

Qigong Journey

Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi

**Protect Your Life
with
Nine Palaces Daoist Qigong**

by

Dr. Baolin Wu

Jessica Eckstein & Di Wu

With Original Artworks

**by
Oliver Benson**

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Dedicated

to

Dr. Uddhava Om.

As he learned and taught in turn,

with joy and kindness,

so shall he continue his journey,

for eternity in the Dao.

Preface

I am in the unusual position to be the student, tasked to write, of a master, tasked to teach.

The contents of this book are taken from many hours of classes taught in Mandarin by Dr. Baolin Wu and translated on the spot by his son Eric Wu. I transcribed the transcripts word for word and then cross-referenced the wealth of material into a form that closely follows the experience of taking a class in person. Dr. Wu always begins with extensive discussion on the philosophical underpinnings of the practice, but eventually the qigong form itself is presented silently, shown, not discussed. Questions from the class are taken and then discussed upon at length, sometimes in relation to what we have already learned and sometimes as a complete digression, which still maintains pertinence to the study at hand.

Ultimately, to learn qigong means to watch the master demonstrate, stand up and repeat on your own. It is a physical lesson, despite the concepts and explanations presented along with it. Even as the words in this book are the words of the master; that I was asked to set them down inevitably causes my words, the words of the student to come through, intercepting the teachings, which at their core are non-verbal. After many years of reflecting upon the implications of this conundrum, the resolution of the problem is actually simple, just as is everything of the Dao.

That these words are the words of the master and the student combined is a gift to you, the reader. You are not just another student at the feet of a teacher. Rather, these words will spark something within you and you shall be your own teacher, as well as your own student, eager to reveal knowledge and to learn. The ultimate message is that the voice of the teacher and the mind of the student are both a part of you. These lessons are the lessons you find from within your heart. My personal mission in accepting the challenge of writing this book is to convey this message and my deepest wish is for you to find this message to be true.

— Jessica Eckstein, Los Angeles, California. Year of the Rat, 2020



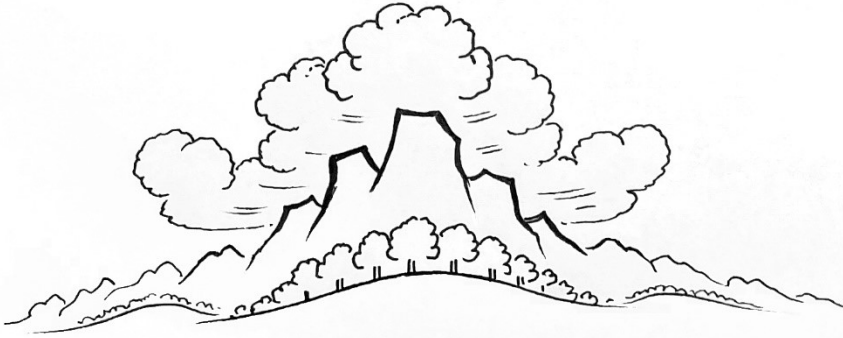
Qiu Chuji
Master of the Eternal Spring



Dr. Baolin Wu
Daoist Master and Physician

Chapter One

A Journey



Setting Out

An early morning in winter in the White Cloud Monastery, the sun has been up for less than an hour and mist still hangs in the silence. All the monks have convened in the main courtyard to say farewell to their brother, who is leaving that day, sent on a mission of great importance to another monastery on the other side of the country. Ranged by rank before their masters, all rise and solemnly perform a parting ritual, a ceremony of protection to grant their fellow initiate safety and strength along his journey. At the end, he hands his teacher a small plant he had been tending. This would be his token of honor he would leave behind in his place. As he sets out beyond the solid walls that surrounded his only home, his master will continue to care for this plant and through it, view his pupils varying fortunes as it withers or blooms.

This book is dedicated to the teaching of this ritual practice of Daoist internal alchemy. It is presented here the way it has been taught within the Complete Reality school (Quanzhen pai) of Daoism since the days of Qiu Chuji (1148-1227), the great mystic who traveled far and wide, met with favor as an advisor in the court of Genghis Kahn, and returned to Beijing in honor, to found the White Cloud Monastery (Baiyun guan) and remain there until his death. He developed this practice for his own safety during his many years of wandering and it has been held closely in great esteem by the monks of the White Cloud Monastery for over eight hundred years. It has been performed for the safety and defense of all those who were tasked to leave on difficult

journeys, and those who stayed behind studied its effects and kept the record of its use for generations. It is with great honor presented to you now, not only to continue its heritage, but to offer you a powerful tool for your own personal growth and protection.

In *Qigong for Total Wellness* (St. Martin's Press, 2006), we presented a Daoist qigong form, involving the cultivation of yang energy from the sun, known as Nine Palaces Facing Heaven Qigong. The form in this book is another version of Nine Palaces Qigong, known as Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi Practice (*jiuwu yangqi fa*). It is considered an “amulet” or talismanic style of qigong that forms part of the nine palaces category of qigong practice. It is a special appeal to the heavens to give the practitioner a charm or ward, to prevent sickness or misfortune while traveling. Right now, there is much sickness and upheaval in the world, in an ecological sense, as well as in the man-made structures of society. This is the reason for introducing this practice publically. It is meaningful to learn this form right now, because times are difficult for all of us and for the world we live in.

Origins of the Form

Nine Palaces Qigong originated in the White Cloud Monastery, one of the oldest and most prominent Daoist institutions in China. It can loosely be described as the Vatican of Daoism, in that many different schools and sects were represented within its halls, and a formal study of Daoist doctrine and practice was carried out, in the style of a university. Today, worldwide there are probably thousands of forms of qigong, but the main origin of all the modern forms of qigong comes from Daoism, branching out over many hundreds of years from the original Daoist teachings. Laozi (6th - 4th c.), Confucius (aka Kongzi, 551-479 BCE), and Sunzi (aka Sun Wuzi, 544-496 BCE) are the three great philosophers who are worshiped by Daoists as three essential gods and venerated in temples across China.

You could say that the tenets of Daoism are a part of Chinese thought as a whole and at the same time, the important elements of Chinese thought are direct products of Daoism. In China today, *The Book of Dao and Its Virtue* (*Daode jing*), one of the great works of Laozi, is again taught, along with *The Art of War* (*Sunzi bingfa*), the great work of Sunzi, as well as the *Analects* (*Lunyu*) of Confucius. Even though Confucius and Laozi coexisted in the same generation, technically speaking, Confucius is the student of Laozi. Sunzi is the student of Confucius, and all three share a student and mentor relationship between them. It is quite remarkable that China's three greatest philosophers lived within one generation of each other.

Confucius studied, or “asked Dao,” with Laozi, posing the question “What is Dao.” He sought knowledge and teachings from Laozi. And Sunzi in the same respect sought knowledge and teachings from both Confucius and Laozi. So with that relationship some people could say that Sunzi in a way is a

student of Laozi as well. In traditional historical lore, Confucius would bring Sunzi with him when he would go to visit Laozi and both sought knowledge and teachings from the great master. Of course, there is little hard evidence to back up this legend, but the few reliable historical records from the time indicate this as a reasonable possibility.

The Nine Palaces is a qigong form originally created by Laozi. In his writings, he discusses the nine palaces and the eight trigrams, although only touching on the five elements theory in passing. The historical evidence of this is recorded in the texts of Wenzhi, however the nine palaces was not publicly taught until Wang Chongyang (1113-1170), the master of Qiu Chuji and founder of the White Cloud Monastery, nearly 1500 years after the days of Laozi. Only then was Nine Palaces Qigong spoken of and taught in an organized manner. Laozi's contributions to this form were recorded, the details of how to practice, the benefits of the practice, in the tablets of Wenzhi. However it was Wang Chongyang, the later master, who actually practiced it as an art form and showed others. Nine Palaces Qigong was enriched by his further explanations of each movement and recorded into the doctrines of Complete Reality Daoism. The school flourished within the White Cloud Monastery when they preserved the art and discipline of Nine Palaces Qigong, for seventeen generations, all the way up to today. Dr. Wu, 17th generation lineage holder, has been tasked to teach its details through these books so that they may continue on as the world changes around us.

While Laozi's teachings focused on the nine palaces and the eight trigrams, five elements philosophy only became strongly developed from Confucius' works. Confucius had studied the *Book of Changes (Yijing)* and poured through the pages of his copy so diligently, so many times that it's said he "tore through its cow tendon bindings three times." Laozi instructed him to study the *Book of Changes*, so he studied so hard he wore out the bindings. This is the classical idiom that is used and it's very apt, as Confucius' theories are pervaded with the wisdom of the *Book of Changes*. He is known as an innovator of Laozi's philosophies, building upon them. Laozi had taught "as big as no boundaries, as small as a speck" and "everything goes with the flow of nature." Through observation and the studies of Laozi's theories, Confucius found that everything has a pattern. As we try to go with the flow of existence, the flow has a pattern of its own flowing through it. This pattern is bound by the five elements.

Laozi did not speak of the restrictions, parameters or refining of these patterns, as for him, there are no boundaries or limits to be made. We say the rat is afraid of the cat, and then the cat is afraid of the dog. Elephants aren't afraid of tigers or lions because they are so mighty, but they are afraid of rats. Confucius sees the world in terms of cycles such as this. In the midst of the cycle, there is also the human capacity to make adjustments within the natural order of things. Cats are afraid of dogs and as humans, we can train dogs to take advantage of this natural advantage if we so choose. Thus, Confucius's teachings contrast with Laozi's. Not everything goes with nature its flow. There

are networks of constraints as well as affinities between all building blocks of existence, embodied by the five elements. Confucius advanced the thought that everything has a central focal point, like a fruit has a pit in its center. No matter how big a family is, there is always a head of the household. No matter how big the flock of birds, there's always a navigator in the flock during migration. There's always a leader or driving force.

Confucius believes in the supremacy of nature and the five elements as the basis of its patterns and cycles, then matches these theories to Nine Palaces Qigong practice. Yin-yang is the center of the entire flow of nature, or the pit of the fruit, the flesh and skin surrounding the pit are the five elements and the eight trigrams and the nine palaces are the shell surrounding the pit. You can't just let kids run around wild. You have to teach them. This is Confucius's thought. Laozi may disagree and advice letting them be free to grow up as they will. This is what is best for nature, but for a helpless infant, it's certainly not the most beneficial method. You have to show children limits and boundaries, so they can be safe to grow. Even a tree still has to be trimmed, if you want the fruit harvest for the next year to be plentiful. This is why Confucius is considered the first teacher of Chinese history, for his emphasis that children should be taught and go to school.

Dr. Wu feels that China has truly moved on from pure Communism, since the government is promoting Confucius again as the teacher and originator of social science, due to his theories of higher education. Now we understand the connection between the five elements and Nine Palaces and its development from the relationship between Laozi and Confucius. From their teachings, Sunzi derived and taught the understanding of the environment and using strategic positioning for a particular purpose, on which the Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi practice is particularly focused. As one travels outside the monastery, one is also traveling through the ups and downs of life. We use all the theories wrapped up in Daoist qigong to aid us on our way.

Cosmic Numbers and the Body

Working with qi means harmonizing Heaven, Human and Earth. There is no way to separate qigong practice from this. Theoretically speaking, when we say nine palaces, we mean the nine stars in the celestial heaven. In ancient times, the mathematics and astronomy of China was very advanced. This science was in service of astrology and divination, comparable to civilizations such as the Mayans. The Chinese methodology for calculating the alignments between stars and predicting the future, and its pervasive influence on the culture is quite comparable, especially in terms of astronomy.

In this ancient cosmology, the earth is placed in the center and around earth, the nine stars revolve. And what is this earth? Essentially, it is us. Every single one of us represents his or her own little earth. You are earth, and your eyes might be the moon or the sun rotating around you. And your meridians,

collaterals and the blood in your veins represent the rivers and the oceans that flow upon the earth. Your skeleton and bones represent the mountains that support the earth and your muscles and muscular system represent the earth's crust. That's how the ancient Daoists make connect the earth to each individual human being. Embodying the earth is the primal perspective that governs the principles of Nine Palaces Qigong. The body is the earth.

To continue the analogy, the nine orifices of the body, the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, urethra and anus, represent the nine palaces and in that respect, each of the organs within your body have a special relationship with the nine different stars in the skies. Even today, we still have an awareness of this correspondence, saying "men are from Mars and women from Venus." Whenever one of your organs is unwell or whenever you want to maintain or tonify that organ, you can accomplish it by enhancing that particular organ's relationship with each of these stars, all nine or just its particular companion star. The body is communicating with the universe, just like the plant that was tended by the monks as a stand-in for their brother while he was away on his mission.

The Chinese expression, "impulse and response of heaven and humanity" (*tianren ganying*) means or heaven and human corresponding to each other. *Ying* means response, so you can consider an organ in your body that is weak is still connected to its star and can gain renewed energy from the star's response to its weakness. There is a chart of nine characters that symbolize the nine treasures of the universe. In heaven, there are three treasures. They are the sun, moon, and the star. On earth there are three treasures as well, water, fire and wind. And as humans, we also have three treasures, our essence (*jing*), our breath (*qi*), and our spirit (*shen*), which is the soul.

Based on this magic square chart, we can assign different numbers, one through nine. We can replace, or fill in numbers horizontally, or vertically or diagonally and whatever way you add them up, it will always total fifteen. Fifteen, according to the *Book of Changes*, can be broken down to the numbers one and five. $1 + 5 = 6$. So therefore the number six is representative of peace and tranquility and smoothness, as in the way our fingers fit together perfectly and comfortably when we interlace them. You can make a symbol using the four directions, east, west, north and south. Draw a square with four points in the corners. East is in the upper left, west is the upper right, north is in the lower right and south is in the lower left, drawn in that order. Now add heaven and earth by drawing two diagonal lines from the corners, bisecting in the middle of the square. These are the six elements, whose harmonization of these we stress here as an integral concept in the Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi.

Yin and Yang

What is born within heaven and earth and the four directions, harmonized together? Humanity. The *Book of Changes* concept is "Within the six harmonization, is "Humankind." Explored further, this concept embodies the relationship

between yin and yang. Observe the image of the Taiji symbol, the circle bisected with a curving line to form the white and the black segments, each with their opposing energy lying within as a circular seed.

Yin and yang are in constant correspondence with each other. They are dependent on each other. They are both continuously present, constantly modulating their relative percentages. Place your left hand palm up, for yang, and your right hand palm down, for yin, and move them in a slight weighing motion, weighing the balance of qi, to feel the physical sensation of this concept. You will feel the two different qualities of their pull.

There is a movement we can make to experience every category of yin or yang energy. For example, day is considered yang and night as yin. Stand and move your left palm going up, its open palm facing your chest with the elbow bent vertically, while the right palm is held with the elbow bent horizontally forming loose fist facing in to chest. Experience the different sensations. We categorize males as yang and females as yin. Reach out as if grasping with the respective hands, forming strong fists as you grasp and feel the distinctions. That which rises is yang; both hands rising up, palms up. That which falls is yin; palms turning over at brow level to face downwards, slightly cupped, passing down to the chest level. Movement is yang, stagnation is yin; open each palm up and thrust slightly outwards. Yet there is no absolute yin or yang, no concept to point to or sensation to feel. They always coexist, in one proportion or another to each other, always oscillating respective to each other. They move in accordance to each other.

To illustrate this key point, as we said before, males are yang. However, even though males are categorized as yang, we have to appreciate that only seventy percent of their structure is yang and thirty percent is yin. The same applies to women. We have already established that females are yin, but they are not absolutely all yin. Two thirds of their existence is yin and one third is yang. This is how yin and yang change in accordance with each other.

The key to this theory of constant change is that within every yang there is yin and within every yin there's yang. There is always a spark of one being born from the other. For instance in the Taiji symbol, the white half pointing up represents yang, and the black half pointing down is yin. In the White Cloud Monastery, the circles that are contained in both hemispheres are usually drawn rather large. They portray the "yang within the yin," on the black half and the "yin within the yang" on the white half. To even further denote that for every yang there's yin, usually the drawing will also contain some dark shading on the lower curve of the yang portion) to signify that yin shadows yang from the outside. On the yin side, you will see a bit of white highlight around the fullest part of its upper outer curve. This is done on purpose to further denote the fact that yang highlights yin from above. So there is always the opposite force growing from within, as well as radiating towards the other from outside.

From here we may ask, what is sinuous line that partitions the two halves of the circle? This line is a representation of the twenty-four seasonal changes

of qi within the year. Rather than just having four seasons or twelve months, in the Chinese system, for every month, there are two individual seasonal periods, each with their own unique climate and balance of yin and yang. From the upper tip of where the curve begins at the outer upper edge we begin in spring, and tracing down to the lower ending point at the lower outer edge on the bottom right of the circle, we finish with winter. This is the peak of yang, at the fullest point of the white curve's "head" where yin's "tail" is at its thinnest. It represents the height of summer. The opposite peak of yin, represent the coldest days of winter. Tracing along this line separating yin and yang, we can see the shape of the timeline of the twenty-four seasonal changes within a year. Yin and yang are reflected by the twenty-four seasonal changes and adjust throughout every period in a particular combination.

This is a unique way of explaining yin and yang developed by the Daoist scholars over millennia. No other culture has delineated the substance of these two energies and their interplay with nature's seasons in this way. There are many layers of meaning to this symbolism. Spring's emphasis is on "rising," when everything comes to life. For summer, the emphasis is growth. Summer is divided into two main seasons, summer, which is growth, and "long summer" or Indian summer, which symbolizes changes, and the inevitability of change. Autumn means the day of fruition, where you harvest the fruits of your labor, and winter is hibernation, as in the hibernation of silkworms in their chrysalis. You can symbolize each of the twenty-four seasonal changes with different kinds of trees and other seasonal plants, such as grain crops.

Every seed that is planted will eventually sprout with life. Even though you might accidentally plant the seed facing down, when it sprouts, it will sprout upwards. This is the inevitable cycle of life. The ten heavenly stems and twelve earthly branches combine to denote the changes will occur within every sixty-year cycle. If you trace along the outer edge of the Taiji symbol's circle, starting with the exact point at the top where the tip of yang meets the thinnest tail of yin, once around the edge represents the changes of the sixty-year cycle.

If you travel this way along the internal curve separating yin and yang that represents the changes within one year, as we have said. These two timelines form the original meaning of what is yin and what is yang. The most important knowledge to take away is that yin and yang cannot be separated from the seasonal changes. Making the choices in your life based on these seasons is "The harmonization of heaven and human," in its fullest sense. Knowledge of the seasonal changes shows us the ebb and flow of yin and yang. We know when to plant the crops and also when to raise new opportunities for ourselves. To work with qigong, especially the Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi form presented here, means working with the twenty-four seasonal changes and the fluctuations of yin and yang within nature.

Heaven, Humanity, and Earth

When we discussed the proportions of yin and yang within men and women, it should be clear that we were not simply referring to a body mass to water ratio. The seventy percent yang and thirty percent yin ratio for men might appear connected to this idea, but then how would you explain the reversed ratios for women? Yin and yang fluctuate and adapt to each other. This is a factor that goes beyond the physical makeup of the body. Take the earth as an example. Land covers about one third and water covers roughly two thirds of the total surface area of the planet. Even though Nine Palaces Qigong practice emphasizes training yang energy, “yang originates from yin.” It is critical to understand this. For instance, snap open a lighter. A flame sparks on. The flame is yang, but where does the flame come from? The source of the flame is the liquid inside. The lighter fluid is yin. It doesn’t matter if you’re male or female. We all came from our mother, who is yin. Even though we’re striving to cultivate yang, ultimately in the very end you will become yin in the cycle of life and death.

Our practice is inseparably linked with the five thousand year old heritage of Chinese thought. It is a worldview that never ceases to find parallels between our individual lives and the cycles of nature. For example, females go through a menstrual cycle of twenty eight days on average. There are three or four days where the egg starts to move, as menses occurs. Chinese medicine directly correlates the phases of the menstrual cycle to the moon’s phases and position in the sky. Treatment is applied based on the moon cycle for regulating menstrual cycle imbalances. This is a perfect example of Chinese culture and Chinese medical culture as well. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is deeply ingrained in traditional Chinese culture, which is based on adjusting to the seasonal weather patterns of the earth, as well as the universe. This is the main reason why TCM treatments are holistic and the focus is treating the patient as a whole rather than treating individual symptoms or parts of the body. It’s a different way of looking at things. Again it goes back to the Taiji symbol as the root guideline for enhancing our life. The Taiji symbol is the source of inspiration for our practice.

In this world, we are surrounded by yin and therefore we endeavor to develop the yang to balance the yin out. Nine Palaces Qigong is a yang practice, most often focusing on the yang-based systems in the body, primarily the nervous system. Five Centers Facing Heaven is the sister practice to the nine palaces and usually done at night with the moon. It focuses on enhancing the yin body systems, particularly the endocrine system and hormonal balance.

Nine Palaces is the number nine, and Five Centers is five. Putting the characters for the number 9 and the number 5 together is a classic Chinese figure of speech, praising something as the pinnacle, the top or the peak. It means the ultimate. The Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi practice is indeed a very high level of qigong, heavily involved with the cycle of yin and yang, life and death,

all in service of building new energy and opportunities. The interplay of yin and yang within the seasons of the year and the cycle of birth, death and rebirth permeates this practice in every movement and breath taken. It is the guiding principle behind the way it trains the body physically, harmonizes the heart and mind psychologically, and influences our safety and opportunities on a mystical level.

For Nine Palaces Qigong we present in this book, about two thirds of the form is involved with yang energy and yin comprises the other third. As we talked about earlier, the nine stars are categorized as yang and the earth itself is categorized as yin. Following from this, if we compare earth to a human being, then earth would be yang and we would be yin. So too, when looking at our opportunities and general fortune in life, seventy percent is heaven's will and thirty percent are factors we can influence or change.

To return to the Mayan astronomers and astrologers, as we know, the Mayans have made major contributions to the history of forecasting and astrological prediction. Their mathematical system uses a base of twenty. Computers use a binary system of using two integers, 0 and 1. So do the *Book of Changes's* calculations. The Mayan system uses base 20, with twenty integers, from 0 to 19. To count a number above twenty, you would have to use a much more complex calculation to express it, especially compared to the binary system of the computer or the *Book of Changes*. Mayan calculations sacrifice the streamlined efficiency of the binary system in favor of complexity and discrete detail. In this respect the Mayan culture is a very profound culture with very finely developed astronomical and astrological calculations. The detailed numeric system allows for extensive mathematical models that they used to predict events far into the future.

According to the Mayan calculations, they projected that the year 2012 would be a year of extreme catastrophes and crises, due to a rare conjunction of the sun to the center of the Milky Way galaxy. Modern scientific methodology verified this alignment would indeed take place and it created a certain amount of anxiety across the world, wondering what would actually come to pass.

In 2009, Dr. Wu decided to run *Book of Changes* calculations for the year as well, out of his respect for the Mayan calendar's accuracy. The *Book of Changes*, being a binary system, relies upon its agility to make up for the lack of mathematical density of the Mayan system. After he completed the calculations, it confirmed the Mayan belief that 2012 would bring a sea change in the health of the planet. Based on the *Book of Changes* calculations, there was no prediction of massive loss of life. However, the losses would be significant and on a global scale. There was one significant detail. It would not be a sudden crisis, but an increase in hazardous conditions, not just for humans, but for the entire animal kingdom, we included. It was these calculations that decided Dr. Wu to teach the Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi publically.

It is very interesting to look back on the notes of our discussions on this topic from 2009, as they appear to be more accurate now in 2020 than they seemed even in 2009, 2012, or 2016. Dr. Wu's feeling was the crisis indicated by the *Book of Changes* was related to the rise of new viral strains, particularly ones that would be passed from animal species to humans at an unusual rate of potency and transmission. In 2009, we were dealing with a looming H1N1 epidemic, that the World Health Organization had assigned a level six severity. Level six severity indicates a pandemic, where a virus spreads globally.

At the time, H1N1 was primarily swine influenza, initially originating from pigs, which had then crossed over the capability of infecting humans. Some research at the time even pointed to humans being able to transmit the disease back to pigs as well, a potentially deadly scenario that was previously unheard of. Of course, since then, we have also experienced severe outbreaks of avian flu or SARS, MERS, Ebola, and in 2016, powerful strains of Zika virus and Chikungunya. As of this writing, in 2020, we struggle in the throes of the COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus outbreak, a global pandemic that is unprecedented in its severity and reach, striking all continents and all socioeconomic levels, violently destabilizing the foundations of world financial and political structures, with millions of infected and tens of thousands of deaths. We have passed the threshold where human/animal viral transmission has become an established phenomenon on a planetary scale.

Daoist theory posits that there is more to brace for. It's a trickle-down theory, in that major catastrophes such as a nationwide or global epidemic, will be followed by smaller disasters afterwards. For instance, after a major earthquake or flood, the devastation results in conditions ripe for breeding disease or hazards, which in turn cause further damage. This belief is the source of the Chinese saying "Heavenly disasters and human disasters are together in the same place" (*tianzai heren huo tamen yiqi*). Human suffering follows from heavenly disasters. What Westerners would call natural disasters, in the Daoist worldview are often considered acts of heaven. Heaven's decree can be invoked by imbalances in the natural order caused by the actions of mankind. Or they simply occur due to the inevitable events that compose the cycles of the universe that take place within the patterns formed along the pathways of the *Book of Changes*.

We are here today to learn the art of Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi. Practicing it will boost our mental and physical immunity, so that we are more resistant to the natural disasters that surround us. Beyond that, it will also increase our positive opportunities as well. In the face of danger, it will bring the kind of fortune that allows us to escape or lessen impending harm. Many people have stories of missing a plane that then crashes, or less dramatically, just missing being hit by a falling tree branch or toppling bookshelf. What do we call the phenomenon that draws us away from brink of catastrophe? Is it luck, reflex, intuition, heavenly blessing? Call it what you will, these moments of be-

ing snatched away from harm are beyond what we can comprehend scientifically.

According to Daoist worldview, the course of a person's life as dictated by numbers from birth to death. The family you were born into, your gender, and your base lifespan potential are all in the numbers, outside of your direct control. However, according to the *Book of Changes* interpretation of this string of numbers, about one third of the calculations are under your influence. You control this third of your fate. You can manipulate the numbers about a third of the time. Marriage, career, if and when you have children, are all factors you have power over and are able to change. Some of this is obvious. For instance, if you don't have a happy marriage, then you can get a divorce. If you're not happy with a career or job, you can always find another one. However, practicing qigong can bring those opportunities into clearer focus and give you the clarity to follow through on them. The Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi takes this to an ultimate degree by generating the power to bypassing harm, or even fate itself. What you put into your practice is what you will get from it, each person to his or her own needs.

Accepting and Adapting to Nature

This brings up an important question that new students of qigong often ask, especially if they have a background in other spiritual, religious or esoteric traditions. When we practice Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi, are we manipulating the forces of the earth for our own ends? Are we taking earth energy and putting it into our bodies for personal gain?

There are many examples of bringing in the living energy of animals or plants to adjust our fortunes in Daoist tradition. For instance if you're sick and a male, there are forms of qigong that you practice in front of flowers because flowers belong to the category of yin and men belong to the category of yang. Conversely if you were a female in the same situation, you would want to practice with trees instead, for their yang properties. The practice involves sensitizing your hands with a combination of qigong exercises and external training using bowls of raw rice filled with water. You then approach the tree or flowering plant, perform sigils with hand gestures and breathing to initiate communication and if a connection is made, breathe together with the plant to absorb their healing qi.

There are other Nine Palaces Qigong practices with trees that are not specifically for improving your health, but for growing various special relationships with them. What method you pick depends on your situation or what you want to achieve. For example, Dr. Wu spent a number of years teaching varying stages of a Nine Palaces practice that you had to practice with a tree, standing facing it or with your back to it, sometimes right next to it and sometimes further away but still within range. Initially when you began the practice, you needed to select the tree knowing its age and usual life span, the reason being

that this tree was going to become a partner in your life. Ideally, you would pick a young tree or a tree with a remaining lifespan proportionate to your age and you would practice and grow old together. For instance, you are seventy years old and you have found a large pine tree that really appeals to you. You search for information about the tree and find that it was planted two or three years ago and its species' natural lifespan is two hundred years. This would be a good match. So as the tree is growing, you are growing. You are mutually growing together. So that's scenario number one.

Another option for a slightly different effect might be that you have found a tree that is already two hundred years old, but you feel like this tree is projecting to you that it has good qi. You see it's blooming and flourishing, not withering or dying. It feels lively when you stand near it and its qi is very animated. For this circumstance, if you choose to practice with that tree, it would also be good. As long as its qi is able to carry you with it as the two of you continue to practice, you have found a good partner. The scenario that we don't want and would hope to avoid is as you are practicing with this tree, it unexpectedly sickens to the point of death, struck by lightning or an aggressive wasting away. You don't want that kind of tree. You would have to be concerned that this negativity will be applied to you as well, because you've been practicing with that tree. But on the other hand, there still is some good to be gained in the sense that this tree took a hit for you. Its death has foreshadowed your own bad luck, misfortune and mishaps. You can use it as a warning to take preventative measures in your day to day life, shoring up against danger. There are things that can't be explained with science.

There are bonds that are so strong, the one can absorb the misfortunes of the other. For instance, the Daoists have studied the scenario where a person with cancer has a dog as a pet. Later on, the dog also gets cancer and dies as a result. A Daoist doctor would tell the person he now might have a better chance of being cured of his own cancer. It's because the dog took that cancer on itself and in a way cured its master. For pets, only dogs have this special ability. No other pet has it.

Science cannot explain this phenomenon. Even the data accumulated by the Daoists is not definitive. Not all dogs capable of taking the sickness for their masters. You can't just buy a dog and start taking care of it once you've been diagnosed with cancer. It has to be a dog you were with long before you became ill. In a sense, the dog had to be fated from birth to be with that master and save him. This degree of loyalty and bonding is an innate ability of dogs, but there also has to be an aspect of destiny and special connection. In general, though, dogs are the number one animal with this ability. Horses are also sometimes able to do this. Other animals such as cats are not as certainly capable and others, such as fish or birds, do not have this capacity. These are natural conditions, the natural order of things. Some animals, like snakes and pythons, might not be appropriate pets at all. Those animals are not for every-

body. As pets, it's based on where you live and your own zodiac animal whether they will be beneficial for you.

The main goal is to accept and adapt to nature. Just as the trees and animals are enlisted to help us, we must respect the laws of nature to properly integrate them into our lives. Whether we are making adjustments using fengshui and *Book of Changes* principles or practicing qigong in search of better energy and opportunities, we only receive a benefit if we recognize nature's laws as our guide.

A student asked Dr. Wu what seemed like a simple question. If your animal sign is the Dog, can you have a dog as a pet? The answer is intricate. There are unexpected variables involved. In Chinese characters, if you take the character for "dog" and double it, those two characters together form the character for "crying" or "sadness." Because of this, it is considered an inauspicious sign to own two dogs at the same time. One dog, three dogs or four dogs are fortunate, but not two. To follow from this, it is recommended that if you are born in the Year of the Dog, never keep only one dog. You are a dog and one more dog makes two, the sign of crying. If your sign is the Dog, you can raise a pair of dogs so you all add up together as three dogs. If you're not a Dog, one dog is acceptable, or have three or four if you like. It's very important to take note of this.

If you're of a certain animal sign, whether or not you can raise that same animal or how many you can raise, are issues you have to be careful about. The same thing goes with fish, how many fish should you raise in a tank, and even their color varies depending on the person and the situation and getting every detail right is very important. All these calculations are derived from the *Book of Changes*. It's a matter of numbers. Besides numeric calculations, the doctrine of "same qi" (*tongqi*) is a factor. If you are the sign of the Monkey, it's helpful if you are able to raise a monkey, especially during hard times. This means you have the same spirit and the same qi, and you can mutually help each other. Of course, caring for a live monkey is not always possible, but you can raise an animal that's similar in spirit or behavior to one. For instance, you can keep a bird. Birds can crawl and climb well like monkeys and have similar impish and intelligent personalities.

A lot of people are not aware this principle is fundamental to Daoist shamanic belief. In the West, we could term this sympathetic magic and there is certainly a tradition of its practice in Western culture going back millennia. In Chinese culture, its principles run very deep and have been inexorably intertwined with the impulse to harmonize with nature. Daoist scholarship has spent thousands of years studying its effects without suffering the persecution that cut down its pagan practitioners in the West. It's more than just putting like with like. Instead, it is a means to completely align yourself with nature's guidelines. It can be a powerful tool and is put to great use in the Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi.

Please do not underestimate all the assistance that nature has to offer you for help and guidance. When you're walking down the middle of a dusty road on a hot, summer day and the leaves of a tree shade you as you pass by, that's what nature has to offer you. It is offering you a great comfort. A moment of shade can seem very small and inconsequential, but that is just one moment. Multiply that by every tree that releases oxygen into the atmosphere and every moment you take a breath of that air. The sense of scale suddenly becomes immense. Stop for a moment to contemplate its vastness and we start to see what nature really has to offer. If there's one thing to understand, just know that in our lifetime, everybody needs help.

The Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi practice teaches us how to dissolve into nature. Every object and every endeavor has its own qi. There are the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water, each with its own balance of yin and yang and its own underpinnings of *Book of Changes* calculation. Everything can be categorized by the five elements. If you can break a plan for your future down to the element that represent it, you now have an archetype or basic image you can use to conceptualize its qi. Along with the same qi, you have the two cycles of the five elements, generating (which can also be called nourishing) and controlling, to work with in order to enhance your plans and prevent them from problems. This is fundamental Daoist fengshui. If you're in the field of construction or architecture, you are part of earth. You are categorized as the element of earth. If you're in the business of restaurants, then you are part of fire, categorized as the element of fire. If you are involved with banking, it is related to metal and also to water, as metal nourishes water in the generative cycle.

Now, let's say that there's a two story building. Downstairs is a restaurant and upstairs is an acupuncture clinic. Acupuncture also belongs to the element of fire, so as fire/fire, they do not conflict. If instead of acupuncture, you have a bank upstairs from the restaurant, there is going to be a problem. Banking belongs to water and metal. The fire of the restaurant will melt the metal of the bank, which is bad for the bank's business. Even worse, because the bank is positioned on the top floor, its water will run down onto the fire of the restaurant, which is bad for the restaurant's business and also bad for the bank.

Water will not coexist with fire. In the mundane world when they meet, at best you will get some steam as the water extinguishes the fire or the fire evaporates the water. However, Daoist internal alchemy takes another direction. Even though water and fire are in direct conflict with each other, if they eventually do merge, much energy is generated and out of this fusion, creates something new. That new substance will be the best. It's this ideal substance that we seek, that everyone who practices qigong should be in pursuit of. This ideal can be seen as a distillation of contrasting forces. The original energies dissolve and a refined, ultimate essence is left. If we recall that "Nine-Five" is an idiom for "ultimate," we can see another layer of purpose within the Nine-Five Maintenance.

nance of Qi. In point of fact, creating this new qi is the purpose of all Daoist qigong.

How do we dissolve? The details of the physical training will be discussed in the course of this book. This qigong form is designed to soften your body. You will practice to the point where you are an infant, newborn, very soft, completely malleable. Only then will you be able to adjust your opportunities and adjust yourself. You will have the fluidity to finally pull away from all the factors that have tightened you into misalignment. All the forces of nature will come to help you reach this state, because alignment means aligning with nature. Dissolving into nature occurs first and foremost in one's consciousness and perception of self. You are changing your perception of the universe from within your physical body and emotional state.

It's true that we use intention and will to go through a series of exercises. It's easy to feel you are at the center of your practice and you stand in that center as its guiding force. In reality, it's not about "You." You're not practicing with the earth. The earth is practicing with you. Why is this? As much as self-determination is a guiding principle in *The Book of Dao and Its Virtue*, Laozi's emphasis is that we have to adapt to nature in order to achieve it. Even though as humans we have the capacity to change nature and alter certain portions of it, the truth is that even with all our efforts, these changes are very minimal and should be recognized as such. Our main goal should be to accept and adapt to nature. When we ignore this and impact the environment without care, geological catastrophes will follow, earthquakes, floods and droughts. If we disturb the natural order of life, we are presented with new diseases and imbalances in the ecosystem, as we are already experiencing. Whatever consequences we are suffering today, we brought upon ourselves, by elevating human agency above its place in nature's design.

The main take away from these lessons is that we are here to adapt to nature. We accept nature on its terms. We are a part of its whole. This is our true relationship with nature. It is also the source of our true sense of self. Even though we do change our natural environment a bit just by our presence on the planet, our impact will be kept to a minimum. In turn, we will share in wisdom of nature's rhythms. This is the theory and philosophy of Laozi.

Daoism emphasizes being one with nature, going with the flow of nature. In this spirit, the Nine-Five Maintenance of Qi is an attunement with nature. As we practice, we harmonize ourselves with heaven and earth, yin and yang, life and death. Everything that doesn't matter dissolves away and what is left is a will that finds its motivation in the cycles of nature. We perceive our humanity anew in the awareness that at once, we are infinite as the cosmos itself and small and imperceptible as a grain of rice. With this knowledge, we take our rightful place on that sinuous line that curves across the Taiji symbol and forms the timeline of the universe.

