

31: Sexual Chi

Nothing seems to stir more interest or controversy than the subject of Taoist sexual practices. This occurs in the context of a Western culture obsessed with sex in almost every aspect of daily life: advertising, television, politics, movies, the Internet, sports, books and art. The extremes of this preoccupation with sex range from complete denial and a desire to control other people's sexual behavior to full-blown sexual addiction. Given the intense conditioning involved, wherever we grew up on this spectrum, it may not be possible to explore a Taoist approach to sex without extreme bias. Let's try, anyway.

Even within the different schools of Taoism, there is much debate about the use and value of sexual practices. One perspective is that sexual techniques are not necessary, particularly if a person undertakes thorough meditation and chi kung studies prior to puberty. Another perspective recognizes cultivation of sexual energy as a powerful aid in the development of subtle internal practices, particularly for those who begin practice later in life.

There is a strong precedent in the historical Taoist traditions to support our personal preferences or how we choose to relate to sexual practices. There is not just one way... and there is a natural way for each of us to find.

It may be useful to explore a Taoist approach to sex rather than make a judgment about the suitability of sexual practices based on personal history and cultural conditioning. It is important to recognize that this approach originates from a time and a culture very different from our own. It is this different perspective that may provide a fresh look at our concepts and assumptions about sexual behavior and activity.

The foundation of a Taoist approach to sex is simple: there is a natural way of sex, just like there is a natural way to each and every thing. Ultimately, it is for each of us to find what that natural way is.

Sex as Chi

For several thousand years, Taoists have explored different functions of the human body, mind and spirit and explained them in energetic terms. These energetic descriptions of anatomy and physiology form the foundation of the sophisticated theories and understandings presented by Chinese medicine.

From a Taoist perspective sex is energy - chi. The nature of sexual chi is creative. Notice what happens with a substitution of the word creative for sexual. Now we are exploring creative chi, creative energy. Taoist practices focus on cultivating creative chi. Sound a little different? Feel a little different? Just recognizing the energetic nature of sex as creative chi allows us to conceptualize and possibly relate to it differently.

The strength of creative chi can be understood through an energetic perspective of conception. The male sperm represents the most potent physical manifestation of yang chi. The female egg represents the most potent physical manifestation of yin chi. Combined under the proper circumstances they merge to form a complete and new person. It's amazing, really. Improvements in nutrition, fertility and childbirth in the last century have made reproduction seem commonplace, to be expected, maybe even a little taken for granted. It hasn't always been this way. Conception is a definition of miraculous.

Reproduction is a creative process. The energy of conception is creative chi. All of the body's energetic anatomy and physiology, both male and female, contributes to the production of this creative chi. The best chi of the entire body - organs, meridians, reservoirs and energy centers - goes first to creative chi. This priority reflects the importance of reproduction to survival of the species.

Creative chi is generated whether we are engaged in reproduction or not.

Creative Chi Cultivation

From this perspective, a very obvious question emerges: If not reproducing another person, could this powerful chi be applied to other creative purposes? This is the realm of Taoist sexual practices: cultivating creative chi to support internal processes involved with body, mind and spiritual development. This approach provides a way to become as familiar with creative chi as we are with liver chi, jing (essence), shen (spirit), earth chi, the chi of joy...all of the numerous manifestations of chi in this body. Through practice we explore the qualities and characteristics of all these types of chi, learning about their contribution to harmony and balance. Creative chi, sexual chi, is no different, and can be explored in a similar way with similar benefits.

Creative chi may be cultivated and applied to many aspects of our lives: art, music, relationships, parenting, jobs, healing work with others and ourselves,

spiritual growth, community, gardening, writing, singing...the list is endless. This potent chi can energize whatever creative impulse or direction we are drawn to.

In the context of Taoist meditation and chi kung, creative chi can be cultivated and applied to support any other practice. Creative chi brought to moving forms greatly facilitates smooth and consistent flow. Combined with standing postures, it supports strengthening structure and natural rootedness in the earth. The internal energetic dynamics and functions of sitting practices are all empowered by creative chi. During practice, all of this happens without effort. When there is an available reservoir of creative chi it naturally flows to whatever we are doing, adding pure, powerful creative qualities to the process. Taoist sexual practices focus on cultivating and bringing awareness to the creative chi process so that it is accessible.

Contrary to much of the information in current popular books on Taoist sexual practices, sexual technique and activity are very minor and not even mandatory aspects of creative chi cultivation. This is not to deny or ignore the natural power involved with the physical aspects of sexual activity; however, this is only one level. An overly narrow focus limited to just sexual activity misses other very valuable levels.

Levels of Creative Chi

There are many levels to this creative process. Much of the literature and attention is focused on practices involving a sexual partner. This is typically portrayed as a male bringing yang and a female bringing yin to sexual activity that can be a source for merging yin and yang within both partners. This is only one level. The graphic in Figure 16 illustrates this better than any words.

Figure 16: Dual Cultivation

Another level involves a deeply internal practice of merging yin and yang within an individual. So much attention on relationships can be focused on finding that one perfect compatible partner. This is typically expressed as a woman's yin complementing or balancing a man's yang and vice versa. That is an external focus.

An internal focus recognizes that each individual possesses both yin and yang.

Each person may have natural tendencies in one way and they may be intensely conditioned throughout their life in one way. Following Taoist sexual practices brings us to this deeper level, exploring and becoming aware of natural tendencies, conditioned behavior and the ultimate reality of an internal source of creative yin and yang. Although simplistic, this process may be described as a woman accessing her masculine aspects and a man accessing his feminine aspects. On an individual basis, it is rarely that simple. Following the practices will guide each person to and through what they most need to learn. The exploration and practice of merging this internalized yin and yang is another amazing source of creative chi that can be utilized in practice and our lives.

Taoism is not the only philosophy or spiritual tradition to address sexual practices. Many other traditions have various beliefs, theories and rules about sexuality. A common theme is celibacy; however, a variety of reasons may be given for its value. Rarely do other traditions directly discuss how conserving sexual energy nourishes spiritual development. Even more rare is an explanation of how this process works. A Taoist energetic approach supplies both.

Incorporating sexual practices is not a requirement for following a Tao path or practicing meditation and chi kung. Some schools and teachers emphasize it; others do not. Whether we include these practices or to what degree, exploring a Taoist energetic perspective on sex may guide us to find a more natural way. This exploration may allow recognition of learned or conditioned beliefs and behaviors that don't actually apply anymore. We may find an increased awareness of creative chi that allows us to relate to it in a more natural and balanced way. In the process, this exploration may enhance and energize all of the many creative aspects of our lives.

