

Text Two

Inscription on Oblivion (Zuowang lun)

→ I have heard my old teacher explain: Sitting in oblivion is the foundation of long life. Thus we engage perfection to refine the body-form, and once it is pure we merge it into qi. We retain Dao to refine qi, and once it is clear we merge it with spirit. The physical structure unified with Dao: this is “attaining Dao.” ← As Dao is without ultimate, how could the immortal ever die?

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→ Perfection is the prime of Dao, thus we cleanse spirit to match perfection.

Zhuangzi says: “I smash my limbs and physical structure, drive out intellect and perception, cast off body-form, do away with knowledge, and become one with Great Pervasion” [ZZ 19/6/92]. This is

exactly what we mean. Zhuangzi also says: “Wisdom and stillness take turns cultivating each other, thus harmony and order emerge from still inner nature” [41/16/1]. This is just it. And he says: “He whose inner being rests in the stability of cosmic peace will send forth a heavenly light” [63/23/41]. Here “resting” refers to the mind, while “heavenly light” means the radiance of insight. As you stabilize your mind, the radiance of insight develops within. By this radiance you can then see the myriad aspects of projected reality, and in emptiness and oblivion you will merge mentally with the realm of boundless serenity. This is what we call “sitting in oblivion.” ←

People nowadays train in popular studies and acquaint themselves with many teachings, yet they are unable to attain the

essential points of these teachings. → For example, there recently was Daoist Zhao Jian who compiled a treatise on sitting in oblivion in one juan and seven sections. Covering a broad subject matter in intricate language, he explains a simple essential idea in extensive arguments.³ ← He thus presents the tradition of one school, yet he is far from matching the truly mysterious. → Thereby he makes the reader only think of his chapters and phrases, tempts him to merely memorize his outward arrangements [lit. doors and windows] and textual layout. This one may call sitting with a “madly racing mind” [ZZ 9/4/32], but never really sitting in oblivion.

←

Rather, when sitting in oblivion, what would there remain unforgotten? Only then can one say: Sitting in oblivion is the gate to

long life. → Laozi says: “If I did not have a body-self, what vexations would I have?” [DDJ 13] ← But if one does not have a body-self and thus returns to annihilation [nirvāna], shouldn't that be called the loss of the basis of eternal life? Yet I answer: What you would call → “not having a body-self” does not refer to not having this particular physical body. It rather means that the physical structure is unified with the Great Dao, that one is never influenced by glorious positions⁴ and does not seek after speedy advancement. Being placid and without desires, it means to forget that there is this body-self dependent on all kinds of things. ← If the sage therefore urges us to refine spirit and merge with Dao, ascend into the formless and unite with Dao to become one, then this is exactly the meaning of “casting off body-form, doing away with understanding, and

smashing up one's limbs and body.”

→ [What is highest] in eternal life is that spirit and body-form are joined in completeness. Thus it is said: “The trigrams Qi an and Kun constitute the pattern of the changes. If Qi an and Kun were destroyed, one could no longer feel any changes. Thus the body-form is a vessel, it is the storehouse of inner nature. If it is destroyed, inner nature has no place to reside. ← If inner nature had no place to reside, where in me would it be?” [Shenxian kexue lun 11 a]. Thus what we value highest about body-form and spirit is their being joined in completeness. One who only → nourishes spirit without nourishing the body-form is like a man who destroys his house and lives out in the open. ← How could spirit ever rest peacefully? Rather, consciousness would continue to be

transformed in the different realms and would eventually take residence in another family. Thus it is said: “The wandering of the consciousness-soul produces transformations” [Shenxian kexue lun 11b-12a]. This is just it.

Yet someone may say, “When at the end of life one observes one’s mind and consciousness properly, then spirit will transcend the world and enter the realm of perfection. It will never again fall into the evil realms of existence.” But these words are only spoken for comfort, they → are not words of perfection and propriety. Now [today] there are wise men of lofty potency ← who either excuse themselves and rest outside of worldly involvement and mundane grime or who bustle around at court and in the city and yet → say that they are entirely oblivious of themselves

and others and never make any distinction between right and wrong. Yet, when these men see someone do evil, they inevitably knit their brows and make a face. When they see someone do good, they in all cases brighten up and smile happily. ←

When spirit is pure and qi vigorous → then one is deluded by this fact and considers it either good or bad,⁵ but how much worse will the delusion get once the end of life is drawing closer? ← And how will one ever be able not to be enticed by the manifold false impressions? The mind. . . . [text illegible] will be split. → Thus, if existing consciousness is transformed into nonconsciousness ← or human consciousness into animal consciousness, how could one explain this? For example, → the Lady of Qin was turned into a stone ←, which is a case of existing

consciousness being transformed into nonconsciousness. → Mrs. Huang was changed into a turtle ←, which exemplifies the situation of human consciousness being transformed into animal consciousness.⁶ → Seen from this angle, mind and consciousness are understood as being molded entirely by yin and yang. How could they ever be stable in themselves? This is precisely why Daoists highly value body-form and spirit in joined existence [DS: completeness]. ← And how could it not be absurd and fantastic to speak of observation while abandoning the body?

Nowadays there are frequently people → who know that glorious positions are worthless and vain, and who understand that life and death are one whole [DS: track]. Yet when the end approaches they

will seek out doctors and pray to the demons. ← To these people the sages say: “He who dies but does not perish enjoys long life” [DDJ 50]. How could this be empty talk? Therefore, when one wants to attain some level of Dao, one must first of all practice sitting in oblivion. → [Sitting in] oblivion means the annihilation of the myriad states of projected reality.

For this one must first understand that one holds countless deluded assumptions. Next, one must stabilize the mind. Above the stable mind everything must be free, open, coverless. Beneath the stable mind everything must be wide, spacey, bottomless.⁷ If you just continue to remain in this state and do not move, ← you will unite with Dao into oneness. This we call entering the state of great stability. Once this is established, insight will arise by

itself. → When insight first arises, ← make sure you do not labor stability. If you just continue to observe your deluded assumptions, you will certainly attain the perfectly wondrous. → However, as this body-self has not escaped the molding through yin and yang and revolves through the grime of the world [lit. “wheel mud”], one must rely on gold and cinnabar to undergo the metamorphosis of wings [Shenxian kexue lun 12b]. ←

Only then can one ascend and → enter the formless, to go beyond the remotest points of all transformation. ← Entering the gate of the boundless, one becomes fully one with Dao. This is called “attaining Dao.” → Only after that will yin and yang be fully controlled. ←

From: Sitting in Oblivion: The Heart of

Daoist Meditation by Livia Kohn