



How to Measure and Deepen Your Spiritual Realization:

*A Short Multi-disciplinary Course on
Evaluating and Elevating Your Meditation
Progress and Spiritual Experiences*

by

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Chapter 4: Twelve Enlightening Case Studies: An Analysis of the Spiritual Progress and Problems Faced by People Practicing Meditation

This chapter will start to use the information that we have already covered on the skandhas and Taoist concepts and apply it to categorizing your meditative experiences. By the end of our discussion, we will end up dealing with the very highest levels of spiritual accomplishment which only the liberated attain. But frankly speaking, the experiences of most ordinary spiritual practitioners can usually be explained without having to resort to anything other than the two skandhas of form and sensation. Most meditators, and even some spiritual adepts like the Immortals, remain bound within these two realms.

In other words, no matter how profound or unusual the experiences of most hard working meditators, the vast majority of the experiences they will encounter from their practice will be very limited. In most cases they will not go beyond simple changes in the physical body, the experience of various feelings or sensations, and a minor calming of superficial psychological states.

These are all changes which belong solely to the form and sensation aggregates. And since sensations are relatively easy to understand, it is the form skandha we must analyze if we really wish to comprehend this. As we already know, the form aggregate involves the five elements of the physical body as well as the form impressions produced by the senses. The sensation aggregate, on the other hand, includes our various reactions to these impressions, namely whether we like them or dislike them or have no particular feelings towards them at all.

It helps to note that the various physical phenomena we refer to as chi (prana), the mai (nadi or energy channels), chakras, and even kundalini (*tumo* or *shakti* spiritual energy) are all phenomena belonging to the skandha of form. In other words, their manifestation only corresponds to the level of form skandha phenomena. These are not imaginary structures, but esoteric physical phenomena that *do* exist, although their existence involves refined energies or subtle materiality. The sensations we experience as these phenomena manifest are properly classified as belonging to the sensation and form skandhas as well. The physical sensations themselves are a characteristic of the form skandha, and our emotional reactions of like or dislike to these impressions belong to the skandha of sensation.

Nearly everyone who starts to meditate correctly will eventually feel various feelings or sensations in the body. This is absolutely inevitable and unavoidable. Unfortunately, many people will jump to the conclusion that these sensations are high stage experiences whereas they are usually just the movement of internal “body wind” activated by cultivation. Thus, before we can progress to investigate the ranks of outstanding cultivation practitioners, we must clarify such

situations in detail.

To be specific, we must familiarize ourselves with the broad spectrum of the initial experiences you can encounter upon first entering the cultivation path. In this way, we will not confuse these minor events with any of the higher stages of cultivation accomplishment. Otherwise, people who experience this or that phenomenon will immediately mistake it for a more advanced stage of practice, as this is the natural tendency of those hoping for spiritual progress. Hence, before we fully enter into a discussion of the form and other aggregates, we must first analyze the common experiences of today's modern practitioners.

To give shape to our discussion, there is a marvelous book by Dr. Lee Sannella, called *The Kundalini Experience*, which has gathered together an excellent collection of cases summarizing the various phenomena experienced by novice meditation practitioners. This collection reveals a broad spectrum of kung-fu experiences (physical reactions and mental experiential realms) which can occur at the lowest, beginning stages of meditation practice. If we examine these cases recorded by Dr. Sannella, we will be in a much better position to understand the much higher levels of cultivation accomplishment.

To understand the experiences of most cultivators as they cultivate their chi and open up the energy channels and chakras, an individual also needs to match their spiritual experiences with traditional cultivation teachings, including the details of spiritual and physical stages revealed within Nan Huai-Chin's *Tao and Longevity* (Samuel Weiser, York Beach, Maine, 1985). This is the only text available which describes the "what" and "wherefore" behind the experiences encountered by practitioners on the meditation path. While the descriptions in this book are purposely limited to the opening of the *tu mai* channel in the back of the body, they are still sufficient to cover most the experiences encountered by beginning cultivation practitioners.

From this book, a reader will begin to understand terms such as yin and yang, jing, chi, shen, the chi channels (mainly the *tu mai*, *jen mai*, *zhong mai*, *ida*, *pingala* and sushumna channels), chakras and kung-fu—all of which constitute the necessary vocabulary you must know to knowledgeably discuss the world's spiritual cultivation schools and practices. To talk about the physical changes of cultivation in an intelligent fashion, it is absolutely essential that you develop a basic fluency with this vocabulary.

Because of this requirement, familiarity with *Tao and Longevity* is almost a prerequisite for understanding the cultivation path; more references at the end of this chapter can help fill in other details. For us to be able to condense this work as much as possible, it will be assumed that the reader already has some basic familiarity with these concepts so that we can proceed to analyze the following cases from Lee Sannella's book:

CASE 1: Male Professor in the Humanities

This sixty-nine-year-old man, who had many psychic experiences as a child, awoke from a nap one day in 1963 to discover a three-inch blister on his thigh where his hand had been resting. This extraordinary experience stimulated his interest in the powers of the mind. Within two years he was meditating regularly, though without expert guidance. Then, in 1967, he began formal Zen meditation.

After a few months, during a sitting, he became engulfed by a bright golden light that lasted several minutes. He had a recurrent experience a few weeks later.

During many sittings he noticed prickling and itching sensations moving up the inside of his legs to his groin, in his arms and chest, up his back and over his head to his brows. From there the sensations moved to his cheeks, the outside of his nostrils, and sometimes to his chin. Later he experienced tingling and itching in his throat during meditation. ...

Today, ten years later and several years into his retirement, the professor no longer experiences any dramatic manifestations ... He is, however, able to encourage energy flows starting in the pelvis and spreading upwards. These flows, he feels, revitalize him and have even cured him of lower back pain. Occasionally he feels an energy blockage in his throat, which is the precise location where the kundalini energy seemed to have been arrested when I first saw him.

Nevertheless, he reports many interesting physical changes in recent years. Doing only mild aerobic exercises, he feels ten years younger. His shoulders and chest have increased in size by several inches, while his waist has shrunk by as much. He is fifteen pounds lighter. His hands still get very hot at times. He hears sounds of bells, and sometimes he is awakened by a loud zzzing sound.

In analyzing this first case which Dr. Sannella has recorded, we must try to understand what has happened to this practitioner. The relevant question is: what is this meditator's particular stage of attainment such that it has caused all these experiences?

To start, we must note that absolutely none of the phenomena reported are the results of kundalini although many people would tend to mistakenly identify them as such. None of the experiences are the manifestation of kundalini, indicative of kundalini, nor even related to kundalini.

Rather, in terms of the stages of cultivating the wind, water and fire elements of the physical body, these experiences are all *precursors* to actually cultivating the body's chi energies. This man has not actually started to cultivate the wind element of the physical nature, but is just beginning to activate its outskirts which the Chinese *chi-gong* and Tao schools call "*fan chi*." When the *yuan chi* (original chi) does appear, which corresponds to the genuine kundalini phenomenon, its characteristics are quite different from any of these indications. This meditator's

kung-fu experiences are only the “wind chi” of the body whose resemblance to “real chi” tends to confuse most cultivation practitioners.

Meditators who have a weak physical nature often easily experience sensations similar to this professor’s. For instance, it is especially easy to feel the chi running up or down the insides of the legs to the big toes. In fact, a common practice in many cultivation schools is to lightly draw the energy up from the toes along this route when you feel weak or tired, and to lightly send energy down these meridian lines to the toes when you feel you have an excess of vital energy. When doing so it is important to never forcefully push these sensations.

From the description of his experiences, we can also surmise that this practitioner probably had some type of liver weakness which his meditation uncovered. This internal weakness involved his liver chi, and it is this disequilibrium which became highlighted when he first started on the road of practice. If he continued meditating, in time this particular imbalance would have adjusted itself naturally and in fixing this potentially debilitating problem, he would have increased his overall health.

If this practitioner had never started meditating, however, this unknown problem would have grown into something much more serious that may later have required drugs and surgery to correct. It is truly a blessing to discover the body’s ailments through meditation and to fix them with gentle methods before they become so severe that harmful intervention is necessary. This is one of the unspoken benefits of meditation.

As to the sensations one sometimes feels in their legs and groin when first meditating, *Tao and Longevity* points out that

Because the *ch’i* cannot flow freely between the blood vessels, muscles and tendons, one sometimes experiences numbness, aches and swelling in the legs [when one sits cross-legged and first begins to meditate]. These sensations indicate that there are obstacles in the *ch’i* routes of *Yin Ch’iao* and *Yang Ch’iao* [energy meridians]. When one can no longer endure this feeling, he can loosen the legs. After awhile he will experience fresh, unfamiliar, comfortable feelings. When one has advanced to a certain stage in meditation, no matter whether he crosses his legs or not, he will always experience these fresh and wonderful euphoric feelings. At this stage, a person will be able to cross his legs to meditate for long periods without feeling any obstructions. 1

Explaining the importance of opening the leg meridians through meditation would require an entire chapter or even book of explanations, but we must certainly draw attention to the fact that our life force runs through our legs. For instance when we watch an infant in a crib, we can see that they kick their legs much more than they wave their hands. As a child grows older, they always crawl about, and then run around everywhere, continuously keeping their legs active.

They just cannot sit still because of all the active chi in their bodies.

One of the reasons behind this disposition toward movement is because the life force is coursing through the legs, and as an adult you must open up the energy meridians in the legs through the process of cultivation so that chi inside can flow freely. When this finally happens, you will experience an indescribable bliss. There are an entire host of reasons why people should sit in a cross-legged position while meditating, and one of the reasons is to help bring the body itself into samadhi so that the leg meridians open up.

When we initially start sitting in a cross-legged position, we sometimes feel pain. Despite this pain, *it is impossible for meditation to become the cause of any type of physical illness*, for meditation is simply a state of resting the body and mind. However, when the vital energy currents of the body start circulating because of meditation and subsequently encounter obstructions, we can correctly say that meditation has revealed a latent weakness. This is the type of thing which may have silently hidden itself in the body while growing in strength and destructive capabilities. As *Tao and Longevity* again reminds us,

“Everyone should realize that latent diseases may be discovered, but are not actually caused by meditation. *In other words, meditation increases inner vitality and begins to heal the body.* By persistent meditation and appropriate medical treatment, one can recover one’s health.”²

Disease and illness are sometimes blessings in disguise because while they can interrupt your life, they may also cause you to rethink your past behavior and enter into a more worthwhile life pathway. They sometimes give you pause to consider, and correct, the way you live. In this way they are sometimes considered a blessing.

Meditation is particularly beneficial to your health because the indications it provides give you a chance to identify and correct any health problems before they cause major interruptions. It often alerts you that you must transform deteriorating conditions before they invisibly accumulate to cause cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, heart disease, mental illness or other serious health problems. Furthermore, meditation involves renewing or unleashing your natural vital energies and letting them flow freely throughout the body, so the path of meditation is often the remedy of cure for many “incurable” illnesses. The fact that this meditator could have such experiences at all indicates he had achieved a degree of cultivation accomplishment in a previous life which had laid a foundation for the speedy results in this one.

Nonetheless, we must be firm in recognizing that this man’s set of experiences are not Tao, nor real chi, nor even the kundalini phenomenon most people commonly talk about today. However,

if people like this practitioner know the true principles of spiritual practice, they can make great progress in these directions, although they must certainly not mistake any of these experiences for the real chi of the body.

What this man experienced were simply the results of internal wind running along his energy meridians. At this level of practice, it would be a gigantic mistake to conclude that the meridians have been totally cleared of obstructions, but to discuss this in detail will require more than we can handle at present. What we can say is that in cultivation, a meditator first starts to cultivate their chi and mai before they can activate the kundalini phenomenon, and cultivating the chi and mai requires a good deal of time and effort which he had not yet undertaken.

As to the golden light experienced by this meditator, this was actually a phenomenon caused by the interaction of his chi with his mental condition. Chi and consciousness are interrelated in the sense that thoughts “ride” on or with chi, and when the chi accumulates and concentrates in a certain region, the compression of friction can cause the experience of seeing internal lights in the body. This is called a physical stage of internal lumination and since chi and thoughts are related, this interrelationship always reveals itself in special mental states.

At this level of explanation, we should simply say that because this practitioner had made progress in his meditation, this light manifested as a result of the friction between his physiological and psychological states. It was not a “light from wisdom” attainment. Nor was it the “light of wisdom,” “clear light” or any other type of holy light experience. Rather, it was simply a “frictional” light of the form realm produced by the interaction of the four elements of the body (earth, wind, fire, water) in conjunction with changes in the mind (the sixth consciousness). It was an internal light caused by the massing of chi at a particular point or area inside. Even the mental state we speak of at this point is “mind” at the level of form—the sixth consciousness of ordinary mentation which deals with the form skandha. Hence his experiences never went beyond the simple skandha of form.

As to our last bit analysis for this case, the reason why this practitioner’s fan chi seemed to stop in the throat is because it is impossible to open up this region of the body until one reaches very advanced stages of cultivation practice. When Jesus was hanging on the cross in incredible pain, yet exhibited the compassion to forgive his tormentors by saying, “Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do,” this selfless behavior was a bit of evidence that he had *truly* opened up the chi channels and chakra in his throat region.

As for this particular meditator, however, we certainly should not believe that he opened the chi channels in his throat, or that the chi channels in his legs actually opened, either. When these happen there will be certain unmistakable experiences involving jing and chi which are far different than what this individual experienced.

CASE 2: Female High School Teacher

This middle-aged teacher of Spanish has been practicing Yoga and meditation for many years. In 1980 she started to have a variety of symptoms, such as headaches, tingling in her face and nose, pains and spasms of the throat, cardiac area, and abdomen, with popping sensations all over the body. These symptoms became accentuated whenever she would meditate. She also had sensations of emptiness and of her voice not being generated by herself.

In November 1985 a dramatic change occurred. In the midst of a thirty-day meditation period, she became aware of strong flows of energy washing over her entire body. There was also a loss of sensation, except for sensory perceptions in her head. She felt the kundalini energy pushing and pulling in her face and at the top of her head. There was a bumping, jerking sensation in the chakras of the throat, the heart, and the abdomen. These sensations were predictably intensified during the most concentrated meditations. Each area also felt greatly heated up in turn. Then she started to hear machinery-like noises in her head that became continuous over the next few weeks. With her eyes closed, she could see white light streaming from her face and head.

These symptoms subsided somewhat after three months but were triggered again after a period of intense meditation and lasted for several weeks. The kundalini energy resumed its flow up the spine and down the face and trunk. She experienced great rapture and ecstatic orgasmic sensations until she began to tire of this hyperstimulation of her nervous system.

Shortly afterward she developed laryngeal spasms, which were accompanied by the fear of choking to death. Then the symptoms returned in full and for several weeks she experienced “heart attacks”. As soon as these symptoms started to subside she began to suffer from sudden acute sciatica, which was clinically typical and later diagnosed by NMR scan as a ruptured disc pressing on the nerve. After three months of therapy, which did not alleviate her painful condition, she agreed to have surgery. By that time she had developed pronounced foot drop. There was intense pain extending from her lower back to her left big toe. She suffered from numbness of the sciatic distribution and great stiffness. Then, nearly as dramatically, there was a sudden subsidence of sciatica, and within three days she could walk with only a slight limp. Now, six months later, she only suffers a slight residual weakness of the lower left leg.

Her impression is that she must have had some weakness in her back that did not show until the intense kundalini energy became active in that area and precipitated the actual pathology. She looks upon her practically instantaneous healing as a gift of grace. All of her symptoms have disappeared, even though she continues to meditate.

As with our first case study, this practitioner's experiences cannot be classified as kundalini either. Once again, these experiences do not constitute an actual awakening of any type, but are simply the initial manifestations of fan chi—the ordinary chi of the body (not the real chi)—being stimulated through meditation practice. It is unfortunate when people jump to conclusions and mistakenly take this as kundalini, for the characteristics of the real kundalini phenomenon are entirely different.

The reason why this woman practitioner experienced headaches from her meditation is because she undoubtedly suffered from some sort of spinal dislocation whose effects impinged upon her throat region. Later she discovered that she had a disc problem in her back, confirming this diagnosis, and she decided to correct this condition through surgery.

Whenever someone's meditation reveals a problem such as this, it might be wise to first resort to osteopathic manipulations, chiropractic adjustments, various deep tissue massage or bodywork therapies (such as Rolfing, Integrative Manual Therapy, etc.) or acupuncture before submitting to radical, invasive surgery on the back. In many cases, back operations never fix the problems they are meant to address, and the results are often unsatisfactory. Furthermore, once bones are fused because of operations, the results can never be undone. Chinese meditation and gong-fu practitioners, when they discover they have a similar problem (revealed through their cultivation), first try all sorts of noninvasive techniques before ever submitting to surgery. Sometimes they use a method called "shuffling the bones" which uses the body's own chi to help move the spinal bones back into their proper places.

This practitioner was particularly perceptive in that she realized her meditation did not cause the medical problems, but simply revealed what was already there. In indicating a latent weakness, it gave her an opportunity to heal the situation before it became worse. As *Tao and Longevity* states,

Meditation does not *cause* ... undesirable effects. They are due to old illnesses. [If for instance] the nerves and *ch'i* routes around the renal and waist areas constitute obstacles to the *ch'i* that is generated during meditation, ... [it must] work to open and pass these areas. If one understands this principle and has instruction from a good master about suitable remedies, these problems can all be overcome, and one will eventually recover health ...

[As another example, people who are old or weak may have illnesses which] include lung disease, gastric and hepatic disorders, cardiac diseases and various other latent conditions. If a person has these diseases, at a certain stage of meditation he will feel aching and heaviness like a strong pressure on the back, flaccidity and lack of strength or aching around the waist. Cramps or convulsive contractions may occur in the back, or congestion may occur in the shoulder, or aching may occur causing one to perspire, feel chills and fever.

If these phenomena should occur, one should understand that this trouble is not produced by meditation. The quiet in meditation is, after all, a means of rest. No one is apt to get sick from merely taking rest. One should be glad, however, because without the test of meditation, one might not have realized that one already had some sort of disease. The pains one feels show the self-healing effect of increased vitality and indicate that the disease is still curable and has not progressed to the extent that there is no remedying it. For example, a man may not initially feel any pain from a very serious wound and yet when the wound begins to heal, he will. Similarly, when a man first catches a common cold, the germs of the cold are still latent; there are no symptoms. When the symptoms of the cold are evident, the cold is already going away.

If these phenomena appear in the course of meditation practice, one should take medical treatments in addition to the healing involved in meditation. So long as one has the will to persist through these crises, the crises can lead to a healthier condition.³

Thus, if this woman had not discovered her spinal problem through meditation, it is likely to have degraded even more as she got older. Who knows what other problems it was causing inside her body? If you go to an osteopath or chiropractor and ask about the possible complications which can result from spinal misadjustments (subluxations), you could sit there for hours listening to their reply. For the road of serious meditation, it is indeed useful to have a yearly adjustment of your bones and joints to make sure that your spine is in good condition.

It is generally true that meditation usually makes people more sensitive to external environmental factors such as wind, weather, odors, people, and so on, but correspondingly, when spiritual cultivation practitioners get sick they know it right away and can immediately take the appropriate measures (i.e., medicine) to adjust their bodies. Normal people get sick without knowing it and therefore do not do anything to heal themselves. As a result, illnesses find no outlet of release and are driven deeper into their bodies, quietly accumulating over time so as to develop into cancer, arthritis and all sorts of other afflictions.

When such people discover a problem, it is often nearly too late. They must resort to fixing matters with radical cures such as surgery, rather than changes in lifestyle or just a few herbs together with nutraceutical supplements. As a result, those ignorant of meditation often go on compounding the errors which produced their condition in the first place! By old age (if they reach it), people with these problems are really in a mess, whereas meditators have a means to both prevent and cure these types of conditions. One great benefit of meditation practice is that it is the basis of longevity, and of preventative as well as curative health care.

In China's Sung dynasty there was once a Zen master called Ta-hui, who lamented that there was no one with the understanding to teach Zen anymore, to teach the practice of directly pointing to

the original mind of enlightenment. It wasn't that there was no Zen anymore, for the Tao always exists, but that there were no talented Zen masters anymore. Ta-hui's story reminds us of the fact that there are few talented teachers today who can properly explain this information.

Many modern teachers do not know how to guide people through all these situations, but refer to them with fancy words like kundalini when they do not really apply to the situation at all. Perhaps today's teachers might correctly use some proper words of explanation, and yet they still might not be able to comprehend what they are talking about either because they know very little about anatomy, biology, psychology, science, kung-fu and medicine. They are like a blind cat bumping into a dead mouse! Such teachers might even label all of a practitioner's experiences as *mara* (delusions), or tell practitioners to ignore everything that occurs when the symptoms might be indicating a great need for medical intervention. It is indeed difficult to find a skilled master nowadays!

In particular, this case is not indicative of the real chi of the body, which typically floods the body like a curtain of rain that travels down a street. This case shows us another example of internal wind rather than chi, but since cultivating the chi is the very first step in the normal sequence of meditation, it is acceptable to refer to these phenomena as "chi" in order to simplify our explanation, as well as to further encourage people along the path. This type of encouragement, by calling the lesser something much greater for the practitioner's benefit, is called "an exercise in skillful means." When a practitioner progresses, they later awaken to the fact that what they thought was chi was initially just the stirring of internal wind, and they recognize that it was initially helpful to make this mistake of considering this as great spiritual progress.

"Wind chi" can also be called "semblance chi" or a "semblance dharma (kung-fu)" because it "looks the same" and closely resembles chi, but is not *really* the chi phenomenon in question. Nevertheless, calling something "chi" when it is only wind is sometimes an excellent means to teach and motivate others in their meditation practice. It not only encourages them to work hard at their spiritual practice, but it enables them to better understand the meditation classics which discuss such matters in detail.

We can also use this case to note that some individuals who meditate originally had a nervous problem to begin with, and will thus, experience symptoms similar to this woman's case. For some such people, the effects from meditation might be the result of this sort of mental imbalance rather than indicative of progress in spiritual kung-fu. So you really must be like a skilled doctor to know what is actually going on when you are trying to help guide people in their meditative practice. You must be very careful not to "mistake fish eyes for pearls" by mistaking one phenomenon for another.

All the experiences of this female practitioner are manifestations of "post-natal" chi, and occurred because of the interaction of the physical body with psychological states of mind. The

experiences were an effect of the interaction of the four elements, so they were not the manifestation of the original chi or kundalini of the body. They absolutely were *not* the pre-natal chi, which the yogis of India and Tibet call kundalini.

This woman was simply cultivating her body's internal wind in advance of cultivating her real chi, meaning she had not yet touched the real chi, mai, or kundalini phenomenon. Thus, we have a typical beginner's practice report which shows some of the initial results from transformations within the skandha of form.

CASE 3: Female Artist-Teacher

I first saw this forty-five-year-old woman ten years ago. At the time, she had been doing automatic paintings for fourteen years. For the past two years she has been creating spontaneous paintings of her inner states, usually foreshadowing imminent experiences.

This cycle started when she blacked out during a painting session. When she regained consciousness, she found herself lying on the floor, with her body shaking violently and filling with great energy. This condition lasted for about half an hour and recurred the next night. The blast of energy and the trembling returned the following morning while she was doing her Yoga practices. It was then that she created her first spontaneous painting.

She immediately went on to the second painting in this series. All the while she was experiencing intense waves of energy and inner heat. She was also unaware of who or where she was. She began to worry about going insane. This was followed by free-floating anxiety and headaches. Then she worked on her third spontaneous painting while hallucinating patterns of force.

It was at this point she fell apart. Depression set in, and she felt like dying. She hurt all over and cried a lot. Painting number four was created. She called it "Fractured," because it reflected her inner chaos.

Then, over a two-day period, she painted her own face with a snake encircling it. At night, on the day of completion, she awoke trembling all over. She saw a strange reddish being with an elephant face. "He" put his fingers on her forehead. Then she fell asleep again. She dreamt of painting eyes that came alive under her brush. Next morning she started work on a painting of the blue-red man. In a subsequent painting she depicted that man healing her broken head. A baby was born from that man and then grew up, which was captured in another painting.

In another crisis she did a painting of a red octopus. Then, while in an ecstatic state, she created a painting of a head superimposed on a black head. Following this painting, she felt reborn.

Her ordeal resumed with painting number thirty-three. Overcome by a mood of depression, she felt as if she was imprisoned in a concentration camp, which is

reflected in the gloomy scenes of several of her paintings. These spontaneous creations were followed by a painting of a egg with a wavy person emerging. At the end of this series, she felt alive and whole.

The next incident was fierce burning in her legs, which then spread into her chest and arms. She suffered hot and cold fevers and was unable to eat. She experienced pain on both sides of her head and behind her eyes as well as violent palpitations. Her blood pressure was found to be elevated.

Just prior to my interview with her, she experienced a cramping pain in her left big toe, as if a nail had been driven through it. My examination revealed a very red toenail, which was not due to bleeding. At this time she was also unnerved by a complete loss of hearing, which lasted for about an hour, and she believed she was going to die. She then consulted a physician, who found nothing wrong with her.

Since my interview, she has reported feeling a “throat opening” sensation, but also breathing difficulties and pressure in the head. These experiences and states seem to be associated with her Yoga practice and artistic creativity. Her teaching work seems to exert a stabilizing influence on her, and she admitted to feeling generally much better since taking it up.

This particular set of experiences is quite different from the previous two. From a cultivation standpoint, we should suspect that this practitioner was somewhat mentally unstable before she even started to meditate, and so, from a psychological point of view, she lacked a balanced state of consciousness at the start of her cultivation practice. This possibility explains some of her mental experiences.

Many people today mistakenly believe that some people are locked away in mental hospitals because they are suffering from the kundalini experience gone astray, but this idea results from a great ignorance about the true nature of the kundalini phenomenon. Nonetheless, this case gives us pause to announce that the great diseases people will fear in the twenty-first century will be forms of mental illness rather than diseases such as cancer or heart disease, and only meditation or life style changes will end up providing effective cures for these coming conditions. While this woman may not be as mentally secure as most ordinary individuals, meditation has indeed helped her to a great extent, and so is useful in the sense of serving as a helpful cure. Nevertheless, the experiences she describes are certainly not the result of kundalini, for once again they are only manifestations of chi.

In explaining this case, we must first understand a little of the system of psychology used in cultivation matters. Naturally, the psychological mappings used in spiritual schools differ from those employed by psychology, such as Freudian, Jungian, or the more modern views of Erikson or Maslow. All one has to do is peruse a book like Xuan Zang's *Doctrine of Mere Consciousness*, upon which one will immediately notice that modern psychology is child's play compared to cultivation science. The psychological categories used in cultivation are extremely

precise and more elaborate since realized masters, employing samadhi-insight discernment, have been able to map all the various levels of the mind.

Modern psychology and psychiatry study thoughts, but neither studies the gap between thoughts. Yet it is this gap, this emptiness which is initially the core focus on the path of spiritual development. If you want to truly study the mind, *this* is what you have to focus on! The coming and going of thoughts are like the two sides of birth and death while the real Reality rests just between these two aspects. This is why someone who wants to know the mind must come to investigate the mental quiet state between thoughts, and extend this state until it envelops the mind in total.

Therapists today are also fond of teaching visualization methods for stress reduction and relaxation, but if you want to reduce stress, this gap between thoughts should once again become the targeted focus of relaxed attention. Individuals in relaxation classes are instructed to follow their breath, but this is entirely wrong as well: what they have to pursue is the cessational gap of no-breath between the breaths. This is the important thing! If modern psychiatry and psychology were built upon studying these gaps, rather than categorizing false thoughts into standardized patterns (a never ending task), they could finally get somewhere in terms of helping solve the problems of the human condition, and by extension, the world.

The schools of cultivation psychology, on the other hand, are based on the true fabric of the mind rather than on some random temporary coloring of the mind. Cultivation psychology therefore involves mental levels of which ordinary psychology will never be aware. For example, how many psychologists have ever reached the samadhi of no-thought? Not knowing of these realms, they can never understand what it truly means to be mentally healthy.

The teachings of cultivation psychology, or mapping the mind, had their first origins in the ancient Vedic cultivation schools. They later flowered under the Buddhist school of Mind-only, called Yogacara or Madhyamika, whose teachings provided elaborate structural details about the many layered levels of the mind. The aspect of psychology we must investigate in this particular case deals with the sixth consciousness of ordinary mind, as opposed to the higher seventh consciousness of egocentric being and the eighth consciousness (called the alaya or seed consciousness), which we will discuss later. All these levels of the mind can be found in Yogacara teachings.

In Buddhist psychology, the ordinary everyday mind of mentation, or “sixth consciousness,” discriminates objects and combines together the various impressions of our senses (smells, sounds, etc.). In other words, it enables us to judge and evaluate things. Since everything in existence has both a positive and negative aspect, a yin nature and yang nature, the sixth consciousness cannot escape this principle either. Hence, it has a bright, clear side of discrimination, and also a shadow side as well.

The bright or clarity side of the sixth consciousness takes in all of the information provided by the senses, and makes sense of it. The shadow side of the sixth consciousness, on the other hand, operates in its own independent realm, and does not rely on the eyes, ears, nose and so on in order to operate. Since this flip side of the sixth consciousness can operate by itself, it is called the “solitary consciousness.”

This shadow side, or yin-aspect of the sixth consciousness, which is also called the *du-yin* (“solitary shadow”) consciousness, produces the pictures and sensations of whatever we experience within our dreams, among other things. Dreams are the operational province of the solitary consciousness, and so are cases of insanity. In many cases our real personality and behavioral traits are only revealed during our dreams, so true spiritual cultivators use these indicators to spot the faults and bad habits they should change.

In general, the *du-yin* can operate under several circumstances:

- (1) During *dreaming*. Dreams can be powerful because the *du-yin*, free of the confines of space and time, can sometimes tap into information about the past or future.
- (2) During *sickness* and *incoherence*.
- (3) During *mental illness* or *insanity*, such as when an individual starts to ramble incoherently, taking their hallucinations as something real. Some of the mentally ill functioning under the influence of the *du-yin* can even develop supernormal abilities which we do not normally possess; however, this does not mean that they are more spiritually advanced than we are, for their minds are not calm or clear, nor do they have control over themselves.
- (4) During *certain stages of meditation*, such as when you mistakenly believe you see the sun and moon, gods, the future, etc., or believe you have developed superpowers. Other cases include when you actually attain samadhi and go beyond the realms of time and space so that you are not influenced by normal sensory input, and whereby various superpowers can manifest. We can say that this is similar to insanity or mental illness, but the difference is that the individual with samadhi has complete control over their mental powers or psychic manifestations, whereas the mentally ill might use the *du-yin* to tap into the past or future and extrasensory powers, but cannot control their mental states.

Western psychology tends to group these possibilities under the rubric of the “subconscious,” but

the psychological classification as the du-yin shadow side of the discriminatory consciousness is much more appropriate.

Some forms of daydreaming can also be classified as the operation of the du-yin, such as when we lose ourselves inside some personal mental scenario with which we are playing. A perfect example is when we eat all the food on our plate without noticing because we are absorbed in some particular mental scenario. Sometimes when we are awake the findings of the five senses also cannot penetrate through to us because we are deeply absorbed in some scenario. This is how the du-yin can even function when we are awake and alert.

Since the solitary consciousness is not restricted by space or time, sometimes mentally ill people will have the uncanny ability know certain things about us, or sometimes we will personally experience ESP in our dreams or exhibit superpowers as well. But if we are really careful about the matter, we should also realize that ESP and superpowers in these cases have a definite connection with mental illness. Going a bit further, we can also say that if you are too intelligent or too dumb, both these extremes can be forms of mental illness as well, so you have to be careful how you interpret matters.

The point is, cultivation practitioners and ordinary people who experience things like this artist will become confused when the du-yin is operating. Through lack of clarity, they will not comprehend what is really going on. Sometimes they will mistakenly believe that they know things about the future or believe they have developed various psychic abilities when their experiences are just the operation of the du-yin shadow side of the sixth consciousness, the shadow side of the ordinary mind. This usually corresponds to the chi not being able to pass through the hind region of the brain. Regardless, this demonstrates that a person must become very aware of their own psyche, no matter what school or sect they follow on the road of cultivation.

Although the following description from *Tao and Longevity* does not perfectly apply to this woman practitioner, whose mental instability had complicated matters, her case provides a perfect opportunity to introduce the special reactions which may occur when an individual's chi, because of various sadhana, may actually bring the chi to the state where it is impinging upon and trying to penetrate through the back of the head:

If one has enough bodily strength and the *ch'i* ascends to the back of the head, one may notice darkness in front of the eyes when half asleep. Gradually a dreamlike state occurs, and images eventually appear. This happens because *ch'i* affects the nerves at the back of the head, which then affects the optic nerves. Many people have dream images accompanied by feelings of love and joy or sadness and dread. These images and feelings match subconscious functions which give rise to one's mental states, thoughts and concepts. States of *Mara*, or demonic delusion, may

occur at this stage. These states depend upon one's wisdom, thought, personality, psychological propensities, and physiological condition. They are very complicated. Without the guidance of a very perceptive master, and in the absence of self-confidence, healthy intelligence, and correct thinking, a person may be led down the wrong road.

When a person understands this, he can ignore phenomena of this sort, knowing that light follows the darkness. After passing through this stage one feels somewhat more awake. Points of light, like a fluorescent star, may appear in front of your eyes, sparkling in different shapes and colors. These colors and lights are connected with your physiology and will be discussed later in more detail. ...

When *ch'i* reaches the back of the head, a person might hear wonderful inner sounds or experience ringing or pressure in his ears. This phenomenon is produced by *ch'i* working to open the *ch'i* route in the brain. The vibration or trembling of *ch'i* causes some brain wave activity. If one's intelligence is not clear and bright enough, then illusions deep inside the subconscious will result.

One who has deep religious beliefs may have illusions of hearing the voice of God or Buddha. Often the voice will speak of the past or future, and this *a priori* information may be quite correct, at least in small things. Thus, one might believe he has clairaudience. Whatever is heard is actually just a big assembly; it is a mixing of previous experience—what has been seen, heard, thought and known before. This kind of clairaudience could be used to predict small matters, but it will not work on big events at all. If one clings to the idea that these voices are real, he will fall into a state of *Mara*, or illusion. This shows that the mind is receptive to impressions but this is not a genuine instance of clairaudience. A person should not be puzzled or moved by this reaction. Instead, he should sometimes swallow the saliva and release the feelings in his head. This requires a strong mind and persistent will. By guiding the *ch'i* downward one will pass this stage and enter the next.

Ideally, one should use the Taoist's internal *Kung Fu*, employ the special body exercises and adjustments of yoga and esoteric Buddhism and have required medical treatments when necessary.⁴

Because it is very easy to be misled in all this, the Zen masters have a saying: "Those people who practice kung-fu but do not know the theory—when they open their mouths, only nonsense comes out. Those people who only know the theory but who have never had the real experience—these people are like the blind."

To summarize, we can say that this female practitioner was not fully mentally stable from the start. We can phrase matters another way by saying that her nervous system was weak which is why she engaged in automatic painting. Her problem was not very large or very serious, but she would definitely have benefited from some form of psychological guidance or counseling. Furthermore, the description of her meditation experiences suggests that she also had an

obstruction (subluxation) in the back of the neck which could have and should have been treated by one or two chiropractic or osteopathic adjustments.

CASE 4: Female Psychologist

As a child, following a vacation spent in a religiously oriented summer camp, this middle-aged woman experienced feelings of oneness with God and Nature for about a year. As an adult she suffered several episodes of severe depression, and was hospitalized during one of these. In 1960 and 1970, respectively, she made two attempts at suicide and was unconscious for days each time.

In 1972 she was initiated in Transcendental Meditation, which helped her bear the tragedy of her daughter's premature death. It also cured her asthma. She practiced this form of meditation for about six months and then did not meditate for a similar period of time. When she resumed her meditation practice, she switched over to the Buddhist technique of *vipassana*, watching her breathing, body sensations, and thoughts.

She gradually increased the time spent in meditation. By the summer of 1974, she was meditating between three and four hours daily. It was then that she found her meditations deepening. During one of her sittings she experienced a strong feeling of disorientation, of not being located in space, which instilled some fear in her. Then, without warning, there was a sudden sharp pain at the base of her left big toe, which was quickly followed by a painful ripping sensation traveling up her leg. Then her lower pelvis and perineum felt as if they were swollen. When this sensation had spread to her waist, her torso suddenly was twisted violently to the right. (She would feel the pain in her left big toe whenever a new energy center was opening up further.)

In her abdomen she distinctly felt, "I must save all sentient beings." This was followed by a cold sensation pouring down over the crown of her head, shoulders, and arms into her chest, with the accompanying words, "I am not ready yet." All this occurred about an hour into her meditation and lasted between ten and thirty minutes.

During an intensive meditation retreat several months later, she again felt her whole body being pushed and pulled by a massive energy. Then she saw/felt a fountain of light erupting from the pelvic area into her head. At the same time she had a sense that there was a wide split in the middle of her body.

In 1975 she switched to Tibetan visualization techniques to correct what a Tibetan meditation master had diagnosed as a lopsided energy flow. She started to experience closing and opening of the energy centers of her body, without reason or order. There was also a low-pitched buzzing in her head and throat during meditation and occasionally during the day. She continued to have spontaneous body movements and energy rushes and pains. However, by the end of that year she was again able to sleep three to four hours every night.

Subsequently she went to Swami Muktananda for spiritual guidance, after having seen him in dreams. He gave her a mantra and asked her to focus on her head, not her body, as in vipassana. She started to have more spontaneous body movements but the pain and fear lessened and feelings of ecstasy and bliss increased during meditation. She also experienced more tingling sensations and heat phenomena, particularly in her lower back and hands.

She began to see how there was a strong part of herself that was negative toward her own growth and spiritual maturation. But it was not until 1987 that she began to consciously work through the problems of her childhood that had proven formidable obstructions in her psyche.

In a recent follow-up interview, she reported her old kundalini headaches are persisting but the energetic disturbances have gone. She is now experiencing many spiritual connections with living and dead teachers. Psychic phenomena are occurring more frequently, and in particular she has developed the ability to heal instantly on occasion.

Let us examine how this case differs from our previous examples. For instance, there are very clear signs that this individual, who spontaneously repeated the vows of a Buddhist to “save all sentient beings,” had practiced spiritual cultivation in a previous life. It is unfortunate that she was unaware of the principle of emptiness which would have enabled her to make substantial progress in her present cultivation practice.

If this woman had known about the principle of emptiness—attaining a state absent or empty of discriminative thought by just letting everything go without mentally attaching to it—she could have made tremendous progress in cultivating her chi and mai. However, this possibility would have depended upon whether she had enough merit to progress in practicing the traditional prajna-emptiness teachings of most spiritual schools.

As to her physical condition, her experiences suggest that she needed chiropractic adjustments in her neck and in the region of her pelvis. As to the cultivation instructions given her by various teachers, let us refrain from commenting too much. Just note that the Zen school always says that there is a gate of no-gate which does not use any practice at all, so why should you put another head on top of the one you already have? It is just too bad that this practitioner did not encounter someone who could teach her about the prajna wisdom path of forgetting both mind and body. As the text *Tao and Longevity* points out, a cultivator may sometimes

have the feeling that there is a strong force moving with difficulty along the spinal cord which is prevented from pushing upward. One may also hope that these forces will push through the obstruction so that one can finally feel relaxed and comfortable. In Taoism, this phenomenon is called the River Chariot which rolls to the location of the *Chia Chih*. This occurs during the process of opening the *Tu Mai*. This is the

stage where the *ch'i* starts to reach the Huang Yang point.

If one cannot release his mind and attain the state of forgetting the body, the pressure will become stronger and stronger. Whenever this phenomenon occurs, a person's attention will automatically focus on the back and one may attempt to use the force of consciousness or imagination to push the pressure upward. Because of the concentration of attention here, the brain and stomach nerves will become tighter and tighter. The heart will contract and the uncomfortable feeling in the back will be increased.

Some schools of Taoism teach one to guide the *ch'i* with consciousness, to push it through or to drive it. Students are to imagine the progression of the River Chariot and engage in taking deep, long, but tiny breaths (6 x 6, thirty-six deep breaths; or 9 x 9, eighty-one deep breaths) which numerically match the Big and Small circulations of heaven. Or they are to use some Taoism or yoga exercises to guide the passage of *ch'i* through this location.

Although these direction exercises have a temporary effect and make one feel that something passes through the *Chia Chih* to rush up to *Yu Chen* (i.e., the back of the head), it is only the mental force that changes the physical feeling, but *it is definitely not the phenomenon of ch'i passing through the Chia Chih*.

If one can attain the state of "forgetting his own body," or apply his wisdom in an attempt to forget his feelings and remain quiet without taking any mental action, then there will be a moment when suddenly, like a switch making a contact, all the tension is gone and the mind and body are loose and at ease. From this turning point one will experience the state of breadth and brightness of mind and fullness of spirit. A person whose back is humped at this stage will naturally straighten his waist and back, stretch his chest, and his breath will become smoother. For those who are born with advanced scoliosis or who have it as a result of an external wound, this is a difficult situation.

At this stage a person will be so charged that he will not fall asleep easily. Since he may be used to sleeping at a fixed time, he might assume that he has insomnia and feel frightened. It should be understood that this is not the insomnia of ordinary people. One should let nature take its course. If one cannot fall asleep, just don't go to bed.⁵

What about the practitioner who sits quietly and never has any special sensations? Not having any special reactions from meditation practice can be due to the fact that you do not have any serious illnesses inside, or that you simply have not put in enough of the correct form or effort. In most cases it is due to a lack of progress due to infrequent or improper practice because when you truly start to make progress in cultivation, you will feel all the vital energies within the body. It is hard to comment on these matters and put forth general principles because each case is an individual matter.

Actually, not having any sensations is already a sensation. The *Diamond Sutra* also says: “Whoever seeks me in appearance, or seeks me in sound is going astray and missing the Tao.” Hence, there is nothing to worry about when you sit in meditation and nothing special occurs. Just remember that this is also correct. But you should also remember that you will eventually begin to feel your chi inside after start making genuine progress in igniting the vital energies of your physical nature through meditation progress.

CASE 5: Male Computer Scientist

This man is now in his mid-twenties. At age nine he suddenly developed shooting pains in his genitals and lower abdomen. When in bed at night, he would feel a strong force pushing its way down his throat. This was accompanied by perceptual distortions. A physician tentatively diagnosed hypoglycemia.

In his early teens, he and his friends experimented with hypnosis, and he discovered that he could easily dissociate from reality. One day, in his sixteenth year, while sitting quietly, he suddenly started to tremble uncontrollably, and his body became very hot. His abdominal pains returned with full force, accompanied by nausea. After a bowel movement these symptoms subsided. The next day, again while sitting quietly, he had an out-of-body experience (OBE). He had undergone a marginal OBE state when he was younger. On this occasion, however, he was able to move around the room very easily and to view his resting body very clearly. He became alarmed and by moving his arm was able to slip back into the body. For several weeks after this incident his world was collapsed and he felt he was going insane. He dissociated many times in school.

Later, during the fifth session in a Rolfing series in which his psoas muscle was being worked on, he had a strong emotional discharge, with a lot of crying and violent shaking. He felt the immediate need to ground himself. Suddenly there was a terrific energy, which felt to him like a fire hose that was being forced into his perineum and up his spine. When it reached his head there was a feeling of infinite space all around him and inside his skull. He also felt a sensation of a hole being bored into his forehead. All the while there was a display of colored lights around and inside his head. Upon the “penetration” of the forehead, he felt a great current of air rushing through the opening. This was followed by an infinite peace in infinite space.

Subsequently he suffered, as he sees it now, from the delusion that he was enlightened and that this infinite space and otherworldly focus were the only truths for him. A Zen master later told him that during that time he had been in a satori [samadhi] state.

At age eighteen he developed debilitating pains in his solar plexus. These were alleviated whenever he allowed his body to spontaneously assume various postures. Only later did he learn that these were yogic *asanas*. It was then that he started a program of yogic practices, including breath control, that he still follows every day

for at least two hours. He was hoping all this would speed up his regaining the condition of satori. He also began to read spiritual literature.

Five years later he discovered the writings of Da Love-Ananda (Da Free John). In the midst of his study of these works he noticed a remarkable fullness in his abdomen and then his belly felt on fire for hours. To his surprise he noted that his girth had increased by four inches, without any gain in weight.

Soon afterward he became a student of Da Love-Ananda. He began to realize that his intense yogic practice was born out of the terror of dying and an attempt to remove himself from the stresses of life. He no longer suffered from the delusions of being enlightened and also saw how he had not the slightest inclination toward surrendering the stronghold of the ego, which is the single most important precondition for enlightenment.

Then he had his first formal “sitting” with Da Love-Ananda. Upon looking at his teacher, who was seated before hundreds of people, this young man was suddenly possessed by the demonic urge to utterly destroy this being. He found it incredibly difficult to restrain himself from attempting a violent assault. While he was struggling with this irrational impulse, Da Love-Ananda made eye contact with him, and he was immediately thrust into his familiar state of blissfulness and infinity. But this time he was not alone. There was a complete merging with the teacher in an enclosure of love. This was the first time he had ever had such an ecstatic experience of being in this space of love and unity with another being. At this moment the thought arose in him, “I can’t wait to tell my wife this.” That very second it all stopped.

Gradually he became more open to this new relationship and learned to trust it. But time and again, he would rupture this by claiming credit for his condition. For a period he became acutely conscious of playing with his energy flows, as if he were masturbating with his nervous system. At other times he would enter into out-of-body states and immediately feel that this too was only an indulgence. He is now dealing with his residual resistances creatively, always reminding himself to return to the naturalness of the spiritual relationship with the teacher. Occasionally his old fears arise, but they are no longer as severe, and he is now more capable of allowing them while simultaneously locating within himself the bliss and equanimity that lies beyond fear.

This particular case represents a great advance in spiritual progress over our previous four. This cultivator’s foundation, perhaps due to work done in a previous life, is much stronger than the others. In fact, this is the first case in which we encounter anything similar to the real kundalini phenomenon; however, it still not the true kundalini.

The active nature of this practitioner’s vitality was the reason why he felt pains in his genitals at age nine, and the reason he could have various unusual experiences by age sixteen. It is most probable that much of this progress was due to the fact that he was a “chaste youth” who rarely

lost his semen through wet dreams or masturbation. As we will later see in the cases of Han Shan and Ramakrishna, brachmacharya, or “no leakage” (celibacy) is an extremely important contributing factor to progress in spiritual cultivation, for as the *Surangama Sutra* says, “Trying to cultivate samadhi without cutting off lust is like cooking sand trying to make rice. It cannot be done.” In regards to the doctor’s mis-diagnosis of his cultivation experiences as hypoglycemia, this also demonstrates how little Western medicine understands of cultivation kung-fu. Unfortunately this lack of understanding will still hold for perhaps a hundred or more years to come.

Despite the experiences described, this individual certainly did *not* yet open his *jen mai* or *tu mai* chi channels, nor did he actually succeed in cultivating his physical chi either. Even so, because of his strong vitality, his meditative experience was close to matching the infinite space samadhi, which is a high state of mental concentration known to many spiritual traditions. The Zen teacher he consulted acted in a most excellent manner by revealing that this experience was not enlightenment, but was simply a particular type of samadhi. Unfortunately, this practitioner’s karma with his teacher was not so good; otherwise, he might have been guided to a stable stage of samadhi at an even higher stage of realization.

All the other sensations this individual experienced were undoubtedly a result of his strong vitality, which generated symptoms similar to the real kundalini phenomenon. If this practitioner had enough wisdom and the proper guidance, his progress suggests that he could reach a much higher level of samadhi and possibly attain enlightenment. This is because the infinite space samadhi properly belongs to the Realm of Formlessness, and is very difficult to attain. Any individual who can reach this realm so easily shows that he has tremendous merit and cultivation roots.

While none of these cases so far have talked about the practitioners’ sexual behavior, this is an extremely important topic in cultivation matters. While Westerners now teach young children that it is okay to masturbate and lose their jing by doing so, there is no teaching more destructive nor misleading than this on the path to spiritual attainment. This is not something you want to encourage.

Yes, the habitual pulls of sexual desire are strong and deep, but you should not encourage these habits if you want people to have healthy bodies or make spiritual progress. It is only when the vital energy of the body accumulates, through the practice of nonleakage and restraint, that it becomes strong enough to open up the obstructed chi channels within the body. In fact, most individuals have trouble attaining the first dhyana of cultivation even when they do not lose their jing through sexual activities, so to lose this energy makes the situation even worse. The improperness or properness of this has many dimensions, one of which has nothing so much to do with naturalness or desire and whether it is right or wrong, but which is a matter of losing spiritual energy.

Unfortunately, ordinary people often do not know better than to squander their normal build-up of sexual energy, especially young adults who are advised to masturbate rather than transform their jing into chi for the benefits of health and spiritual progress! Thus, few seem to make genuine progress in spiritual cultivation these days, and everyone wonders why. Even if someone were to become a monk, priest, nun, or rabbi, *their spiritual striving will amount to little unless they can refrain from losing their jing, and transform it into chi by cultivating the mental emptiness of discriminative mentation*. From the point of view of attaining samadhi and spiritual progress, unless you can accomplish this necessary transformation of jing to chi by cultivating emptiness, then celibacy for spiritual purposes is practically useless.

There is also an interesting point from this case which keeps popping up time and time again, which is the fact that several practitioners have felt sensations in their left big toe, which often manifested as pain or swelling. Shakyamuni Buddha commented on this phenomenon thousands of years ago, telling people that when performing visualization practices on their skeleton, they should always start their visualization concentrations by focusing on the left big toe (see the *Chan Mi Yao Fa Sutra*).

The reason behind these instructions is that the left big toe has an extremely strong relationship with the brain. Obviously, the brain is a vital area in cultivation. Furthermore, the chi routes down the insides of the legs and reaching to the toes are some of the hardest chi channel meridians to open. Opening them requires this extra bit of cultivation concentration. Another reason we concentrate on the left big toe in visualization practice is because one of the most important of the primary mai terminates there. For instance, you can only become a Taoist Immortal if you open the chi routes to the bottom of the feet.

The sensations within the toes also have to do with the termination points of certain major chi channels within the physical body. The Esoteric school often teaches that there are twenty-four major mai in the body, grouped into three sets of eight. These twenty-four major mai each sub-divide into three minor branches to produce a total of seventy-two minor mai, and each of these in turn sub-divides into 1,000 mai. Thus, figuratively speaking, we have a total of 72,000 mai, or nadi, within the body. Hatha yoga uses the same figurative number as well, although the *Shiva Samhita* of Hinduism says there are 350,000 nadis in the body, while the *Prapanchasara Tantra* says 300,000; all you have to know is that there are a lot of these tiny energy channels since they span everything like nerves and blood vessels.

The modern practice of foot Reflexology also confirms the relationship between the left big toes and the brain, especially the pituitary and pineal glands in the head. The fact that these meditation practitioners in our cases always mention this toe simply complements what Shakyamuni said ages ago. As to the reason these meditators first experienced sensations on the left side of their bodies, it was due to the fact that the left side corresponds to the chi portion of the body, whereas the right side corresponds to the blood. The functions of the left and right chi channels,

or ida and pingala energy meridians which run through the body, are responsible for this attribution. Hence, it is normal, as a general rule, for chi to first become activated on the left side of the body, since the nature of yang is arousal or movement. Thus, we have the usual emphasis on the “left side and big toe” as Buddha stressed.

It is another matter entirely when various practitioners feel that this or that chakra or energy center is opening or has opened. This experience is normally just a phenomenal sensation and not the actual opening of the chakras. When the elements of the physical body are not properly attuned, and the body is not in good shape, it is normal for the chi channels to make the body to shake or experience other sensations. Some people may experience spontaneous movements, or want to cough or burp to release their discomfort as the chi opens up obstructed passageways. In general, people with internal diseases or large obstructions experience large reactions, while people who are healthy and have unobstructed chi meridians experience slight reactions or none at all.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* tried to summarize all these matters by saying, in regards to pranayama (breath cultivation) practices, “At the first stage perspiration breaks out, at the second stage the body trembles, and at the third stage the prana reaches the head.” Of course the process is more complicated than this, and there are many variations as explained in *Tao and Longevity*, but you can see how, generally speaking, this information is correct.

To suppress any of these experiences is not good for your health, for trying to tighten yourself or push these phenomena away only impedes the development of spiritual progress and the transformations necessary on the spiritual path. You experience these things in the first place because the body is trying to clear blockages and internal obstructions to the flow of vital energy. The more you let go of the body, the quicker the work will become finished and then these phenomena will disappear. If you ignore your body through detachment, or go even further and forget that you even have a body because of emptiness meditation, these phenomena will arise and then quickly go away. After the body is properly attuned, which will happen naturally through perfect relaxation, such experiences will disappear entirely.

When the body’s chi channels and chakras open, and I mean *really* open, it is usually accompanied by tremendous pain. Why? Because throughout our growth we accumulate so many poisons in our bodies, and the strong force that is required to push through these obstructions and eject them from our physical nature causes discomfort during the spiritual stage of physical purification. This explains the great pain genuine cultivators feel when their mai and chakras finally start to truly open on the spiritual path. For instance, when the heart chakra is opening up, you might even feel like you are having a heart attack. As another example, the Second Patriarch of Chinese Zen thought he would die when the chi was trying to penetrate his skull because the pain was so terrible, but a voice from the sky said to bear it a little longer because the chi was only penetrating through and subsequently transforming the bones of his

skull.

All of the ancient masters lived in an era where natural foods were the norm. It was an era without chemicals, pesticides, herbicides or food additives, and yet they still had to go through intensive detoxification, involving painful eliminations, so that poisons in their bodies were eliminated. So do not believe that eating organic produce will solve this problem. Even babies born to organic-eating vegetarian parents will have inherited poisons and obstructions in their body as a result of the fact that they have inherited a human birth.

The process of clearing the mai will arise for everyone. Only the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and high stage adepts who are born into this world through a flower will have clean mai to start with, but this type of birth is a very rare occurrence. For other ordinary beings like us, we can exercise, do breathing practices, ingest certain internal detoxification and cleansing supplements like glutathione, alpha-lipoic acid and N-acetyl-cysteine, while using meditation to help transform and purify our physical bodies. Every little bit helps.

The force which arises to clear obstructions in the body does not come from chemicals, but is generated naturally when we accumulate our jing and chi. Unlike what New Age cultivation schools try to teach, we cannot produce this force artificially nor should we try to mentally construct or guide it. After all, the mai are so incredibly thin that despite what many cultivation schools tell you, the chance of grabbing them correctly, and guiding chi through them, is absolutely nil. The only thing a practitioner can do is *forget the body entirely and then things will proceed naturally and perfectly without need of outside interference or intercession*. The force necessary to clear any obstructions will, because of cultivating an emptiness of discriminative thought, arise naturally and then act on its own. All we need to do is have faith in the process. Nature is not wrong in what it tries to accomplish, especially when the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are helping us.

This is a particular point of dispute between the Zen school and school of Esoteric Buddhism, whose methods represent a mixture of Taoist teachings and the teachings from various schools of Indian yoga. The proponents within the school of Tibetan esotericism like to laugh at the Zen school, saying, “How can you achieve enlightenment if you do not transform your body? This is what you are missing, and that is why our school is much higher than yours.”

The Zen school, on the other hand, simply tells people to match their thoughts with their breath, because in doing so, the central channel will open naturally. By calming your breath and matching this calm with emptied thoughts, the central sushumna channel (*zhong mai* in Chinese or *avadhuti* in Tibetan) will open naturally and your body will be transformed without having to resort to all the artificially contrived practices of the esoteric schools. But *the process is so simple that people do not believe it*, which is why the Tibet school, Indian yoga and Taoism have invented all their strange techniques and methods. So who should be laughing at whom?

Another misconception to correct is that the real kundalini energy is not hot like fire, but is more akin to a feeling of blissful, peaceful warmth in each and every cell. Thus, the genuine, real and true kundalini phenomenon can be compared to *the natural warmth of a healthy young baby*. When you feel that your chi is hot, that is partially because your yang chi is naturally warm, but the extra degree of hotness *represents a frictional force (or infection) involving the four elements in the body, or it may be due to a blockage in that region's energy meridians*. Hence, when you read stories of meditators getting very hot, in most cases this is not the real kundalini phenomenon but just the *frictional heat* generated as your real chi struggles to push through internal obstructions.

As another example, Indian yogis sometimes eat bitter herbs during their cultivation practice because they help cool down the heat generated through their use of artificial, forceful techniques (such as *kumbhaka*) to ignite the chi energies of the physical nature. Several Christian mystics were also known to use buckets of water in order to cool themselves from the results of their spiritual practice, for the transformations of *incendium amoris*, or kundalini, can really be that warming.

This is a good time to explain a little of the actual kundalini phenomenon, which we will discuss in great detail much later. *The Kundalini Experience* has summarized four of the classical characteristics of kundalini for us, as mentioned by Swami Narayananda:

- (1) There is a strong burning, first along the back and then over the whole body.
- (2) The kundalini's entrance into the central spinal canal, called sushumna, is attendant with pain. Swami Narayananda makes a special point of mentioning that this and any of the other disturbing phenomena should not be taken as a sign of disease.
- (3) When the kundalini reaches the heart, one may experience palpitations.
- (4) One feels a creeping sensation from the toes, and sometimes the whole body starts to shake. The rising sensation may feel like an ant crawling slowly up the body toward the head, a snake wiggling along, a bird hopping from place to place, like a fish darting through calm water, or like a monkey leaping to far branch.

To understand these comments, and the cases before us, we must first recognize that these descriptions are a bit incomplete. For instance, according to the Tao school and school of Esoteric Buddhism, an actual kundalini arousal can be of two types—a yin type or yang type. The correct yang type of kundalini phenomenon, which is born from emptiness, feels warm and peaceful. The yin type, which produces burning sensations, is usually due to abnormal

awakenings that are forced and which do not involve a true mastering of mental emptiness. For instance, Chinese medicine typically refers to fevers as internal yin fire, and this accounts for some types of “kundalini experience.” On this point, we must note that Chinese culture calls the Emperor a “yang fire” while his officials are called “yin fire,” meaning yin fire experiences are not the real kundalini phenomenon.

Generally speaking, people who meditate are typically entertaining some scenario in their minds, and so they only experience the yin type of awakening. The yang type of experience can be identified from the fact that it makes every cell of the body feel as if they are experiencing a warm, peaceful and cozy summer day. This is the correct and genuine kundalini phenomenon. Therefore, it is incorrect to say that kundalini arousal will always be hot or be accompanied by burning sensations, for in most cases this is just one’s latent vitality working to clear the chi channels of their obstructions. The hotness is just a sign of friction from internal blockages.

Nevertheless, because most people who cultivate have been influenced by teachings in the yoga schools, they try to raise their kundalini artificially by forcing its initiation. They do not cultivate true emptiness and prajna wisdom, whereby it will arise naturally. So they cultivate force, from force they get friction, and from friction they experience heat rather than comfort. Even the Tibetans have translated the term for kundalini incorrectly by using the term “fire” rather than warmth, so this is a common mistake that people have been making for ages. Because of this mistranslation, many people misunderstand the nature of this phenomenon entirely.

Technically speaking, we must also note that the kundalini phenomenon does not originate from the back of the spine, but rather from the region of the perineum. To think that cultivation kung-fu originates from the head rather than from below, as is claimed by another spiritual school called Anthroposophy, is also just plain nonsense and imagination. The kindest thing we can say for this view is that is just examining the results that have occurred because of preliminary transformations on the spiritual path.

Cultivation kung-fu can be compared to the circulation of the weather in the following analogy: the sun shines on a body of still water, the water evaporates and ascends into the sky forming clouds, the clouds collect and form rain, and the rain water falls and returns to its home in the earth. Thus, we have jing transforming into chi, the chi ascending through the *tu mai* to reactivate the pituitary gland hormones, the hormones descending through the *jen mai* energy channel, and the pattern cycling all over again. This is the nature of the kundalini activation, and you can clearly see that it does not start in the head.

Pain will usually accompany the progression of the chi as it initially enters and starts to clear any of the genuine chi channels that are most responsible for spiritual progress, such as the central, left, right, front and back chi channels. The pain we feel results because our bodies are not perfectly healthy, so before the central channel opens we will feel aching and discomfort as

various poisons and blockages are removed. Buddhism describes eight possible feelings which can arise from the movements of chi, including pain, itching, coldness, warmth, weightlessness, heaviness, roughness and smoothness. These eight are not all-inclusive descriptions, but rather general guideline indications.

When the chi actually progresses enough to reach the center of the heart chakra, an individual will typically feel anxious or nervous, and the heart may experience palpitations. If the heart chakra is really opening, a healthy practitioner may even fear they are about to die from a heart attack. If they can forget the body at that point, and give everything up, there will be a loud explosion in the room as the chi finally passes through this difficult region, after which the practitioner will be able to individually feel all eight petals of this chakra like little tongues one can move and exercise. Since it is said that six of the eight mai running from this region are usually blocked for human beings, the opening of the heart chakra will correspond to great progress in cultivation. It is a big accomplishment that is related to the attainment of prajna wisdom.

If you do not open the heart chakra, not only is it impossible to correctly engage in various cultivation practices (like the Taoist method of absorbing the essence of the moon), but more importantly, you will never experience your inherent great transcendental prajna wisdom. So, opening the heart chakra is not an easy affair. In fact, it only happens at very advanced levels of sustained meditation achievement, whereas the symptoms most people think of as chi passing through this region typically represent only a “semblance dharma” of attainment. They are not the actual opening of the heart chakra itself. Rather, they correspond to stimulation of the tiny subsidiary channels surrounding this region, which not the actual the heart chakra or central channel.

Low-stage practitioners as well as high stage cultivators, often deceive themselves when experiencing semblance dharma, or semblance kung-fu, and it is almost impossible to convince the stubborn or ignorant that their conclusions are incorrect. If you tell someone who has been working hard and who is fervently desiring progress that their experiences are not what they imagine, you are only going to be met with disbelief, denial and sometimes even hatred. If you tell people they are wrong, sometimes in response they will cling to mistaken notions with even stronger zeal. Even experienced Zen masters experience such troubles when teaching talented students, although talented students will usually thank their masters later for being so frank when they finally recognize their own mistakes.

When someone reads the description of a particular stage of cultivation, they will first try to match the symptoms reported with their own experiences, and then conclude they have attained that same stage, when they have only achieved a slight resemblance. It is like the experience of young doctors and psychologists-to-be who are studying the descriptions of various illnesses in medical school. Sometimes these students will match these descriptions with their own

experiences and then fear they have contracted all of these terrible diseases themselves.

Thus, there are countless people who think they have cleared their chi channels, opened the supreme bliss chakra at the top of the head, activated their kundalini, achieved the Taoist yang-shen transformation-body, or even attained ultimate realization! People can believe they have attained all sorts of high cultivation stages when they have no level of attainment whatsoever. Unfortunately, most of these individuals are only cheating themselves because they are experiencing sensations of wind coupled together with great hopes and self-delusion. We cannot even begin to count how many people believe that they have opened their head chakra because some teacher said so, but yet are a little bit wiser and come asking for confirmation. We tell you truthfully: be careful, be careful!

Many people nowadays even employ the correct cultivation jargon within this net of self-delusion, which is the result of their having been exposed to cultivation information, and which helps them to validate their own conclusions. One of the reasons for this book is to help clear up these misconceptions. There are even individuals who will use such information to deceive others, claiming they are a master because such-and-such an experience happened which they only learned about from the descriptions in some book!

In a case of semblance kung-fu, an individual's personal experiences will closely resemble an actual stage of cultivation although they will not reflect the genuine phenomenon in question. The most that can be said is that with a great deal of wisdom, merit and continued effort, the experiences of the practitioner can serve as a precursor to the actual phenomenon, which will manifest in the future. Thus, there are many continual "refinings" of a particular kung-fu experience which must be experienced over and over again before the genuine stage of accomplishment is finally achieved. However, a practitioner's hard work and merit will earn them an analogous taste of the final experience ahead of time.

Thus, even though one may experience pain concentrated in the area of the heart, accompanied by feelings of anxiety and palpitations as one would expect with the opening of the heart center, this may just be the chi wind blowing around the region of the heart chakra and not the heart chakra or central channel itself. It might even be a medical problem such as a heart attack, so one must be careful of succumbing to misconceptions.

There are many people, in various cultivation schools, who feel they have opened the heart chakra and central mai because they previously experienced difficulties in this region which have now disappeared. However, this usually only indicates that a trickle of chi has been able to excite the subsidiary (minor) energy channels in this region, and even these channels have not yet opened completely. So to believe that you have opened a region because you experienced semblance kung-fu is an understandable misconception, but to believe you can open the chakras or mai through visualizations, music and concentration—as the New Age crowd suggests—is a

giant illusion indeed. It is absolutely, unequivocally impossible to open the esoteric structures of the body by focusing on physiological feelings. Imagination leads to delusion, and never to self-awakening. As Lao Tzu said,

One who possesses abundant virtue resembles a newborn babe. Poisonous insects will not sting it, nor fierce beasts seize it, nor birds of prey maul it. Its bones are supple and its sinews soft, yet its grip is firm. It does not yet know of the union of male and female, yet its male member can stir. This is because it is full of virility. It can cry all day without its throat becoming hoarse. This is because it is full of breath. To know how to breathe is called being constant, and to know the constant is called insight. To try to add to one's vitality is ominous. To have the mind control the chi is called forcing. To become overgrown is to decay, and this is going against the Tao. That which goes against the Tao will face an early end.

Generally speaking, there are a variety of different chi sensations you can experience through meditation. Some practitioners will feel coolness coming out of their body, which happens when the body is too warm inside and relieves itself of what traditional Chinese medicine calls "internal heat" or "fever." Then again, you can feel chilly when the body is purifying itself by expelling internal "chill" and "wetness." All these reactions can be understood by studying Chinese medicine.

The reactions of meditation can also cause you to feel hot, bloated, itchy, or smooth. Sometimes you can feel soreness and sometimes tingling, lightness (such as the sensation of floating), or even heaviness. As the body starts to adjust itself to a state of more optimum health, some people can even have the experience of feeling like they are getting bigger or smaller. When you are expelling sickness chi, those with stomach, intestinal or liver problems may burp or feel nauseous, while lung and throat problems will sometimes give rise to coughing as they are being corrected.

To understand these various interactions, you really must understand the phenomenal interrelationship of chi and physical states outlined in Chinese medicine, because this field of medicine was developed based on an investigation of chi rather than the intrusiveness of clinical anatomy. For a first look at this goal, *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* will prove especially helpful. Indian ayurvedic medicine may also provide some helpful insights, but Chinese medicine's usefulness is foremost in this particular arena.

Hearing sounds in the head, as we have seen in several cases so far, is explained very clearly in various texts of Taoism. When the chi, or chi wind starts going through the head mai, it is common to hear these sounds as the mai clear themselves of obstructions. The Hatha Yoga text of *Hatharatnavali*, written by Srinivasabhata Mahayogindra, says that after certain pranayama exercises, one should listen "with the right ear to welcome internally aroused sounds of crickets,

flute, thunder, cymbals, a black bee, bell, gong, trumpet, drum” so we know that the wind chi inside the ear mai can make all sorts of sounds.

Some people mistakenly try to concentrate on these sounds, believing they are something special and meaningful or even the basis of *nada* or sound yoga. However, this is just unnecessary concentration on the realm of sensations which leads nowhere. As *Tao and Longevity* explains,

when the *ch'i* is really passing through the head there will be sounds like “Pi Pi Pai Pai” in the head. This is the reaction of the nerves induced by the *ch'i* working to open up the paths. The sound is nothing strange; it is like the sound one hears when he covers his ears with his palms and hears his own heart and the circulation of blood. However, if one’s attention is absorbed by these sounds or if there is some latent disease in [the] Upper Warmer, then one will want to shake his head quite often. If a person does not know the treatment for this, or if he cannot deflect his attention from it, it will become a kind of sick state. On the other hand, if the meditator knows how to be calm and quiet and can ignore this feeling, then he will naturally attain [the state of] *Ching An* [which is a stage of lightness and calm which precursors the onset of samadhi] ... There are some people who experience this phenomenon in their youth without practicing meditation. One might think of it as a kind of neurosis but if it is not stimulated by other factors, it is not a disease.⁶

The various phenomena which practitioners experience through cultivation, as seen in this explanation, always have a scientific basis behind them. They just *seem* strange and fantastical because people are not familiar with them. We know, for instance, that when people are really frightened, their hair can stand on end. Although this rarely happens, we are not mystified when it occurs because it has been explained through science and medicine. Cultivation kung-fu is no different in that there is always a scientific explanation behind the manifestation of various kung-fu phenomena. But while science will insist on labeling things in terms of blood, hormones or internal biochemistry, cultivators must also add to this list an understanding in terms of jing, chi, shen, mai, chakras, *bindus*, mental states and kundalini.

Thus, when we read of the famous story of the demon of lust that attacked St. Francis of Assisi during the winter, knowing of cultivation theory we can recognize the scientific reasons behind the eventual departure of his erotic desires. St. Francis cured his lust by going out into the cold and making “wife” and “children” snowmen. He then stood in the cold pointing to the snowmen, and started talking to himself about all the problems that would arise if he took a family. When his lust finally abated, he felt it was because his conversation had befuddled the lust demon so that it departed.

In actual fact, his lust did not depart because of a demon leaving him. Rather, it abated because his exposure to the cold had chilled his body and thus affected his chi mai, just as when we “take

a cold shower.” Thus, his level of sexual desire had naturally decreased due to this change in temperature together with his physical exercise. If you understand cultivation matters and the science involved, you can easily understand such stories and develop the type of understanding behind jing, chi, mai and chakras which we need today.

A knowledge of various supernormal powers can also be obtained in the same manner by matching what you know of science with the insight you gain from achieving spiritual kung-fu. For instance, there is the famous story of a *mantrayana* practitioner who stopped a raging elephant in its tracks—as the story goes—by reciting *mantras* over a blade of grass while blowing over the grass in the elephant’s direction. If one can match the scientific properties of certain plant substances with what can be accomplished through various mantras, you will immediately surmise that the “blade of grass” was actually poppy leaves. The mantras amplified the potency of the poppies and caused the elephant to sleep.

In the Old Testament story of the Passover, the angel of death was said to have “passed over” homes where sheep’s blood marked the doors, and killed the first born sons in homes where there was no blood. Without describing the actual methods behind this event and the samadhi-mantra supplications which can cause it to occur, the important thing is to focus upon the sheep’s blood. The strong yang nature of sheep’s blood can be known from the fact that sheep are called “yang” in Chinese, and yang chi is what repels ghosts and yin influences such as death.

The Tao school uses a black dog’s blood for warding off ghosts and other yin beings because sheep are too expensive and not available, but the principle of using the blood of a black dog is the same. Although your personal cultivation may not have reached the stage where you can duplicate these phenomena yourself, when you can connect the pieces of information such as this, you can begin to understand the scientific basis underlying such phenomena.

CASE 6: Female Artist

This woman, now in her late fifties, had practiced Transcendental Meditation for five years when she began to experience occasional tingling in her arms and heat in her hands. Next she was unable to sleep for days, with energy surging through her whole body. She also had several dreams of having her consciousness separated from her body. A continuous loud sound started to appear inside her head. Soon there were cramps in her big toes, followed by vibratory sensations in her legs. Overnight, her big toenails darkened, as if hit by a hammer, and eventually partially separated from the flesh. The tissue in her legs felt torn by vibratory sensations. The vibrations spread to her lower back and from there swept over her body up to her head, causing a sensation of a band around her head, just above the eyebrows. Then her head started to move spontaneously. Later her whole body would move sinuously, and her tongue would automatically press against the roof of her mouth.

Both phenomena are well known in yogic circles. The cleaving of the tongue against the palate is counted among the most secret practices of Yoga. It bears the technical designation of *khecari-mudra* or the “space-walking gesture.” The “space” here is the inner space (*kha*) of consciousness. All kinds of psychic powers are attributed to yogis who have mastered this technique. In the case of this woman, the *mudra* or “gesture” of inverting the tongue occurred involuntarily.

She would also sense a strong sounding of “om”—the most sacred syllable in the Hindu tradition—emanating from within her head. The tingling sensations spread to her neck, upward over the head, down to the forehead and face. Both nostrils were stimulated, causing a feeling of elongation of the nose. At times her eyes seemed to move separately, and the pupils felt like holes that bored into her head and met in the center. Then she felt tremendous pressure at the back of her head, at the crown, and across the forehead. This pressure would become especially severe during reading, resulting in acute discomfort around the eyes and in a pulsing sensation at the top of the head.

This was followed by the experience of a brilliant light and of bliss and laughter.

The tingling sensation spread further down to the mouth and chin. It was then that she began to have dreams of heavenly music. Then the sensations traveled to her throat, chest and abdomen, and eventually she felt as if there was a closing of the circuit in the shape of an egg: The energy was moving up through the spine and down through the front of the body. As it developed, the circuit activated particular energy centers on its way—starting in the lower abdomen and proceeding to the navel, the solar plexus, the heart, the head, and finally the throat. After this closure she experienced a continuous feeling of energy pouring into her body through the navel area. This feeling stopped after the circuit was completed. The whole experience had strong sexual overtones. It was also accompanied by spontaneous yogic breathing (faint and controlled).

The greater part of this kundalini activity occurred over several months. Subsequently she experienced only occasional kundalini phenomena, mostly during meditation or when relaxing in bed. Throughout the protracted experience, this woman understood that she was undergoing a kundalini awakening, since she had read about this phenomenon before. In the beginning she felt relaxed about what was happening to her and simply allowed the process to unfold as it might. But eventually she became perturbed and had difficulty integrating her experiences with her daily activities. The inflow of energy prevented normal sleep for months, and, since it continued during the day as well, she found herself incapable of efficient work. She felt herself thrown into the position of a detached observer of her own activities. In due course she brought the situation under control.

The general effect of this kundalini arousal was positive. There has been steady progress toward an ever greater sense of connectedness with what this woman calls her “higher self”—a sense of being in touch with an unshakeable core, a center, that

is unaffected by all the ups and downs of everyday life. In my follow-up interview with her, she remarked ... that, with the exception of pressure in the head, all physical sensations have ceased.

This artist is different from the practitioner in our previous case in that this practitioner has experienced the correct awakening of the chi and partially opened the *tu mai* and *jen mai* chi channel energy meridians. However, this woman's central channel has still not opened yet. She did not open the crown chakra on the top of her head yet either, which is why she felt the sensation of pressure there. A relevant passage from *Tao and Longevity*, which provides some insight into this case (and which can be applied in a general sense to the experiences of several of our practitioners) runs as follows:

Taoists call the top of the head *Ni Huang Palace* and yogis call it *The Crown*. Some Taoists believe that this is the phenomenon of opening up the *Tu Mai* completely. But, this is not the case. These are merely changes along the *Tu Mai* that accompany the initial opening of the central nervous system. This is followed by stimulating the function of the top of the head to enhance the uniform distribution of endocrine secretions. However, at this step some people will have temporary pain or a heavy sensation at the top of the head, as though it were being pressed by something, or they may feel extreme tightness. This is due to the fact that the *ch'i* route in the head is not completely open, or because one's attention is unduly attracted to feelings and sensations and one is preoccupied with them. If one can divert his attention and forget his head and let it be natural, then a very comfortable and refreshing feeling will gradually be generated and will move downward from the top of the head.⁷

The fact that this woman could not sleep, an affliction we have encountered previously, is actually a good sign or progress because when you practice Tao, you want to lessen the desire for sex and sleep. The five barriers to attaining Tao include fortune, wealth, name (fame), sleep and sex. People all say they want to become free of these factors, but when they start to lose a single one they become frightened and lose their sense of composure.

This particular meditator did not need much sleep anymore because she had reached the stage where her chi was actually starting to transform into shen. As the Tao school says, "when one is full of shen there is little desire for sleep," so this is a positive phenomenon one should not fear. This is what was actually happening in this case.

The Tao school has many sayings summarizing the general sequence of cultivation progress. Most of these sayings actually refer to attainments (transformations) within the form and sensation skandhas. Thus, we have the three famous sayings from Taoism:

When you are full of jing, there is no desire for sex.
When you are full of chi, there is no desire for food.
When you are full of shen, there is no desire for sleep.

Accordingly, this female artist actually experienced a bit of this last stage of transformation, whereas noncultivators with sleep problems usually have them because of stress. Or because their bodies are very weak. As a Chinese medical book called *The Classic of Difficulties* states, “Old people suffer from a debilitation of their blood and chi, and their passageways for their flows are rough and choppy. Therefore during the day they are not sharp while at night they do not sleep. Thus you should understand why the elderly cannot sleep.”

As to various other points in this case study, we once again discover the importance of the big toes as well as sensations on the inside of the legs where the chi mai run to the feet. This woman’s spontaneous body movements indicate that her chi was encountering obstructions to its free circulation, and these various reactions manifested as it worked to clear the mai of their blockages. In so doing, this practitioner (and any other) would eventually rid herself of any hidden illnesses and extend her normal life span while increasing the quality of her life.

When taken in conjunction with the other phenomena, such as her tongue naturally curling backwards during meditation indicated that her *jen mai* was being opened. This is a practice, well known in the yoga schools, which indeed does help to prolong a person’s longevity. If the front *jen mai* channel, which the Taoists call the “red sparrow,” opens all the way, the tongue will curl back even farther, and sometimes even recede into the throat a bit.

Why did this practitioner feel she was a separate consciousness? This experience resembles one of the first stages of the Tao where you feel, because of cultivation progress, that you are separate from the physical body. This is learning how to detach from the physical body. At an even higher stage of attainment, you might feel like you have no body at all.

Any familiarity you can develop with this stage can prepare you to cultivate during the time after death, which is the basis of Tibetan *bardo* yoga teachings. Unfortunately, this practitioner’s wisdom was not high enough and she was unaware of the correct principles and theory of cultivation practice. Otherwise, she could have used that auspicious timing to have made much more progress with her cultivation attainments.

Naturally, it took her some time to become accustomed to these physical and mental changes, just as it takes some time to get used to living in a new apartment. In time, though, all the various sensations ceased, just as expected, since the obstructions in the mai eventually cleared because as we have seen, transient phenomenal realms cannot endure for very long.

The physical benefits to this practitioner, at just this earliest stage of cultivation, certainly include a longer life, a more beautiful figure and complexion, and freedom from certain illnesses that were destined to erupt with age (and perhaps cause her death). Spiritually, if this woman were to keep working hard, it is probable from this basis that she would definitely achieve some measure of spiritual attainment.

CASE 7: Male Scientist

This person, now in his sixties, began Transcendental Meditation in 1967. After about five years he suddenly started to have gross thrashing body movements during meditation and at night in bed. After a few weeks these involuntary movements subsided. Several months later, on going to bed, he felt a tingling sensation in his lower legs, followed by cramping in his big toes. The cramping extended to other muscles before it gradually faded. The tingling sensation spread to his lower back, and he “saw” a reddish light there. The light solidified into a rod, which he then sensed and “saw” being pushed up his spine. Next it extended forward to the umbilical area, accompanied by many tingling, vibrating sensations. Step by step it moved up the spine to the level of the heart and then extended forward to stimulate the cardiac plexus.

When it reached his head, he “saw” floods of white light, as if his skull were lit up from inside. Then the light seemed to sprout out the top of his head as a solid beam. Some time later he felt a vibration in his right arm and wrist and also in his left leg. As soon as he attended to these sensations, they disappeared. He also experienced energy currents running through his shoulders and arms in waves of three or four per second, later increasing to seven and more per second. At one time, when he focused on the center in his head, violent and uncontrollable spasms occurred.

At various times this kundalini activity was accompanied by a variety of internal sounds, mostly high-pitched whistling and hissing. At other times, he heard flutelike musical tones. Frequently he would experience peace and bliss.

Then his sleep began to be disturbed again by automatic movements of the body. Sometimes he would awaken to find himself doing spontaneous yogic breathing and assuming a variety of Hatha Yoga postures. After several nights of this, the tingling sensation traveled to his forehead, nostrils, cheeks, mouth, and chin. This whole process was accompanied by ecstatic feelings, and he experienced sexual arousal when the activity centered in the pelvic area. Then all these effects ceased, returning only from time to time when he relaxed at night in bed, and he could shut these off by turning on his side.

About a year later, pressure developed in his head at night and started to move downward. Simultaneously, a tingling sensation moved upward from the stomach. He experienced all this activity as if from a distance. The two stimuli met at the throat, and he felt as if a hole appeared where they joined. He further experienced,

still from a detached witnessing disposition, all manner of purely spontaneous sounds being emitted from that hole in the throat. Approximately six months later, the stimulus moved down from the throat to the abdomen, where it remained for a few months before moving down into the pelvic area.

This scientist had an inherently sensitive nervous system. Yet his awareness that he was undergoing a kundalini arousal and his knowledge of what to expect, together with the stabilizing effect of a meditative discipline, made him less susceptible to the disorganizing aspects of the kundalini cycle ... and so he was not beset by anxiety during the process

This is a typical case to be expected of a meditation practitioner. As already revealed, the vibrations in the body (such as feelings along the spine) and the sounds in the head originate when the chi encounters obstructions within the body. These obstacles make it impossible for the rising prana in the body to complete a full circuit and return to its original position.

This individual could hear high-pitched noises during meditation because his chi could not fully penetrate through the small *nadi* channels located around the region of the ear: noncultivators who catch a cold or “get wind in the head” might sometimes experience this same phenomenon. When people start to hear sounds in the head because of meditation, we have to remember that it is nothing holy or supernatural, and we should tell others this; otherwise they will go down the road of misconceptions. Rather, it is simply the phenomenon of jing or chi working to open up obstructed passageways and causing vibrations as a result of the process which, because chi and consciousness are linked, interact with the mental state.

Why did this man feel that various activities seemed as if they were happening from a distance? This was not unusual considering his advanced age, which means that he had probably lost most of his jing over the years due his cumulative sexual activities. Even so, if he practiced meditation at this stage, he could still reach at least the first *dhyana* of peacefulness and bliss.

From the description of his experiences, it would seem that this meditator was experiencing all the yin characteristics of his stage of accomplishment and none of the positive yang experiences. This is something you would expect in a case of decreased vitality. To make progress in his cultivation, it is essential, imperative in fact, that he first restore his lost vitality through medicine, meditation and self-restraint before he can achieve higher states of attainment. *Meditation with self-restraint will never fail to restore any man's lost vitality.*

As regards the factor of his yogic sleeping postures, you must remember that the original yoga postures in India were positions people naturally found themselves in without being taught, just as in this case, after which the positions were formulated into the classical standardized teachings. This man's body discovered these postures naturally, just as without ever being taught a cat naturally discovers how it should stretch its own muscles for maximum benefit. Thus, these

postures are not a past life legacy nor do they constitute anything particularly mysterious. His body simply found out what it should do in response to the activity of the chi. Since these reactions were completely natural, like yawning or stretching, they did not constitute anything special that should have provoked worry or concern.

In the fifth and sixth meditation cases we reviewed, we can say that the kung-fu of the practitioners was very good, but would have been even better had they understood the spiritual teachings on prajna wisdom attainments, and emptiness and been able to skillfully apply them. But overall, these various experiences are some of the initial phenomena you might naturally encounter when you become engaged in the process of searching for the Tao. It is wrong to think you absolutely must experience these same phenomena, but it is perfectly proper and natural if they do indeed manifest. Therefore, they are nothing to fear unless you have perhaps artificially forced them into manifestation. If they happen naturally, it is because they *are* natural: *the body knows what it is doing* so you do not have to worry about it.

CASE 8: Actress

This woman, now in her early forties, had many psychic experiences in her childhood. As an adolescent she suffered from recurring migraine headaches, mental disorganization, and impulsive disruptive behavior. She received psychotherapy for these symptoms for several years, was diagnosed schizophrenic, but was never hospitalized. When she was twenty-four years old she began to meditate, using various techniques. About a year later, her headaches became worse. But then, within a few weeks, her head pains, mental disorganization, and disruptive behavior suddenly ceased.

Within a year, tingling sensations started in her legs, then spread to her arms and chest. After a few weeks they extended to her neck and the back of her head, and soon down to her forehead. They were more noticeable during meditation. At intervals her entire body, but especially her hands, would become very hot. During meditation she was troubled by swaying and jerking of her body, and by anxiety. ...

Sometime later the physio-kundalini cycle started again. During one long meditation she became aware of her throat in a new way. She felt as if her head had become separated and floated above her trunk; her throat started to produce sounds on its own, and she became aware of a separate observer-self. Most of her kundalini symptoms ceased after this experience, which was a typical “throat opening.”

Since then her meditations have been quiet and peaceful. She reports that her productivity and contentment have greatly increased.

In this connection it is helpful to recall the experience of the British psychic Matthew Manning (1975), who was plagued by poltergeist phenomena from an early age. These persisted until he discovered that he could do automatic writing. Soon he found that he could paint in the style of several great painters, completing a

work in ten to twenty minutes. This then turned out to be his most fruitful channel of expression. Once the bulk of his energy could be Thus, expressed, the poltergeist activities ceased.

To understand this particular case, we must recognize that this girl's body was originally sick inside, and the existence of internal illness explains many of her case symptoms. It would have been preferable if she had been advised to go to a Chinese doctor, who through pulse diagnosis might have noted any internal organ imbalances and treated them with relevant herbal medicines. It is quite probable that she suffered from some type of chronic infection, or had experienced past problems (which never really healed) involving her bronchial tubes or lungs.

With regards to the specific experience she encountered, the reason this practitioner felt she was floating in the sky was because her chi was stuck in the region of the neck, and could neither ascend nor descend. Many people sometimes dream at night they are flying, and this often happens when the free chi in the body ascends into the head during sleep. Thus, rising chi can cause the flying sensation. Though sometimes flying or floating can be the symbolic dream language for some other situation rather than reflect the condition of the physical nature, this is often the reason that people experience the sensation of floating or flying in their dreams.

As to the man experiencing the poltergeist phenomena, in many cases, chi externally manifesting itself accounts for poltergeist experiences. When adolescents have frequent and sudden mood swings that involve chi fluctuations, this also has tie-ins with various poltergeist cases. There are indeed some cases where the poltergeist phenomena are genuinely connected with external entities, but these are very rare. In the USA there are many more cases of "poltergeists" than in Asia, because of the nature of America's climate, geographical magnetism, electrical surroundings and so on. From a scientific basis, the possible occurrence of such phenomena is often related to the electrical conditions in an area.

In addition, we can guess from this description that this man's visual cortex, located in the back of the skull near the "jade pillow" region of the hind brain, was probably not able to reach its normal functioning equilibrium. However, when this man took up painting, which shunted more energy to different areas of the brain, he averted or alleviated some of this particular problem.

CASE 9: Female Psychologist

In 1973 this woman, then in her forty-first year, noted the onset of heat in her head and chest, with tingling sensations over her body and head during meditation. She had been engaged in various intensive group and meditation disciplines for a number of years. Another curious phenomenon occurred during that time. Whenever she would do the tongue-and-palate exercise she had been taught during a meditation retreat, she would experience orgasm like waves rippling through her body.

She felt hot much of the time, particularly in her chest and throat, yet sensations of coldness were mixed in. She felt shaped like an egg, and her whole being felt unified. Vibrations started in the pelvic area and from there moved up her back to her neck. Her chest felt soft and open. She heard brilliant bird song inside her head and felt a tingling in her throat. Once, three years earlier, she had felt like a giant heart while meditating. At the time, she experienced a prickly itching heat all over her body, but she was not troubled because she believed that these sensations indicated successful and centered meditations and a flow between herself and others. She assumed that she was experiencing a kundalini awakening, which she believed to be dangerous unless the “higher mind” was in control.

A few months after the kundalini symptoms started in 1973, she felt, during meditation, as if she were two feet taller than her normal self and as if her eyes were looking out from above her head. At this time she was sure that she knew what people were thinking, and many of her impressions were confirmed.

Soon after this, her feet began to hurt and headaches started. The headaches grew worse whenever she attempted to stop the rippling sensations she was experiencing in her body. She noted that the headaches came when she tried to regulate the rush of energy passing through her. Massage helped the pain in her feet, but it was still so severe that she could walk only with difficulty and was unable to drive. She ate very little, her sleep was fitful, and she suffered some nausea. It was hard for her to talk with people. At times, she questioned the reality of her experiences, wondering if they were just a crazy episode.

She felt heat on one side of her back and was convinced that, unless it spread to both sides, she would be in danger. Once she succeeded in spreading it, this crisis passed. Then a tingling sensation started to move from her pelvis up her back and to her neck. She began to see light inside her skull. She was amazed to find that she could see this light all the way down her spine as well. The energy and tingling moved over her forehead and became focused under her chin. She felt as if there were a hole in the top of her head. Sleep became very difficult for her, and for the next six weeks, meditation was the only thing that helped her. She felt that if she did not meditate, the heat flowing in her body would grow so intense as to damage her system. Other people could feel excessive heat when they touched her lower back.

Although she felt “strange” at times, she was determined to avoid psychiatric help during her trouble, because she feared that she would be labeled and treated as insane. When her symptoms were more than she could bear alone, she worked with various meditation teachers.

Then she began to experience rippling sensations and shaking of her body, and she felt as though she was being cleansed and balanced. Shortly afterward, she felt a prickling in her cheeks and under her chin. Then all unpleasant phenomena ceased, and she had no further difficulty, although she continued her meditation practice. She underwent this physio-kundalini cycle in the span of a year. She later started a

successful center for personal growth and was able to help others who experienced difficulties in the kundalini process.

Most of the comments we can make about this case have been made in earlier cases, so a review of these explanations should enable you to understand the origin of many of this woman's experiences. However, there are three new points for this case which we should note:

- (1) From the Chinese medical point of view, this woman's physical body is of a particularly damp (wet) condition inside, which is the reason she experienced so many of the various heat phenomena.
- (2) This woman had studied psychology, and so she had developed the tendency to over-analyze situations. People who continually use their minds (such as PhD's, scholars, and so on) tend to keep on using it during their cultivation practice, and this tendency toward mentation definitely contributed to this woman's symptoms. We can also say that this practitioner was originally a nervous, anxious individual, and that this natural tendency had also biased her experiences. People who use their minds too much tend to bias themselves toward this nature.
- (3) This practitioner actually generated many of these phenomena through the use of her own mind, and then guided herself accordingly. In other words, because of her own subconscious thinking and planning, she created many of the external phenomena herself (such as the big heart, egg, etc.), which she then used to help guide herself to make further progress in practice.

As with Chinese medicine, when you analyze someone's cultivation experiences, you must take into account a variety of factors, such as the individual's age, their sex, occupation, living conditions, education, whether or not they are sexually active, and so on. While the transformations due to cultivation follow a general form and pattern, the pattern will be influenced by all of these attendant factors. Just as in medical science, only when you take into account these other factors will you be qualified to understand an individual's cultivation situation.

A last point to note is the fact that this woman once felt two feet taller due to changes in her chi mai which generated this illusory feeling. Sometimes, because of meditation, people may actually feel they are smaller or larger, sometimes even as large as the universe. Naturally, these are feelings rather than reality; they do not correspond to any esoteric existence in the literal sense. Such feelings are due to movements and transformations of the chi mai and must not be confused with similar results from when one attains genuine samadhi attainments. Hence, in this practitioner's particular case, the feelings were entirely illusory.

CASE 10: Female Librarian

This woman, now in her mid-fifties, had been a meditator in her own style for many years. One day, in 1968, she lost awareness while meditating with her hands on a table. She awoke to find char marks on the table corresponding to her hand prints. She had the table refinished before I could examine it. No heat manifestation of any kind ever happened again. Because she did not show a regular progression of symptoms, I regarded her as a possible case of arrested physio-kundalini.

The reason we have included this case is to explain the phenomenon of the char marks, which some people might mistakenly assume is a manifestation of kundalini heat. Actually, the reason this individual could generate char marks on the table is because—using Chinese medicinal classifications—her internal physical body was in an *extremely damp condition*. As a result of this excessive internal dampness, a problem often addressed in Chinese medicine with herbal remedies, this individual might already be suffering from arthritis or rheumatism, (types of “wet” diseases) or will suffer so in the future.

Sometimes meditation will generate a feeling of cold, rather than heat in the body. No matter what feelings develop, all of these sensations depend upon the interaction of the four elements within the body and are eventually eliminated through further meditation. While meditation is a cure for many ills, the availability of Chinese or ayurvedic herbal remedies is also a real help to quicken the balancing process that must occur in spiritual practice.

CASE 11: Housewife

In 1972 this woman, who was then in her mid-fifties, experienced the onset of an intense and disturbing process. She suddenly felt that something was descending over her head. Indira Devi (see Roy and Devi 1974) described in almost identical words this experience, which happened during her first meditation and which was soon followed by a spontaneous kundalini awakening. In the case of our woman, this feeling or sensation was followed by a fainting spell. This pattern recurred several times. Remarkably, she was never groggy after regaining awareness, as might be expected with a convulsive disorder. Physicians were unable to give her any relief.

Then, one time, she heard a voice saying inside her head: “Are you ready?” Later she heard internal music. One day she was feeling well until late in the afternoon when the base of her left big toe started to ache. Soon the pain extended up her shin, and she could feel the working of her knee joint. The pain was intermittent but disabling. She spent a few days in bed, where she spontaneously assumed many yogic poses.

Several days later her body felt “worked on” from the toes up to the back in segments. This process was accompanied by pain on both sides of her nose and by

waves of energy and tingling sensations up her neck and down her face. There was also the sensation of intense heat in her back, and she experienced severe viselike pressure around her head. During some of these energy flows she was forced to breathe in a sighing manner. Occasionally there were torsional whipping movements of her head and neck, and once the energy moved down into her head, causing her scalp to get cold and her face to get hot.

Over a period of about three years, she slowly became convinced that she had been selected by God to be born anew as an advanced human being. Thus, she yielded to the tendency that Jung (1975) had warned against: that of claiming this impersonal force as her own ego creation and, as a result, of falling into the trap of ego inflation and false superiority. She expected others to understand exactly what she was speaking about and to accept her word unquestioningly, and she grew distrustful of anyone who disagreed with her interpretations.

This is a very simple case to analyze. First of all, we must note the likelihood that some of this woman's neck vertebrae were out of place, which accounted for her various head movements, such as the swaying. The way to fix this problem, as we saw before, would be to go to a chiropractor or osteopath for necessary spinal adjustments. These minor adjustments can be very useful and must thought of as a proper way to adjust the spine and vertebrae.

Secondly, this women's older age helps us understand this case. She had probably already gone through menopause or was going through it. When women go through menopause, their personalities can change greatly; a similar phase occurs in men as they get older.

Oriental medicine and the Tao school tell us that female bodies change in seven year cycles, while male bodies change in eight year cycles. Therefore, a woman typically experiences her first menstruation around age fourteen (2×7) and experiences menopause at around age forty-nine (7×7). Of course, the increasing prevalence of pseudo-estrogens in the environment (from plastics, pesticides and pollution), means that some women may experience their first menstruation early than age fourteen. In fact, Shakyamuni Buddha predicted long ago that the child bearing age would eventually get down to five years of age because of society degrading.

Men start to experience their manhood at around sixteen (2×8) years of age, and by age fifty-six (7×8) their prenatal chi has gradually become exhausted. According to Taoist principles, reaching these ages marks the beginning of a new life; it does not mean you are declining, as emphasized in the West, though people often associate age with deterioration. The whole problem is that people do not know how to rejuvenate themselves during these periods.

At this age, one can still indeed reach Tao (achieve enlightenment) but must proceed in practice as follows: if you are a woman and practice before menopause, you must reach the stage where your menstrual period stops, called "returning to the state of a virgin," in order to make further

progress in cultivation advancement. If you start your cultivation practice after the onset of menopause, you must first practice well enough so that your menstrual period returns. This indicates a return of youthful vitality and which flushes the accumulated poisons and toxins out of the body. Then you must work even harder so that it stops once again.

In other words, you must work a little harder at your cultivation than those who are younger, but you can still succeed. In fact, at this stage in life, you will generally have more time available to devote yourself to this effort and far less distractions, so your chances of success can be higher than for those much younger. Physically speaking, getting older is the beginning of a new life, but people do not realize this and develop problems in their psychological outlook.

Surprisingly enough, a naturally calm and quiet person, such as the one in this case, can spontaneously exhibit all these symptoms after menopause without meditating at all. In fact, they can occur with more ease than before menopause! Her symptoms are similar to a kundalini arousal, but they represent the natural reactions of the physical body in conjunction with the results of a quiet mind. This is why some older people can have “spontaneous” spiritual experiences.

The point is that the phenomena in this case constitute a natural reaction which sometimes spontaneously occurs to people of a calm, quiet nature, and they can occur more readily after menopause. This woman, unfortunately, combined her experiences with delusional concepts of God and religion, and thus diverted her own spiritual progress. This is an unfortunate deviation due to *mara* and self-deception, and it is a pity to see because it represents an obstacle on the path.

CASE 12: Male Psychiatrist

This colleague of mine, now in his early forties, had been meditating regularly for three years and also had served as a subject in our research with the magnetic stimulator when, in 1975, he experienced a kundalini awakening. It is worth noting that he was born with a spinal defect for which he had surgery that left him with chronic lower back pain since his teens.

In December 1975 this psychiatrist attended a weekend at the school of the late Swami Muktananda in Oakland, California. Upon being touched by the Swami, he went into a deep meditation. Within ten minutes, his mouth automatically opened widely, and his tongue protruded. After a few minutes, he experienced a blissful calm and many inner visions, in which Swami Muktananda appeared to him and helped him experience a fusion with the guru. A few minutes later, he “saw” the interior of his abdomen, chest and throat light up with a golden energy. Then his lower back began to ache severely. At the onset of the pain, a white light in his head became more and more intense. The back pain disappeared toward the end of the

meditation and did not return.

Following this remarkable experience, his meditations at home became very productive. Emotional problems and unfinished incidents seemed to find solutions very rapidly and at great depth during his meditations.

Then, in the middle of January 1976, he developed a rash that formed a curved line. It began at his lower back, crossed his spine twice, and veered off to his left shoulder. He was wondering whether it might have a symbolic significance, rather like the stigmata of some Christian mystics. At about this time, he also noticed a return of the high-pitched sounds and scratching noises during meditation that he had experienced earlier, after being stimulated many times over a period of several months with the magnetic device.

In January he participated in a second weekend intensive during which he was again touched by Swami Muktananda. Immediately he felt painful tingling and hot and cold sensations spreading over his upper back and neck. His throat burned, and there were automatic movements of head and neck. Then he felt inner peace and blissfulness. Later his head started to spin, and he felt vibrations in his hands. Next his knees began to burn and he felt a buzzing up his spine that ended in feelings of light and energy in his head. Throughout these experiences his breathing was irregular—at times rapid and shallow, at other times slow and deep. Everything seemed to be breaking loose inside him, and he felt as though he were in labor.

Toward the end of this meditation, he experienced great inner peace and a deep knowing of his inmost self, followed by a total sense of freedom and of “coming home.” The next day he had difficulty returning to his usual state. He was uncoordinated and unable to concentrate. For several days he felt physically exhausted.

His meditation, however, continued to deepen. Then, for a few days, he experienced intense pain in his left big toe and left foot, which spread to his lower leg. He also had an ache on the left side of the back of his head. The pain extended to his left eye, which would occasionally close automatically. After a few days, this intermittent pain disappeared. The pain in his leg, which had resisted all treatment, cleared at about the same time.

In his day-to-day life, family and friends experienced him as more relaxed. A physical therapist, whom he saw regularly, confirmed that my friend felt more relaxed and integrated since this kundalini awakening. His sense of having “come home” grew into a feeling of at-oneness with the world.

Then, during meditation, itching developed on his forehead and occasionally on his cheeks, indicating a further progression of the physio-kundalini cycle.

Toward the end of 1976, he visited Swami Muktananda’s hermitage in Ganeshpuri, India. He meditated three times a day for a total of four hours. Another two to three hours were spent chanting. During most of his meditations, he experienced ecstatic love-bliss, and he would frequently “merge with the blue light of consciousness.” This intense spiritual discipline stimulated the kundalini energy in the region of the

first and second chakras. As a result he experienced powerful surges of energy that sent his uro-genital system into orgasmic spasms. He felt his semen flow upward through the body's central channel (traditionally known as *sushumna-nadi*).

He later understood that this experience was associated with the "piercing of the first knot." He spontaneously entered a period of complete celibacy. He witnessed the baby toenails on both his feet falling off the same night.

After his return from India, he spent several years integrating his spiritual experiences with the practicalities of daily life, achieving a rare attunement and balance. Other meditative experiences followed, indicating the "piercing of the second knot." During one of his evening meditations, back again at the Ganeshpuri ashram, the kundalini energy became intensely focused in the subtle center between the eyebrows. Swami Muktananda spontaneously walked over to him and immediately began to work his fingers over the space between the sixth center and the center at the crown of the head. Streams of kundalini energy started to flow in a V-shaped pattern toward the crown center. Since that time, he reports, the kundalini energy has rarely left the crown center.

In this meditator's case, there are lots of physical feelings and sensations being reported, but none of them are due to the attainment of samadhi. This man, for instance, felt that his vital energy had reached the seminal area, and he describes symptoms similar to the Tao school's categorization of jing transforming to chi. Whether he actually achieved this transformation is a point on which we have to refrain from comment because there simply is not enough information presented here to make a conclusion. However, this practitioner definitely did not reach the stage of transforming his chi to shen.

As to his belief that he opened the central channel of the body, which the Hindus call the *sushumna nadi* and the Chinese call the *zhong mai*, he actually experienced an opening of the *jen mai* channel in the front of the body instead. In their cultivation and medical schools, the Hindus (and Tibetans to some extent) tend to emphasize the central, right and left energy channels in the body whereas the Chinese emphasize the central, front and back channels (*tu mai* and *jen mai*). This explains some of the differences between these cultivation schools.

Naturally the Chinese also recognize the existence of the left and right channels (the left is called the "blue dragon" and the right is called the "white tiger" channel), although Chinese cultivation schools of all types do not place too much importance on them because they will open naturally once the *jen mai* and *tu mai* channels are opened. The *jen mai* and *tu mai* channels also open automatically when someone cultivates emptiness of mind, whereas the artificial physical exercises of the yoga schools are specifically designed to forcibly open the chi channels through artificial efforts. If a practitioner is not prepared, this can then cause all sorts of problems. This practitioner has worked hard at their cultivation but because they knew a little too much, had mistakenly assumed that they had opened the central channel when they were quite far from this

stage of accomplishment.

When one really opens the central channel, they will see a dark blue light comparable to the color of the sky at twilight, and this signifies the correct completion of this stage. That is the point where the chi is in the central channel, and in conjunction with the *tumo* heat of the dan-tien, will cause the jing hormones in the body to descend and bring about a state of supreme bodily bliss. When the chi first enters the central channel, the practitioner will also feel like they can see all the stars, moon and planets even with their eyes closed. But when people such as this practitioner see the “blue light of consciousness,” it is more often an effect of mental visualization rather than from the real thing, though one would have to inspect the student in person to know for sure.

Sometimes, during or after cultivation practice sessions, meditators will see a tiny but brilliant blue dot of light floating about, which sparkles like a diamond. This is because they are able to see some chi which has escaped from the body’s mai. This should not be confused with opening the central channel, which is a much greater accomplishment.

As to the strange rash, which zigged and zagged across the practitioner’s back, this was stimulated by a problem in the neck bones and spinal vertebrae. The reason the back pain eventually subsided is not because the chi actually penetrated through the troubled areas, but because it found an alternate route around the problem! As we have recommended before, this person should also visit a chiropractor or osteopath to determine whether any spinal manipulations can help, and should also visit deep tissue therapists. At times, such adjustments will not only improve a practitioner’s health, but the quality of their meditation as well.

SUMMARY AND REVIEW

Thus ends our brief analysis of the accounts of twelve ordinary cultivation practitioners. If we had been able to meet these individuals in person, we could have added much more to our commentary, but this is a good level of analysis given the available case information.

In reviewing these cases, however, the first thing to discover is that while everyone thinks that the various kung-fu phenomena they experience is indicative of kundalini, none of these practitioners had reached the level of completely cultivating the real chi, let alone their mai and *tumo* fire. Furthermore, none of our case study practitioners have exhibited the ability to reach any level of stable samadhi either. The vast majority of sensations we have encountered result from the initial reaction of the chi wind as it excites the outside of, or makes its way through, the inside of the body’s tiny nadi energy channels. In other words,

most of what we have reviewed are physiological reactions which occur naturally due to quiet psychological states.

When the real chi phenomenon is finally experienced, it will manifest itself quite differently from the wind chi. True chi produces a flood of warm fullness that will be experienced in every cell of the body at once. This produces a state of physical bliss which is peaceful and calm, and much more full and enjoyable than sexual orgasm. But to get to this stage, you must meditate often, must not let your jing or chi leak, must cultivate merit, and allow your jing to transform into chi by engaging in emptiness meditation. The book *Twenty-Five Doors to Meditation* details many of the methods one can use on this road of practice.

From these cases we have also found that an lot of people have unfortunate experiences due to the fact that their bodies need some type of physical adjustments. Sometimes these experiences appear due to latent illnesses, weaknesses in the internal organs, or from an internal homeostatic biochemical imbalance, all of which can to some extent be adjusted through Chinese or Indian ayurvedic herbal medicine. On this note we can once again reference Nan Huai-Chin's *Tao and Longevity*, which notes that the colors meditator's see often reveal where a health problem may lie:

Seeing uncertain and changing colors, either in visions or dreams, may be due to latent disease in the viscera. If the kidneys and related genital nerves deteriorate or are weakened and diseased, this will be reflected by the phenomena of light seen in the form of black points or solid black. If the liver is diseased, the color will appear to be blue; if the heart is diseased, the color seen will be red; if the lungs are not healthy, the color one sees will be white; if the spleen or stomach are diseased, the color seen will be yellow; if the gallbladder is diseased the color seen will be green.

From the standpoint of Chinese mystics, seeing black in dreams, visions or hallucinations usually indicates trouble and disaster. The color blue indicates sadness, grief or sorrow, and green indicates hindrance from hallucinations, or Mara. Red indicates inauspiciousness. Yellow and white are auspicious, indicating calm persons and smooth situations. However, these are not fixed rules.⁸

Meditation can therefore be considered a type of super X-raying process, more efficient than MRIs, PETs or CT scans, that often reveals hidden illnesses which will only worsen in time if they remain uncorrected. Meditation is *Thus, our own best diagnostic doctor as well as a means of spiritual progress and healing*. As science will later prove, resting the body and mind is certain to contribute towards optimum health. In meditation practice, one always takes this proper course of action by letting go of any thoughts and sensations which arise, which is "cultivating emptiness."

We have not yet covered the one type of case which runs counter to this injunction: the case of those practitioners who violate the basic principles of rest and ease in their spiritual practice. When anyone subjects themselves to excessive mental "pushing" or strain during meditation, and tries to force things into manifestation, there are bound to be undesirable results.

Such was the case of the Japanese Zen adept Hakuin, whose story is found in *A Second Zen Reader* (retitled *The Tiger's Cave*), by Trevor Leggett. As a Zen student, Hakuin in his fervor had over-exerted himself in strenuous and scattered concentration exercises and found himself in dire straights. His forceful meditation style, which had little to do with “emptiness,” resulted in the chi ascending to his head so that his ears constantly heard a rushing sound, his lungs felt as if they were on fire, and his legs felt as cold as ice.

No matter which remedy Hakuin tried in order to solve his self-induced ills, and no matter which meditation master he consulted, no one could explain nor cure his ailment. Naturally, this would also be his case today if he were to go to see most doctors, for as we have seen in several much simpler cases, mis-diagnosis is the inevitable result.

Searching everywhere for a cure, Hakuin was lucky enough to hear of a Taoist mountain hermit, named Master Hakuyu. Hakuyu taught Hakuin the following remedy which people can use to help cure chi imbalances within their physical nature. He said:

Your condition is pitiable. By contemplating on truth too strenuously, you have lost the rhythm of spiritual advance, and that has finally brought on a grievous malady. And it is something very hard to cure, this Zen illness of yours [caused by over-exerted concentration on a *koan*]. Though the sages of medicine frown over your case and put forth all their skill with needle and cauterization and drugs, yet would they be helpless. ...

From the mounting of the heart-fire your grievous illness has arisen. If you do not take it down you will never recover, though you learn and practice all the healing remedies human and divine. Now it may be that as my outward appearance is that of a Taoist, you fancy that my teaching is far from Buddhism. But this is Zen. One day, when you break through, you will see how laughable were your former ideas.

This contemplation attains right contemplation by no-contemplation. Many-pointed contemplation is wrong contemplation. Hitherto your contemplation has been many-pointed and so you have contracted this grave malady. Is it not then proper to cure it by no-contemplation? If you now control the fire of heart and will and put it in the Tanden [tan-tien] and right down to the soles of the feet, your breast will of itself become cool, without a thought of calculation, without a ripple of passion. This is true contemplation, pure contemplation. Do not call it dropping your Zen contemplation, for the Buddha himself says: “Hold your heart [mind] down in the soles of the feet and you heal a hundred and one ills.” Further the Agama scriptures speak of the use of the So cream in curing mental exhaustion. The Tendai [Tien-tai school] meditation classic called “Stopping and Contemplation” deals in detail with illnesses and their causes, and describes the methods of treatment. It gives twelve different ways of breathing to cure various forms of illness, and it prescribes the method of visualizing a bean at the navel. The main point is always that the heart-fire must be taken down and kept at the Tanden and down to the soles, and this not only cures illness but very much helps Zen contemplation. ...

If the student finds in his meditation that the four great elements are out of harmony, and body

and mind are fatigued, he should rouse himself and make this meditation. Let him visualize placed on the crown of his head that celestial So ointment, about as much as a duck's egg, pure in color and fragrance. Let him feel its exquisite essence and flavor melting and filtering down through his head, its flow permeating downwards, slowly laving the shoulders and elbows, the sides of the breast and within the chest, the lungs, liver, stomach and internal organs, the back and spine and hip bones. All the old ailments and adhesions and pains in the five organs and six auxiliaries follow the mind downwards. There is a sound as of the trickling of water. Percolating through the whole body, the flow goes gently down the legs, stopping at the soles of the feet.

Then let him make this meditation: that the elixir having permeated and filtered down through him, its abundance fills up the lower half of his body. It becomes warm, and he is saturated in it. Just as a skillful physician collects herbs of rare fragrance and puts them in a pan to boil, so the student feels that from the navel down he is simmering in the So elixir. When this meditation is being done there will be psychological experiences, of a sudden indescribable fragrance at the nose-tip, of a gentle and exquisite sensation in the body. Mind and body become harmonized and far surpass their condition at the peak of youth. Adhesions and obstructions are cleared away, the organs are tranquilized and insensibly the skin begins to glow. If the practice is carried on without relapse, what illness will not be healed, what power will not be acquired, what perfection will not be attained, what Way will not be fulfilled? The arrival of the result depends only on how the student performs the practices.⁹

The fact that we also wish to pass on this remedy, as well as warn people to avoid scattered and over-strenuous mental activities, is the whole reason for recounting this case.

We must note that this is a Taoist technique for cultivating the physical body only, meaning that it does not lead to enlightenment or any type of advanced mental or spiritual attainment. It simply works on adjusting the imbalances within the physical body, and from this balance, helps to bring about corrections in mental and physical health. If you are following a road of practice and find you need it, then by all means use it, even if it is not the way to Tao itself! On the road of spiritual practice there are no denominations and you must use any remedy that works, whether it comes from America, or Germany or Russia, whether it comes from Buddhism, Taoism, or Christianity. This is the *rule of discipline* in cultivation: do not worry about the origins of a technique and sectarian claims of ownership, but simply use what works!

The cultivators who are not likely to succeed in their practice are those who are afraid to try new things or borrow from various different religious schools and traditions, for they are the ones who are already firmly stuck in dogma and tend to cling to claims of religious pre-eminence. You should only care about the effectiveness and veracity of various teachings and techniques, which is the right way to practice in our gigantic universe of multiple beings and teachings. This is also a “scientific” attitude in that it focused on producing the results of spiritual cultivation without a sectarian bias.

Hence, this “So Cream Meditation” is a powerful technique that can help successfully cure many severe illnesses such as arthritis, cancer and even tumors. It can also help return equilibrium to much simpler imbalances in your chi circulation resulting in cold and clammy hands, skin problems, and other related conditions. This method has such a wide variety of effective uses, such as extending one’s longevity and banishing illness. Hakuin employed this method until his death. In fact, he attributed his great vitality and longevity to the daily use of this practice. It is something we can all imitate.

From these initial cases, one might reflect upon the usefulness of the four elements in analyzing a person’s body, such as noting that a person who is excessively “damp” inside will likely produce excessive heat from meditation when their body is imbalanced. We have also discovered that few practitioners cultivate their true chi at the initial stages of their practice, and instead feel only the sensation of wind chi during their spiritual exercises.

We have also discovered that many ancient cultivation schools have correctly categorized various stages and aspects of cultivation, as we found when we revealed that Shakyamuni Buddha advised people to concentrate on the left big toe during visualization practices. Many of these practitioners independently verified such teachings and injunctions through their own personal experiences. If you cultivate correctly, that is always what will happen because *cultivation is a science*, and its results can be known beforehand.

Although we are getting ahead of ourselves, the basic understanding you have already obtained of some simple cultivation kung-fu will soon allow us to move onto more complicated phenomena, such as investigating the stories of Lady Yeshe Tsogyel, Milarepa, Gampopa, and Machig Labdron, all of whom succeeded through the path of kundalini cultivation. But there is still more to learn before we can fully turn to a detailed discussion of kundalini cultivation or the kung-fu of those who actually succeeded in enlightenment.

Our present descriptions of the four elements, the five skandhas, the nine realms of samadhi concentration, and the eight consciousnesses are still inadequate for fully evaluating these cases, and so in the following chapters we must continue to go deeper into these matters.

For further preparatory background on kundalini, the chakras, the mai, chi, jing, and shen and the lowest stages of cultivation kung-fu, the reader is advised to reference the materials in various books such as the following and those recommended for Chapter 3:

The Kundalini Experience
Lee Sannella, M.D.
Integral Publishing, California, 1992.

Tao and Longevity: Mind-Body Transformation

Huai-Chin Nan, trans. by Wen Kuan Chu
Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1984.

Working Toward Enlightenment

Huai-Chin Nan, trans. by J.C. Cleary
Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1993.

To Realize Enlightenment

Huai-Chin Nan, trans. by J.C. Cleary
Samuel Weiser, York Beach: Maine, 1994.

The Tiger's Cave and Translations of Other Zen Writings

Trevor Leggett
Charles E. Tuttle, Rutland: Vermont, 1995.

Our thanks go to the Yoga Research and Education Center, www.yrec.org, for its permission to use the cases from Lee Sannella's *The Kundalini Experience*, © 2001, Yoga Research and Education Center.

1 Huai-Chin Nan, *Tao and Longevity* (Samuel Weiser, York Beach: ME, 1991), p. 37.

2 *Tao and Longevity*, pp. 45-46.

3 *Tao and Longevity*, pp. 38-41.

4 *Tao and Longevity*, pp. 45-47.

5 *Tao and Longevity*, pp. 42-43.

6 *Tao and Longevity*, p. 51.

7 *Tao and Longevity*, p. 50.

8 *Tao and Longevity*, pp. 48-49.

9 Trevor Leggett, *The Tiger's Cave and Translations of Other Zen Writings* (Charles E Tuttle, Rutland: Vermont, 1995), pp. 144-154.