

## Text Six

### Heavenly Seclusion<sup>1</sup>

The path to spirit immortality is rooted in long life. The key to long life is to make nurturing *qi* a priority. Now, *qi* is received from Heaven and Earth, then harmonized by yin and yang. Yin and yang spirit and emptiness—this is the [nature of the] mind. The aspects of the mind that rule sleeping and waking during night and day are the spirit and material souls. Set up like this, people's body-self is never far from the path to immortality.<sup>2</sup>

I do not know where the Master of Heavenly Seclusion came from. He wrote this treatise in eight sections to encompass the secret and the wondrous. Things found here cannot be attained through study alone.

Now, [the methods of] cultivating and refining the form-body to pure *qi*, nourishing and harmonizing the mind to emptiness, in their “return to the root” [DDJ 16] go back to Boyang [i.e., Laozi], while their “bestowing inner radiance” is found with Zhuangzi. “Long life and eternal vision” [DDJ 59] also begin with these works.

I have practiced the techniques of Dao myself. Now I feel compassion for the people of the world. They often die prematurely and do not live to perfect longevity. Therefore I decided to transmit the teaching to fellow adepts of long life.

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<sup>1</sup> This translates the *Tianyinzi* (Master of Heavenly Seclusion, DZ 1026). The text has been popular since its inception and appears, with minimal variants, in many collections, including the *Daozang jiyao* (dat. 1577; Weiji 7.27a-40b), *Ersbi jia zishu* (dat. 1578), *Baizi quanshu* (dat. 1875), *Yimen guangdu* (dat. 1940), and *Qigong yangsheng congshu* (dat. 1990; #19). The main variants used in the annotation come from the *Daoshu* (abbr. “DS”) and *Congshu jicheng* (abbr. “CS”), ch. 573.

<sup>2</sup> This first paragraph seems to be a later addition. Song bibliographies have the text start with the next section.

I have simplified it so that it can be practiced and referred to easily. From Boy-ang to the Master of Heavenly Seclusion, there has only been this teaching.

Respectfully submitted

## 1. Spirit Immortality

When a human being is born, he or she is naturally endowed with the *qi* of emptiness [DS: numinosity]. Essence and intellect are pervasive and awake, learning has no obstructions: this is what we call “spirit.” Settle the spirit within and let its radiance shine without, so that you naturally become different from ordinary people: this is what we call a spirit immortal. Therefore even a spirit immortal is still a human being.

Just focus on cultivating the *qi* of emptiness and never get involved in worldly discussions and analyses. Follow your self in spontaneity and never let wayward views obstruct your path. Thus you reach success.

NOTE: Joy, anger, sadness, happiness, love, hate, and desires—these seven are [natural] emotional tendencies turned wayward. Wind, damp, cold, heat, hunger, satiation, labor, and idleness—these eight are *qi* turned wayward. Rid yourself of these manifestations of waywardness and reach immortality!<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Simplicity

The *Yijing* says: “The way of Heaven and Earth is simple” [*Xici* I.1]. What does this mean?

The Master of Heavenly Seclusion says: “Heaven and Earth are above my head and beneath my feet. When I open my eyes I can see them. I can speak of them without complex devices. Thus I say: consummate simplicity is the inherent potency of immortality.” [CS: Thus I speak of simplicity. Simplicity is an expression for spirit immortality.]

NOTE: The Scripture says: “Utmost Dao is not complex, the perfect man does not act” [cf. ZZ 58/22/18].

What path should one use to seek this?

He says: “Without seeking you cannot know; without a path you cannot attain. All students of spirit immortality must first attain simplicity. Teachings that are

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<sup>3</sup> This paragraph appears as a note in DZ 1026, but has been integrated into the main text frequently. The seven emotions are first described in the “Liyun” chapter of the *Liji*. It has “fear” instead of “happiness.”

intricate, artful, and attractive only lead people astray. They do not lead to “return to the root.” They can never be my teaching.”

NOTE: Some people in the world study immortality but are only deluded by it. Some study breathing but are only made sick by it.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Gradual Progress Toward the Gate of Dao

The *Yijing* has a hexagram called *Jian*, “Progressive Advance” [no. 56]. Laozi speaks of the “Gate of all Wonders” [DDJ 1]. When working to cultivate perfection and master inner nature, do not expect sudden awakening. Rather, progress gradually and calmly practice. Thus you enter the gates of gradual progress: [CS: As I enter them through insight, Dao becomes visible.]:<sup>5</sup>

- |                                   |                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Fasting and abstention.        | 2. Seclusion.           |
| 3. Visualization and imagination. | 4. Sitting in oblivion. |
| 5. Spirit liberation.             |                         |

What does fasting and abstention mean? It means cleansing the body-self and emptying the mind.<sup>6</sup>

What does seclusion mean? It means withdrawing deep into the oratory.

What does visualization and imagination mean? It means holding in the mind<sup>7</sup> and recovering inner nature.

What does sitting in oblivion mean? It means letting go of the form-body and completely forgetting the “I” [ZZ 6].

What does spirit liberation mean? It means the myriad concrete manifestations [dharmas] are pervaded by spirit.<sup>8</sup>

Practice according to these five gates of gradual progress and complete step one, then gradually move on to step two. Complete step two, then gradually move on to step three. Complete step three, then gradually move on to step

<sup>4</sup> The *Daoshu* includes this in the text and reverses the order of the two statements.

<sup>5</sup> The *Daoshu* summarizes this paragraph in one sentence and includes the following explanations in later sections (2.4b).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the statement on “keeping the mind empty” in *Daode jing* 3 and Zhuangzi’s “fasting of the mind” (ch. 4).

<sup>7</sup> This contains a reference to section 3 of the *Zuowang lun*.

<sup>8</sup> The *Zhuangzi* has: “Knowledge is pervaded by spirit” (29/12/14), and “Make yourself one with Great Pervasion” (19/6/92). Buddhists speak of “spirit pervasion” as the state of the deep and transcendent *samadhi* of the Buddha. He then emits a bright light and possess supernatural powers. See *Yuanjue jing* (T. 17.913a) and *Weimo jing* (T. 14.539a).

four. Complete step four, then gradually move on to step five. Thus you succeed at spirit immortality!

#### 4. Fasting and Abstention<sup>9</sup>

Fasting and abstention not only mean to live on vegetables and mushrooms. Cleansing the body is not just bathing to remove the dirt. Rather, the method is to regulate food intake so that it is perfectly balanced, to massage the body so that it glows in health.

All people are endowed with the *qi* of the five phases.<sup>10</sup> They live on things that consist of them. From the time they enter the womb people breathe in and out; blood and essence circulate in their bodies. How could one stop eating and yet pursue long life?

Ordinary people do not understand that abstaining from grains and absorbing *qi* are only temporary measures of Daoists. These things do not mean that we completely abstain from all food forever. We speak of fasting and abstention from food, yes. But we refer to the purification of nourishment and the moderation of intake.<sup>11</sup> If one is hungry one eats—but never to satiation.<sup>12</sup> Thus we establish a balanced diet.

Don't eat anything not well cooked! Don't eat dishes with the five flavors in excess! Don't eat anything fermented or conserved! These are our basic abstentions.

Massage your skin with your hands so that it becomes moist and hot! This drives out cold *qi* and makes the body radiate with a glow.

Refrain from long sitting, long standing, long exhaustive labor! All these are basic abstentions.<sup>13</sup> They serve to balance and regulate the body. If the body is strong, *qi* is whole.

Thus fasting and abstention are the first gate to Dao.

<sup>9</sup> *Zhaijie*, lit. “purification and precepts.” In the middle ages, this indicated days of retreat which involved fasting (see Kohn 2010, 99). Here it refers to dietary practices.

<sup>10</sup> *Zuowang lun* 11ab. See also *Huangdi neijing suwen* as cited in YQ 14.13b.

<sup>11</sup> The *Daoshu* shortens this and defines fasting as “purification” and abstention as “regulation.” For Daoist diets, see Lévi 1983; Arthur 2006; Kohn 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Cunshen lianqi ming* 1b.

<sup>13</sup> See Kohn 2008b, 71. This follows the *Daoshu* (2.5a). The DZ edition leaves out “no” (*wu* 勿) before every item. The same abstentions appear in Sima's *Fuqi jingyi lun* (YQ 57.19b; see Engelhardt 1987) with reference to the *Huangdi neijing suwen* (23.10b). Already the *Zhuangzi* contains warnings against physical exertion (see Robinet 1983, 79).

## 5. Seclusion

What is meant by seclusion?<sup>14</sup> It has nothing to do with living in ornate halls, in cavernous buildings, on double matting and thick carpeting. It means sitting with one's face to the south, sleeping with one's head to the east, complying in everything with the harmonious rhythm of yin and yang.<sup>15</sup>

Light and darkness should be in balance. The room should not be too high. If it is too high, yang is predominant and there will be too much light. The room should not be too low. If it is too low, yin is predominant and there will be too much darkness.

The reason for this precaution is that, when there is too much light, the material souls will be harmed. When there is too much darkness, spirit souls will suffer. People's spirit souls are yang, their material souls are yin. Harm them with light and darkness, and they will get sick.

When things are arranged in the proper balanced way, we have a chamber of seclusion. Still, don't forget how various the *qi* of Heaven and Earth can be. There may, for example, be violent [CS: primordial] yang that attacks the flesh. Or there may be a lascivious yin that overpowers the body. Be wary and guard against these! During the progressive advance of cultivation and nourishment there is no proper seclusion unless these instructions are carried out.

The Master of Heavenly Seclusion says: "The room I live in has windows on all four sides. When wind arises I close them; as soon as the wind has died down I open them again.<sup>16</sup> In front of my meditation seat a curtain is suspended; behind it a screen has been placed. When it is too light I draw the curtain to adjust the brightness inside. When it gets too dark I roll the curtain up again to let light in from outside.

"On the inside I calm my mind, on the outside I calm my eyes. Mind and eyes must be both completely at peace. If either light or darkness prevails, there are too many thoughts, too many desires. How could I ever calm myself inside and out?" Thus in studying Dao, seclusion marks the second step.

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<sup>14</sup>The term for "seclusion" (*anchu* 安處) goes back as far as the *Shijing*. It also occurs in the "Xinshu" 心術 (Arts of the Mind) chapter of the *Guanzi* and in Buddhist literature. The *Yuanjue jing*, for example, mentions it in the context of a progressive system as the step to be taken after "meticulous observation of the precepts" (T. 17.914b).

<sup>15</sup>The *Daoshu* here has: "The place where one lives must be completely in accord with the harmonious rhythm of yin and yang" (2.5a).

<sup>16</sup>Closing and opening doors to match yin and yang is already mentioned in *Xizi* I.11.

## 6. Visualization and Imagination

Visualization means to visualize my spirit. Imagination means imaging my body-self.<sup>17</sup> [DS: How to do this?] Closing the eyes and one can see one's own eyes. Collecting the mind one can see one's own mind. Mind and eyes never separate from my body-self and never harming my spirit: this is the gradual practice of visualization and imagination.

Ordinary people, to the end of their days, direct their eyes only toward others. Thus their minds wander outside and for their whole life is concerned only with outer affairs. Thus the eyes also continue looking at things outside.<sup>18</sup> Brightly sparkling they float around everywhere and never reflect back on themselves. How can people not become sick from this and end up dying prematurely?

Therefore “return to the root means stillness, and stillness means to recover destiny” [DDJ 16]. To recover destiny and be true to inner nature is called “the gate of all wonders” [DDJ 1]. Thus, with the step of visualization and imagination one is halfway to succeeding in one's study of Dao.

## 7. Sitting in Oblivion

Sitting in oblivion is attained after learning visualization and imagination. It also means the forgetting all about visualization and imagination.

Acting in Dao and not seeing oneself act—isn't that the meaning of sitting? Seeing something and not acting on it—isn't that the meaning of oblivion?

Why do we speak of not acting? Because the mind remains free from agitation. Why do we speak of not seeing? Because the body-form is completely obliterated.<sup>19</sup>

[DS: Someone asks: “If the mind is not agitated, does it have Dao then?” {CS: How do you attain the non-agitated state of mind?} The Master of Heavenly Seclusion remains silent and does not answer. Another asks: “If the body is obliterated, does it have Dao then?” {CS: How do you attain the obliteration of the body?}]

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<sup>17</sup> “Imagination” means the deliberate creation of images on the basis of actual experience. It stands in opposition to “fantasy” which refers to images largely devoid of reality. A similar usage of these terms is found in the psychology of Carl Jung.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the interaction of mind and eyes, see below in the translation of Wu Yun's treatise “On Mind and Eyes.”

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Zuowang lun* 4b.

The Master of Heavenly Seclusion closes his eyes and does not look.

At some point, he wakes to Dao and withdraws, saying: “Dao is really in me. What person is this ‘me’? What person actually is this Master of Heavenly Seclusion?”

Thus, self and other both forgotten, nothing is left to radiate forth.

## 8. Spirit Liberation

Step one, fasting and abstention, is called liberation through faith.<sup>20</sup> NOTE: Without faith, the mind cannot be liberated.

Step two, seclusion, is called liberation through withdrawal. NOTE: Without withdrawal, the mind cannot be liberated.

Step three, visualization and imagination, is called liberation through insight. NOTE: Without insight, the mind cannot be liberated.

Step four, sitting in oblivion, is called liberation through stability. NOTE: Without stability, the mind cannot be liberated.<sup>21</sup>

When the four gates of faith, withdrawal, insight, and stability have been pervaded by spirit, then we speak of spirit liberation. By “spirit” we mean that which “arrives without moving and is swift without hurrying” [ZZ 26/11/17]; what transforms along with yin and yang and is “as old as Heaven and Earth” [DDJ 7].

When the three forces of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity [*Yijing*, “Shuogua” 1] are combined, changes occur. NOTE: The *Xici* says: “When the changes come to an end, there is transformation. Where there is transformation, there is pervasion. Where there is pervasion, there is continuity” [II.2].

When the myriad “things are equalized” [ZZ 2], then Dao and inherent potency are active. NOTE: This refers to Laozi’s *Daojing* and *Dejing*.

When the underlying inner nature of all is attained, there is perfect suchness.<sup>22</sup> NOTE: The *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, and the *Nirvāna Sūtra* of Sakya-muni all deal with “the underlying inner nature.”

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<sup>20</sup> “Liberation through faith” (*xinjie* 信解) translates the Sanskrit *adhimukti* (Soothill and Hudous 1937, 288).

<sup>21</sup> The order of the various kinds of liberation is different in the *Daoshu*: 1. faith; 2. absorption; 3. stillness; 4. insight (2.6a).

<sup>22</sup> This translates *bhūtataṭhata*, the eternal unchanging reality behind all phenomena (Soothill and Hudous 1937, 332).

[CS: Enter into suchness and return to nonaction. NOTE: The *Yuanjue jing* says: “Whether there is the threefold embodiment of the Buddha in action or in nonaction or the metamorphosis body of the Buddha which cannot fall back into mundane destiny, all is the one original nature” {T.17.921b}.]

The Master of Heavenly Seclusion says: “I am born with the changes; I will die with the changes. I move with the myriad things; I rest with the myriad things” [ZZ 34/13/14; 40/15/10]. Waywardness comes from the underlying inner nature; perfection comes from the underlying inner nature.<sup>23</sup> For this reason, life and death, movement and rest, waywardness and perfection: through spirit I am liberated from them all.

“Among human beings, I am called an immortal. In heaven, I am a celestial immortal. On earth, I am an earth immortal. [CS: In water I am a water immortal.] Thus the path to spirit immortality consists of these five progressive gates, leading to a single goal. NOTE: Meaning that through all five one ultimately returns to immortality.

### Postface: Oral Instructions<sup>24</sup>

I recited the text *Tianyinzi* and after three years I had gained some vague understanding. Subsequently I used the five gates it outlines and very gradually approached the practice. After another three years, I awakened to the peace of body-form and mind and realized the insipidity of fame and profit. After yet another three years, the Master appeared to me and gave me the following oral instructions.

The central part of my teaching, he said, is the section on visualization and imagination. It deals with the return to the root, with recovering life and fulfilling one’s inner nature in all its subtleties. The fundamental root of the human being grows from the elixir field. When one returns to this one can live long. Thus I say: Return to the root and recover destiny [DDJ 16]. The numinous consciousness of humanity is grounded in rational nature. When inner nature is pervaded by spirit, it is subtle and there will be no obstruction in dealing with the myriad things. Thus I say: Perfect nature in all its subtleties.

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<sup>23</sup> Dao as the one original nature of the cosmos which underlies all existence is an important concept in Tang Daoism. The expression used is *daoxing* 道性, a direct take on the Buddhist *foxing* 佛性, “buddha-nature.” See Kamata 1966.

<sup>24</sup> As found in Tao Zongyi’s 陶宗義 *Shuofu* 說郛 (Theory Land, ch. 75), Hu Wenhuan’s 胡文煥 *Gezhi congshu* 格致叢書 (Integrated Research Collection) of the late Ming (1.5), and *Baizi quanshu* 百子全書 (Complete Writings of the Hundred Masters) of 1875 (“Daojia”).



Breathing is activated by *qi*, so I provide instructions to expel the old and draw in the new [breath]. Saliva arises from the kidneys, so I teach to rinse the mouth and swallow the saliva. Thoughts and ideas stir in the mind and consciousness, so I instruct to practice visualization and imagination. The defensive *qi*, the blood, and the channels in the human body all turn toward the outside when one is awake and focus inside during sleep. In both waking and sleeping, inside and outside should nurture each other in harmony.

With harmony established, practice daily between midnight and noon [during the time of living *qi*]. Lie down flat on your back and stretch your arms and legs. Next, rise to undertake healing exercises, breathing strongly but steadily. Tap the front teeth together quietly, then click the molars to produce a loud sound. With both hands massage your face to the eyes, until the body feels warm and glowing.

Next, sit upright with legs folded under. With your tongue stimulate the Flowering Pond, then rise when saliva arises in the mouth. Silently count the times of rinsing and once in 300 swallow the saliva. Swallow only after you have inhaled fully and do not exhale before you have completed the swallowing. Practicing like this, the inhaled *qi* reaches the lower elixir field together with the saliva. Also, practice only between midnight and noon when all food is well digested and the mind is empty. Rinse and swallow without interruption—it does not matter how many times altogether. Just stop when you feel it is enough. Five saps of this practice count as one cycle.

Next, light incense in your oratory. Visualize and imagine your body from head to foot, then again up from the feet to the [upper] elixir field, moving along the spinal column and into the Niwan [Palace in the head]. After this, turn again to rinsing the mouth and swallowing the saliva.

Also, cover your ears with the palms of your hands until you hear a drumming sound inside the head. After three sets of seven, stretch both legs, stand up, and bend forward. Stretch the neck, gripping it tightly with both hands. Then place your hands on your hips and raise your shoulders in alternation. Hold the breath. Stop when the *qi* is full and your face is red. Repeat this seven times. Pay close attention to make sure the *qi* enters all the way into the Niwan. This concludes the general outline of the practice.

There are, however, more essential and subtler practices which more carefully align and synchronize the practice with the *qi* of Heaven and Earth. For this you must be able to recognize when the *qi* comes and clearly feel when it stops. This way you can be in harmony with Heaven and Earth, eventually attaining the same age. This is spirit immortality.

The practice ideally begins at midnight on the day of the winter solstice. This is when yang *qi* first arises. Regardless of whether it is early or late, make sure you

can feel the arising of *qi* within yourself. One when you clearly feel that it has arrived can you begin circulating it within, always remaining fully aligned with the *qi* of Heaven and Earth. The next day again you wait for the *qi* to arrive, then work along with it. This is the subtlest and most essential method of spirit immortality. Only few can practice it.

For 360 days circulate your *qi* in harmony with the perfect *qi* [of the cosmos]. Having done this three times over [for three years], you will feel clarity and harmony within. It will feel quite different from ordinary life. How much more so when you continue with the practice for even longer periods! Growing in subtle alignment, the way of spirit immortality is no longer hard to attain.

Recorded by Sima Chengzhen.