

Shang-qing Taoist Enlightenment

A Look Inside the Most Mystical Lineage of Taoism

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History of Shang-qing

The Chinese term Tao translates as "The Way." This Chinese character is a combination of two ideas meaning "walk and head." It is an esoteric term that refers to the source of all life, movement, existence and nonexistence. According to Daniel Reid, he describes the Tao as a "singular source" of both impermanent, relative and ultimate reality (Reid, 1994, p. 15-17). It is immaterial, not really personalized, but an alive, intelligent and creative force that exists as a primordial, foundation of the universe. To live in accord with the Tao, one might say, would be to "walk" in the way that life moves us correctly, without obstruction.

The "father" of Taoism is credited to be the renowned Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu, during the eighth to the third centuries BCE. However, there were many great sages then such as Confucius and Sun Tzu. The foremost publication is called the *Tao-Te-Ching* or the "Way of Non-Action," a compilation by these philosophers (Wang, 1997, p.3). Taoism was practiced and taught primarily to nobility from the Wu region. In the third century BCE, there was a daughter of a Taoist Priest called Lady Wei Huats'un, who founded a school called Shang-ch'ing, known as *High Pure* or Highest Clarity. This school practiced a ritualized, deity influenced, shamanic version of Taoism mysticism. Shang-qing offers highly developed techniques of working with life force energy or *Qi*, and "transforming the mind and body from within" (Wang, 1997, p.4).

How Shang-qing is Practiced

The indestructible Tao within is called *The One*, this provides life sustaining, vial energy. This is also called the seed of immortality or "the shining pearl of primordial awareness" (Reid, 1994, p. 291). Shang-qing practitioners believed in a pantheon of unseen deity spirits called *Shen* as well as malevolent spirits (Wang, 1997, p. 54). They would make protective, magical amulets depicting "guardian deities" called talismans. They would visualize and evoke wisdom of past ancestors and benevolent spirits. These deities were believed to exist externally and even inhabit the human body and are referred to as *The Three Ones*. Within us, there are three principal Shens that guard the "spiritual, vital and generative" life force energy (Wang, 1997, p.49-56).

There are in addition, five internal spirits that correspond the major organs of the heart, liver, spleen, kidneys and lungs. These spirits protect each organ and when flourishing, will emanate a bright color. Personal vitality would be increased in the body's power center called the *tan-tien*. A Shang-qing practitioner would visualize the deity associated with that organ to help to strengthen it, and practice breathing and silent meditation. These practices would also help to ward off any malevolent forces residing in the body cavities and thus increase health. When energy flows well through all organs and pathways, the *shining pearl* becomes nourished and the practitioner becomes profoundly spiritually adept (Wang, 1997, p.49-56).

Deities also exist in the natural external world, including the sun, moon and stars (Wang, 1997, p.57). A powerful technique for an accomplished student is to "*absorb energy from nature*." According to renowned *Qi-Gong* master, (Qi-Gong is energy exercise using breathing and movement) (Reid, 1994, p. 4) Eva Wong, one would lay directly on the earth, gaze at the sun or moon, or breathe in mountain mist to ground replenish oneself (Wang, 1997, p.220-222). The

sun is said to replenish one's Yang or active, creative energy, and the moon, Yin, or receptive, grounded energy (Wang, 1997, p.57). There are many more detailed, subtle and secret methods of practicing Shang-qing, under the strict guidance of a master.

Mind, Body and Spiritual Benefits

Connecting more with your body and nature will undoubtedly increase health and wellness. Some the tenants of Shang-qing like belief in deities or spirits are difficult for westerners. We can rather see these as imbalances or blockages. Most all of us have weaknesses or an excess or deficiency of either yin or yang energy. Practices such as sitting in nature, breathing, feeling open are invaluable tools, and do not belong to any one tradition. This defines the Tao, the way of being alive which is conducive to health and human spiritual evolution.

Incorporating Into my Life

Shang-qing encourages us to spend more time in nature. I have excess yang and was told by my acupuncturist to lie down on the earth and have my belly touch the ground. I do know that when I sit in the sun or go hiking, I feel more energized, wholesome, and open hearted. I practice Buddhist meditation and might try to combine both by practicing outdoors. Buddhism uses protective amulets, and I'm wearing one right now to protect from any obstacles. We also believe in unseen beings who have previously attained enlightenment, who's power you can evoke through visualization practice. Personally, knowing that there are methods that purport to result in the attainment of complete enlightenment intrigues me. Why not strive for the most accomplished human evolutionary process, the Highest Clarity?

Personal Transformation to Enlightenment

The fruition of these Shang-qing practices would be to fully nurture this *seed of immortality*.

According to Eva Wang:

"The body will become light; it will float up to the sky to join the sun, moon and stars in the High Pure Realm" (Wang, 1997, p.57).

Literally, the body ascends, leaving no physical remnants. The ascension is of course a foundation of Christianity as well. In Tantric Buddhism, there is also a term called Rainbow Body, where the five physical elements transmute through the secret meditative practices, into "the five lights." The body then develops an immaterial, angelic body whose sole purpose is to act for the welfare of other beings (Norbu, 2012).

Summary

Shang-qing offers potent, ancient methods of increasing life force energy. There are no scientifically verifiable accounts of anyone attaining this final enlightenment, but these elaborate practices have tremendous value in increasing health, both mentally and physically. Seeing ourselves as a connected part of a living universe, the Tao, can help us to evolve into the healthiest and best being we can become. No human boon can compare to the possibility of attaining full, complete enlightenment, where one's body becomes an inextricable part of the perfect, creative and compassionate light of the universal elements.

References

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