

**Interview with Bruce Frantzis
& The Tao Bums**
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Okay, now the next question – is it a system as a whole that makes something a Fire or a Water method, e.g., the Hua Shan or the Mao Shan schools? (17)

Are fire, wood, metal, earth energies used in the Water Method? Are there also entire separate methods for each of these other four phases as well, or is this a misunderstanding? (18)

Is it possible that the Water Method "flattens" the peak and pit stages in the Buddhist path, named "Arising & Passing" and "The Dark Night of the Soul"? (18)

Even though Liu Hung Chieh was already recognized as "enlightened" in the Mahayana Tien Tai school of Chinese Buddhism, he later on focused in Taoist meditation practices. So, what aspects of the spiritual road did he consider not covered well enough by the Buddhist practices? Also, did Liu Hung Chieh mention what insights of the Buddhist tradition are harder to get in Taoism? (19)

Many Tao Bums who resonate with the material in your books yet are also interested in practices that work with Chi and Shen levels. What advice would you give to such seekers? (20)

Ok, last question! Could you tell us 3 simple things we could do every day to enhance our lives and our harmony with Tao, no matter what system or path we are following? (22)

What are your main goals for teaching Taoist Energy Arts in the west?

I have several goals for teaching Energy Arts in the West.

First and foremost, I want to pass on the information of the Taoist lineage that I learned in China, becoming a living bridge for future generations in the West. I hope to pass on the personal practice lineage as it relates to all aspects of the internal martial arts, including their higher spiritual aspects, the healing work and the meditation work of Taoism, primarily the inner dissolving process. This process is what will enable a person to be able to achieve the goals of Taoist meditation.

My second main goal is that other people will take from the Taoist lineage what is useful and will be able to incorporate what they learn into whatever they do. In this way the knowledge of Taoism will help people in the future, regardless of whether they attempt to learn the entire lineage or not. Even if they learn only parts of it, what they learn can catalyze their creative process into benefiting the people on this earth.

Within the lineages are teachings regarding personal practices of Taoism, things you do by yourself for the first years of studying this way. These are devoted to what in Taoism is called body, energy, spirit, emptiness and Tao.

The main purpose of the first years of practice is to develop the body and its energy along with the insularity methods that are related to chi. This occupied the bulk of my lineage teachings for the first 15 years after I returned to the West from Beijing.

In Taoism, Chi means emotional energy, mental energy and psychic energy and shen, or spirit, which encompasses the energy of karma and individual essence, essence beyond personality.

In the past 7 years I have been devoting my teachings to shift toward the emotional, mental and psychic energy aspects of the teachings along with those secondary practices that have to do with the body.

Through my courses, seminars, and print materials, I hope to offer Taoist information, perspectives and “parts of the puzzle” which will help human beings in whatever form it takes, as the road anyone travels on the Tao is always a mystery and where it ends is also a mystery.

If I could only do one practice exercise what would it be and why?

There are three answers to this question depending on what sort of practitioner you are.

If you are a beginner or a casual practitioner and you want to learn something basic about chi, [Dragon and Tiger Medical Qigong](#) will be a good start. This relatively short and complete system has only seven movements and will give a beginner enough of a start to feel their chi and the benefits of practice.

If, however, you are a more disciplined or stronger practitioner or you are willing to practice more than 10 or 15 minutes a day, I would recommend one of the eight standing postures of I-Chuan or one of the 200 standing postures of Taoism. If your goal is to become extremely strong, or your interests are in martial arts, practice [Hsing-i and Santi](#).

Now, if your interest is meditation clearly you would want to do a sitting meditation practice. In Taoism I would recommend Inner Dissolving as the most direct way to go. However, you might have to do more preliminary Taoist meditation practice before you could arrive at Inner Dissolving. The is one reason I started the [Taoist Meditation Circle](#), so people can develop core skills such as concentration, focus, awareness of the body and conscious Taoist breathing so they have a solid foundation for the deeper Taoist meditation practices.

If you already practice tai chi or bagua, and especially if you learned the spiritual and chi aspects of the arts rather than solely their physical health aspects, that would be fine as your single exercise if your goal is meditation. Although the spiritual and chi aspects are rarely taught, this is something my lineage teaches.

These are the easiest and the most direct practices if one had to give a simple answer. But there really isn't a simple answer because the practitioner's access to a good teacher and what sort of effort you want to put in have to be taken into consideration.

A qualified teacher is essential to give you a very direct way of learning to reach the highest level with the least amount of effort. Your individual situation can only be assessed on a one-by-one basis and cannot be answered in a general way.

Many Bums resonate with the material in your books, yet are also interested in practices that work with the energy and spirit levels. What advice would you give to such seekers?

When I first came back to the West, I had a clear thought of transmitting, to the best of my ability, the tradition I belong to in terms of the classic Taoist paradigm of body, energy, spirit, emptiness, Tao. The first fifteen years of my teaching were devoted primarily to the physical level, which means the energy of the body and everything that is related to the energy of the body, including your animal emotions that are generated from your internal organs.

In the past six years I have now begun teaching what is called shengong, or spiritual qigong. This is the beginning of my teaching the qi or energy level which relates to the emotions and mental energy as well as psychic energy. As of yet, I've only just lightly tapped on the psychic energy part, which I will begin teaching more of at the end of 2011 again in Oxford, England.

In this past six years, I have been going much more into how meditation is incorporated into everything that relates to physical practices such as qigong/chi gung, tai chi, etc. I have now been doing all these physical practices equally in terms of the chi level or the energy level. These levels are taught in live teachings now.

My company does not yet have videos, books, etc. on these subjects in great depth. The closest it gets to this is the [Bagua Mastery Program](#). This intermediate level work is going into what you are doing with the channels, etc. In my live teachings I am always doing this all the time. The Bagua Mastery Program is beginning to touch on this subject in terms of it being available outside of live teachings.

Also in the past 6 years we have been continuously archiving video materials of all of my courses where I have been teaching this. As of yet, we have no plans to release any of this work mostly because we do not have the personnel or volunteers for the editing to get done so we can release them in video format. But I am teaching this material live all the time and at some point we hope that these archival materials can become available to people. However, for financial reasons, we cannot promise a release date at this time of these materials.

You look very healthy and much lighter in your recent videos. Did something shift for you in the last few years?

I have been spending a lot of time in the past few years in Maui, Hawai'i. Hot weather has always caused me to lose weight, and cold weather has always caused me to gain weight. I have a body like a bear in that sense. Looking much healthier isn't necessarily

related to weight, but to the fact that over a period of 7 years in my fifties, I had a car accident every year. In the past few years I haven't had any car accidents.

Anyone who has gone through 7 car accidents would probably look like death warmed over, forget about looking "not so healthy." They would be lucky to be alive, which was my case. Now that I haven't had any car accidents for a couple of years I've been able to begin regenerating myself. Previously, every time I would begin to regenerate myself, I would have another car accident.

Those are the big things that have shifted. Also now that I'm a little bit older I've actually started eating better. The fact of the matter is that my entire life, I ate enough for three people, forget about one. But now I'm eating less and that seems to be making a bit of a difference, also in lightening up.

Many of us on The Tao Bums forum take an eclectic and non-traditional approach to cultivation. As someone whose path was also quite eclectic and yet still traditional, is there any advice you would impart to the modern, information-age, spiritual seeker?

I can speak from my experience about what the traditional approach is and the eclectic way I went about it, and the essential difference between an eclectic traditional approach and the approach of the dabbler, who just knows a bit of this and a bit of that.

The first issue is: why become eclectic? In some sense you become eclectic so that you can gain a really specific perspective on something. You may want to do tai chi, but as an eclectic, you may want to do a tai chi specifically for fighting. For example, I did Praying Mantis and 8 Drunken Immortals. Doing these showed me some martial aspects of tai chi I needed to pay attention to rather than ignore. But I went deeply into them. I didn't just skim the surface with them.

There is a very old phrase from India about the desert: if you want to strike water don't dig 20 wells ten feet deep, dig one well 200 feet deep. That sums up the approach that I've taken. My principle was that if I was to be eclectic in several different things, in each one of them I dug a well 200 feet deep.

Many people say, "Well, you know, I'll do this for a month or two, and I'll kind of just do that for a workshop." That approach only helps you get some idea of what each thing is. You still haven't really done a particular thing until you start to get what its special point is, after several years. So, you really need to go deep to know something and that is generally not the approach of most New Age practitioners.

My experience has been that the traditional ways were all about getting right to the central issue of your practice. By going deep, I don't mean reading about it. I mean doing your practice until it's in your blood and in your bones.

Now, in purely intellectual terms, you want to read as widely as possible and apply the methods you would use for any form of research. However, the great trouble with a lot of information is that you may not be able to sort out what is the wheat and what is the chafe, what is relevant and what is minimally tangential. This is a problem with the masses of information available: often much is not actually grounded in anything substantial.

Another example of this is my experience with Hatha Yoga. Originally, as background for qigong, I did the 300 postures of Hatha Yoga and a lot of Pranayama. But even before that I did the Yoga postures simply to become very flexible so I could kick in martial arts better, do judo better, do ground work and what not, better. In one sense, learning the 300 hatha yoga postures can be seen as the traditional approach. From the eclectic view of wanting to know the whole subject of chi, this study was only a piece; it was not the whole thing.

Also, as a Taoist Priest, we went through a great number of subjects. Each one was leading to the other and we went deeper and deeper and deeper. It wasn't that we just got a little bit of information on each piece. We really went deep and that is the eclectic traditional approach.

Sometimes to understand something in its entirety, you have to come at it from many angles until you can see both what is and what is not so. But again I want to say that the eclectic approach of real traditionalists is not surface knowledge in each of the approaches. It is an incredible in-depth knowledge in each of the approaches, so that even if you work and study ten things, you become a "mini-master" in each of those ten things. You are not just a beginning or intermediate student, you go down your path picking up whatever possible from wherever available until you really clearly get the essential point of the particular piece you are studying until you get it, unambiguously and with no nonsense.

It was very main stream in all of China for some people to do only one thing for their entire life. Others even if they specialize in one thing, want to know what tangentially or directly connects to and enhances that one thing, or whatever number of things they really are focusing on. This approach can be very difficult. So, the traditional eclectic approach in China is that in each and every part of your approach, whatever its inclusive different components, you would be either virtually at the Master level, not a casual level. The purpose of all this was to become a super master a Grand Master or what in China they simply would call a real Master of the subject.

A recurring debate on the forums is whether it is better to focus intent and direct chi in our bodies (tell it where to go) or to let the chi go where it wants, especially when it seems to "have its own agenda". Can you speak to this?

The reason why this is a recurring debate is that it doesn't have a simple answer. There are essentially two answers, two sides of the coin, to this question.

First of all, if you stand or do any sort of chi practice, the chi is initially to some degree going to go where it naturally needs or wants to go, regardless of your attempts to control it.

That being said, chi can go in pathways that are more efficient or less efficient. As such, the benefit of directing chi is that you can efficiently shorten the time it will take to get whatever results are going to come from your practice.

If you learn to direct your chi, for example, along a meridian line or internally within a multitude of other channels including the right, left or central channel, the chi is going to be activated in that area, as long as you keep your awareness more or less within the parameters you're working on.

Essentially, chi will start going where it wants to go and the key is in letting it. Instead of trying to force chi to go into a channel, it is best to simply encourage its flow into the desired channels and then watch how and where it goes and morphs.

What is the difference between dissolving the physical body and simply relaxing as understood in the West? Can one dissolve the physical body through ordinary relaxation practices, or must one be able to feel qi to practice dissolving? If the latter, what would you recommend as the fastest way to learn to feel qi, so that one can dissolve the energy body?

Dissolving the physical body and relaxing it is not the same thing. Here, we use the image of going from ice to water.

Relaxation in the West is mostly understood as a mental or an emotional mood change. When we're going from ice to water in Dissolving practices, we're talking about the body physically softening as well as your mood softening.

Of course, there is a general emotional sense of relaxation, but more specifically, the tissues of the body are physically relaxing and becoming softer. The blood in the body

begins flowing better, which comes from blood vessels being less constricted.

Now, can one dissolve the chi of the physical body through ordinary relaxation practices? I don't believe that you can dissolve the chi of the body through ordinary relaxation practices because the whole focus is to open the chi to your etheric body or in inner dissolving, to take the chi into the inner space. Ordinary relaxation normally does not do that. Yes, it will relax the tissues, but it won't directly affect your chi like dissolving practices will.

Anything is possible but dissolving is not the normal expectation because it happens so rarely with ordinary relaxation.

Must one be able to feel chi to practice dissolving? The major point here is that directly feeling chi is a fruit, a final stage, of your practice. Initially however, you could begin sensing your chi through visualization or imagination.

I had a teacher named T. T. Liang who wrote a book, Imagination Becomes Reality, in which he states that if you focus your intent (your imagination) eventually your intent (your imagination) will help move your chi.

Regarding the ability to practice dissolving, one actually has to be able to feel the chi to some degree because the process of outer dissolving involves releasing energy into the etheric field, which is not physical but energetic. That requires you to feel your etheric field. If you can't feel your chi and you can't feel your etheric field, how would you know if you're dissolving or not? Yes, you could visualize it but would have no concrete, actionable idea of the chi itself.

The same goes for inner dissolving. You could visualize it but the process of dissolving in Taoism is not only a visualization practice. You actually do need to be able to feel chi for this practice.

Most people usually start out only being able to feel two or three of five percent of what's going on and gradually, that ability to feel and recognize their chi starts to grow until it eventually reaches 100%.

That said, it would be a false dichotomy to say that if you can't feel it you shouldn't do it at all. Learning to feel your chi is a gradual growth process.

What would I recommend as the fastest way to learn to feel chi? Essentially, all of my books and all of my materials teach the processes for learning how to feel chi.

In terms of what I teach, the coherent system of Qigong called Dragon and Tiger Medical Qigong will help you initially feel your chi the fastest. This one coherent system works with the etheric body and gives the overwhelming majority of people the fastest ability to feel chi to some degree.

The second practice I recommend is Standing and Dissolving within Energy Gates Qigong because, although the process of standing is dramatically harder than Dragon and Tiger, Standing and Dissolving has historically proven to allow the largest number of people to feel their chi deep inside their body in the most concrete way in the shortest period of time.

Many of the practices you teach focus on letting go, increasing awareness and sensitivity, and feeling and working with various energies. What protective methods, if any, would you recommend to someone in situations in which feeling other energies could be harmful, or if there is an abundance of overtly negative energy?

This is somewhat of a complex question because how you protect yourself against other people's negative energies is a subject for that there is no quick sound bite.

This question is especially important for body workers or others who work with severely deranged people, or in negative circumstances; e.g., soldiers, police officers, therapists, doctors, crisis center workers. For these individuals, there has to be a way of both recognizing the need to and then pragmatically releasing energy as it potentially becomes stored in their system.

I taught a course in Sweden a couple of years ago and I'm going to be teaching one in Reading, UK in mid-October 2011 that is geared toward body workers and others as mentioned above who are constantly being bombarded by other people's energies. In this course I teach you the basic principles that are very important in Safeguarding Your Health and Protecting Your Qi.

The first thing to understand is that you cannot block someone else's negative energy unless you can clearly feel your own energy. If you can't feel your own energy, there's not much you can do to distinguish whether and to what degree any outer energy is affecting your inner energy.

There are 100 different ways of blocking energy.

Do you personally use the I Ching for divination and overall how do you feel about such a practice?

My whole training as a Taoist Priest, as well as my whole training in China, was about using the I Ching. What I personally do or don't do, although it may be an interesting

topic of gossip like what the celebrities ate for lunch last week, is not particularly important here.

At a practical level I have not used looking at the written I Ching to try and sort something out for a lot of years.

There's a whole process, a very classic long term form of Taoist meditation, which is about learning to recognize the eight energies of the I Ching directly and, more importantly, learning which energies are active and what to do about them at any given moment. With this, you can very much get a sense of the nature of the Universal flow and where and how it is going.

I have learned the I Ching practice in terms of eventually finding the empty center of the I Ching in which there is no change, which is beyond all change, which never came into existence and will never leave. That is the actual spiritual aspect of the I Ching.

As far as the changes themselves, the I Ching is a huge subject, but I will go into a bit. The first point is, if you wish to use the I Ching for divination, do not throw your own coins or stalks. Have somebody else do it because once you do it enough, you will shade the answer.

The second point is that if you're going to use the I Ching for divination, make sure that you sit and truly calm yourself for 5 or 10 minutes before you do it and be willing to let what is going to come in, arrive. If you do those two things, that's the best way to go about throwing the coins or the stalks or whichever particular method you use.

I would not recommend one of those things on the computer or something like "push the button" that gives you a read out. This is because the I Ching should be something where your energy is fused into the divination process since it's only by your energy fusing into the divination process that it is possible for the process to actually work as well as it can.

In terms of the internal martial art bagua zhang, all I was taught about the I Ching and all of the issues around the I Ching are included in the Single Palm Change, Walking the Circle and the Sitting Meditation. All the practices in bagua relating to the I Ching were classically done in Taoism for thousands of years, and there's a whole other process that I mentioned before where you learn to directly comprehend what the energies are themselves, so it's not just a representation.

A drawing represents a person. That's a very different thing than putting your hands on the person or being in a room and talking with the person.

Are you planning to release the Bagua mastery program for a larger audience than to the 250 in the future, and/or do you have plans to release individual DVD's or books on the material in smaller segments? Will we ever see a book on the single palm change?

The instructional portion of the Bagua Mastery Program is close to 1,000 pages so, as such, I think that pretty much is the Book or Mastery work at this juncture. It also includes over 20 audio CDs and will include over 30++ DVDs in the end.

There are no immediate plans for releasing the material in smaller segments, the Bagua Program is done as one piece. Frankly speaking, I'm involved in a lot of other projects but there is a hope that somewhere down the line, there may be DVDs and audio tapes in terms of the other Palm Changes. The Bagua Mastery Program started as a 1,600 page document and, to say the least, it was not a casual undertaking to write – probably over 5000 hours of time if you include the filming, recording, instructor training and all the editing required because everything has to be precise.

We initially printed just 250 of the Bagua Mastery Program because we just did not know what the demand would be. To print the 1,000 pages and all the audio CDs and DVD is quite a cost. In the future when we re-launch we will attempt to adjust to what the demand is at the time.

So at this stage of the game, the Mastery Program may be re-released after a year or so, and that's as far as I will comment in the current moment. To my knowledge it is the most comprehensive set of materials ever produced for bagua or for any internal martial arts for that matter. I did this to lay out all of the knowledge to help future generations of practitioners and to ensure the knowledge I hold will be shared with others.

Will you ever create a Tai chi training program, like your Bagua one?

We are looking at some type of Tai Chi Training. However, it will not be like the bagua program in one major sense. The Bagua Mastery Program, focusing on the Single Palm Change, was originally 1,600 pages of writing. If I were to do a similar program for tai chi, the document would be a minimum of at least 10,000 pages, in the Bagua Mastery Program I stated this, because of the sheer number of motions that are involved in tai chi.

I created the Bagua Mastery Program the way I did because with one motion, the Single Palm Change, you can experience all the major points that will be extremely relevant to anybody who does tai chi or bagua. Also there is a whole tradition of bagua that came

out of the monasteries in China where bagua originated that was based on meditation not just fighting.

If we do create tai chi training program with video and audio and I want to ask this question back to you, would you want one? Will the readers want a tai chi training program and what will they be most interested in seeing in it?

If something was done, the tai chi training I would lead with is the Wu style because I'm a lineage holder of this style and because the Wu style of tai chi is the only form that I have learned that is directly linked to Taoist meditation, which I feel is the most important subject I teach in the west.

That being said, I am also a lineage holder in the Yang style and can and have taught all that stuff during my day. My question would be, what would you be most interested in seeing? If you practice Yang style what would be most useful for you? I would appreciate your feedback.

How about a Neigong version of the Bagua Mastery Program?

Well, there is no plan to make a neigong version of the Bagua Mastery Program at this juncture.

I will say that the basic six part Energy Arts Qigong System that I teach is essentially a complete Neigong Mastery Program. In the west people don't know what neigong is so we use the word qigong for our exercises.

Each of my qigong sets is designed to teach specific components of the classical 16 neigong. For example Heaven and Earth Qigong specifically is a short exercise set that teaches how to put openings and closings into qigong, tai chi or any movement form. That qigong set is designed to be the easiest access point to that specific neigong. So it goes with all of the qigong sets I teach as they each focus on different neigong, with the exception of Gods Playing in the Clouds where all of the neigong can be put into that set.

The Qigong System involves: 1) Taoist Breathing, 2) Dragon and Tiger Medical Qigong, 3) Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body, 4) Marriage of Heaven and Earth, 5) Bend the Bow, 6) Spiraling Energy Body and 7) Gods Playing in the Clouds.

We are currently working through this qigong system so the breathing, especially vis-à-vis how you move fluids within the body and how you move shen with your mind is highlighted.

We're hoping to offer a rather large teaching about breathing.

I should mention that I do teach the whole neigong thing live but cannot promise when materials will be available, that is based on my company's ability to make my teachings available in any sort of video or audio format. In the meantime, I want some feedback to know which systems the readers would like first and what the particular interests are. I can't promise we can fulfill them but if we can, we will.

There's just so many different types of qigong, neigong & neidan. Can you share some general principles for differentiating them?

Well, first of all neidan is a very, very specific thing in Taoism. The real neidan is about circulating the ball of light. The practices in the bulk of Fire schools of Taoism and this business where people are just mentally circulating through the micro-cosmic orbit, is actually kids' stuff compared to that practice of neidan and it's partial, not full, anyway you want to slice it.

I know because I did neidan when I was younger, so having said that, let's take neidan out of this question. If you talk about chi gung and neigong, there are probably 400 schools in China and each of the major schools has numerous branches. But I'll give you some big differentiating principles.

The first one is: are you doing the practice from the outside in or the inside out. If it's neigong, it's primarily done from the inside out. Qigong is done from the outside in and working with the etheric body, like I do initially with Dragon and Tiger Medical Qigong. That is what could be called qigong.

There are so many styles where everything is about the movements that you do, the way that you trace lines on your body or you do something externally and how you visualize yourself doing something, that's one big huge crowd.

Then there are other styles, which are much more like neigong, where you learn to go inside yourself by opening up the chi inside of your body. By opening up the pathways of chi inside your body, you make your chi become full. These usually have specific movements too.

The ones which are about opening up the inside to the outside can be done equally sitting or lying down, moving, standing or interactively, sexually or in conversation; whereas the qigong styles that are about going from the outside in usually don't work so well if you're lying down or if you're sitting because you don't have any physical motion to catalyze the body.

So those would be some distinctions.

Now, is there any way in terms of movements to differentiate styles? The biggest single thing about every qigong and neigong system is whether it is on a scale of let's say 1:100, is it partial or is it complete?

Now a lot of things, partial systems start at about a 5% percent and they rarely go above a 50% or 60% in teaching all of the internal components. For a system to really be considered complete, it should have at least 90% of the internal material, but the fact of the matter is that a lot of what are considered to be complete neigong or qigong schools usually only have somewhere between about 60% and 80%, something like that.

So I think the much bigger issue is whether the style is partial or complete. By that definition, you only can get so simple before it cannot go beyond being partial. That does not mean that it necessarily has to have a lot of physical movements. Just think of our modern computers which don't have a giant box with all sorts of things but just have a few chips that have been etched like nobody's business and now have more power and capacity than a Cray super computer.

So this is where you have to know the field very well. For me to talk about these styles of neigong and qigong would be the equivalent of trying to tell someone who knows absolutely nothing about computers the difference between a hand-held device and a Cray computer.

Well, let's just say there's a lot more in a Cray computer than there is in your little hand held device and leave it at that. What are the specifics? Now, that's why people have PhDs and all sorts of forms of electrical engineering and computer technology and what not. That's a bit different than what you do when you just have to open up emails and watch a few downloaded videos.

For those that are interested I suggest the study the 16 neigong components that I teach, because that is a classical way to look at what is included or what is missing in any system.

Are there other paths that would come under this Water Method umbrella besides Liu's lineage? Is it that a particular practice is a water or fire method, or is it the system as a whole that is a fire or water method? What in particular makes a method or system water or fire? Are their mixtures?

Yes, there are other Water Method schools in Taoism, besides that of Liu Hung Chieh. All Water Method schools directly descend from Lao Tzu and follow Lao Tzu water principles.

The Fire schools are simply used within Taoism as a declaration for what basically started after 1000 AD where they were to varying degrees influenced by Tibetan Buddhism, and there were influences from all sorts of other things to do with Buddhism and the alchemy of the Middle East.

Water methods are initially dramatically more about feeling and the ability to focus on the vibration of sound. Fire methods are dramatically more about visualizations where sound and physical feeling get folded into the visualization but in dramatically lesser degrees. There is another distinguishing characteristic, the term internal alchemy is used in the Fire schools as the initial method of transforming whatever is within the human system.

Using Western terms, as opposed to Chinese terms so that we don't get confused, there is the whole idea that people have an ego. There is a place that I call post ego, where you could say one knows who one is, one gets past their ego and one finds out who and what one is that has nothing to do with the ego. One understands what the root of oneself is and it's not the personality or personal history. Fire schools define the methods that you use to arrive at that point as alchemy.

In the Water schools, they say that you begin the process of internal alchemy only after you have arrived at that point of the "post ego," which is called the Body of Immortality in Water traditions, and true alchemy is about shifting your essential vibration of how you exist in the Universe.

Now, one thing both the Fire and Water traditions have in common is that when a Taoist in the Water tradition uses the term internal alchemy (which was not a term that was used within Lao Tzu's tradition before the Fire tradition came about) they are talking in equivalent terms of what, in the Fire schools, is when at a pragmatic level, you have birthed the immortal fetus. You are not in the process of birthing it but the immortal fetus has popped out and is evolving.

Okay, now the next question – is it a system as a whole that makes something a Fire or a Water method, e.g., the Hua Shan or the Mao Shan schools?

Well, there are Fire methods which are 90% of Taoism and Lao Tzu's tradition which is only about 10% of Taoism. This is because Water is the old tradition and a lot of the old tradition was subsumed within the Fire traditions.

Now, are there mixtures? Yes, everything has mixtures. There is no system of anything in the world that is totally pure, especially if it's been around for a few thousand years

because things mix and match. But as a general rule within Taoism, Fire schools and Water schools are considered to be quite distinct.

When I was in Taiwan, almost everything was in Fire schools. I looked and my friends looked to find someone who was directly tied into the old tradition. It was after many years of searching until I was introduced and studied with Liu Hung Chieh, but he was very hard to find.

When I was a Taoist priest, and underwent seven years of training with the Fire Method, before I ever met Liu Hung Chieh, I was a Priest in the Fire school of Taoism. So I know what it is. I've been there, done that as the phrase goes.

**Are fire, wood, metal, earth energies used in the Water Method?
Are there also entire separate methods for each of these other four
phases as well, or is this a misunderstanding?**

This is a misunderstanding. Both the Water schools and the Fire schools work with the five Elements. The Water school does not only work with the water element. The Fire school does also not work only with the Fire element. They all work with all of the five Elements or phases of energy. So it is a misunderstanding that there are separate methods or traditions for each of the elements.

**Is it possible that the Water Method "flattens" the peak and pit
stages in the Buddhist path, named "Arising & Passing" and "The
Dark Night of the Soul"?**

What you can say is maybe. Water methods, because of the way in which they're done in general, don't go to radical extremes, and as such, smooth out the peak and valley stages but no method of spirituality can completely flatten these out.

Let's just say that the spiritual manic-depression cycles that people get when they rise so high on inner experiences getting charged up and then go the other way to crash down, all have a dark night of the soul or similar. How this happens is all dependent upon what is inside someone's internal matrix.

As a general proposition Water methods are a smoother ride, but I wouldn't say that it or anything else can completely flatten the peak and valley stages. The Water method is a smoother ride because of its emphasis on moderation, it tends not to push the system to a breaking point which many Fire methods do.

Knowledge has been transmitted to you via the lineage system. Are you intending to pass the lineage on in the traditional fashion to one or more students? If not what are your thoughts about this lineage being passed to you a westerner and not being fully transmitted in the traditional fashion?

Every master who holds a genuine lineage is responsible for that lineage and how he chooses to handle it is not a subject of casual conversation. So, I respectfully decline to comment.

Even though Liu Hung Chieh was already recognized as "enlightened" in the Mahayana Tien Tai school of Chinese Buddhism, he later on focused in Taoist meditation practices. So, what aspects of the spiritual road did he consider not covered well enough by the Buddhist practices? Also, did Liu Hung Chieh mention what insights of the Buddhist tradition are harder to get in Taoism?

Liu Hung Chieh never mentioned what aspects of the Buddhist tradition are harder to get in Taoism. As a matter of fact, I would have to say that is not a topic that ever particularly came up. I think that in both Buddhism and Taoism, the ability to truly understand what emptiness is, is equally difficult because you're essentially dealing with the exact same thing.

Buddhism says that it is not possible for a Buddha to fully comprehend the entirety of the universe in every aspect of it, until he has what's called paranirvana, when he dies.

Taoism says that can be done while you're still alive in a body. However, since I personally have not done that, I do not feel like spreading gossip and I would have to say that my experience of Buddhism and Taoism is that I think Taoism went further than anything I ever did in the Mahayana schools.

I studied Zen in high school in New York City and College in Tokyo and I studied Chan Buddhism at times when I was a Taoist priest. Liu Hung Chieh initially had me go through a lot of the stuff in Chan Buddhism to show me pretty much exactly how it works as he said Tien Tai Buddhism was not going to be my thing.

I would just say that although each has certain areas of specialization, Buddhism and Taoism in China have always cooperated because many of their essential spiritual insights are similar.

The biggest difference in one sense between Buddhism and Taoism, to be terribly cheeky about it, is that Taoists have a dramatically looser sense of humor about life and what is or isn't proper.

Buddhists, in general, tend to be very stern and they tend to very much focus on the ultimate; being free of needing to be born again and again and again. Taoists, while they do have things about reincarnation, are much lighter about the whole thing and are much more focused on the here and now of living life at every moment. So that's about the only thing I could say.

Many Tao Bums who resonate with the material in your books yet are also interested in practices that work with Chi and Shen levels. What advice would you give to such seekers?

Initially, when I left China, Liu Hung Chieh proposed that I first teach, download, put into the air, whatever way you want put it, the body practices of Taoism, the term is *jing shi shen* or body, energy, spirit and emptiness Tao.

He said to initially put out the physical stuff and whatever chi and spirit aspects that were related to a person needed to be able to open up their body without leaving their body behind. The body practices in Taoism are for most people. Working with people at that level is a bit like going through concrete, especially at the psychic level, because most Westerners are so dead to their bodies.

They are dramatically deader to their bodies than most "native" peoples around the world because we don't really have a culture in the West of people feeling their bodies and having direct personal knowledge of their bodies.

They know about their bodies as mental images of their body rather than actually feeling and being present inside their body.

When we talk about the physical body, we're discussing your flesh, then we're discussing the chi that makes your flesh work and then we're talking about the chi that makes your lower animal emotions work. So in a sense your internal organs generate emotions just like all of your neurotransmitters.

Most people hear the word chi and they think that is the next phase of body, energy, spirit but in actuality, the chi of the body is still the body. When you talk about the term chi, you're into the emotions, what lies behind the ability to create mental symbols, what lies at the bottom of the words, where all this thinking comes from and the entire psychic realm.

I started teaching the energy of body-energy-spirit a couple of years after the millennium rolled around, sometime in 2003 or 2004 and it's actually in many ways a lot easier teaching that.

If a person is going to engage that level, then you have to start looking at what really lies behind not just ordinary emotions but what about their more subtle shades? What about higher emotions? What about the emotion of love, kindness, generosity, the ability to truly emotionally connect, the ability to truly emotionally nourish someone, and the ability to be emotionally nourished by someone.

What about mentally? Where does your creativity come from? Where does the ability to know where that thought came from, before you start talking in your head about it.

Then you start talking the whole psychic realm. At this level, you know you have external senses but do you know you have internal senses? You can obviously see something that you look at externally, for example, a wall or a picture.

Well, what about when you see the future? What about when you can see energies inside people, etc., etc.?

So just the same way you have internal hearing, you have internal senses. This is very well known. Buddhism very often talks about consciousness but they're really referring to senses.

In India, it is referred to as external senses and internal senses - you have five of each. Taoists have a very big thing about this but it simply gets rolled into the issue of chi. I do not expect personally for a while to be teaching about shen which are the issues of karma and what a person's essence is beyond personality or whatever. To engage this, the middle stage of energy needs to be worked out and reasonably stable or there can be problems. However, when this energy is stabilized for my students I will be very happy to teach about shen. I believe safety first is a wise way to go.

This is mostly because if you do not have sufficient body stability and stability with your chi, when you start answering questions in the psychic realm what we can say is that very few people can hang with it.

If you want to really start going into karma, if you don't have the subtle awareness of emotions behind thought and the psychic realm, it's very, very hard to see anywhere where the karma of energy is abused.

My advice to anybody who wants to learn the Chi and shen levels or Taoism is there's only one way to do it.

You've got to start personally interacting with a live teacher. To think that you're going to get it purely by reading is a bit of a problem because all those mental symbols will not

take you into your body and all those mental symbols rarely, if ever, take a person to the place from where those mental symbols arise and can internally imprison you.

All I can say is that I'm teaching as the years go by and we're trying to get our filming and production to put out whatever materials, videos, audios and books are within my limited capacity to produce and generate. And if there are other authentic teachers out there who can get you to the same point all the better.

It has been well known in the subject of rhetoric for hundreds of years, even thousands of years, that there can be a person who is intellectually an absolute genius and a totally emotional wreck in the psychic world. Mental IQ is not necessarily going to help you because psychic energy can take anybody's ability to meditate and blow it up like a little bomb or more accurately, it is like having an EMF field all of a sudden scramble a computer's hard drive and memory.

That's pretty much how it goes and do bear in mind when those things happen, the energies are running through your body and it's not really good for you. It's nice to be stable.

This is a subject when you start going into the level of Chi, when you start going into the level of Spirit, you really need to be with someone who has been there and done that. It's a bit like thinking, "I'm just going to start walking in the middle of the Canadian wood somewhere." It really helps to have someone who actually knows, hey, don't eat that berry, it'll poison you or, listen, don't walk over here or you're going to get some big animal attacking you.

The reason there have been teachers is not simply because they're some exalted beings but simply that they have been there before and at least they have some idea of what's going on so they can give the student some sort of needed context.

Ok, last question! Could you tell us 3 simple things we could do every day to enhance our lives and our harmony with Tao, no matter what system or path we are following?

Three things, three simple things.

The first one is: learn how to breathe, learn how to breathe, learn how to breathe better. If you're going to know anything about chi, you should learn how to breathe really well with your entire body. The Taoist breathing system is unique and powerful.

The second is the process of recognizing what is going on and separating what is really happening inside you from the infinite series of distortions that can happen at any level; physical, mental, emotional, psychic, or karmic.

The third thing is simply that if you want to approach the Tao and live your lives in harmony, start really looking at whether your life is in balance and do whatever is possible for you to put your life in balance.

This usually means looking at what's really important in your life. We can get filled up with so many things that don't mean much but in terms of what our life is like from the inside, if you're going to be in balance, it's a useful thing to start looking at what's important and what doesn't matter.

This comes down to two very simple words that run through every Taoist and Chinese culture. One is *wu suo hui* which means it doesn't matter if it happens. The other is *you suo wei*, it matters.

So as an example: "Should I go to the beach or should I go skiing on my vacation?" Well, that's really a *wu suo hui* thing, whereas, "Should I let a dog chew my foot off or not chew my foot off?" That's a *you suo wei* thing because it's really hard to move about without a foot. So what is irrelevant? What is relevant? That's going to require going into that and that's going to be quite a journey.

Taking what is inside of you and being able to work that out is a good place to start.

Thanks to all the Tao Bums readers and to Sean for keeping this forum alive. I wish you the best on your path.

Bruce Frantzis