

# Summer

## The Dao of Lengthening

長之道

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The three months of summer are called luxuriant flowering.  
The qi of Heaven and Earth mingle.  
The ten thousand things bloom and bear fruit.  
At dark to bed, early to rise. Do not tire of the sun.  
Keep that which is of the heart/mind from anger.  
Allow the finest things to flower fully. Allow the qi to leak (sweat).  
Act as though you love the outside.  
This is the summer compliance of qi  
(and) the cultivation of the Dao of lengthening.  
To oppose these principles injures the heart.  
(Consequently) Autumn will bring intermittent fevers  
(and) there will be little to offer one's gathering,  
and the Winter solstice will bring grave disease.<sup>1</sup>

As the old song goes:

Summer has come in,  
Loudly sing, Cuckoo!  
The seed grows and the meadow blooms  
And the wood springs anew,  
Sing, Cuckoo!<sup>2</sup>

Summer is the time when Yang is at its strongest and everything grows vigorously. At this time the element that is most powerful is fire. Fire burns giving heat, light and life. The source of all fire in the world is the sun. This, then is the time to enjoy the sun, which is why the *Nei Jing* tells us not to 'tire of the sun' and to spend time outside. Of course too much fire burns and that will damage the skin, affecting our *wei qi* 衛氣 or protective *qi*, which is a very important part of our immune system. (One of the great

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<sup>1</sup> *Neijing* Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> 'Sumer is icumen in, Lhude sing cuccu! Growep sed and blowep med. And springþ þe wde nu, Sing cuccu!' Written in the 1200's this is the oldest known six part polyphony.

benefits of *Dragon & Tiger Qigong* is that it clears and strengthens the *wei qi*). So care must be taken when we are out in the sun. Chinese medicine, following Daoist philosophy, places great importance on avoiding both excess and deficiency in all aspects of life.

The organ most closely associated with summer is the heart. The word for heart in Chinese also means 'mind.' It encompasses a much broader understanding than we have in the west. The heart has a very special role as it is the ruler, not only of all the other organs and the blood, but also the emotions, thoughts and the spirit. If the heart is disturbed nothing else will function well.

Keeping the solar plexus and midriff open and constantly moving the shoulder blades during Taiji, neigong and qigong is very important to the heart's health. It is all part of what is called 'containing the chest and raising the back'<sup>3</sup> and 'sinking the shoulders and dropping the elbows.'<sup>4</sup> Summer is the time to pay particular attention to these alignments.

Summer is ruled by the dao of lengthening (*cháng zhī dào*). The word for 'lengthening' in Chinese, *cháng*, has a range of meaning, including: long; lengthen; strong; to be good at; to grow; to increase; to advance. Thus *cháng zhī dào* also means, 'the dao of growth,' 'the dao of increase' and 'the dao of strength.'

The translation 'the dao of lengthening' is particularly relevant to our practices, because tissue lengthening is an essential component of the internal arts. Without it we cannot properly activate the ligaments, open and close the joints or twist and spiral the soft tissues. Lengthening does not make these things happen, but it does make them possible. It is necessary to have tissue lengthening before we can move on to the more complex aspects of internal work.

*Cháng* is the general principle of increase that is activated in the summer. Everything grows in the heat. This is the time to allow the body to release open. What was tight in the winter can now loosen. Recognising that the heat of summer can be our friend can be quite liberating. Our passage from the *Nei Jing* tells us to 'act as though you love the outside' with the implication 'even if you do not.' By doing so, we will come to recognise the benefits of the warm weather. Many people do not like hot weather and see only its negative side. This prevents them from seeing how useful it can be for opening the body and releasing tension and stress. Acting as though we love the outside can help us overcome our dislike of the heat and to make the most of the season. With summer comes the opportunity to grow.

*Cháng* is as applicable to the mind as to the body. Allowing the mind to release open will open up our internal space and 'allow the finest things to flower fully.' But it is important that we release open and not push. With any aspect of neigong, working at it, but not rigidly, is crucial. Our passage from the *Nei Jing* warns us not to make the mind angry, *nù* 怒 in Chinese. *Nù* also means 'to sprout or spring up with vigour.' This implies that a heart-mind that is over stretched will become angry. The literal meaning of *nù* is 'enslaved heart-mind.' An angry heart-mind is a slave to the emotions, which means that it has lost its proper function as ruler. Having a strong, balanced heart-mind will allow that which is best in us to develop fully.

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<sup>3</sup> *Hán xiōng bá bèi* 涵胸拔背.

<sup>4</sup> *Chén jiān zhù zhōu* 沉肩坠肘.

Since with anger there is a strong rising of energy (liver fire) to the head, the antidote is to drop and sink our energy to the feet, as we do in standing. The other antidote is joy: it is impossible to genuinely laugh and be angry at the same time.

Along with our practice, eating what is in season is always a very good way to comply with the *qi* of the time. Eat cooling foods: watermelon is particularly good, as is green tea (not too strong). Other cooling foods are: bean sprouts, Chinese leaf, bamboo shoots, water chestnuts, green leafy vegetables, tomato, cucumber, asparagus, seaweed, mint, fish and shell-fish.

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