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Introduction

Mental Health in Daoism and Modern Science

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There are many conceptual and practical overlaps between Daoism and modern science. The world of Dao and its material energy qi closely matches that of quantum physics. Body and mind are increasingly seen in terms of energetic networks and flowing patterns of interaction, matching the organ and meridian system of traditional China. Specifically Daoist body centers and activation methods, moreover, find their scientific matches in behavioral kinesiology and modern ways of working with the universal energy that pervades the body and all life.

Mental health in Daoism means the complete alignment of mind and spirit with the flow of Dao 道, the underlying, creative power of the universe that—if left to its own devices—manages everything to perfection. Part of the greater universe, mental health within the individual is a dimension of bodymind energetics, attained through the perfect balancing of the dynamic vibrations of a vital energy known as *qi*. *Qi* 氣 is the material aspect of Dao, the subtle matter-cum-energy that makes beings appear in physical form and come to life. Working with a model of dynamic processes—expressed in terms of yin-yang and the five phases—rather than of solid, stable entities, the Daoist understanding of mental health goes far beyond its Western counterpart, which tends to see it primarily as the ability to function consciously and competently in the world. In this respect, it is much like “health” in Chinese medicine: the integrated balance of physical well-being, personal happiness, good fortune, and harmony, it is much more than the mere absence of physical symptoms.

Daoists see body and mind along the same continuum of *qi* and tend to work with one through the other, yet they make a clear distinction between them. In addition, they also distinguish body and mind on the cosmic and personal levels—the pure body-form and spirit human beings receive from Dao versus the personalized body-self and mind they create through reactions to sensory stimuli and social adaptation. Much of Daoist practice, then, leads to a

recovery of the original connection to Dao in the purer dimensions of the bodymind. It is an unlearning of personality structures, a reprogramming of interaction patterns into modes of greater harmony and enhanced purity. The practice, moreover, works closely with energy centers and pathways within the bodymind—the inner organs and meridians at the core of Chinese medicine as well as specific locations of cosmic power and divinity. Also, it does not stop with rectifying obvious dysfunctions, but goes beyond the attainment of mental balance toward a sense of at-oneness with creation and the transcendence of immortality.

However alien the Daoist vision may seem, in recent years many of its aspects have begun to play a role in modern science and psychotherapy—usually without any direct influence from the Chinese tradition. Thus, the world of quantum physics replicates much of the vibrational understanding of the universe described in terms of Dao and *qi*; energy medicine sees the body as a tensegrity system of multiple yet completely integrated energetic forces and finds repeated validation for things like prayer and the laying-on of hands; energy psychology makes use of internal energy systems from various cultures, including Chinese organs and meridians, and reports great success with tapping and subtle suggestion techniques; behavioral kinesiology makes use of energetic forces and networks as well as bodymind techniques that closely reflect Daoist models; and, last but not least, the integrated personality restructuring system of Core Health uses visualizations and suggestions along the lines of the Inner Smile meditation together with a vision of living life in complete harmony and inner peace.

In all these respects, as well as in many others outlined in this book, Daoism can contribute deeper dimensions of understanding mind, body, and universe while providing enhanced methods and systems of practice based on thousands of years of experience and experiment.

The World of Dao

Daoists see human beings as an integral part of nature and the greater universe, which functions in perfect harmony and is fundamentally good. Created in a series of transformations without a radical break from the pure, formless Dao, the universe manifests itself in a wondrous combination of manifold forces that ideally work together to constitute a cosmos of perfect goodness.

The goodness of the cosmos is all-pervasive and part of the inherent make-up of human beings. However, it is not necessarily a moral goodness that can be expressed in sets of rules and enforced by laws and other restraints. The goodness of the cosmos goes beyond human morality because it is cosmic and natural, and both cosmos and nature are cruel and unjust at times; they do not have a set of values that can be defined or to which they can be held. As the

Daode jing 道德經 (Book of the Dao and Its Potency) says: “Heaven and Earth are ruthless; they treat the myriad things like straw dogs”—the universe is not ethically good and treats all things as though they were without inherent value. The cosmos thus functions naturally in its own way, without guidelines, standards, and values, to the highest possible good of all (Kohn 2004, 13).

The natural goodness of the cosmos, which is present everywhere all the time, is intuited by human beings as a sense of well-being and inner harmony which they feel deep within and activate spontaneously, without thinking. To reach it with their limited sensory and intellectual faculties, they resort to conscious patterns, organizational models, rules and regulations. Mental and social structures thus form a secondary part of the cosmic harmony which Daoists embody; they ideally increase the overall potency of life. Nevertheless, perfected Daoists try to see and go beyond these structures, transcending the patterns of organized society in a spontaneous sense of cosmic oneness.

Both these aspects of Daoist living are authentic—perfect (*zhen* 真) in the sense of matching cosmic flow: they are true to the organizational manifestation of Dao in the world as well as to its inherent suchness as creative power. They reflect the dual nature of Dao, as already the *Daode jing* says: “The Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao” (ch. 1). This distinguishes an eternal aspect of Dao that is ineffable and beyond sensory perception from visible and tangible patterns that manifest in the rhythmic changes and natural processes of the world.

The first, the eternal Dao at the center of creation, forms the ground and inherent power of human beings and the world, yet it is entirely beyond ordinary perception. Vague and obscure, it is beyond all knowing and analysis; we cannot grasp it however hard we try. The human body, senses, and intellect are not equipped to deal with it. The only way a person can ever get in touch with it is by forgetting and transcending ordinary human faculties, by becoming subtler, finer, and more potent, more like the Dao itself.

Dao at the periphery, on the other hand, is characterized as the give and take of various pairs of complementary opposites, as the natural ebb and flow of things as they rise and fall, come and go, grow and decline, emerge and die. Things always move in one direction or the other: up or down, toward lightness or heaviness, brightness or darkness. Nature is a continuous flow, described in terms of yin and yang as the alternation of complementary characteristics and directions that cannot exist without each other. This becoming can be rhythmic and circular, or it can move back toward the source of life in the ineffable Dao, which at the same time is a forward movement toward a new level of cosmic oneness (Kohn 2005, 9-10).

The connection of Dao to world, moreover, is expressed in terms of a vital energy known as *qi*. *Qi* is bioenergetic potency that causes things to live, grow, develop, and decline. People as much as the planet are originally equipped with prenatal or primordial *qi* that connects them to the greater uni-

verse (Dao at the center), but they also work with postnatal or interactive *qi*—through breath and food as well as sexual and emotional exchanges—which can enhance or diminish their primordial energy (Dao at the periphery).

Qi is a dynamic, vacillating energy that flows constantly, either properly (*zheng* 正) or in a wayward manner (*xie* 邪), usually described in terms of excess or deficiency. The quality of flow, rather than the quantity of energy, determines health and happiness, thus leading to a definition of mental health in terms of energetic smoothness, inner harmony, and an intuitive connection to Dao.

Modern Physics

In terms of science, the Daoist vision has much in common with modern physics whose chaos theory describes the world in terms of unceasing processes of movement, change, and transformation that yet come together in a well-functioning natural control system, marked by a fair degree of unpredictability and offering a constant chance of new possibilities and discoveries. The inherent processes of the world, moreover, are described in terms of quantum fields that, unlike gravity or magnetism, carry neither matter nor energy.

Quantum physics states that the subatomic world is in no way like the world we inhabit. Energy is not continuous, but instead comes in small units: quanta, the energy that electrons absorb or emit when changing energy levels; and gluons, the forces that hold atoms together. The most basic subatomic particles behave like both particles and waves, and many of these particles form pairs like yin and yang, where one cannot exist without the other. The movement, moreover, of these particles is inherently random. It is impossible to know both the exact momentum and location of a particle at the same time—in fact, there is an inverse relationship in that the more information one has about the former, the less is known about the latter, and vice versa (see <http://phys.educ.ksu.edu>).

Quantum physics has shown that matter is made up of vibrating energy and fields which change rapidly—trillions of times in one second. Atoms are largely empty and consist of a tiny nucleus that is ten thousand times smaller than the rest of the particle—99,999 parts being emptiness. Body and mind consist of the same vibrating atoms that are constantly oscillating, arising and dissolving: all empty, no solidity, no firmness. As a result, reality consists less of the combination of solid entities than of an interlocking web of fields that each pulsate at their own rate. These interlocking fields of vibration—described in Daoism as patterns of *qi*-flow—can come into harmony with each other and mutually support and increase their amplitude. But they can also interfere with each other and create disturbance. Since all fields are ultimately interlocked, even a small disturbance in any one of them carries into all the others. This

holds true not only for the body, but also integrates the mind into a vibrational bodymind totality. Just as bodily transformations are of unlimited possibilities, so the mind is ultimately non-local: it can be anywhere and exchange information with anything instantaneously (see www.newscientist.com/hottopics/quantum).

Another way to understand this vibrational pattern of energy fields is through sound. Sound can appear as random acoustic disturbances, such as voices, body, hand, or air movements, or again in rhythmic patterns as a note, a single acoustic frequency (Bentov 1977, 23). An experiment known both to the ancient Chinese and modern physicists is the harmony created among two string instruments. If you pluck the string of one lute, the matching string on a lute sitting next to it will begin to vibrate. Similarly, if you apply the violin bow to sheet metal with sand, you get a distinctive pattern of standing waves or nodal points that form both active and quiescent areas. These show the pattern of *qi* in the universe, the alteration between up and down, activity and rest.

Smooth *qi*-flow is thus essentially entrainment or vibrational harmony among different objects or parts of the same entity. Various modes are possible. Superimpose two sounds of identical wave pattern: hill matches hill, valley matches valley, and the amplitude of the original wave pattern doubles. This is constructive interference or the productive pattern of *qi*-interaction, leading to proper flow. Superimpose two sounds of opposite wave pattern: the exact opposite happens, they cancel each other out and the wave vanishes into a straight line. This is disruptive interference, the creation of disharmony and a destructive or wayward form of *qi*-interaction.

In the case of varying wavelengths, moreover, some phases match each other while others do not. This results in a curve that goes up and down, is far apart at one point, then meets again and parts again. A rhythmic pattern of interaction emerges, typical for the natural and human world. This, in turn, matches not only the classical view of the movements of Dao and *qi* in the Chinese universe, but also modern physics. As described by David Bohm in *Quantum Theory* (1951), living organisms are intrinsically dynamic. Their visible forms are nothing but apparently stable manifestations of underlying processes that change continuously in rhythmic patterns—fluctuations, oscillations, vibrations, waves.

The ideal of harmonious *qi*-flow and entrained vibrations, then, is a completely resonant system. The waves of one entity impinge on another so that it moves in the same frequency. This, in essence, is the Daoist definition of mental and physical health: the *qi*-vibrations of each aspect of the bodymind resonate smoothly with all others. Individuals resonate harmoniously with the people and things around them; society and nature resonate perfectly with each other. The perfection and total harmony of Dao is reached when all beings and things hum on the same wavelength and frequency, in a state of optimum transfer and total resonance.

In terms of psychology, this means that the bodymind is a conglomeration of various vibratory fields. Never can there be just one single cause for a given symptom or mental state, but the interconnection of the whole needs to be examined. Nor can the mind be viewed in isolation, but should be seen in relation to many fields that go far beyond the individual: planets, earth, society, family, and so on. Disease and disorder may be related to the out-of-tune behavior of one or the other sector in the flow of vibration, but they affect the whole and can be approached from many different angles. Corrections come accordingly in various forms—mental and physical—and should have an effect on the entire system, applying a strong harmonizing rhythm to any given part of the vibration pattern. Eventually the flow moves back into its harmonious rhythm and health results.

Body and Mind

The Chinese generally do not radically distinguish between body and mind, seeing them both essentially as *qi*, with the *caveat* that the mind vibrates at a subtler and faster level. Still, it is a gross simplification to assume that they see body and mind as simply one entity: they make a clear distinction between the two in idea as well as language. As Maxime Kaltenmark points out:

Chinese terminology reflects subtle differences between states of a more or less ethereal quality, but of one and the same principle lying at the foundation of all the complex functions of man. The gross conditions of the body are as much included as are its finer essences and the higher mental states, which make up holiness.

This, then, is the reason why one can say that the Chinese do not make a clear-cut distinction between what we call body and mind. Their outlook is in general much more oriented towards life as an organic whole and ongoing process. (1965, 655)

The main distinction is accordingly less between body and mind in the Western sense than between states that enhance primordial *qi* and favor ultimate realization of Dao versus those that do not.

There are accordingly two sets of terms for body and mind: the body-form (*xing* 形) and the body-self (*shen* 身) plus the spirit (*shén* 神) and the mind (*xin* 心). Both body-form and spirit are part of original Dao, pure and potent, connected to cosmic flow, ultimately impersonal, and essentially without end. Body-form is a replica of the universe, the material appearance of things, their being as entities quite distinct from other objects yet wholly integrated into the greater universe. Cosmologically, the body as form marks the beginning of the created world. “Before body-form, there is the One,” says the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Book of the Prince of Huainan; 1.9b) of the Han dynasty. In later philosophi-

cal discourse, *xing erxia* 形而下, literally “below the forms,” designates the created physical world, while *xing ershang* 形而上, “above the forms,” stands for the realm of metaphysics and abstract speculation. In the Daoist vision, it moreover incorporates all kinds of cosmic forces: various souls, the five phases, the seven stars of the Dipper, as well as numerous celestial palaces, networks, and deities (see Kohn 1991; see also Huang 2010).

The spirit, on the other hand, is like Dao. The seventh-century philosopher Li Rong 李榮 says in his commentary to the *Xisibeng jing* 西昇經 (Scripture of Western Ascension): “Spirit serves to give life to embodied beings. Without this, there would be no life. . . . It is only upon borrowing spirit that embodied beings can come to life. Spirit uses them as a habitation in order to attain completion. Without the joining of the spirit and embodied beings, there would be no life or completion” (4.14b; Kohn 2007, 96; see also Assandri 2009). Matching this, the eighth-century *Tianyinzi* 天隱子 (Book of the Master of Heavenly Seclusion) says: “Spirit arrives without moving and is swift without hurrying; it transforms along with yin and yang and is as old as Heaven and Earth” (sect. 8). The *Neiguan jing* 內觀經 (Scripture of Inner Observation), also from the mid-Tang dynasty, provides more detail:

Spirit is neither black nor white, neither red nor yellow, neither big nor small, neither short nor long, neither crooked nor straight, neither soft nor hard, neither thick nor thin, neither round nor square. It goes on changing and transforming without measure, merges with yin and yang, greatly encompasses Heaven and Earth, subtly enters the tiniest blade of grass. Controlled it is straightforward, let loose it goes mad.

Clarity and purity make it live, turbidity and defilements cause it to perish. Fully bright, it radiates to the eight ends of the universe. Darkened, it confuses even a single direction. Keep it empty and serene, and life and Dao will spontaneously be present. (2b; Kohn 2010, 101)

Oneness with spirit, then, means its liberation (*shenjie* 神解) and the attainment of spirit pervasion (*shentong* 神通), which manifests in the emitting of a bright radiance and the attainment of supernatural powers. Perceiving fully with spirit instead of the senses, Daoist immortals (as much as enlightened Buddhists) are omniscient and can penetrate all phenomena with equal ease.

In contrast to these pure dimensions of the human bodymind, body-self and mind are conscious constructs, largely defined in terms of afflictions. Already the *Daode jing* says: “The body-self is the reason why I have terrible vexations. If I didn’t have a body-self, what trouble would I have?” (ch. 13). Li Rong cites it in his commentary and explains:

Having a body-self means having vexations and adversities. Frustrated by sight and hearing, tortured by taste and smell, one is subject to pain, irritation, heat, and cold.

As soon as there is a body-self the hundred worries compete to arise and the five desires (of the senses) hurry to make their claims. (Kohn 2007, 100)

This defines the body-self as an artificial creation, a conglomerate of the senses. It encompasses the various human sensations and feelings together with the judgments and evaluations attached to them and their resulting passions and emotions. Understood as the personal body or extended self, it is both a physical and a psychological entity inasmuch as people identify with their body image, their sensory impressions and desires. It is not part of the original human make-up: at birth, there are just body-form and spirit. Only when a sense of personal identity forms through the senses and social positioning, it becomes a body-self. The Daoist quest, then, in essence means to diminish the power of the body-self in order to retrieve and enhance the original purity of the body-form. Realizing Dao, therefore, means a “depersonalization,” a change of body identity from person to body as form.

The same relationship also holds true for spirit and mind. The mind is the ruler of the emotions and close to the idea of the heart, which is also the physical organ it resides in. It is judgmental and evaluative, given to flights of fancy, and subject to sensory impressions and desires: for cosmic purposes, this kind of mind is entirely useless. On the other hand, the mind can become the vehicle of spirit, a psychological force that allows the purity of the cosmos to flow through it. This is often called “no-mind,” a state when the perception of oneself as a limited entity is replaced by an almost mystical sense of oneness with all, openness to cosmic flow, a detached yet positive relationship to the world.

The Daoist path to full mental health thus consists of two major stages. First, there is a de-personalization, de-emotionalization of the individual: make your body-self no-self and your mind no-mind (*Xisheng jing* 5.1a). After this, the purified bodymind merges with the cosmic forces of body-form and spirit, leading to oneness with Dao and cosmic consciousness. Doing so, adepts recover their birthright as integral parts of the natural and supernatural world, foregoing all claims to be anything in and of themselves and never limiting pure spirit for mere emotional and egotistic purposes. “The world is me—I am the world.” Far from being an expression of personal empowerment, this position heralds the complete abrogation of all active molding, of all outgoing force, of all purposeful deliberation and human thinking.

Energy Medicine and Psychology

Among Western science, the close integration of body and mind, combined with the vision of the human bodymind as interlocking energy fields that can function at different levels of purity, is most prominent in the emerging field of energy medicine. Recent research in biology, physiology, and physics has

opened up many new venues of looking at the bodymind and begun to create a language that will eventually allow science to integrate Chinese concepts, demystify the phenomenon and experiences of *qi*, and make the Daoist perspective more widely accessible to the general public.

The most important new concepts emerging from this research are measurable biomagnetic fields and bioelectricity. Biomagnetic fields are human energy centers that vibrate at different frequencies, storing and giving off energies not unlike the bodymind in the Chinese system. Their energetic output or vibrations can be measured, and it has been shown that the heart and the brain continuously pulse at extremely low frequencies (ELF). It has also become clear through controlled measurements that biomagnetic fields are unbounded so that, for example, the field of the heart vibrates beyond the body and extends infinitely into space, verifying the Chinese conviction that people and the universe interact continuously on an energetic level (see Becker and Sheldon 1985; Gerber 1988; Seem 1989; Targ and Katra 1999).

Similarly, bioelectricity manifests in energy currents that crisscross the human body and are similar to the meridians of acupuncture. Separate from and, in evolutionary terms, more ancient than the nervous system, these currents work through the so-called cytoskeleton, a complex net of connective tissue that is a continuous and dynamic molecular webwork. Also known as the “living matrix,” this webwork contains so-called integrins or trans-membrane linking molecules which have no boundaries but are intricately interconnected. When touching the skin or inserting an acupuncture needle, the integrins make contact with all parts of the bodymind through the matrix webwork. Based on this evidence, wholeness is becoming an accepted concept, which sees the bodymind “as an integrated, coordinated, successful system” and accepts that “no parts or properties are uncorrelated but all are demonstrably linked” (Oschman 2000, 49, citing E. F. Adolph).

The bodymind as a living matrix is simultaneously a mechanical, vibrational, energetic, electronic, photonic, and informational network. It consists of a complex, linked pattern of pathways and molecules that forms a tensegrity system. A term taken originally from architecture where it is used in the structural description of domes, tents, sailing vessels, and cranes, tensegrity indicates a continuous tensional network (tendons) connected by a set of discontinuous elements (struts), which can also be fruitfully applied to the description of the integrated system (Oschman 2000, 153).

The vision of the body as an energetic network and of the mind as a key factor in human energetics is thus becoming more familiar in Western culture. Without specifically speaking of yin and yang, the five phases, inner organs and meridians, energy medicine yet adapts an understanding of body and self that has been at the root of Daoist ideas and practices for millennia.

Energy psychology, on the other hand, takes the extra step and works with traditional models, seeing the body as consisting of “various interrelated

energy systems (such as the aura, chakras, and meridians), which each serve specific functions” (Feinstein et al. 2005, 197). According to this understanding, the visible and measurable material body is supported by an underlying network or skeleton of living energy that forms the foundation of all bodily systems (see also Pert 1997; Gach and Henning 2004; Gallo 2004).

Supported increasingly by electromagnetic measurements, followers of this new method distinguish seven major aspects of this energy network:

- the meridian system defined as the energy bloodstream, which “brings vitality, removes blockages, adjusts metabolism, and even determines the speed and form of cellular change” (Feinstein et al. 2005, 198);
- the chakras, energetic vortexes adapted from Indian body geography, which are concentrated centers of energy that supply power to specific organs and resonate with universal principles, such as creativity, love, survival, and transcendence;
- the aura, a fundamental energy shield surrounding people that was studied extensively in the seventies (e.g., Krippner and Rubin 1974), that is now seen as a protective energetic atmosphere that surrounds the person “like a space suit” and serves to filter outside energies (Feinstein et al. 2005, 200);
- the basic grid, a sturdy fundamental energy net that can be compared to the chassis of a car;
- the Celtic weave, a spinning, spiraling, twisting, and curving pattern of energies that creates a “kaleidoscope of colors and shapes” and functions as an “invisible thread that keeps all the energy systems functioning as a single unit” (Feinstein et al. 2005, 201);
- the five rhythms, matching the five phases and their related organs, senses, muscles, and so on, which establish a person’s primary rhythm and provide the basic blueprint of personal and interactive functioning;
- the triple warmer, adapted from Chinese medicine and reinterpreted as an energy line that “networks the energies of the immune system to attack an invader and mobilizes the body’s energies in emergencies” (Feinstein et al. 2005, 202), which is the key factor in the stress response according to this energetic vision;
- and finally, the radiant circuits, an adaptation of the eight extraordinary vessels, now described as primary to the body’s system in terms of evolution, “operating like fluid fields and embodying a distinct spontaneous intelligence” (Feinstein et al. 2005, 203).

Applying this vision of the human body, practitioners of energy psychology propose that people should enhance their “energy aptitude,” perform daily exercises to harmonize the energies, and use specific tapping techniques to release tensions and emotional trauma (Kohn 2008, 26-27).

Energy aptitude means the ability to work effectively with one’s internal energies. It has four components: a careful awareness of one’s energetic pat-

terns, the ability to influence these patterns in a beneficial way, the faculty to perceive energies in other people and outside objects, and to join or transform these outside energies in a beneficial way (Feinstein et al. 2005, 204-5).

Daily exercises include many moves familiar from Daoist practice: they involve pressing key acupuncture points while breathing deeply and visualizing energies flowing through the body. Like traditional Chinese and Indian exercises, they make use of various bodily postures and involve self-massages of key areas, such as the face, the scalp, and the abdomen. In some cases, meridian lines are opened through placing the hands at either end and allowing the energies to flow, in others simple bends stretches in conjunction with conscious breathing and mental release serve the purpose. While these are all similar to practices already advocated in Daoism, the closest exercise is the Auric Weave, a passing of the hands over the energy lines of the body, known as Dry Wash in traditional China and as Marrow Washing in modern qigong (Feinstein et al. 2005, 233-35).

The third and most important clinical application of energy psychology lies in tapping techniques that ease stress, release trauma, and heal ailments. Also practiced under the name Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), the method has patients measure a problem on a scale from 1 to 10, then imagine the feeling associated with the issue, create a positive affirmation (“Even though I have . . ., I deeply and completely accept myself.”), and repeat the affirmation while tapping a set of eight acupuncture points. The points range from the center of the forehead through the face, neck, and upper torso to the sides of the hands. After completion, patients re-measure the feeling, then repeat the technique—often with a slightly modified affirmation (“Even though I still have a remnant of . . .”)—until it goes down to zero. Not only are urgent issues immediately relieved with this method, but even long-standing issues resolve with persistent tapping (Craig 2007).

The technique in this precise form is not found in traditional documents, but there is a Daoist method practiced today that involves tapping the three energy centers in head, chest, and abdomen as well as the third eye while chanting an incantation to the powers of chaos underlying all creation. There are also multiple qigong tapping routines that help recover health and stabilize energy (Johnson 2000, 703-7). Daoist materials, moreover, frequently require practitioners to “drum” certain areas of the body, most commonly the chest or abdomen, while holding the breath, thereby releasing stale or wayward *qi*, the traditional way of referring to past trauma, unwanted emotional baggage, and physical obstructions. Self-massages that involve tapping energy channels on arms and legs as well as around eyes and ears, moreover, are common and considered essential to establishing physical and mental health (Kohn 2008, 79-80).

