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Daoist Methods of Dissolving the Heart-Mind

Michael Winn

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

177 Daoist Methods of Dissolving the Heart-Mind MICHAEL WINN “I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the Great Thoroughfare.” —Zhuangzi 6 In the Daoist tradition, there are medical, martial, and spiritual approaches to dealing with imbalances arising in the heart-mind (xin). The Chinese notion of heart-mind is roughly equivalent to what new age Westerners call the “body-mind”, implying an integrated continuum between the two. This is opposed to purely psychological mainstream Western notions of mind, ego or personality which tend to separate thinking and feeling functions of mind from what are considered automatic body-sensory perceptions. Broadly speaking, these methods have in common that they involve a process of “dissolving” resistance to change in the heart-mind. This commonality of “dissolving” is matched by a great divergence as to how far the dissolving process goes, and the degree of personal will or sagely intention that is cultivated in order to shape the qi-field afterwards or even while imbalances in the heart-mind are being dissolved. I offer a quick survey of some Daoist approaches to the heart-mind

that have become popular in the West. These include standing and moving qigong (subtle breath skill); neigong (inner mind skill) meditation techniques such as the Inner Smile and zuowang (sitting and forgetting); and neidan gong (elixir skill) inner alchemy methods. What does it mean to dissolve the heart-mind, and why would Daoists even want to do that? The simplest answer is that the heart-mind has become rigid or dysfunctional in some way, and this obstructs the free flow of qi within the individual. In the medical model of dissolving the stuck patterns using acupuncture, herbs, or massage, the qi can flow 178 / Journal of Daoist Studies 2 (2009) more easily, improving both mental and physical health. In the martial model, repeated training of the heart-mind using movement supports the qi to be expressed more powerfully in relation to others. In the spiritual model, excess fixity of the heart-mind may obstruct the unfolding of one's spiritual essence or moral power (de). Heart-mind rigidity prevents exchange of qi between the individual as microcosm and the collective macrocosm of Nature and Humanity. Zhuangzi advocates getting rid of the "mind of everyday life" (sheng zhi xin) in order to fly on the wings of the Dao. So dissolving the heart-mind allows spontaneous change to happen between the individual and the environment. The dissolving process is a spiritual prerequisite to cultivating a wuwei attitude of openness that promotes effortless change, a fundamental value of Daoists. In qigong (including taiji quan and other internal arts), body movement and breath lead the process. Moving qigong is the most comfortable for Westerners, as its dynamic approach satisfies their need to "do" something with their mind at the same time their bodily energies are being productively directed. As a teacher, I have found qigong movement and breathing practices to be the quickest and most effective way to tame the "monkey mind", i.e., any mind that is easily distracted or fragmented. People who claim they are unable to meditate find themselves moving spontaneously into a space of tranquility and stillness after practicing qigong. In most moving qigong there is no direct focus or intention to dissolve the heart-mind, it just happens after the mind achieves a deep entrainment with body movement and regulated breathing. The resultant benefits to both physical health and psychological health have been well documented in thousands of scientific studies. Standing forms of qigong are more challenging, as the mind is forced to wait in stillness and give up its impatience to physically move, while it is simultaneously challenged by gravity. What happens eventually is the qi within the vertically aligned body begins to create micro-movements between the poles of Heaven and Earth. This produces an energetic detoxifying effect that gradually intensifies and breaks up old heart-mind patterns. Standing still also allows the ordinary mind to observe and release tension within the layers...

Daoist Methods of Dissolving the Heart-Mind

MICHAEL WINN

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— *Zhuangzi* 6

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Broadly speaking, these methods have in common that they involve a process of "dissolving" resistance to change in the heart-mind. This commonality of "dissolving" is matched by a great divergence as to how far the dissolving process goes, and the degree of personal will or sagely intention that is cultivated in order to shape the *qi*-field afterwards or even while imbalances in the heart-mind are being dissolved. I offer a quick survey of some Daoist approaches to the heart-mind that have become popular in the West. These include standing and moving *qigong* (subtle breath skill); *neigong* (inner mind skill) meditation techniques such as the Inner Smile and *zuowang* (sitting and forgetting); and *neidan gong* (elixir skill) inner alchemy methods.

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