

Developing Clarity and Stillness: The Scripture for Daily Internal Practice

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The present article is a discussion and translation of the *Taishang laojun nei riyong miaojing* (Wondrous Scripture for Daily Internal Practice of the Great High Lord Lao; DZ 645). Abbreviated as *Nei riyong jing* (Scripture for Daily Internal Practice), this scripture (*jing*) is a Song dynasty (Northern: 960-1127; Southern: 1127-1279) text that emerged through the coupling of internal alchemy (*neidan*) and the earlier tradition of clarity and stillness.

This scripture is a latter continuation and development of a group of Tang-dynasty (618-907) works that could be labeled “Clarity-and-Stillness literature.” The most well known and influential of these is the *Taishang laojun shuo chang qingjing miaojing* (Wondrous Scripture on Constant Clarity and Stillness as Spoken by the Great High Lord Lao; DZ 620), usually abbreviated as *Qingjing jing* (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness). In addition to the *Scripture on Clarity and Stillness*, the other Clarity-and-Stillness texts include the following: *Qingjing xinjing* (Heart Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 1169), *Wuchu jing* (Scripture on the Five Pantries; DZ 763), *Liaoxin jing* (Scripture on Perfecting the Heart-mind; DZ 642), *Xuwu benqi jing* (Scripture on the Origin and Arisal of Emptiness and Non-being; DZ 1438), and *Xuanzhu xinjing zhu* (Annotations to the Mysterious Pearl and Mind Mirror; DZ 574, 575). The Clarity-and-Stillness family of texts also relates to other Tang-dynasty works focusing on meditative practice and attaining the Dao such as the *Neiguan jing* (Scripture on Inner Observation; DZ 641), *Zuowang lun* (Discourse on Sitting-in-Forgetfulness; DZ 1036), *Dingguan jing* (Scripture on Concentration and Observation; DZ 400), *Cunshen lianqi ming* (Inscription on Preserving Spirit and Refining Qi; DZ 834), and *Tianyinzi* ([Book of] Master Heavenly Seclusion; DZ 1026).

The *Scripture for Daily Internal Practice* is a Daoist text of unknown authorship, but probably was composed during the Southern Song period (1127-1279). As the name suggests, there is another associated text - the *Taishang laojun wai riyong miaojing* (Wondrous Scripture for External Daily Practice of the Great High Lord Lao; DZ 646). The former discusses meditation, while the latter emphasizes ethical practice. A scarcity of historical sources on the *Scripture for Internal Daily Practice*, as well as its relative obscurity in the later Daoist tradition, makes the original context of its composition difficult to ascertain. What is clear is that the scripture embodies the cross-pollination of the Tang-dynasty (618-906) Clarity-and-Stillness literature and the internal alchemy traditions of the Song dynasty.

With regards to the Clarity-and-Stillness literature, the most representative and well-known work is the *Scripture on Clarity and Stillness*. This text emerged under the influence of Buddhist insight meditation (*vipaiyanā*) and expresses a form of wisdom (*zhi*) based on the practice of observation (*guan*). Composed of verses in four and five character combinations, it combines the worldview of the *Daode jing* (Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power) with the practice of Daoist observation and the structure (as well as some content) of the Buddhist *Panruo xinjing* (Heart Sutra of Perfect Wisdom; T. 250-57). Similarly, the *Scripture for Daily Internal Practice* also employs the format of verses in four and five character combinations (380 characters in total).

As the *Scripture for Daily Internal Practice* contains much of the worldview and practice of the *Scripture on Clarity and Stillness*, a thorough understanding of that text is required. The *Scripture on Clarity and Stillness* gives short verses that emphasize the need to eliminate

ordinary, habituated perception and to develop clarity and stillness - the foundation for “realizing the Dao” (*dedao*). The text first describes aspects or manifestations of the Dao as divisible into yin and yang, turbidity and clarity, as well as stillness and movement. Emphasis is also placed on the tendency of the heart-mind (*xin*) to generate desires, attachments, and entanglements. The condition of being in desire and attachment is described in terms of poison, for this leads to dissipation of qi, confusion of heart-mind (the seat of emotional and intellectual activity), and instability of spirit. The scripture in turn recommends the practice of observation as foundational: the adept must observe both external and internal worlds, including the self and heart-mind. This meditative observation results in the realization that everything is empty of self-identity. Completing this, one practices the observation of emptiness (*guankong*), culminating in a state of complete clarity and stillness or oneness with the Dao. This is the ontological condition of “constant clarity” (*changqing*) and “constant stillness” (*changjing*). One enters the Dao (*rudao*), awakening to the reality that this is one’s original nature (*benxing*), one’s original suchness (*ziran*). The *Scripture on Clarity and Stillness* concludes with an admonition for further practice, for attentive and sustained cultivation: “As for the Dao of perfect constancy,/One who awakens to it will naturally realize it./Realizing and awakening to the Dao,/You will have constancy in clarity and stillness.”

Another influence on the *Scripture for Daily Internal Practice* is the tradition(s) of internal alchemy. As internal alchemy developed in the Song, it came to be discussed, retrospectively, in terms of the so-called “Northern Lineage” (Beizong) and “Southern Lineage” (Nanzong), an obvious borrowing from the sectarian divisions of Chan (Zen) Buddhism. The Northern Lineage refers to the Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) movement, founded by Wang Chongyang (1113-1170), while the Southern Lineage refers to a textual tradition revolving around “five patriarchs.” These include Liu Cao (Liu Haichan; fl. 1031); Zhang Boduan (d. 1082?), author of the *Wuzhen pian* (Chapters on Awakening to Perfection; DZ 1017, j. 26-30);

Shi Tai (d. 1158); Xue Shi (d. 1191); and Chen Nan (d. 1213). The well-known Bai Yuchan (1194-ca. 1227) was a disciple of Chen Nan. Both of these internal alchemy lineages owe a great deal to the slightly earlier textual tradition known as the “Zhong-Lü tradition,” referring to Zhongli Quan (2nd century C.E.?) and Lü Dongbin (b. 798?). The *Zhong-Lü chuandao ji* (Anthology of the Transmission of the Dao from Zhong to Lü; DZ 263, j. 14-16) is representative of the latter.

Modifying the earlier tradition of operative alchemy (*waidan*), the internal alchemy lineages emphasized interior forms of meditation and the Tang practice of observation (*guan*). Internal alchemy practice frequently involves two related processes. The first is the dual cultivation of innate nature (*xing*) and life-destiny (*ming*). In terms of “Daoist etymology,” the character for innate nature symbolizes the heart-mind with which one was born, while the character for life-destiny depicts the two kidneys viewed from the back. In one interpretation, innate nature refers to mind or consciousness, and thus to related meditation practices; life-destiny refers to physical vitality and longevity, and thus to related “nourishing life” (*yangsheng*) practices. One is advised to maintain a balanced cultivation regimen through the use of both movement (*dong*), physical discipline, and stillness (*jing*), mental discipline. Closely associated with this is the process of alchemical transformation, which centers on the Three Treasures (*sanbao*), namely *jing*, qi, and *shen*. The first, preliminary stage in internal alchemy practice involves establishing the foundations (*zhuji*). Adepts seek to replenish vital essence and qi through specific stretching and qi circulation practices. Internal alchemy practice proper is a threefold process: (1) refining vital essence and transmuting it into qi (*lianjing huaqi*); (2) refining qi and transmuting it into spirit (*lianqi huashen*); and (3) refining spirit and returning to emptiness (*lianshen huanxu*). As the various psychophysiological aspects are combined, an “immortal embryo” (*xiantai*) is formed. What exactly this means depends on the specific alchemy tradition and the individual practitioner. But returning to emptiness is returning to the Dao.

While the *Scripture for Daily Internal Practice* provides direct statements about meditation practice, it also contains some technical terminology that deserves mention. First, I have translated *cunshen* as “preserve your spirit,” suggesting something like consciousness in a more cosmic sense. Such a translation captures the meaning in terms of internal alchemy. However, this phrase could also be translated as “visualize the spirits,” recalling earlier Shangqing (Highest Clarity) visualization practices. It seems likely that each rendering is possible in different sections of the scripture. For consistency’s sake, I have maintained “preserve your spirit” or “preserve spirit” throughout.



A Daoist in sitting meditation

In addition, clarity (*qing*) and stillness (*jing*) are often used as paired cultivation terminology. Through the cultivation of stillness, clarity increases; through the cultivation of clarity, stillness increases. The two are inseparable. Moving through a process of relaxation, stillness occurs. As one becomes more relaxed, stillness deepens and expands. The deepening and expansion of stillness eventually becomes stabilized. This stabilization or concentration is the unshakable root of practice. According to the *Scripture for Daily Internal Practice*, “The numinous tower of the heart-mind emptied of all things:/This is called clarity./Not allowing even a single thought to arise:/This is called stillness.”

We also find references to the “twelve double-hours of the day” (*shier shichen*). These are as

follows: *zi* (11pm-1am), *chou* (1am-3am), *yin* (3am-5am), *mao* (5am-7am), *chen* (7am-9am), *si* (9am-11am), *wu* (11am-1pm), *wei* (1pm-3pm), *shen* (3pm-5pm), *you* (5pm-7pm), *xu* (7pm-9pm), and *hai* (9pm-11pm). Daoist practice frequently employs time-specific cultivation regimens. Thus, many internal alchemy texts note that the hour of *zi* (11pm-1am) is an important meditation time. The text also speaks of “sweet dew” (*ganjin*), a reference to salvia produced during Daoist cultivation and one of the key elements in the alchemical process. Here mention is made of the perfect qi (*zhenqi*), sometimes referred to as “true qi.” Perfect qi is the final stage in the process of refinement and transformation of qi and is the qi that circulates in the meridians and nourishes the orbs. The *Scripture for Daily Internal Practice* also describes the process of gathering and storing qi in the elixir field (*dantian*) in terms of two metaphors: “like a child cherished in the womb” (*nanzi huaiyun*) and “like a hen incubating an egg” (*ji baoluan*). The adept must guard and nourish the storehouses of qi.

In this context, the scripture also advises one to “observe the inner regions” (*guan neijing*); one must become familiar with the microcosm, the inner world, of the human body. This Daoist view of the body as cosmos and landscape is emphasized when the *Scripture for Daily Internal Practice* urges the adept to “support the country and pacify the people” (*dangguo anmin*), an allusion to chapter 10 of the *Daode jing*. From at least as early as the second-century C.E. Heshang gong (Old Master by the River) commentary on the *Daode jing*, entitled the *Daode zhenjing zhu* (Commentary on the Perfect Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power; DZ 682), Daoists have read various references to the “country” and the “people” as relating to the body and its constituents. The *Scripture for Daily Internal Practice* continues this commentarial tradition. Additional echoes of the *Daode jing* appear throughout this scripture, from descriptions of the Daoist adept in terms of subtle (*wei*), empty (*xu*), nonexistent (*wu*), and wondrous (*miao*), to the famous line on the Dao from chapter 1, “mysterious and again more mysterious” (*xuan zhi you xuan*).

Finally, the adept is advised to nourish and

protect the Seven Treasures (*qibao*), namely essence, blood, qi, marrow, the brain, the kidneys, and the heart. This is a modification of the “seven treasures” of Buddhism: silver, gold, lapis lazuli, crystal, agate, rubies, and cornelian, substances that receive a variety of symbolic interpretations in the Buddhist tradition. The *Scripture for Daily Internal Practice* suggests that the Daoist adept should consider and reflect on the various ways that the Seven Treasures are dispersed. These aspects of human being are not simply substances or organs; it is also important to recognize the related associations, specifically

the Five Phase correspondences. For instance, becoming overly engaged in listening may be detrimental to the kidneys and dissipate vital essence. Excessive emotional and intellectual activity may injure the heart, thus leading to instability of spirit. One should in turn adopt lifeways and practices that preserve and nourish the Seven Treasures.

The *Scripture for Daily Internal Practice* has not been translated to date. For a brief discussion of the text see Livia Kohn’s *God of the Dao*.

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Wondrous Scripture for Daily Internal Practice of the Great High Lord Lao

Now, as for your daily practice,
Keep your eating and drinking regulated;
Restrain your speaking and meditate alone.
Do not allow even a single thought to arise.
The ten thousand affairs are all forgotten.

Then preserve your spirit and stabilize your intent.
The mouth and lips are mutually locked up;
The teeth should be lightly touching.
Your eyes do not see a single thing;
Your ears do not hear a single sound.
Unified, the heart-mind is guarded within.

Continually harmonize your breathing.
Subtle, still more subtle, make a light exhale.
It is as if the breath exists, as if it does not exist.
Nothing is allowed to separate or interrupt.

Then the fire of the heart naturally descends;
The water of the kidneys naturally ascends.
Inside your mouth, the sweet dew arises of itself.
The numinous Perfected support your body
And you spontaneously know the path to long life.

During the twelve double-hours of the day,
Constantly seek clarity and stillness.
The numinous tower of the heart emptied of all things:
This is called clarity.
Not allowing even a single thought to arise:
This is called stillness.

The body is the dwelling place of qi.
The heart is the residence of spirit.
When intent moves, spirit is agitated;
When spirit is agitated, qi is dispersed.

When intent is stable, spirit remains settled;
When spirit remains settled, qi gathers.
The perfect qi of the Five Phases
Then gathers together and forms a pinch of elixir.

Then naturally in the body a sound can be heard.
Walking and standing, sitting and lying down,
One constantly practices awareness.
In the body, it is as if there is the movement of wind.
In the belly, it is as if there is the sound of thunder.

Infusing and harmonizing qi fully,
A rich liquid pours into the top of the head.
When you drink from this pinch of elixir,
Your ears begin to hear the tunes of the immortals.
These are the sounds of the stringless melodies
Sounding spontaneously without any strumming,
Reverberating naturally without any drumming.

Spirit and qi then combine together
Like a child being cherished in the womb.
If you can observe the inner regions,
Spirit naturally begins to communicate.
This is the residence of emptiness and nonbeing,
The place where you can reside with the sages.

If you refine the combination through nine
revolutions,
You will bind and complete the great cinnabar elixir.
Spirit then spontaneously enters and leaves.
Your years will match those of heaven and earth;
Your radiance will join with that of the sun and moon.
Then you will cast off arising and passing away.

Each day that you cease to practice this,
Surely there will be injury and disease.
So, during all the twelve double-hours of the day,
Constantly seek clarity and stillness.

Qi is the mother of spirit;
Spirit is the child of qi.
Like a hen incubating an egg,
Preserve spirit and nourish qi.
Then, you will never be separated from the Wondrous.

Mysterious and again more mysterious;
In the human body, there are Seven Treasures.
Use them to support the country and pacify the people.
Then your essence, qi, and blood will be abundant.

Essence is quicksilver;
Blood is yellow gold;
Qi is beautiful jade;
Marrow is quartz;
The brain is numinous sand;
The kidneys are jade rings;
And the heart is a glittering gem.

These are the Seven Treasures—
Keep them firmly in your body, never letting them
disperse.
Refine them into the great medicine of life.
Then with all of the ten thousand spirits,
You will ascend to the immortal realms.

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