiral energy at those points. Emphasize the lower half of the body. When the lower half of your body fills up, the chi will naturally flow up the spine and down the front of the chest.

d. Gently begin to pack. Hold breath for 5 seconds max. Hands may remain over navel or raised into Embrace The Tree position. Ever so gently, as you inhale from the earth to the navel, pause at one point per breath. Delicately squeeze on the inhale and then release the muscles completely on the exhale back down to the feet. With a slow, cool, breathing rhythm, repeat 10 or 15 times squeezing only one point per inhalation: perineum, or kidney / mingmen, or chi ball, or chi belt.

e. Repeat above, but spiral and squeeze at each point. Combine the pulsation of gentle squeezing/packing at each point as you inhale with mental spiralling. This will help train your mind to open the points later without any inhaling or squeezing the point. As your mind gets more steady, you will be able to do a double spiral at each point, one clockwise and one counter-clockwise spiral, without any strain on your lungs. If you start to feel any strain, do a quicker spiral and release the breath sooner. Then inhale to the next point, and repeat.

f. Stand quietly, and breathe internally. (see following description of internal breathing).

6. What Kind of Chi are You Storing in Your Body?

One goal of Iron Shirt chi kung packing is to increase your capacity to store chi in your body. It will then be available whenever you need it -to live creatively, or to survive any crisis. But if you want to become an internal alchemist, the higher process leading to complete realization of the Tao, you need to understand some fine distinctions about the type of chi you intend to store in your body.

The major distinction is between "wai chi" -- the external or post-natal chi, and "nei chi" -- the internal, or prenatal chi. Food, sunlight, water, and air energies are all post-natal, or acquired after birth. They strengthen the body, but only temporarily.

Ching, or vital essence, and the original chi bubbling forth from your tan tien are examples of prenatal chi. It would also include your DNA and inherited physical and mental abilities, which are innate to you. These prenatal energies are much more concentrated and potent. Both wai chi and nei chi are necessary to life, and humans must constantly regulate and balance these inner and outer energy sources.

I draw these distinctions in reference to Iron Shirt packing, because many students forget that packing a lot of air into their fascia is giving only a temporary boost of energy. That packed air is post-natal chi that is destined to be shortly consumed or spent. However, the purpose of all chi kung is long term. In the case of Iron Shirt packing, the short term purpose is to open up the energy channels in our vital organs and fascia with the external chi so that the body is protected from illness or blows.

The long term goal of Iron Shirt packing is to create more room in our energy body for internal chi to circulate during meditation. This is why I urge students not to get overly focused on the external aspect of the packing, and cultivate the internal chi as they stand in postures. In this high sense, Iron Shirt chi kung becomes a standing meditation that increases our capacity for internal breathing.

7. Internal Breathing Requires Deep Relaxation

After you do this systematic contract-release breath for a few minutes, your whole body begins to rhythmically pulsate. If you surrender your mind to this pulsing process, your body begins to breathe and pulsate itself automatically. But your mind must be very calm and 100% focused internally. This pulsing is the first stirring of internal breathing.

I focus my breath in my lower tan tien with very light packing, and then exhale and release it into the earth. I begin pulsing between the earth and my navel. Then I just stand quietly, and spiral the Fusion belt routes to clear my body's energy field and connect it with Heaven and Earth. If I am calm and my mind is clear, the Tao fills me with fresh chi that pours in through my feet, my bones, and my three tan tiens -navel, heart, and crown. This is quite blissful, and the chi circulates spontaneously through the channels I have opened through more formulaic meditation.

One of the goals of all Taoist chi cultivation practice is to increase your ability to breathe internally. Taoist adepts and yogis from other traditions have long claimed this marvelous state is attainable with proper training. Some students misinterpret this and think that by forcibly holding their breath, they can stop physical breathing and begin internal breathing.

YOU CANNOT FORCE YOUR BREATH INTO STOPPING, AND THEREBY GAIN INSTANT ENLIGHTENMENT. This confused belief leads to abuse of training methods like Iron Shirt packing. You have to "charm" your autonomic nervous system and vital organs into a deep state of relaxation. If you convince your vital organs that your body has a surplus of internal chi, then they don't need to bother

working so hard to gather extra post-natal chi from the air, sunlight, sex, etc. Instead you begin breathing at the lower tan tien, which connects you to your primordial, or original breath (also called pre-natal chi).

8. Internal Breathing is Spontaneous Pulsation

The few times I have experienced true internal breathing have occurred spontaneously and unexpectedly -not because I willed it. But I had created the right conditions: my mind was very calm and focused inward, my physical breathing so deeply relaxed as to be negligible. The air was moving imperceptibly between my two nostrils. Suddenly, my physical breathing stopped completely. My breath was literally snatched away by the explosion of inner energy and light.

When this kind of total internal breathing occurs, you have activated your internal atomic power, sometimes called the kundalini. You realize that your soul is always breathing the "Original Chi", the primordial breath of God, which arises from within. That is why the Taoists often refer to it as "embryonic breathing" -- you feel like you are back in the primal womb, breathing through an umbilical cord connected directly to the purest source, the wu chi, the unnameable & unknowable Tao.

But what would internal breathing be like in a more ordinary, less mystical state of consciousness, i.e. when you're standing in posture? This primordial breath is experienced in your subtle body as an extreme fine yin/yang pulsation. On the physical level, it stimulates inhalation/exhalation. But this is not just a mechanical sucking in and out of air.

It is your soul body -- your higher mind -- drawing the chi from the oxygen and feeding it to the vital organs, glands, blood, etc. With this chi, your body can function and your soul can operate your five senses to enjoy life on this plane. So while standing in Embrace the Tree, simply be aware that it is your soul body/spirit that is breathing in the oxygen that sustains your physical pulsation. This will sharpen your awareness of the internal breathing that is happening unconsciously in you every moment.

9. Safe & Pleasurable Packing Power: 5 - Point Plan

I believe a safe practice for Americans seeking the powerful benefits of Iron Shirt chi kung would include the following:

a. Always do 10-15 minutes of movement warm-up to increase your chi circulation before doing any packing practice. These are taught at the summer retreats, and are as important as the practice itself. This is NOT a muscle warm-up like joggers do. This is a chi warm-up. Stretches must be done slowly, with full awareness of chi flowing in your blood and meridians. Develop a warm-up. routine that is a gentle movement chi kung, and do it every day.

d. Exhale frequently to prevent tension buildup. Follow a long term program that begins with very gentle breathing exercises. Give yourself a spacious time frame of months or even years. Inhale to the energy point you are working on, i.e. perineum or kidneys, and then exhale. Inhale to the next point, and then exhale. After a few weeks or months, you may be able to comfortably hold your breath for two or three points before exhaling. In this way you will gradually build up the capacity of your body without straining it.

c. Holding the breath is not important--opening the energy channels is what counts. In Embrace the Tree and other postures, keep the emphasis on training your mind to open up energy channels.

These channels can be opened many different ways -- with movement, with meditation, with sounds, with dozens of different types of breathing techniques. The Iron Shirt breath packing techniques can be used to quickly stimulate the energy channels, but you don't want to develop a dependency on them, or it will slow your progress later. They are crutches meant to be thrown away as soon as you can walk (breath internally).

d. Listen to your own body, and do what it tells you is safest. If an instructor is leading you in the Iron Shirt practice, and he/she is holding the breath longer than you can comfortably do it, DON'T BE AFRAID TO EXHALE AND RESUME NORMAL BREATHING. Just follow along by spiralling the chi at each point instead of packing it. It's O.K. to pack the chi mentally, without squeezing your muscles and holding your breath. And don't copy nearby students who are straining their bodies.

e. Keep your chi kung practice simple and fun. If you start with gentle breathing methods and keep your mental focus simple and calm while in each posture, you will love the fresh vitality you'll feel daily and get addicted to your practice!

But if you feel stress from doing the packing, this will create mental resistance and you will eventually stop practicing. Remember, PACKING IS ONLY A SMALL PART OF IRON SHIRT CHI KUNG -- your structure, rooting, keeping a calm mind and internal circulation of chi are all equally important.

10. Rooting and Packing: Two Different Processes

There is a tendency among the beginners to try to root themselves by packing their breath and squeezing their abdominal and neck muscles tightly. This actually makes it easier for someone testing your structure to uproot you, because the body is being held rigid as one piece by muscular effort. Genuine

rooting develops only after you relax both your mind and your body. When these are both as soft as a baby's, your internal chi easily mixes and absorbs the earth's chi.

So what does genuine rooting feel like? In Embrace the Tree posture your body is rooted when it literally feels solid as a mountain. Your feet and legs connect with the Earth chi below and they merge into one piece. You feel "packed" -- but it's not a feeling of high internal pressure. It's cooler, more still. Yet you still feel movement inside your body/earth. There are underground rivers and lakes hidden inside the body/mountain -- your chi meridians and tan tines which serve as the transportation and storage system of your energy body.

There are two points worth noting about the effect of packing on rooting:

a. Breath packing can help to partially open energy channels, but if your mind cannot control the chi, it will probably rise up to your head and actually uproot you rather than sink down and root you to the earth. There is no benefit in indiscriminately opening up energy channels or creating strong internal chi pressure -- it is the balance and harmonious flow and high quality of your chi that is important.

b. Breath packing is a method of taking the chi from oxygen in the air and converting it into body energy. Rooting occurs when your body's chi is mixed with the earth chi. Do not confuse the chi absorbed from air and the chi absorbed from earth, as they serve different functions.

The air is the fire element, which has a tendency to rise up. The earth holds the water element, which is heavy and flows deeper into the earth. Thus water is far superior as a guide for rooting into the earth's gravitational field. It is also much cooler for packing and condensing chi in the body.

In my own case, my tendency to overpack had overstimulated my heart and lung fire, so my mind was jumping about wildly and it was impossible to really root. After I stopped excessive packing of breath, my rooting improved dramatically.

This was because I was able to relax, and let my mind sink down into the cool earth and contact it's chi. We are all naturally rooted -- it is only our own mental resistance that uproots us. If we put on our Iron Shirt gently, and pack it slowly and safely for a few minutes each day, our bodies will begin to glow with good health.