

Chapter One

The Dance

Right now, a dance is unfolding within you. It started years ago, inside your mother's body, when that one-in-a-billion sperm merged into that one special egg. The dance in question is the dance of creation. The dance of creation is a dance of opposites.

The very life of your body is a dance of opposites. It is an intimate dance of fire and water; of motion and stability; building up and breaking down. It is a dance wherein every function and every quality embraces and caresses its opposites. The fire of life enlivens the water, and the water stabilizes the fire into a steady life-giving flame.

Our capacity to think depends on the interaction of opposites. We understand something by comparing it to its opposite. Our emotions are also based on the play of opposites. We are entertained and motivated by dancing opposites. Our capacity to maintain mental clarity and emotional serenity depend on opposites interacting harmoniously in the mind. Creativity is an expression of opposites dancing in the mind. The more harmoniously opposites interact within the mind, the greater is our capacity to consciously create health and happiness.

The interaction of opposites is also fundamental to our everyday social interactions. The family centers around two polar opposites called husband and wife. Business, politics and religion are galvanized by the interaction of opposites. Movies, theatrical performances and novels are based on the play of opposing forces. There can be no drama or comedy without the play of opposites. The popularity of organized sports is another indication of how strongly we are drawn to the play of opposites.

Practical Application

The amazing diversity of life cannot be entirely explained as the interaction of opposites. However, duality (the interaction of opposites) is the first order of complexity that emerges from Unity. The story of Creation, according to the ancient Taoists of China, goes like this: In the beginning there was the One (Unity). And then, the One became two (the primordial Yin and Yang). And then, the two began interacting harmoniously, thus giving birth to the many.

On a more practical human level, when we take the time to understand the simple dance of opposites in the created universe, the complexity that follows is easier to comprehend. On the other hand, when we lose sight of the dance of opposites at the root of creation, the diversity that follows may seem baffling.

By understanding how opposites interact, we can better comprehend the workings of the body and mind. We can also see more deeply into our relationships, politics, economics, religion and the physical sciences. For example, we can understand fear more deeply when we recognize that it's opposite is desire. We can more effectively free ourselves from excessive fear when we recognize that it is inseparable from unfulfilled or out-of-control desires. According to Zen teachings, if you want to master anything, you must have an understanding of it's opposite.

From ancient teachings, we get the impression that the subtle understanding of opposites was more common thousands of years ago. Such understanding was apparently forgotten for the most part, as humanity moved into an era in which competition was valued over cooperation, and conquest was valued over friendship. Rather than living in harmony with nature, humans sought to “subdue” nature.

Since the human population has swelled to unprecedented numbers, we are challenges that have never existed before. And so, from sheer necessity, we are compelled to remember what was long ago forgotten.

The Ancient Secret of Health and Well-Being

When opposites are in harmony, life renews itself. This is the ancient principle that is now being resurrected. This is the “secret” of health and happiness.

Why is the interaction of opposites so fundamentally important to life? Quite simply, it has to do with energy. Life requires energy. This is true whether we look at life from a modern physiological standpoint or the ancient Taoist standpoint.

In the non-living world, energy tends to dissipate, until finally there is no net usable energy. In the language of Western science, such a state of unusable energy is called entropy. On the other hand, living things have the capacity to gather or accumulate energy. This is the essential difference between life and non-life.

From an energetic standpoint, the secret to a long and healthy life is to maintain ones capacity to gather energy, so it can then flow in a purposeful manner. What makes this possible? Quite simply: *The gathering of energy is made possible by the creation of polar opposites. The harmonious flow of energy is made possible by the rejoining of opposites.* This is the miracle of life, described in practical terms.

The Power to Choose

In other words, if there are no opposites, there is no energy. If there is no energy, there is no life. This is true for all living things, from bacteria to oak trees. We, as self-aware humans, have the added option of *cooperating* (or not) with this inner dance. To the extent that we cooperate with it, we gather our energy more effectively, thus promoting a healthy body and mind. To the extent that we do not cooperate with it, inner opposites go into conflict, resulting in a depletion of energy.

Chronic fatigue (low energy) occurs primarily though fighting oneself. We are usually not aware of the warring opposites within us. However, the *effect* of the inner warfare – the depletion of energy – is usually quite noticeable. It shows up as mental confusion, emotional unrest and physical degeneration. These symptoms may seem inexplicable, until we look deeply enough to see the hidden inner conflict that silently depletes our personal energy. For example, when we are stressed, the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems (which effect the body in opposing ways) go out of balance; one side dominates over the other. The net result is depletion of energy and reduction of our capacity to heal and regenerate the body.

If we look deeply into any physical ailment, we see opposing forces in a state of disharmony. The same applies to psychological issues. The condition labeled as “neurosis” is the outer manifestation of opposing thoughts and emotions silently at war within the individual’s mind.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the diagnosis of physical and psychological ailments invariably boils down to identifying specific opposing functions (yin and yang) that are in a state of disharmony. Treatment focuses on restoring harmony between these functions. The doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine understands that the harmonious dance of inner opposites is the key to regeneration and rejuvenation.

Your Hidden Potential

The healing of pathological conditions is one tangible benefit of harmonizing inner opposites. Beyond that, as inner harmony deepens, the body can apparently achieve levels of health and vitality that might otherwise be considered impossible. The same holds true on the psychological level: the mind can reach levels of clarity, heightened awareness and serenity that we might associate with saints and sages.

Individuals trained in the martial arts speak of Masters of advanced age who enjoy vibrant health and display amazing physical strength and agility. We hear wide-eyed students speaking of their eighty-year-old teacher, who is barely five feet tall, but can jump on one foot and touch the ceiling. His reflexes are fast and his mind extremely sharp. He can easily defeat opponents much younger and bigger than he – and he can do it blindfolded. These students might also add that their teacher also seems to be very much at peace with himself and the rest of life.

The Taoists of ancient China were, above all else, very practical. They developed an elaborate system for understanding the play of opposites, but not just for the sake of philosophy and higher learning. They noticed that their lives flowed more smoothly on every level when they took the time to recognize and the harmony of yin and yang. They understood that, within a living system, opposites in conflict results in a wasting of energy, while opposites in harmony allow for the gathering of energy.

On the psychological level, inner harmony builds energy in the form of clear thinking, creativity, joyfulness and calmness. Sadness and depression result from a depletion of energy. Aggression is typically a response to the depletion of energy. The more deeply we harmonize our inner opposites, the more we feel a solid sense of personal power, calmness and happiness.

Simple and Available to Everyone

Now the question is, how do we cultivate the harmony of inner opposites? It's simpler than we might think. It does not require that we catalogue the various opposing qualities within us. It is sufficient to simply recognize that life *is* a dance of opposites. When we do so, we tend to spontaneously think, speak and act in such a way as to cooperate with that inner dance.

In terms of our behavior, the art of cultivating inner harmony is the art of re-learning to do what comes natural. It is the art of speaking when we feel like speaking, laughing when we feel like laughing, crying when we feel like crying, and being silent when we feel like being silent. It is the art of fighting or not fighting as we see fit. It is the art of reaching out to touch and to be touched with love when we feel moved to do so. It is the art of eating when we are hungry, drinking when we are thirsty and resting when we are tired. Inner harmony occurs most easily when we are being spontaneous, allowing life to emerge from within as easily and naturally as clear water from a bubbling well.

In summary

From a practical standpoint, there are two ways that we can benefit from cultivating the awareness that Life is a dance of opposites. There is an immediate benefit and a long-term benefit.

The immediate benefit is simple: Since the life within us and around us is a dance of opposites, any personal, interpersonal or social issue, such as conflict resolution and addiction can be understood more deeply when seen as part of that dance.

The long-term benefit is subtler. As mentioned earlier, the more deeply we understand the dance of opposites within us, the more we tend to spontaneously cooperate with it. We tend to spontaneously see simple solutions to complex problems. We tend to see through paradoxes and recognize contradictions within us and around us.

In other words, you, the reader, can use this book to more deeply understand specific subjects and issues that are of interest to you right now. In addition, if you make a habit of looking at life in this manner, you will, more than likely, compel a gradual evolution in your mind, wherein you cooperate with the rhythm of life within you so as to invite physical health, mental clarity and emotional serenity.

Chapter Two

The Secret of Transformation

The secret of personal transformation is cultivation. This 90-Day Program is about cultivation. Cultivation means tending the garden. Cultivation means maintaining the environment that facilitates growth. The more methodical and consistent we are with our cultivation, the greater is our potential for growth and transformation. In other words, this book is not about “stimulating” change. This book is about cultivating the inner landscape that makes growth possible.

The secret of successful cultivation is to be mindful that you cultivate *your* garden. Cultivating *your* garden simply means you are following your own heart’s desire. On the other hand, when we try to cultivate our garden so that it looks like someone else’s, we tend to harm ourselves. The more closely our actions reflect our own heart’s desire rather than external pressures, the more likely that our self-cultivation will invite health and happiness.

As long as we remain faithful to our heart’s desire, personal development, like tending a garden, is a simple dance of focused attention and letting go. With diligence and care, we work the soil, water the plants, and remove the weeds. And then, we relax and let Mother Nature do the rest. We certainly would not try to make a plant grow faster by pulling on it. Neither do we yank the plant out of the ground to see how the roots are doing. In other words, creative passion must be balanced with serenity, the desire to change must be balanced by the capacity to let yourself be, discipline must be balanced with kindness.

Both firmness and softness of essential. An excess or deficiency of either one results in inner conflict and frustration. However, for most individuals, living in the West, what is generally lacking is, not firmness, but softness. Without softness, firmness becomes rigid and fragile.

The master cultivator knows that moving too quickly can slow us down. Using too much force defeats our purpose. Our urgency can cause us to stumble. If we clutch too tightly at our heart’s desire, we squeeze the life out of it. Or, we might become impatient and abandon our efforts because we do not see immediate results.

This book is about cultivating the ability to know when to water the plants and when to let them dry out for a while; when to work the soil and when to let it be; when to dig deeply and uproot the weeds, and when to just let things settle. It is about cultivating the ability to know when to focus directly on the desired outcome, and when to leave it alone. It’s about sensing when we need hands-on and when we need hands-off.

Meaningful changes often happen when we aren’t even looking. In fact, the deepest personal changes tend to occur slowly, below the surface, while we are tending to the activities of daily living. The body grows and regenerates most effectively while sleeping. Insights and breakthroughs often show up in the early morning hours, after the conscious mind has rested in the stillness and silence of the night.

The way of cultivation is the way of the farmer who knows that seasons come and go; that there are hot days and cold days, wet days and dry days, easy days and challenging

days. Through it all, he is steady in his work, until one day he awakens to see the field ripe with the harvest.

Questions and Answers About The Program

How do I do the 90-Day Program?

The program involves reading the book over a three-month period (or longer) and doing one lesson per day. Each lesson involves reading a few sentences and doing a simple exercise. Each lesson takes two to three minutes.

Is there value in reading this book without doing the lessons?

Yes. Reading this book is likely to stimulate your mind in a manner similar to actually doing the lessons, but in a more subtle way. After reading through the book, you can still go back and do the lessons in the recommended manner.

How does the program actually work?

The program works in two ways:

- *Gradually and gently* educating the conscious mind.
- *Gradually and gently* stimulating the subconscious mind.

The education of the conscious mind involves understanding the basic principles. This sets the stage for the deeper work, which occurs silently on a subconscious level. Both the conscious and subconscious work are facilitated through the simple process of *repetition*. The major principles are simply repeated over and over again in various ways throughout the book. *Repetition is the key to learning. It is the key to mastery. It is the key to personal transformation.*

Does this work involve programming the subconscious mind?

In one sense, yes. We must bear in mind, however, that if the subconscious mind is left alone, its natural tendency is to integrate our inner world so as to support health and happiness. Therefore, part of our strategy for “programming” the subconscious mind is to cultivate the ability to just leave it be so it can do its job.

Since the 90-Day Program is designed to be gradual, does this mean it will be emotionally uneventful?

Some individuals have reported an emotional opening and even a spiritual awakening during or after the program. Such experiences are great, but they are not necessary for the program to “work.” The inner changes may occur so slowly and gracefully that you may not even be aware that anything is happening from day to day or week to week. Even when a change appears to happen “overnight,” it was probably a long time in the making, like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. As reported by some individuals, the changes may show up months after the program is completed. Like a journey up the gentle slope of a mountain, the change might be so gradual as to escape notice, until you stop, look around and notice that your horizon has expanded.

How does this program compare with those designed to produce rapid changes?

The value of gradual cultivation does not negate the value of short-term rapid work. In fact, the two fit together very nicely. Programs designed to induce a breakthrough or rapid changes can be very beneficial. The desired outcome, however, seems to evade us when we, through our urgency, try to force change. Such experiences also tend to quickly lose their luster when flaunted as a sign of achievement or superiority. Consequently, spiritual highs might be followed by emotional lows and even suicidal thoughts. Short bursts of emotional or spiritual work are most effective when supported by steady and gentle mindfulness. The steady day-to-day work stabilizes the short bursts of intense work. Likewise, the intense work adds new energy and power to the daily practice.

Do I need to set specific goals before I start the program?

Only if you want to. If you do, please be aware that such goals can change. One of the functions of this program is to help you discover what *you* want. An important key to your happiness and freedom is the discovery of your own heart's desire. This idea might seem simplistic, but awareness of our true desires and aspirations isn't as obvious as we might think. Such awareness is often obscured by external pressure, childhood programming, and years of not trusting oneself. The discovery of what *you* really want is a deeply personal inner journey. This 90-day program will not necessarily "speed you up." In fact, it might slow you down! Either way, it will support you in trusting your own timing and rhythm. It will help you dance to the music of your own soul. When you do so, your goals tend to emerge naturally and with ease and grace, because they are truly *your* goals.

Are there any major challenges in doing this program?

The one major challenge of this program is that it is not very challenging. Since the program is designed to be easy and gradual, the lack of stimulation might cause you to space out and do the lessons half-heartedly. The lack of drama and immediate gratification might cause you to lose interest. Therefore, part of the "hidden" strategy of this program is to support you in cultivating patience; the ability to maintain a steady focus; relaxing into yourself; relaxing into the flow of the daily lessons, without trying to create an "experience." By freeing yourself from the tendency to force change, you invite deep and meaningful changes.

What if I miss a day?

Since the daily lessons do not demand a lot of your time, you can complete the entire program without missing a day. If, however, you happen to miss a day or two, just resume when you are ready. Even if you stop for a few weeks or a month, that's okay; just pick up where you left off.

Should I do the lessons as presented, or can I skip around?

There is a logical and linear progression to this program. However, the process of self-discovery is seldom logical or linear. Like a woman giving birth, our inner dance of self-discovery has its own secret wisdom that often baffles the rational mind. Therefore, if you feel a strong visceral inclination to skip to a particular section of this book, repeat a few lessons, or to just put the whole thing away for a while, go ahead.

Is it helpful to do the program with other individuals?

Yes. This can be as simple as casually sharing your respective experiences. Or, you can organize a class that meets once a week. The sharing of personal experiences tends to enliven the program. In addition, the structure of a support group helps each member to maintain a steady focus.

How do I begin the lessons?

Read the next two chapters. It contains the foundational principles that will prepare you for the lessons that follow. And remember, it is not necessary to actually do the lessons in the recommended way in order to derive benefit from this book. You can simply read and enjoy.

