

Speaking of Warm Current Energy

Beginners in the Healing Tao quickly learn the meaning of "healing energy" and "warm current." Mantak Chia's instruction in Taoist esoteric yoga is clear and effective so that students catch on soon after beginning the practices. Every time we cultivate the microcosmic orbit, we become more familiar with the subtle reality referred to by the term "energy." The more we practice, the stronger and deeper are the sensations of tingling warmth. We soon learn to apply the term "energy" or "warm current" literally to our own experiences as we cultivate the inner channels.

Yet not all students of meditation are comfortable with the language of "energy." Some authorities on meditation reject such terms and warn us against using that language. They claim that "energy" should be used figuratively or not at all in describing meditation. They claim these terms mislead people because the notion of energy comes from the physical sciences and does not properly apply to spiritual practice. This is a widely held view.

In an influential book, Lawrence LeShan (*How to Meditate*, 16 printings since 1974), says we should not apply terms like "energy" directly to meditation. LeShan says these terms are "cheap explanations of things." In particular, he criticizes the Taoist tradition for thinking of energy centers as real locations in the human anatomy. Scientific language, he says, tells us the facts while mythic or poetic language reveals a person's inner feelings about something. LeShan believes that "energy" has a scientific factual meaning and should not be applied literally to meditation. If applied to meditation, "energy" should be used only in a metaphorical or poetic sense. Metaphorical statements allow us to speak about how we feel in our private experience but do not deal with realities. If we confuse scientific facts with metaphors, says LeShan, we risk "seriously

hampering any future progress." He fears we are falling for the seduction of Makyo or delusion if we take "energy" to be something real and definite.

Here's how LeShan rejects the language of one Tai Ch'i instructor:

Recently a highly trained scientist, who had also fairly well trained in meditational techniques, leading a movement meditation. In this she the group to "let your fatigue drain the soles of your feet into the earth. Now up energy from the center of the earth." I that she would be making more sense if she the group know that these were metaphors and they "try to feel as if your fatigue is and so forth." She insisted that they not metaphors but facts, and that she could not, conscience, present the exercise any other way. (page 86)

According to LeShan, if meditation produces a tingling in our hands and legs, we can only legitimately say that we feel as if there were a lot of energy in our extremities. But we should not go on to say that meditation increases the energy in the hands and feet because we are then making a metaphor (which reveals private experience) into a fact (which says something about reality). LeShan objects to any direct references to the reality of psycho-physical energy.

I'm sure that nearly every student of the Healing Tao would side with the Tai Ch'i teacher whom LeShan criticizes. LeShan's "try-to-feel-as-if" approach is unacceptable because it leads us away from direct experience and inserts a "let's-pretend" attitude into the practice. Every change in our language alters our attitude toward the practice and affects the degree of seriousness with which we practice. The "as-if" approach simply does not foster internal

communication with ourselves; it is simply not true to our innermost feelings and possibilities.

LeShan's resistance to the language of "energy" and his desire to label that language a poetry of subjective feelings, is part of modern philosophical baggage. Western philosophy has brought about a split between the perception of outer reality ("facts") and the reality of inner life ("poetic feelings"). The split is symptomatic of our alienation from the natural, physical world — and from our inner selves. Taoist esoteric yoga teaches us a different tradition, one which excels in healing the divisions in the world.

So it will not do to understand "energy" as a mere metaphor without real reference to the world. But I think we may be able to preserve the accuracy of our meditation language while still heeding LeShan's warnings about introducing false scientific terms into the description of healing energy. We can take a clue from the ancient origins of Western philosophy.

Long before modern science was established, the philosopher Aristotle pointed out that some words have the same underlying meaning but are still applied differently to different things, each in a way appropriate to the type of thing referred to. He called this not metaphor but *analogy*. Analogy is the use of a term with the same basic meaning in many cases but applied differently in each case according to the nature of the thing referred to. For example, we refer directly and literally to "waves" as movements we see on the Ocean; we also refer directly — but analogously — to the "waves" we detect with our radio instruments. Both waves are real.

In his work *Metaphysics*, Aristotle first introduced the word "energy" (Greek *energeia*) into Western languages. He understood all reality to be essentially energetic or at work. But Aristotle realized that every reality was energetic in a way appropriate to its own nature.

So "energy" was originally thought to be in each thing analogously or differently in different types of things.

By retrieving Aristotle's original insight, we may say that, when applied to the sensations of the inner microcosmic orbit, "energy" is not merely a metaphor but is simply and literally true energy — in the sense appropriate to bodily life experienced from within. Energy applies analogously to each thing — one way in the physical sciences, and another way in reporting internal sensations of warm current. In fact, Taoist yoga refers to the *microcosm* (Greek for "little universe") that is within us, suggesting that our inner world is a reflection — or is analogous to — the outer world of the vast cosmos.

So there is nothing wrong with applying the term "energy" as we experience it directly and as we explore the warm healing currents within. As long as we remain true to our experience, we are helping to heal the divisions in our language.

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