

The image is a traditional Chinese ink wash painting. It features large, dark, textured clouds that dominate the upper portion of the frame. The clouds are rendered with varying shades of grey and black, creating a sense of depth and movement. In the lower right corner, there is a small, dark silhouette of a structure, possibly a pavilion or a building, partially obscured by the clouds. The background is a light, almost white, wash, which makes the dark ink elements stand out prominently. The overall composition is minimalist and evocative, typical of classical Chinese landscape art.

The Lunar Tao



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Meditations with the Seasons

Deng Ming-Dao



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For Alison Jade

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Introduction

My grandfather emigrated from southern China to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. When he arrived in San Francisco, he bought a Seth Thomas Office Calendar Double-Dial Wall Clock. It had a windup mechanism and a pendulum. My mother kept it when he died. Now she's passed away too, and it hangs in my home.

The clock has two white faces set vertically in a carved oak frame. Slender black hands on the upper face point to twelve elegant roman numerals. Two revolving cylinders set in the lower face name the month and the day of the week, and a single narrow hand points to black numbers around the circumference to indicate the day of the month. My grandfather brushed a four-word phrase from the Confucian classics on a semicircle of red paper and glued it to the lower face above the cylinders:

Esteem virtue; accept everyone.

Whenever he looked at the clock, he saw these words in his own calligraphy. They expressed the ideal he observed for the rest of his life.

When my grandfather named me Dao, (the same Chinese character as Tao), he set the theme of my life as boldly as that black ink on red paper. I didn't know it as a boy, struggling to master the strokes of my own name, but Tao would become a lifelong passion for me. It has taken me into middle age to learn that Taoism is as simple as my grandfather's clock: set forth an understanding, observe it, and live it constantly throughout each year.

My grandfather used three calendars. He dated his diary by the reign year of the emperor then on the throne in Beijing, Emperor Guangxu (1871–1908). As the owner of a garment factory in San Francisco, he used the Western calendar. But he, his family, and the entire community tracked their significant holidays and seasonal observations by the lunar calendar.

When it was the Spring Festival, the shops sold oranges and quince blossoms, and the family came together to celebrate the year's beginning. During the time of the Clear Bright Festival, my grandfather spent the day on buses to and from the cemetery where he swept the graves. During the Dragon Boat Festival, my grandmother cooked special rice dumplings steamed in bamboo leaves. When the Moon Festival arrived—which coincided with my grandmother's birthday—the family shared moon cakes and watched the harvest moon rise. As the year came to an end, my grandfather was careful to settle all debts and clean the home to prepare for a fresh start. There were always plenty of people in the house—children, neighbors, factory workers, cousins visiting from afar. Each festival was a time of family reunion, and family meant even the most distant of relations or cherished friends.

Beginning with the first grade, I attended San Francisco public school during the day and then went to a Chinese school held in a church's classrooms at night. I sat at old oak school desks carved with graffiti. Fluorescent lights buzzed overhead, their reflections flickering on the dark windows. The smell of pine-soot ink and mulberry

paper mingled with the odor of crumbling plaster, old varnish, and ammonia-washed linoleum floors. The lessons were historical, moral, or poetic—sometimes all three at once. The teaching method was the same as it had been in my grandfather's youth: memorization, recitation, and endless copying of words, idioms, and pages with a pointed brush. If we did not do well, the teachers ordered us to stand in a corner or dared us to cry as they hit us with chalkboard pointers, rulers, or yardsticks.

Occasionally, these harsh moments were tempered by sentimental reminiscences of China. At other times the teachers expanded on the folktales behind idioms such as “One bowl of rice is worth a thousand pieces of gold” (p. 128). Stories of the loyal hero Yue Fei (p. 53) or Song Hong's refusal to abandon his wife (p. 96) were far more vivid than the ancient utterances we memorized.

But the talks always returned to morality. A favored source was the *Twenty-Four Paragons of Filial Piety* by Guo Jujing (1260–1368). One of our teachers, Mr. Luo, gave rhapsodic accounts of one of the paragons, Wu Meng. The boy's family was poor and had no mosquito netting. Each night, Wu Meng lay in his father and mother's bedroom until the insects were too satiated to bite his parents. We scoffed at how dumb he was—which instantly brought more scolding.

Our skepticism was surpassed by puzzlement, however, because Mr. Luo—a short, slight teetotaler, with thinning hair and rimless spectacles, ever-dressed in a double-breasted suit and tie—enthusiastically praised the drunkenness of poets such as Li Bai (p. 264) and Tao Yuanming (p. 106), and artists such as Wang Xizhi (p. 85). He insisted that artists and poets needed wine to be free, to be creative, to become the greatest creators in all the centuries. “They had to be completely drunk before they would fling ink to make beautiful paintings or write words in masterly calligraphy. If they tried the next day when they were sober, they couldn't match the work from the night before.” He delighted in our confusion, adding that we had no hope of comprehending these works, let alone becoming great ourselves.

Headmaster Tan, with shoulders like a gravestone, gray hair slicked to his skull, and age spots on his wrinkled face, wandered in whenever he pleased. Our strict teachers deferred to him without hesitation. The headmaster's message was unwavering: “The ancients were perfect. Preserve tradition and never compromise it. You are all duck eggs, but you must try!” Duck eggs were the shape of the number zero.

Nearly every student—even those who were already native speakers—wanted to quit Chinese school. We cheered each one who managed the feat as if he or she had escaped from prison. I went for nine years before my parents allowed me to withdraw. In a few years, though, I found myself returning to Chinese language, art, history, and religion during college and afterward. I soon began an intensive and ongoing study of martial arts and Taoism with private teachers.

I was driven by a mystery that appeared throughout the years. I kept running across the words Tao and Taoism. Maybe it began because it was my own name, but soon my interest in these scattered references went well beyond curiosity over a coincidence. Tao, I read, meant “the Way,” and I encountered many books with titles beginning with *The Tao of—* or *The Way of—*. Mai-Mai Sze's *The Way of Chi-*

nese Painting began with a chapter titled “The Concept of Tao.” To this day, a long list of words have been appended to *The Tao of—*, including dating, Jeet Kune Do, sex, leadership, equus, physics, travel, motherhood, nutrition, Montessori, health, meditation, sobriety, Willie (Nelson), and Pooh. *The Way of—* has been paired with shaman, herbs, shadows, master, sword, heart, energy, and Zen.

When studying the Chinese classics, I was fascinated with the varying meanings of the word Tao. Confucius said, “A filial son must not deviate from his father’s way [Tao] for three years after his father has died.” When discussing archery, he spoke of “the ancient method [Tao].” He said that a “scholar should set his determination on the truth [Tao].” He exhorted scholars to “be devout, studious, and keep an excellent course [Tao] for all your life. . . . The world has a way [Tao] whose laws can be seen. There is no path [Tao] whose laws cannot be seen.” My inquiry into Chinese philosophy soon led to Laozi’s book, the *Daodejing (Tao Te Ching—The Book of the Way and Virtue)*, but the wordplay in the first two lines only made the book seem more abstruse:

The way [Tao] that can be spoken [Tao] is not the constant way [Tao]. The name that can be named is not the constant name.

I discovered Zen Buddhism. But Tao again appeared in the texts. D. T. Suzuki wrote in *Zen and Japanese Culture*, “Zen united itself to a great extent with Taoist beliefs and practices and with the Confucian teaching of morality. . . .” The scholar Okakura Kakuzo devoted a chapter to the subject, “Taoism and Zennism,” in his *Book of Tea*: “Taoism accepts the mundane as it is and, unlike the Confucians and the Buddhists, tries to find beauty in our world of woe and worry.”

How could Tao be a part of so many different subjects? How could it be so admired by people from Confucius to Bruce Lee, Laozi to Okakura Kakuzo? What in the world was everyone talking about? And what kept me looking?

The sentiment that Okakura Kakuzo hinted at—finding beauty in our world of woe and worry—appealed to me. After more investigation, I found that Taoism and Zen alike held meditation to be paramount. That was attractive—except I hated sitting still. After more searching, I read that Taoism had a method that began with physical training and proceeded step by step to the meditative.

Wen-Shang Huang wrote in *Fundamentals of Tai Chi Ch’uan* (Taijiquan):

Tai Chi Ch’uan is also a synthesis or a crystallization of the philosophy of Confucianism, Taoism, and Zen Buddhism—Tao or Way of Chinese life. The mastery of this eminent art, based on natural laws as expounded by Lao Tzu [Laozi] and Tao Chia [Daojia], is the very key to happiness, longevity, and eternal youth. It also embodies meditation (Zen) in its movement, and one is likely to be rid of tension and disequilibrium, as well as to have one’s physical health restored.

That appealed to me, and I went to a succession of teachers to painstakingly learn the system that began with stretching and progressed to spiritual practice (you can get an overview of this system in my book *Scholar Warrior*).

I found the culture of my Chinese school alive in martial arts teachers: memorize the movements, and then practice them daily for forty years to understand them.

And Chinese poetry teachers: chant poems every day and let their music and multiple meanings reveal themselves over time. And Taoist priests: read the scriptures morning and night, chant mantras to the gods, meditate daily, and give yourself over to good deeds for a lifetime, and someday you'll reach enlightenment. Everyone subscribed to Headmaster Tan's view: preserve the tradition and don't compromise it.

How does one learn about Taoism today without compromising it? Since my writing career began in 1983, many people have written to me asking about Taoism. The most common questions are, "How do I find a master?" and, "How can I learn about Taoism if I cannot find a master?" This book is one way to answer those questions—beginning with my grandfather's maxim:

Esteem virtue; accept everyone.

The Purpose of This Book

This book is written to help people follow Taoism until they find a master. As soon as I state this goal, Headmaster Tan's ghost appears: "Preserve tradition and never compromise it." I am preserving the tradition, not in a dry and dutiful way, but in a fresh and creative way. If you've glanced ahead at the sidebars, I've provided sources with original translations in support of the text. At the same time, I've written about Tao from my own experience. Taoism is the best tradition of wisdom I've found. This is my testimony to it.

When my teachers emphasized preserving the culture, I took it as one more arbitrary demand from annoying old people. Only after all this time do I see that the teachers were training me for myself and the generation after me. Their tradition had sustained people over thousands of years. If I'm passing on their tradition through this book, it's not because I'm trying to save traditional knowledge for its sake. No, I'm offering it for the sake of anyone who can gain by learning it.

The traditional rote approach has been replaced by better methods—all education strives to improve. But the original intention of the teachers was not that obtuse. It was meant to be a process of self-discovery. In the case of Taijiquan's forty years for realization, that meant a long time-frame, but the point was to reach an inner awakening.

Look at the three major figures in this book: they all exemplify self-discovery after long effort. Buddha reached his enlightenment only after he abandoned ascetic efforts, gave himself over to his own meditation, and trusted his own realization (p. 118). Laozi grew weary of the world and realized that he would not be able to advocate Tao in conventional settings; in leaving a book behind he ended up reaching a far greater number of people than he ever did as an archivist (p. xxx). Confucius is known to have been disappointed at the literal learning of his most beloved pupil, Yan Hui (p. 32), believing that if a teacher holds up one corner of a square, the student should be able to infer the other three (p. 281). Self-discovery is the goal of training, and self-discovery is the way to spiritual awakening.

We need Taoism that goes beyond dull lessons. We need Taoism that is daily life. The best way to find that is to return to the lunar calendar that has been embedded in the culture and shaped by centuries of spiritual and folk traditions. Providing something Taoist to consider each day for an entire year both imparts key concepts and models the importance of perseverance and constant learning. It may take decades for understanding to mature, but the initial meaning must be apparent right away.

The goal of understanding Tao is to discover a personal philosophy of understanding and self-reliance. All you need to do is to read each day and to consider how the idea presented might fit into your life. The small efforts of daily practice surpass grandiose declarations. There is no authority, no force, no threat of damnation, no guilt. Just an idea and an example from history, or a moving poem, or the example of someone's life. Consider each one. If it works, take it. If it doesn't work, move on. Out of all of the material presented, out of 365 days, there will surely be a good number of ideas to keep.

All the sources are collections of smaller essays, poems, or aphorisms. They are written in terse and poetic language, and they range wildly from the loftiest of cosmological outlooks to the most practical of minute advice. They can be read sequentially or at random. In the same way, this book invites you to enter it from where you stand and as you wish. The traditional, nonlinear model of writing has its advantages. This book is designed to be read in whatever way seems preferable. It can be read one page to each day, beginning at the beginning of the year. It could be dipped into by subject. One might simply follow the exercises, or one might refer to the sidebars only when necessary. Perhaps one enjoys the festivals and stories. Whatever your approach, this is a book that testifies to the tradition and experience of Taoism, and lets the reader choose how to approach the different dimensions offered.

This book is not *about* Taoism. It *is* a book of Taoism, and it's for everybody.
Esteem virtue; accept everyone.

Tao: Not Just Chinese

The concept and tradition of Tao happen to have their origins in China, but Tao is universal. People all over the world have embraced it and study it. Tao is a spiritual path for anyone who wishes to find understanding and contentment in life.

Imagine you were reading a French cookbook. You would want to know that the recipes were authentic, and you would enjoy knowing about the background of the dishes. But you wouldn't have to be French to cook the meals, and you certainly wouldn't have to be French to eat them! Taoism is the same way. Yes, it has a Chinese background; yes, it is thoroughly a part of its culture; and yes, it has thoroughly shaped that culture in return. Yet one need not be Chinese to be Taoist, and one certainly need not be Chinese to be nourished by Taoism. Especially when Tao's origins are dynastic Chinese, how can we remain both true to the tradition and true to who

we are today? What does it mean when the gods are dressed in imperial robes and holding magic swords or peaches of immortality, looking nothing like what we see in our world today?

What matters is whether the ideas that the gods represent are useful to us. Over the past millennia important personages have given us vital ideas still unsurpassed today. Just as Newton gave us insight into classical physics, Darwin gave us the theory of evolution, and Beethoven gave us music no one else has come close to duplicating, great philosophers like Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Confucius have given us spiritual wisdom and insights into human existence. When we look for answers to our questions today, we can still learn from these figures who gave profound and ever-relevant responses to human dilemmas.

This book's many references to Chinese things therefore represent a grounding in tradition, a nod to authenticity, and an examination of the basis for the ideas—but nothing is true just because it's Chinese. We still need to take the ideas and find the right way to apply them to our own lives, regardless of who we are or where we live. There is no reason to meditate unless it works for you. There is no reason to try to be Chinese if you aren't. And if you are Chinese, there's no reason to dress as a medieval figure with a long beard and silken gown. Ideas are templates. If you find them useful, you are welcome to make them your own.

Esteem virtue; accept everyone.

Why Should We Study Taoism?

道 Taoism (Daojiao) is China's oldest and only indigenous spiritual tradition. Buddhism (Fujiao) came from India, and Confucianism (Rujiao) is a system of morality, philosophy, and governance. Taoists believe in following Tao—the Way. They believe that there is a Way that all of nature and all human endeavors follow. Furthermore, they believe that everyone has a personal Way. The ideograph for Tao (Dao) illustrates this. On the right side is a face, representing a person. The left side and the bottom represent moving feet: Tao is a person—or people—on a path.

The dual sense of the English word “way” is true of the Chinese word Tao as well. When we say “way” in one context, we mean a path. When we say “way” in another, we mean a method, procedure, or approach, as in “there is a way to do it.” Tao is the Way, as in the Way of all life, and it is the study of how to live and walk that Way well.

Here are other reasons why studying Tao is worthwhile:

Antiquity. Taoism has been tested for centuries, and the doctrines that survive are the ones that are the most effective. Taoism definitely has had its share of mistakes, excesses, days of glory, and days of destruction. What is in the system now has been thoroughly examined—and has had to prove itself against other systems.

Nature. Taoism patterns itself after nature. It looks to the cycles of day and night and of the seasons for its truths. It points to what all of us can see and experience,

and it does not need to say that its laws were given by a god to be valid. Instead, it asks us to look in the world around us for the answers to our spiritual questions.

Open Theism. Taoism is polytheistic. Any of us can find a god that is most resonant with us. However, Taoism is also the perfect system for the doubter, the agnostic, or even the atheist. The masters freely admit that either the gods are not the highest beings in the world, or they don't exist at all independently of human belief. One need not even worship a god to be a Taoist, because one can concentrate wholly on Tao itself. Taoism is the spiritual tradition for anyone, from someone who wants only to worship a special god to someone who does not want to worship a god at all.

Health. Taoism has a wide variety of health techniques. It asserts that being healthy and living a long and happy life are vital to spirituality. There is no mind-body duality. There is only a mind-body continuum.

Moderation. Taoism advocates the middle path: no extremes, no fanaticism, no campaigns against other people or other religions.

Individuality. Taoism is nonconformity. Due to the enormous social pressures of Confucian society, there had to be some sanctioned relief. Taoism was the system for the eccentrics, the artists, the poets, the musicians, and the hermits.

Inquiry. Taoism is skeptical. The most cursory reading of Zhuangzi (p. xxxi) reveals his dry wit, his criticism of the established Confucian order, his skewering of the rich and powerful, his mockery of rationalist philosophers. Many of us today question religion, authority, and power. Taoism has been doing that for more than 2,500 years. Taoism addresses the political—except its stance is that people in power are usually abusive and seldom try to benefit the people.

Philosophical. Taoism is practical. While it addresses every level of reality from the beginning of the universe to the meaning of death, it is not inclined toward speculation or intellectual intricacies. It tries to get at reality directly, and its teachings are intended to lead the student to the source of all things. That doesn't make it easy to master, but it does show that Taoism is a complete philosophy.

Mysticism. Taoism is unabashedly mystical. That doesn't appeal to every person. On the other hand, for those who intuitively believe in the need to accept mystery, and even account for it in one's outlook, Taoism is perfect.

Community. Taoism believes in community. It believes in supporting the masses, not propping up the ruling elite. It believes that government exists to feed the people, keep them happy, and protect them from conflict. How many governments really live up to those simple goals?

Peace. Taoism believes that each individual deserves peace, and it believes in peace for every country.

Taoism welcomes anyone who comes to it.

Esteem virtue; accept everyone.

The Lunar Calendar

The lunar calendar that provides the structure of this book has been used in China since at least 500 BCE. It was first used for farming. The calendar's Chinese name is *nongli*, meaning "agricultural calendar," and it incorporates both lunar and solar features. Generations of farmers followed it to plant crops and predict when rain, sunny days, and snow were most likely to occur. As the centuries passed, farmers added folk customs to the calendar and tracked the rituals and festivals that fit with the seasonal rhythms of their lives. Their spiritual concerns had to match their cycles of work.

When harvests were good, the farmers were more likely to give thanks to the God of the Local Land at a roadside shrine than to trudge to a temple. They brought offerings such as fruit, rice, flowers, and cooked foods, and these offerings evolved into the foods associated with today's festivals. The calendar eventually filled with celebrations ranging from the first day of spring to thanksgiving for plentiful crops, remembrances of special myths, memorials to heroes, and the observance of key days such as the summer solstice.

China's three great spiritual traditions—Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—also contributed holy days. While there were some conflicts, an open acceptance of all gods and beliefs developed among the populace. If a story was compelling or if a person was worth honoring, people placed them in the calendar.

The three systems address different aspects of spirituality. Generalization is risky, but the rough differences are these: Confucianism addresses propriety, morality, social organization, scholarly understanding, the dominance of family, and worldly accomplishment. Buddhism is visionary, otherworldly, compassionate, and advocates devotion. Taoism is nonconformity, creativity, physical health, and lifelong integration with nature. Needing all three, people wove the profundity of these great spiritual traditions into the lunar calendar.

The effort to integrate society with nature by observing the moon was by no means exclusively Chinese. Other cultures use the lunar calendar as well. Easter falls on the first Sunday after or on the first full moon following the spring equinox (northern hemisphere) or autumn equinox (southern hemisphere). Islam uses the Hijri calendar. India uses a Hindu calendar. The Jewish calendar is used to determine religious and ceremonial observances as well as agricultural dates. While all the world uses the solar calendar, billions of people all over the world keep parallel traditions of living with nature and celebrating with the seasons by following the moon. The lunar calendar fits a deep-seated need in us. It keeps us in tune with the seasons and the rhythms of the sun, moon, and tides. It ties us back to simple childhood observations of the moon crossing the night sky.

Esteem virtue; accept everyone.

The Festivals

The lunar calendar has seven major festivals.

Spring Festival begins with the first day of the lunar new year (which occurs during a four-week period centered around February 4) and extends over fifteen days. There are many observations and celebrations, but the central theme is family reunion.

Lantern Festival is a night for beautiful lanterns in many shapes, fireworks, and feasting. It closes the fifteen-day spring celebration.

Clear Bright Festival occurs roughly around April 4 or 5, shortly after the spring solstice, and is a day to visit the cemeteries, remember the dead, and focus on our ancestors.

Dragon Boat Festival is observed on the fifth day of the fifth moon. It features competitive rowing races to honor Qu Yuan, a patriotic poet who lived nearly 2,300 years ago.

The Double Seven Festival is held on the seventh day of the seventh moon. Sometimes called Chinese Valentine's Day, it is a day for lovers and romance.

Moon Festival occurs on the fifteenth day of the eighth moon. It is also known as the Mid-Autumn Festival, and it celebrates the time when the full moon appears largest.

Double Nine Festival is held on the ninth day of the ninth moon, celebrating the harvest, chrysanthemums, and the elderly. It's been adapted in China as Senior's Day.

Smaller festivals, birthdays, and holidays focus on Taoist gods such as the Three Pure Ones, the Gods of the Five Sacred Mountains, or the God of Literature; Buddhist figures such as Buddha, Guanyin, or Bodhidharma; and Confucian figures, including Confucius himself, the poet Qu Yuan, and the legendary emperor Fuxi. Since the lunar calendar varies, these birthdays aren't literal; rather, they are observation days. Furthermore, there are regional and sectarian variations on some of the dates of observation.

Chinese families are relaxed about the dates of these observances. They use them more as rough guides; the important thing is that family members come home, the old stories get shared, and bonds get renewed. Nobody is terribly dogmatic, every good philosophy is preserved, and basic ideas are adopted as one's own.

Esteem virtue; accept everyone.

How This Book Is Organized

Twelve lunar months, with thirty days each, make a year. Each month begins with a new moon. Since a lunar month is 29.530589 solar days, an intercalary, or leap, month added every two or three years synchronizes the lunar and solar years.

The first day of the lunar new year falls on the second new moon after the winter solstice. This day may be as early as January 21 or as late as February 20. The actual day is determined by astronomical data that vary according to one's position on the globe. The original calculations that fixed the calendar were based on the position of the stars as they were observed over the east coast of China thousands of years ago. Not only do the stars' positions appear different from different places on the globe, but the speed and orbit of the earth have changed since as well. Local calculations therefore are required each year; information about the moon for specific areas is available in newspapers or online.

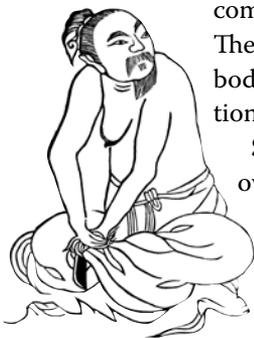
Furthermore, the meteorological aspects of the calendar may be perfectly attuned to northeast China—but they don't hold completely true for the rest of China or for any other place in the world. In subtropical southern China, for instance, it does not snow, rendering terms in the calendar like "Great Snow" symbolic. Using the lunar-solar calendar requires numerous local adjustments according to the season, longitude, and latitude of the place where we live.

While the months are calculated by the moon, dates based on the sun are also incorporated—most notably the two solstices and equinoxes, the first day of spring, and the festivals of Clear Bright and Winter Solstice. The solar year is divided into the Twenty-Four Solar Terms, consisting of fifteen days each, for a total of 360 days.

This book matches the 360 days of the lunar calendar and the 360 days of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms to show the ideal structure and to give a universal organization for coming years. However, in any given future year, these two sets may not match exactly, and minor adjustments will be necessary to tally with the true solar year of just over 365.25 days. To provide five more days to make up 365, the Five Phases that appear at the end of the book can be used as "spacer" days. Since the Five Phases are also keyed to the seasons, they are also ideal to round out the year. For greatest accuracy, map out the lunar calendar for your exact location.

Each of the Solar Terms opens with the exercise prescribed for it. These are meditative *qigong* (vitality training) exercises rather than athletic ones. The key to this training lies in the breathing instructions, in the visualization coupled with swallowing, and in how we are encouraged to sit in meditation when the exercises have been completed. It should be obvious that these exercises cannot treat serious illnesses. They are included here for cultural and historical reasons, to demonstrate the idea of bodily integration with the seasons, and to consider exercise as a prelude to meditation. They are not literal prescriptions for therapy.

Swallowing is a classic Taoist technique. First, Taoists consider saliva the body's own medicine. It's called the Jade Elixir and the allusion to the legendary elixir of immortality is wholly intentional. Second, each time we're asked to swallow, we inhale and then exhale to the *dantian*—the center of energy deep in our bellies. Not only does the breath charge this center with vitality, but the swallow opens the channel to the dantian so more qi can flow to it. This is a boon to the circulation of energy fundamental to Taoist meditation—and a bodily way to integrate ourselves with the days and seasons.



1

The First Moon

Thought on a Still Night
 Moonlight is light before my feet
 and a light beyond the ground.
 From here I can feel the night
 from here I can feel the light.
 — Bai Juyi (772–845)

The two solar terms within this month:

SPRING BEGINS	RAIN WATER
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• Fifteen-day celebration of the new year begins
 • Birthdate of the **Great Supreme Old Lord**
 • **Qian** hexagram begins annual auspices
 • **Qian** hexagram (Heaven) Day
 • Birthdate of **Madame Wu**, of the **Yellow Emperor**, the founder of the **Yellow** lineage
 • Birthdate of **Shang Yang**, the founder of the **Yellow** lineage
 • Birthdate of **Shang Yang**, the founder of the **Yellow** lineage
 • Birthdate of **Shang Yang**, the founder of the **Yellow** lineage

Twelve part-openers appear with the number and literary title of the moon, a poem, and the two solar terms within that month.

1

The Old Child

Hold the old and hold the new.
 Be the elder and be the child.

The name "Laozi" means "Old Master." The second word in the name, zi, can also mean "child." It is conventional to refer to the name literally, but there is some insight here.

Have we not on the first day of the new year? We can see that all we do as a practice as what we would want for the rest of the year.

We will learn from our experiences from years past, and we will experimentally realize that we do have to do so.

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We will learn from our experiences from years past, and we will experimentally realize that we do have to do so.

MOON 1 Day 1

Spring Begins Day 1	Lunar New Year Day 1	5
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Each one of 360 entries appears with a sidebar of source information beside a meditative essay for that day.

361

Wood

Know wood, rising force that remains constant,
 the green sprout that becomes the ancient tree.

What is the secret of wood? Wood is to know the beginning. The beginning is a seed. That is a seed without a place to be planted. Hence, the seed of heaven is important without the bed of earth. The fundamental power of wood cannot be understood without understanding that heaven and earth must combine, that power and place must unite, that there is in wood neither both yet and yet a power and care tension.

The seed does not appear without rain. The seed will burst to death unless it is kept under ground. Rain and sunlight are important to the coming plant, if the seed is exposed to sun and sunlight unseasonably it will die. It is a paradox, but the miracle can be described simply by a failure of arrangement and timing.

The ground shows the beginning power of wood. It grows upward. The seed and soil must be downward, but the tree never conditions itself with ground. Wood understands downward.

Understood, wood grows straight upward, as it is known. Heaven and earth is upright, that is its direction, content as where it comes, branching out to accept the rain and the sun, the heaven and earth, the tree needs nothing. The tree does not rise to anything but to the tree, and heaven and earth give that the tree needs to sustain itself.

Wood has grace. The tree trunk has rings. The tree's vascular is called from its fibers and cells that join together in a perfect wholeness. The trees are different size. No matter how small they grow, the essential evolution of the tree takes place in its relatively thin bark. Thus the tree is modest and efficient as how it grows.

The tree breathes in carbon dioxide and it exhales oxygen. It takes in a large amount of water, and it gives back air that helps us live. It'll allow a transformation to be and an example of how designed or we are with the lifecycle of our world.

Wood grows. Wood is rising. Wood is the humility of accepting something given of heaven and earth from one place. Wood is to breathe out the very air we breathe in. Know wood.

MOON 1 Day 1

Spring Begins Day 1	Lunar New Year Day 1	5
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The Five Phases round out the lunar year to the 365 days of the solar year. The sidebar details the many meanings related to each phase.

Exercise 1

SPRING BEGINS
 This first festival of the new year begins around February 4 and ends around February 19. It is a time of renewal and growth. The weather is mild and the days are longer. It is a time to plant seeds and to begin new projects.

The Seasonal Position of the Yellow Emperor's Spring
 The Yellow Emperor (Spring) 24th-26th Day. This is the first of the four seasonal positions of the Yellow Emperor. It is a time of renewal and growth. The weather is mild and the days are longer. It is a time to plant seeds and to begin new projects.

The Yellow Emperor on Spring
 In the first month of spring, the Yellow Emperor is in the first position. It is a time of renewal and growth. The weather is mild and the days are longer. It is a time to plant seeds and to begin new projects.

MOON 1 Day 1

Spring Begins Day 1	Lunar New Year Day 1	5
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The exercises to the Twenty-Four Solar Terms divide each month, with the Yellow Emperor's seasonal advice appearing once per season.

Spring Festival

A Family Holiday
 The Spring Festival, beginning with Lunar New Year Day, is a family holiday. It is a time of renewal and growth. The weather is mild and the days are longer. It is a time to plant seeds and to begin new projects.

Five Days of Celebration
 Traditionally, the five most detailed Spring Festival practices include the New Year's Eve dinner, the Spring Festival Gala, the Spring Festival Parade, the Spring Festival Parade, and the Spring Festival Parade.

Auspicious Actions
 In the first month of spring, the Yellow Emperor is in the first position. It is a time of renewal and growth. The weather is mild and the days are longer. It is a time to plant seeds and to begin new projects.

MOON 1 Day 1

Spring Begins Day 1	Lunar New Year Day 1	5
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Festivals, gods, and important people are highlighted in pages interspersed throughout the book.

Therefore, the overall structure of this book divides the years into moons; divides each moon into its two solar terms; gives the exercise for each solar term; and includes interspersed pages focusing on festivals, important gods, or personages, accompanied by daily meditations supported by factual examples or explanations. The sidebars and the highlight pages for festivals and biographies note sources and give possibilities for further exploration; when one is learning Taoism from a teacher, from historical to anecdotal, and from the profound to the practical with no distinction between "high" or "low" culture.

Following Those before Us

When my grandfather moved to the United States, he left a life of poverty. The house he fled had dirt floors, no indoor plumbing, and rooms so small that their four walls could nearly be touched with outstretched arms. Nevertheless, he needed great determination to face the unknown future as he embarked on a monthlong sailing over the Pacific Ocean.

He worked the rest of his life in his garment factory, but he kept up his scholarly pursuits. My grandfather kept diaries and records in beautiful calligraphy, and many of the woodcut illustrations you'll see in this book come from his collection, kept in the wooden trunk that held them when he crossed the seas. As a community, business, and religious leader, he maintained his ties to China, working in the early twentieth century to contribute to the establishment of the Nationalist government. His experience suggests the importance and possibilities of maintaining and enlarging one's beliefs even in difficult circumstances.

We can set goals each morning and we can work to achieve them. If we can reflect at night and say we've met those goals, then we have success and happiness. Each night, we return to ourselves and our path. The sequence of those days and nights forms movement. And movement means Tao.

This book is an offering to help with that process. As the moon is constant, so too are the words of those who have traveled the path before us. Let their example be an inspiration to us all.

Esteem virtue; accept everyone.

Acknowledgments

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I am grateful to Jacqueline Berkman, Xiaolin Chang, Jeanette Perez, Betty Gee, Lynn Golbetz, Shannon Kong, and Susan Riley for editorial and production work.

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Romanized Chinese

The Chinese language is based on ideographs. Each one has a single-syllable sound, but words may be combined for complex subjects. For example, the word for computer is the compound: “electric-brain-machine.” Thus, a term that may seem to be multisyllabic is always a combination of single words. The name Laozi, for example, is a combination of the words “old” and “master.” Naturally, language has evolved over thousands of years, many meanings have been added, and translation is complex.

Since the Chinese language is not alphabetic, different systems to approximate its sounds in English were established. The task was not easy. First, there are sounds in Chinese that no English sounds can duplicate. Secondly, and confusingly, there can be five different tones to any given Chinese sound, with each tone signaling a completely unrelated meaning. While there are about four thousand syllables in English, there are only about forty in Chinese, so each basic sound must have its five different tones (flat, rising, falling, falling-rising, and neutral) to gain a large enough number of words. A sound like *ma*, for example, can mean “mother,” “hemp,” “horse,” “scold,” or it can be a question-particle—all depending on the tone.

One prominent method of transliteration, established about 1867, was the Wade-Giles system, and that is where Tao spelled with a “T” originates. In 1958, the People’s Republic of China adopted a new method of romanization, known as pinyin, that became the prevailing system throughout the world. Pinyin utilizes diacritics to indicate tones for language learning and pronunciation, although these diacritics are seldom employed in publications and scholarly works. The majority of the Chinese words in this book are romanized according to pinyin.

Exceptions to Pinyin Romanization There are some exceptions to pinyin in this book when a word has entered the English language under an earlier spelling. Tao, Taoist, and Taoism are the major examples. In pinyin, Tao is properly spelled Dao (which is a better indication of its pronunciation—a hard “D” sound rather than a hard “T” sound). However, especially in search engines and popular references, “Tao” has far more recognition than “Dao.” Examples of other words left in non-pinyin spelling are *I Ching (Yijing)*, Confucius (Kong Fuzi), and Buddha (Budai).

How to Read Chinese Names Chinese names are written with the family name first. For example, Zhang Lang is from the Zhang family and his personal name is Lang. When someone has a two-word personal name, the personal name is made into a two-syllable word. For example, Zhao Gongming comes from the Zhao family and his personal name is Gong combined with Ming. A few people have compound family names, such as Sima Qian and Zhuge Liang.

Many of the gods mentioned in this book have descriptive titles. Taishan Laojun means the Great Supreme Old Lord. In these cases, the translation of the title is used with the pinyin in parentheses.

Major Sources

Many sources have been utilized in writing this book, but most of the references come from the core texts of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Their titles and alternate names can be confusing, so a brief overview of naming conventions and the names of the key texts will be helpful. All translations are original.

Naming Conventions

In order to standardize the translations of book titles, the designation *jing* is translated as “classic.” For example, the *Shijing* is translated as *Classic of History*. The word *jing* means a classic, a sacred book, scripture, or canon. Any book that has the appellation *jing* is highly revered.

A *ji* is a record. Examples are the *Record of Rites (Liji)* and the *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*.

Some books are named after their author; one might refer to an author’s name and then refer to the book title by the same name in the same paragraph. For example, Zhuangzi is both the name of the author as well as the title of the *Zhuangzi*.

In most cases, the title is given in its English equivalent, but there are three notable exceptions. The *Daodejing* and the *I Ching* are given by their Chinese titles, since they are widely known by those names. The *Zhuangzi* is also left as it is, in part because it is familiar by that name, and in part because it means no more than “Master Zhuang” and there would be nothing illuminating about referring to it in English.

Daodejing and Zhuangzi

The majority of Taoist quotations are drawn from the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*.

Daodejing The *Daodejing* (*The Classic of the Way and Virtue*; also spelled *Tao Te Ching*) is Taoism’s premier holy book. The

authorship of the book is constantly debated in scholarly circles, but tradition holds that an ancient sage named Laozi (p. xxx) wrote this book in the sixth century BCE.

The text is central to philosophical Taoism and it has strongly influenced other schools such as Legalism and Neo-Confucianism. Religious Taoists chant the text as a devotional act and they worship Laozi as the **Great Supreme Old Lord** (p. 5). Chinese Buddhism has also utilized the book, taking its terms to translate Buddhist texts brought from India. In addition, many commentators have asserted that Chan Buddhism, which is known as Zen in Japan and the West, represents a melding of Buddhism and Taoism.

The traditional text consists of eighty-one short and poetic chapters in language so variable in meaning that many simultaneous understandings are both possible and valid. The *Daodejing* is one of the most frequently translated of Chinese spiritual books.

Zhuangzi The book, dated to the fourth century BCE, has also been known as the *Nanhua Zhenjing* (*The True Classic of Nanhua*), because it’s believed that Zhuangzi came from southern China (*nan* means south). As is the case with the *Daodejing*, scholars dispute the idea that a single person wrote the entire book. The academic view is that Zhuangzi wrote the first seven chapters, called the Inner Chapters, and that others wrote the Outer Chapters. In traditional contexts, however, all parts of the *Zhuangzi* are considered important.

Where the *Daodejing* is terse, brief, and poetic, the *Zhuangzi* is largely prose, utilizing essays and fables to make its points. Zhuangzi satirizes the arguments of other philosophers with exaggerated logic that leads to absurd conclusions, and imagines dialogues between Laozi and Confucius, or between Confucius and his students. Sometimes he uses Confucius as an exemplar of wisdom, and at other times, he shows Confucius rebuked by others. He also makes use of dreams, dialogues with skulls or trees, and shows the native wisdom of fishermen or butchers to be superior to sages. Zhuangzi is the skeptical, absurdist, argumentative, and humorous counterpoint to Laozi’s mysticism.

Confucian Texts

Analects (Lunyu) A compilation of speeches and record of discussions between Confucius and his disciples. Most of the text was written by Confucius’s students thirty to fifty years after his death. The date of publication is estimated around 500 BCE.

Mengzi (Mencius) A collection of conversations between Mencius and the kings of feudal states regarding the proper philosophy of ruling.

Additional material is drawn from the canonical texts of Confucianism known as the *Five Classics (Wujing)*. All were



The *Daodejing* inscribed on a wall on Zhongnanshan.

© Photo by Peter Pynchon

supposed to have been in some way compiled, edited, or commented on by Confucius himself.

Classic of Poetry (*Shijing*) A collection of 305 poems consisting of 160 folk songs, 105 court ceremonial songs, and 40 hymns or eulogies used in sacrifices to gods or the royal family's ancestral spirits. The poems date from the tenth to seventh centuries BCE.

Classic of History (*Shujing*) Also known as the *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu*), the book is a compilation of documents and speeches written by the rulers and officials of the Zhou dynasty. The majority of the texts are thought to have originated in the sixth century BCE.

Record of Rites (*Liji*) Rites are a central component of Confucianism. They are rules governing rituals; court ceremonies; and social conduct around filial piety, ancestor worship, and funerals. The original work was reputedly edited by Confucius, but the present version is probably from about the third century BCE.

I Ching (*Classic of Changes*) The proper transliteration of this book's title is *Yijing*, but the book is better known under this older spelling. It is a book that can be used on many different levels. Based on sixty-four hexagrams—graphs consisting of six lines—the *I Ching* is a deep study of change. The core texts go back to at least the twelfth century BCE, and it has been studied as a book of divination, strategy, and philosophy ever since. Its core thesis is that all is constant change propelled from within by yin and yang.

Spring and Autumn Annals (*Chunqiu*) Also known as the *Linjing*, the book is a historical record of the state of Lu, Confucius's native feudal state. Diplomatic relations, alliances, military actions, the affairs of the ruling family, as well as natural disasters from 772–481 BCE are chronicled for both their historical and moral significance.



These are the first lines of the *I Ching*, incised into one of the Kaicheng Stone Classics (*Kaicheng Shi Jing*). The 114 massive rock slabs preserved at the Forest of Stone Steles Museum in Xi'an contain twelve Confucian classics including the *Classic of History*, the *Classic of Poetry*, and the *Analects*. The monumental "books" were carved by order of the Tang Emperor Wenzong (809–840) in 833–837 as an indisputable reference work for scholars.

Poetry

The primary source for most of the poems quoted in this book is *Three Hundred Tang Poems* (*Tangshi Sanbai Shou*), an anthology of poems from the Tang dynasty (618–907), first compiled around 1763 by Sun Zhu (1722–1778). There are actually over three hundred poems, perhaps emulating the 305 poems in the *Classic of Poetry*. Many people consider the Tang dynasty the time of China's greatest poets, with Li Bai, Du Fu, Wang Wei, Li Shangyin, Bai Juyi, Han Yu, and Meng Haoran among the most notable.

Records of the Grand Historian

The *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*) was written by Sima Qian (c. 145–90 BCE, p. 46), who is considered China's foremost ancient historian. His history covers some two thousand years from 2600–91 BCE. While modern historians may debate some of the details of the text, Sima Qian had the advantage of being closer in time to the events he was writing about.

Chan Buddhist Texts

A number of Chan (Zen) Buddhist koans (*gong'an*) are referenced in this book. All of them are drawn from two sources, the *Wumenguan* and the *Blue Cliff Records*.

Wumenguan (*The Gateless Gate*) As is the case with the *Zhuangzi*, the book is named after its writer, the Chan Buddhist master Wumen Huikai (1183–1260). Each koan recounts a dialogue or situation that reveals an understanding of Chan Buddhism. Wumen wrote a commentary and verse to each one of forty-eight cases. The name *Wumenguan* itself is ambiguous and lends itself to multiple interpretations. It can be translated as the *Gateless Gate*, the *Checkpoint With No Entrance*, the *Pass With No Door*, and many other possibilities.

Blue Cliff Records (*Biyuan Lu*) A collection of Chan Buddhist koans first compiled in 1125 by the Chan master Yuanwu Keqin (1063–1135), which he later revised and expanded.

The Twenty-Four Solar Terms

The woodcut illustrations and basic text of the exercises to the Twenty-Four Solar Terms are taken from *The Beverages of the Chinese*, by John Dudgeon, The Tientsin Press, 1895. Dudgeon (1837–1901) spent nearly forty years in China as a doctor, surgeon, translator, and medical missionary. According to editor William R. Berk, the exercises were taken from *Zunshen Ba Jian*, written by Gaolian Shenfu in 1591. Other sources name the exercises' creator as Chen Tuan, also known as Chen Xiyi (871–989), a legendary Taoist sage associated with the western sacred mountain, Huashan.

These movements are a subsection of qigong classified as *daoyin*—movements to lead energy. The instructions are modified according to contemporary training. ▀

Laozi and Zhuangzi

What is the most basic knowledge we have about **Laozi** and **Zhuangzi**, the two most influential writers in Taoism? We have two books, the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*, and we know that both are highly regarded works of spirituality and singular wisdom. In the case of Laozi, he was deified, revered by every sect of Taoism, and given attributes that reflect the concerns of the worshippers: the religious consider him one of Taoism's highest gods, the alchemists portray him as a maker of the elixir of immortality, and the philosophical consider him the source of Taoism's naturalistic and visionary philosophy. In contrast, Zhuangzi was not deified, and any mythologizing of his personality came from his own stories. Depicting Zhuangzi asleep and in the act of the Butterfly Dream has become a motif in itself, and phrases from the *Zhuangzi* have entered the culture in the form of proverbs, idioms, fiction, opera, and comic books.

It is impossible to say with certainty who Laozi and Zhuangzi really were and the dates we have for them are educated guesses. However, we can understand the stories around them, keep a working knowledge about their lives, and absorb the intent of the beliefs about them.

Laozi

Laozi literally means, "The Old Master." According to the *Records of the Grand Historian*, he was a native of Chu



(p. 150), which places him in southern China. There is no clear knowledge of his exact dates, but he is often placed about the sixth century BCE. His surname was Li, his given name was Er, and he was also called Lao Dan. Laozi served as the keeper of the royal archives for the court of Zhou until he saw the decline of the dynasty and resolved to leave it, mounting a water buffalo to ride beyond the western border. When he reached the pass in Zhongnanshan, an official named Yin Xi asked him to put his teachings into writing. The result was a book of some five thousand characters—the *Daodejing*.

The *Records of the Grand Historian* recounts a meeting between Laozi and Confucius (551–479 BCE), where Confucius asks Laozi to give instructions about the rites. Similarly, the *Record of Rites* portrays Confucius quoting Lao Dan on proper funeral rites. The *Zhuangzi* also contains stories of encounters between Laozi and Confucius, but it's impossible to tell whether these are historical or allegorical episodes.

Over the centuries, Laozi was venerated for many reasons, and the sum of all these efforts elevated him in Taoism and Chinese culture in general. The first organized Taoist religion in the second century, called the **Way of the Celestial Masters** (Tianshidao), made Laozi the personification of Tao itself. During the Tang dynasty (618–907), the imperial Li family traced its ancestry back to Laozi as Li Er. In the third–sixth century, the intellectual movement known as the **Mysterious Learning** (Xuanxue), also called Neo-Taoism, made Laozi the center of their thought. As a result, Laozi's philosophy influenced literature, calligraphy, painting, and music. In 731,



The speaking platform on Zhongnanshan, marking the place where Laozi gave his first discourse on the *Daodejing*. © Photo by Peter Pyncheon

the Tang Emperor Xuanzong (685–762) decreed that all officials should have a copy of the *Daodejing*, and he placed the book on the list of texts to be used for the civil service examinations.

The religious Taoists made Laozi one of the gods of the highest trinity, the Three Pure Ones, with the title Great Supreme Old Lord (p. 5).

The *Daodejing* was translated into Sanskrit in the seventh century. By the eighteenth century, a Latin translation was brought to England. There are some 250 translations of Laozi, with more than one hundred in English, and more being added each year.

Whether there was an actual person named Laozi is academic at this point. The figure of Laozi has become the nexus for concerns from the philosophical to the political to the religious. Merely to reduce him to normal biographical parameters is to miss much of his importance. On the other hand, the lack of solid evidence about him makes him as mysterious as his own writing—and in the end, we are left with what we started with: one of the world's greatest books of wisdom. Regardless of who Laozi may have been, it is his gift to us that truly matters.

Zhuangzi

The name Zhuangzi means "Master Zhuang." His personal name was Zhuang Zhou.

Much like Laozi, we cannot be certain of his dates, but he is usually placed in the fourth century BCE during the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE). He is believed to have come from Meng City (Meng Cheng) in what is now Anhui. Scholars dispute whether he is an actual person or whether the *Zhuangzi* is a text constructed by a group of writers. Perhaps he's fiction.

Perhaps he's simply a person following Taoist philosophy of self-effacement and modesty. Certainly, there are pseudo-autobiographical references in the *Zhuangzi* itself. The picture of a witty philosopher emerges.

People today ask, "What is it like to live as a Taoist?" Zhuangzi's sketches of himself help answer that question. Here are just a few of them:

Huizi (380–305 BCE; a philosopher and representative of the School of Names famous for ten paradoxes of the relativity of time and space) told Zhuangzi that he had been given seeds and had grown a large gourd. But then he didn't know what to do with it. When filled with water, he could not lift it. He cut it in half to make drinking vessels, but the pieces were too big and unstable. He threw the gourd away. Zhuangzi reproached him: why didn't he use the gourd to float over the rivers and lakes?

Huizi compares Zhuangzi's words to a big tree that is large, but so knotted and crooked that no carpenter can use it for straight timber. Zhuangzi retorts: "If so, why don't you plant this tree in the barren wilds? Then you could saunter idly by it or sleep under it. No axe would shorten the tree's existence. Why should uselessness cause you distress?"

Huizi asks: "Can a person be without desire?" Zhuangzi replies that this is possible. "Tao gives a person appearance and ability. Heaven gives bodily form. You subject yourself to toil. Heaven gave you the form of a person but you babble about what is strong and white."

Zhuangzi was fishing in a river when the king of Chu sent two emissaries to say: "I wish you to rule all within my territories." Zhuangzi continued fishing and without looking around said, "I have heard that in Chu there is the shell of a divine tortoise who lived three thousand years ago. The king keeps it in his ancestral temple, covered with a cloth. Tell me, was it better for the tortoise to die but be so honored? Or would it have been better for it to live, dragging its tail in the mud?"

"We suppose that it would be better for it to be dragging its tail in the mud," replied the officials.

"Go away, then," said Zhuangzi. "Let me drag my tail in the mud."

When Zhuangzi's wife died, Huizi went to express his condolences. He found Zhuangzi squatting on the ground singing, and pounding a basin like a drum. "When a wife lives with her husband, brings up his children, and dies in old age, to wail for her is not even enough expression of grief. Instead, you drum on a basin and sing. Isn't that improper and strange?"

Zhuangzi replied that he was indeed affected by the death, but then, reflected, "Before she was born, she had no life, no bodily form, and no breath. In the intermingling of the waste and dark chaos came a change. Then there was breath; another change, and then came a body; another change, and thus came birth and life.

"There is now a change again, and she is dead. The relation between phases is like the sequence of the four seasons from spring to autumn, from winter to summer. She lies with her face up, sleeping in the great chamber. If I were to fall sobbing and wailing for her, it would mean that I didn't understand what is meant for us all."

Zhuangzi dreamed that he was a butterfly, flying about, enjoying itself. He did not know he was Zhuangzi. When he awoke, he found that he was Zhuangzi. He did not know whether he had been Zhuangzi dreaming that he was a butterfly, or if he was a butterfly dreaming that he was Zhuangzi. ▀

