

The Yellow Emperor asks about Real People

A translation of the Ming dynasty *Lei Jing* (The Classics Classified) – first part of the third section of chapter one.

By Steven Clavey

THE *LEI JING* classified the *Su Wen* and *Ling Shu* by bringing related passages together, with annotations by the outstanding physician Zhang Jie-Bin (1563-1640, hao name Jing-Yue), author of the influential *Jing-Yue Quan Shu* (Complete Works of Jing-Yue), and creator of the still frequently used herbal formulas *You Gui Wan* and *Zuo Gui Wan* among many others.

The following passage is interesting because Zhang is not particularly remembered for his interest in Daoism, although he has written about the importance of the *Yi Jing* to medical understanding. Yet this section from the *Lei Jing* demonstrates an intimate knowledge of a wide range of Daoist writings, quoted because, Zhang says, “only the Daoists discuss essence, qi and spirit in sufficient detail” to understand the meaning of the selections from the *Su Wen*.

It does lead one to wonder how widespread among Chinese physicians was the interest in the Daoist arts of inner cultivation, and how inner cultivation may have enhanced their natural abilities in medicine. More and more frequently, looking into the lives of the most outstanding Chinese doctors of the past, a link to the inner practices of Daoism can be found: Tao Hong-Jing (*Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing*), Sun Si-Miao (*Qian Jin Yao Fang*),

Sun Yi-Kui (*Chi Shui Xuan Zhu*), Li Shi-Zhen (*Ben Cao Gang Mu*), and now Zhang Jie-Bin.

Let’s see what he has to say (bold quotes are *Su Wen*, italic quotes are various Daoist writings, normal text is Zhang himself):

The Yellow Emperor said: I have heard that in ancient times there were Real People, who could marshal Heaven and Earth and control yin and yang.

“Real” refers to celestial reality. No falseness, no artificiality, thus they are called Real People. Their heart is attuned to the permutations of yin and yang, which they can harmonise through their virtue (德 *dé*). Thus they circulate, create and transform, co-ordinating yin and yang; this is what is called “marshalling” and “controlling”.

Inhaling and exhaling essence and qi, standing alone, conserving the spirit, muscles and flesh as if one.

Exhaling links to heaven, and thus connects to qi. Inhaling links to earth, and thus connects to essence. Those aligned with the Dao exist as individuals, therefore they can stand alone. Their spirit does not run away outside, so it is said that they conserve the spirit. When the spirit is conserved internally and the form is complete externally, heart and body are then linked in the Dao, and thus it says that muscles and flesh are as if one.

This is also the meaning of the previous section in which we discussed the completion of the form with the spirit.

We should note that this section emphasises the three words essence, qi and spirit¹. Only the Daoists discuss each of these in sufficient detail, so I have appended cogent discussions from the early sages on this topic, to help as reference in understanding.

*Bai Le-Tian said: Wang Qiao and Chi Song inhaled the qi of yin and yang, consuming the essence of Heaven and Earth. Exhaling, they expelled the old, inhaling they bring in the new.*²

Fang Yang³ said: Those who forget the centre are only those who find sufficiency outside. Thus those good at nourishing things conserve the root, those good at nourishing life conserve the breath.

These mean that nourishment of qi should start from the breath.

Cao the True⁴ said: Spirit is essence, oh! qi is life. When the spirit no longer runs outside, the qi settles naturally.

Zhang Xu-Jing⁵ said: If the spirit goes out, bring it back; when the spirit returns to the body qi naturally comes back.

These mean that one should conserve the spirit to nourish the qi.

The Huai Nan Zi⁶ says: If you engage the spirit, it goes out; if you rest the spirit, the spirit resides.

This means quiet can nourish the spirit.

The Jin Dan Da Yao⁷ says: When qi gathers, essence fills; when essence is full qi will be vigorous.

This means that essence and qi have a mutual basis.



The Qi Bi Tu⁸ says: The trigram Kan [made up of two broken yin lines with an unbroken yang line in the middle] is water and the moon, in the body it is the Kidneys; Kidneys store essence, and within essence is a pure yang qi that can flame upwards in the upper body. The trigram Li [made up of two unbroken yang lines with a broken yin line in the middle] is fire and the sun, in the body it is the Heart; Heart stores blood, and within blood is the fluid of the true One (血中有真一之液) which flows downward to the lower body.

This describes the inter-coupling of Kan and Li [Kidneys and Heart].

Lu Dong-Bin⁹ said: Essence nourishes the root of awareness, qi nourishes the spirit; outside of this reality there is no other greater reality.

This means the way of cultivating truth is through essence, qi and spirit.

The Tai Xi Jing¹⁰ (Classic of Embryonic Breathing) says: The embryo is solidified from hidden qi, and respiration of qi occurs in the midst of the embryo. When qi enters the body it makes life, when the spirit leaves the body it makes death. Those who know the spirit and qi live long, and thus they maintain formless emptiness in order to nourish the spirit and qi. When the spirit moves the qi moves, when the spirit halts then qi halts. If one wishes to live long, spirit and qi must concentrate, the mind must not wander in out and around. Once this halting becomes natural and constant, the mind can move as it will, for this is the true path and way.

The Tai Xi Ming (Inscription on Embryonic Breathing) says: Swallow 36 times. One swallow is first, then your exhalation should be fine and thin, your inhalations should be continuous and unbroken; do this whether sitting or lying down, and your walking should also be unhurried and unworried. Beware of noise and chaos, do not eat meaty stimulating foods. While the assumed name is "foetal breathing" this is actually the inner elixir. It does not only treat disease, it absolutely lengthens your years. Perform it over and over for a long time, and you can be enrolled in the ranks of the high immortals.

This means that the path of nourishing life lies in preserving the spirit to nourish qi.

Zhang Zi-Yang¹¹ said: the Heart serves the spirit, and the spirit also serves the Heart; the eyes are the house of the spirit when it roams, but even as the spirit roams through the eyes it serves the Heart. If the Heart seeks quietude, the eyes must first be controlled. Restraining the eyes makes the spirit return to the Heart, then the Heart will be quiet and the spirit will also be quiet.

This means the spirit should be kept in the Heart, and the way to calm the Heart is in the eyes.¹²

He also says: There is an original spirit (yuan shen) and an original qi (yuan qi), could there fail to be an original essence (yuan jing)? We know that essence depends upon qi to be generated, and when essence is firm qi melts; when original essence is lost then original qi cannot be generated, and original yang cannot appear. When original spirit appears, original qi is generated, which produces original essence.

This defines original essence, original qi and original spirit as the early stages of the transformative generation of essence, qi and spirit.

How widespread among Chinese physicians was the interest in the Daoist arts of inner cultivation, and how may this have enhanced their natural abilities in medicine?

Throughout the four seasons the ten thousand things are born, grow, decline and die – and is it not all the doing of qi? The life of a person is completely dependent upon this qi.

Li Dong-Yuan's *Shěng Yán Zhēn* (*Advice on Saving Words*)¹³ says: *Qi is the ancestor of the spirit, essence is the son of qi; qi is the root and base of essence and spirit: how great it is! Accumulate qi to end up with essence, accumulate essence to complete spirit. You must be clear, you must be quiet, proceeding by means of the Dao, you can become a celestial person, those with the Dao can accomplish this. But who am I to speak of this? It is definitely better to just talk less.*

This means that the path of nourishing life is based on nourishing qi.

Now I note that all of the foregoing passages discuss the principles of essence, qi and spirit, and that the Dao of transformation and generation uses qi as the basis – heaven, earth and the ten thousand things all come from it. Thus when qi is outside heaven and earth, it envelops heaven and earth; when qi is within heaven and earth, it moves heaven and earth. The sun, moon, stars and celestial bodies are bright due to it; thunder, rain, wind and clouds all act due to it; throughout the four seasons the ten thousand things are born, grow, decline and die – and is it not all the doing of qi? The life of a person is completely dependent upon this qi.

And therefore Chapter 65 of the *Su Wen* says: **What in the heavens is qi, on earth is form; qi and form mutually resonate (相感) in order to transform and generate the ten thousand things.**

Now this “qi” means two things: pre-birth qi and post-birth qi¹⁴.

Pre-birth qi is the true primal qi, qi that is transformed from emptiness, and form is created because of qi: this qi comes from empty nothingness.

Post-birth qi is the “qi” of “qi and blood” that is transformed from grains, and qi is created because of form: this qi comes from mixing and absorbing.

Now this word “form” (形 *xíng*) really refers to “essence” (精 *jīng*), as essence is generated by the celestial one (精为天一所生) and is the ancestor of those with form¹⁵.

The Dragon and Tiger Classic¹⁶ says: *Water gives birth to the ten thousand things; only sages know this.*

Chapter 10 of the *Ling Shu* says: **When a person is just conceived, first comes essence, when essence is completed the brain and marrow are generated.**

Chapter 5 of the *Su Wen* says: *essence transforms into qi.*

Thus in pre-birth qi, qi transforms into essence, while in post-birth qi, essence transforms into qi; essence and qi are rooted in mutual generation,

and when both are sufficient, the spirit naturally flourishes.

Although the spirit is generated from essence and qi, still that which harnesses the essence and qi and masters its use is the spirit within my Heart. The three combine into one: this can be called “Dao.”

People nowadays only know to nourish life by restricting desires, not realising that when the Heart (mind) is moved by distraction, the qi follows the mind and is dispersed. Dispersed qi, not gathered, bit by bit exhausts not only qi but essence. The Buddhist sutra¹⁷ says “Cutting off evil practices is not as good as cutting off the mind. The mind is the lieutenant [in day to day charge of running affairs], if you stop the lieutenant, those that would follow will cease. If you do not stop the evil tendencies in the mind, what use is cutting off evil practices?”

This shows a deep appreciation of the importance of controlling desires, and can be very helpful for beginners¹⁸.

For detailed annotations on the inhalation and exhalation of essential qi, and maintaining the three to comprise the One, see number 41 in the section on circulating qi; for more on the idea of “treasure within qi” see number 18 in the section on treatment.

Endnotes

1. Essence, qi and spirit (or mind) – 精 *jīng*, 气 *qì*, 神 *shén*. Thomas Cleary translates these as “Vitality, Energy and Spirit” which is also viable, reserving the term “essence” for 性 *xìng* – the most basic inner nature. About the former three he has the useful comments: “Vitality, energy and spirit are envisioned as three centers of the individual and collective organism. Each centre is twofold: there is a primal or abstract noumenon, and a temporal or concrete phenomenon ... Vitality is primarily associated with creativity, temporally associated with sexuality. Energy is primarily associated with movement, heat, and power, temporally associated with breath, magnetism, and strength. Spirit is primarily associated with the essence of mind and consciousness, temporally associated with thought and reflection ... In terms of the individual body, vitality is associated with the loins, energy with the thorax, and spirit with the brain ... Vitality, energy and spirit can also be defined in terms of three bodies: vitality is the flesh-and-blood body, energy is the electrical body within the flesh-and-blood body, and spirit is the ethereal body of consciousness within the electrical body.” (excerpt from the book *Vitality Energy Spirit: a Taoist sourcebook*, Shambala, 1991, pp.ix-x).

2. Bai Le-Tian is the famous poet Bai Ju-Yi, known for his interest in Daoism and Buddhism. Wang

Qiao is a famous early Daoist credited with the creation of a series of exercises in 34 movements. Master Red Pine (Chi Song Zi) was reputedly the minister for rain under Shen Nong. Cf. "Gymnastics: the Ancient Tradition", Catherine Despeux, in *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, ed. Livia Kohn, University of Michigan, 1989.

3. A commentator on the *Zhuang Zi*.

4. Cao Guo-Jiu (曹國舅), the "imperial uncle", close relative of the emperor who left the palace to refine himself; student of Lu Dong-Bin, he became one of the eight immortals.

5. The Celestial Master Zhang Xu-Jing, a native of Jiang Xi province, was the founder of the Zheng Yi (Correct Unity) sect (正乙派) of Daoism.

6. *Huai Nan Zi* "The Masters of Huainan" an early Daoist classic, 2000 years old. The introduction to Thomas Cleary's collection of extracts from the it, *The Book of Leadership and Strategy*, says "The book of the masters of Huainan is a record of sayings on civilization, culture, and government. More detailed and explicit than either of its great forerunners, Lao-Tzu's *Tao-te Ching*, and the *Chuang-tzu*, it embraces the full range of natural, social, and spiritual sciences encompassed in classical Taoism."

7. "The Great Essentials of the Gold Elixir", fully titled *Shang Yang Zi Jin Dan Da Yao*, as it was composed in the southern Song dynasty by Shang Yang Zi. An important Daoist work on inner alchemy.

8. The *Da Huan Dan Qi Bi Tu* (Engraved Secret Illustrations of the Great Cyclically Transformed Elixir), found in Chapter 72 of the *Yun Ji Qi Qian* (Cloudy Bookcase with Seven Labels), a major Daoist anthology compiled by Zhang Jun-Fang around 1025. Cf. *The Taoist Canon: a historical companion to the Daozang*, vol. 2, Schipper and Verellen, University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp. 943-945.

9. Lu Yan, Lu Dong-Bin, also called Lu Zu or "Ancestor Lu", who lived in the Tang dynasty, was the founder of the hugely influential Complete Reality (Quan Zhen) school of Daoism. Cf. T. Cleary's *Vitality, Energy, Spirit* which has a section dedicated to his sayings.

10. Referring to the *Tai Xi Jing Zhu* (Commentary on the Classic of Embryonic Breathing) by Huanzhen Xiansheng. Jing-Yue's next quote is from the *Tai Xi Ming* (Inscription on Embryonic Breathing) which is the conclusion to the Classic. Both are found in the Daoist Canon. Cf. *The Taoist Canon: a historical companion to the Daozang*, vol. 1, pp. 366-367.

11. i.e. Zhang Bo-Duan, the founder of the southern branch of the Complete Reality (Quan Zhen) school in the 11th century. See his *Wu Zhen Pian*, translated by Thomas Cleary as *Understanding Reality*, and his *Jin Dan Si Bai Zi*, translated by Cleary as *The Inner Teachings of Taoism*.

12. "... the way to calm the Heart/mind is in the eyes" means that you can calm the mind by deciding consciously both what you will look at, and how you look at it. The effects of this choice (and

choosing to remain out of control is still a choice) can be far-reaching. For example, research in the US showed that one can get fat just by looking at food. When food is looked at longingly, the lower processes of the body have no way to tell whether the conscious mind will decide to finally eat the food or not: its job is to prepare. It does this by pulling sugar out of the blood, and putting it into fat.

13. The second to last section in his *Pi Wei Lun* (Treatise on the Spleen and Stomach).

14. *Xian tian*, *hou tian*, earlier heaven, later heaven, constitutional and acquired. The reasons for translating as pre-birth and post-birth will become clear from the passage.

15. Essence as form is a concept discussed thoroughly in a passage in Zhang's *Jing Yue Quan Shu*, but is also referred to in endnote 1 above when Cleary says "vitality is the flesh-and-blood body."

16. The *Long Hu Jing*. See Eva Wong's *Harmonizing Yin and Yang: a manual of Taoist Yoga*.

17. The passage is from the *Sutra of 42 Sections*, one of the earliest sutras translated into Chinese, around the year 67 AD, by the Indian monk whose Chinese name was Chu Fa-Lan.

18. It is "helpful for beginners" because it makes the point that trying to oppose desires that have already a firm root in the mind can be extremely difficult. The best way is to not allow the idea to sprout at all, giving it no ground suitable to grow, so that it never gains a foothold. Interestingly, JRR Tolkien seems to have been quite familiar with this concept, as in the *Lord of the Rings* he illustrates it perfectly in the contrast between the two brothers Boromir and Faramir. Boromir entertains the idea of possessing the Ring and its power, and ultimately finds it impossible to resist. Faramir, on the other hand, is quite different: "Alas for Boromir, it was too sore a trial ... But you are less judges of men than I of Halflings. We are truth-speakers, we men of Gondor. We boast seldom, and then perform, or die in the attempt. *Not if I found it on the highway would I take it* I said. Even if I were such a man as to desire this thing, and even though I knew not exactly what this thing was when I spoke, still I should take those words as a vow, and be held by them. But I am not such a man. Or I am wise enough to know that there are some perils from which a man must flee." Soon after this, Sam says: "Good night, Captain, my lord. You took the chance sir." "Did I so?" said Faramir. "Yes, sir, and showed your quality: the very highest." Faramir smiled. "A pert servant, Master Samwise. But nay: the praise of the praiseworthy is above all rewards. Yet there is nought in this to praise. **I had no lure or desire to do other than I have done.**" This, of course, refers only to the books; but it does illustrate how much depth and subtlety was stripped out by the changes in the screenplay for the Jackson movies.

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