

SPIRITUAL ALCHEMY FOR WOMEN

In the science of essence and life, men and women are the same—there is no discrimination. In sum, what is important is perfect sincerity and profound singlemindedness. An ancient document says, “Only perfect sincerity in the world is capable of ruling.” A classic says, “The perfection of singlemindedness is that whereby one may heed the order of life.”

In general, what is most essential at the beginning of this study is self-refinement. Self-refinement is a matter of mind and breathing resting on each other. This means that the mind rests on the breathing and the breathing rests on the mind.

What is most important in this is harmony. Harmony is in balance, balance is in harmony. Are they one or two? The union of balance and harmony is called the go-between.

With the harmonious attunement of the go-between, there is natural mutual love between mind and breathing; there is mutual attraction, mutual inspiration, mutual expiration. Continuing uninterrupted, do not forget, yet do not force.

Lao-tzu said, “The singleminded energy is most supple, able to be like an infant.” This is the perfection of true harmony.

The Master of the Jade Moon, a spiritual alchemist, said, “When husband and wife meet in old age, their feelings are naturally affectionate.”

A classic says, “Tie them into one whole, mix them in one place, make them into one piece, force them in one furnace.”

The same classic also says, “Cow and bull go along with each other, sun and moon are in the same place; positive and negative charges merge, metal and fire commingle.”

The reality behind all of these sayings is spirit and energy being together, which means mind and breathing being together.

Spirit is essence, energy is life. This is what is meant by the classic saying, “The root of essence is rooted in mind; the stem of life stems from breathing.”

It is necessary to know that creative evolution only takes place when spirit and energy are joined into one. The joining of the two into one is the reversion of the two modes—yin and yang—back into one totality.

This is called the twin cultivation of essence and life.

The twin cultivation of essence and life is a matter of keeping the mind and breathing together, not letting them separate even for a moment.

Therefore an ancient alchemist said that “firing the medicine to produce the elixir” means driving energy by spirit, thereby attaining the Tao.

In daily practice it is essential to embrace the breathing steadily with the mind and embrace the mind steadily with the breathing. When you have done this for a time, once you reach even balance you naturally become very stable and concentrated. You plunge into a profound trance where there is no sky and no earth, where you forget about everything, including your own body.

This stage is the experience referred to by the classic saying, “Knowing the white, keep the black, and illumination of spirit will come of itself.” You seem to feel body and mind revitalized and supple, with unusual buoyancy and well-being.

One alchemist said that in this state you are like someone without the power of speech eating honey, unable to tell of its sweetness.

Another alchemist said, “Almost imperceptible, the first transformation of yin and yang—heaven and earth, full of living energy, suddenly revolve. Therein is a bit of fine scenery—how can this work be put into words?”

This time is what is known as “the one primordial energy coming from the void of space.”

As one alchemist said, “The winter solstice is midnight, where you find the celestial mind has no change, where creative energy first stirs, before myriad things are born.”

This is what is referred to in alchemical texts as Living Midnight.

One alchemist said of this, “Gather energy quickly when winter comes.”

Another said, “Gathering means gathering without trying to gather, which means splitting open the primordial indefinite.”

This “splitting open the primordial indefinite” refers to the time of ultimate emptiness and perfect quietude. To empty oneself to the ultimate extent and preserve quietude to perfection is known as returning to *Earth*, the spiritually receptive mode.

Earth the receptive is associated with the southwest: It is known as “the region where the medicine is produced,” “the land of primordial nondifferentiation,” and “the opening of the Mysterious Female.”

An alchemist called Seeker of the Fundamental said, “If you want to look for the primordial seed of realization, you must seek out undifferentiated wholeness to set up the foundation.”

Understanding Reality, the classic of spiritual alchemy, says, “If you want to attain the immortality of the open spirit, you must set the foundation on the Mysterious Female. Once the foundation is set up, the open spirit does not die. Then how can the person die?”

The aforementioned self-refinement, setting up the foundation, and gathering the great primal medicine are all the same for men and women. Therefore it is said, “The great Way does not make a distinction between men and women; yin and yang, in their various combinations, are all the same.” After this I’ll talk more about temporal difference.

In his *Secret of Feminine Alchemy*, Liu I-ming says, "There is a true secret about starting practice. The operation is as different for men and women as sky from sea. The principle for men is refinement of energy, the expedient for women is refinement of the body."

Men begin practice with the attention in the lower abdomen, just below the navel. Women start work with the attention between the breasts.

Immortal Sister Zhang, one of the great Taoist women, was initiated long ago by Lu Yan, one of the ancestors of spiritual alchemy. Lu told her, "After midnight and before noon, settle the breathing and sit. As the energy passes through the mid-spine and on through the brain, gaining the power of energy, contemplate the self."

Lu also said, "You must find the ancestor of your own house. Thunder in the earth rumbles, setting in motion rain on the mountain. Wait until washing, and the yellow sprouts emerge from earth. Grab the golden essence of vitality and lock it up tightly. Fire metal and wood to produce the dragon and tiger."

In general, it is necessary to refine oneself thoroughly before one will have autonomy. Also one must take the positive energy of heaven and earth day after day, and concentrate to clear the mind hour after hour, before the effects of the practice will be experienced. It may take one or two months, or perhaps three or four months. The length of time depends only on the depth of one's work.

While carrying out the work it may happen that women feel there is energy in the opening between the breasts that thrusts out, divides and goes into the breasts, right through to the nipples, which then erect. This is what alchemical classics call the living midnight when the medicine is produced.

One alchemist said, "Suddenly at midnight there is a peal of thunder, and ten thousand doors, a thousand gates, open one after another. If you perceive that there is form within

nothingness, I will admit you have seen the original human being in person.”

When the work reaches this point, the hundred energy channels in the body are in harmony, while their critical apertures, the passes where energy can accumulate, are all opened. In truth, each pulse fills the chest, all is spring.

Now to explain Lu Yan's initiatory statements to Immortal Sister Zhang. “After midnight and before noon” refers to the fact that the midnight hour is best for finding reality. People who practice quiet sitting usually do it late at night or early in the morning.

To “settle the breathing” means to tune the breath so that it is even. In “sitting,” two people sit with unified attention placed between them. With mutual concentration, pure attention is embraced. With pure attention in the center, a unified energy flows, thus pressing tightly on the midspine, and going on through the brain.

This is what is referred to as the reversal of the Yellow River, meaning the opening of the spinal energy channel.

“Gaining energy, contemplate the self.” The “self” here is a metaphor for pure positive energy, and the self has been refined into an incorruptible immortal of absolute unity. This is what alchemical classics refer to as absolute unity containing true energy.

“Find the ancestor of your own house” means seeking out the very beginning of the living body receiving energy, finding the primordial point of original generative energy.

“Thunder in the earth rumbles, setting in motion rain on the mountain.” This is the same as the saying, “The white clouds pay court to the palace on high, ambrosia pours on the polar mountain.”

“Wait until washing, and the yellow sprouts emerge from earth.” Waiting means waiting for the right time, washing means washing the mind and refining oneself. This is what is meant by the alchemical term “perfumed steaming.” As for

“yellow sprouts,” yellow is the color of earth, sprouts are the life potential. Emerging from earth means that the experience is like when myriad things grow in spring, and the whole earth is renewed.

At this time the positive energy goes all the way to heaven, in the form of a fiercely blazing fire, resembling flaming wind. Quickly gather it up and send it into the central chamber, in the center of the torso. This is why Lu Yan said, “Grab the golden essence and lock it up tightly.”

Another alchemist said, “Hold the golden essence fast, draw it carefully on, send it into the field of elixir.”

As for “Fire metal and wood to produce the dragon and tiger,” this refers to the perfection of the sense and essence of consciousness, the first sprouting of the Tao.

To sum up, it is just a matter of having people draw their attention to the inner sense of the real mind, carrying the work through the natural cycle. The dragon and tiger mean the ascent and descent of bipolar energy.

If you work diligently, as one alchemist said, “When that one point of energy returns of itself and sinks into the body, it turns into year-round spring. A bit of white cloud brings a waft of fragrance; each time the rain passes, all is refreshed. Unconscious like a drunkard all day long, free and at ease, just keep ‘the spring within the hollow.’ When the essence of negativity throughout the body has been stripped away, it turns into a mass of pure positive gold.”

The work after this is the same for women as for men. Overall, in the secrets of the spiritual alchemy for women, these words alone should be the quickest route. Lu Yan did not hoard his celestial treasure, but divulged it all at once. It is a pity that people do not recognize it.

Yet it should be realized that expressions such as “below the navel” and “between the breasts” are both representational. Do not look for them as having physical form.

WU CAILUAN

According to Taoist lore, Wu Cailuan was the daughter of Wu Meng, himself a distinguished Taoist adept and civil administrator of the late third and early fourth centuries. She studied at a special center for feminine alchemy, and there attained the Way. Secular writings, however, place her in the ninth century; according to Taoist lore, she was “banished” to the ordinary world in the ninth century, to become the wife of a certain impoverished scholar. She supported her husband financially by selling copies she made of a reference work on poetry. After ten years of doing this, she became somewhat well known in her locality. Later she and her husband moved to another region, and eventually disappeared together into the mountains.

POEMS BY WU CAILUAN

I.

My mind is like a jade jar of ice,
Never invaded by even half a mote of dust.
Though the jade jar be obscured without,
I pay no mind at all—
On the terrace of Immortals,
I climb straight to the highest level.

Notes

Here jade and ice are symbols of purity. Dust is a symbol of material sense objects.

2.

Favor and disgrace are meaningless—
 What's the use of contending?
 Drifting clouds do not obstruct the shining moonlight.
 Let the ox and horse be called,
 To both I can respond—
 But how could I let a speck of dust
 Into the city of mind?

Notes

Drifting clouds are Confucian metaphors for status and wealth, Buddhist metaphors for delusion. The moonlight symbolizes the clear cool light of enlightened awareness. The ox and horse are the ox-head and horse-face wardens of the underworld that reward good and punish evil.

3.

My body lives in the city,
 But my essence dwells in the mountains.
 The affairs of a puppet play
 Are not to be taken too seriously.
 When the polar mountain fits into a mustard seed,
 All the words in the universe may as well be erased.

Notes

It is said that the great recluse lives in the city, while the lesser recluse lives in the mountain, emblematic of the idea that true transcendence does not depend on favorable external conditions. Mundane behaviors are described as affairs of a puppet play insofar as they are controlled by conditioning rather than by autonomous individual decisions. The image of the immense polar mountain fitting in a mustard seed comes from Buddhism, and represents the attainment of mental freedom through experiential realization of universal relativity.