

Spirit of the Dancing Warrior

Jerry Lynch and Chungliang Al Huang

Part I: Intention From Ordinary to Extraordinary

We now enter the first stage of the journey of the Spirit of the Dancing Warrior: intention. In this part, your primary intention is to discover how to play, train, compete, work, and live in alignment with your heart. When you do so, you mitigate pressure, tension, fear, and frustration. The Buddha said it so eloquently: "Your work is to discover your greatness and with all your heart, give yourself to it." When you function from a heart-space, you enjoy the journey, exist in the moment, and focus on what can be controlled rather than fixating on the results and what you cannot control. You demonstrate integrity, affirm yourself and others, and seek the extraordinary in each day.

Spanning a period of over forty years, we have been associated with extraordinary performers of all ages in many disciplines, including athletics, business, theater, and dance. But how did they move from being ordinary to being truly extraordinary? We have much anecdotal evidence that indicates that this is a choice, a conscious decision whether to accept an ordinary state of complacency or discover one's greatness. We notice that many rather good and even talented people settle for being good enough. A mere few decide to navigate the uncharted waters of their full physical and spiritual human potential in order to experience new heights of personal performance, recognized as extraordinary levels of functioning.

Athletes like Michael Jordan, Lance Armstrong, and Tiger Woods are examples of ordinary humans who have discovered ways to break away from the masses and achieve extraordinary levels of functioning. They are ordinary in that they need strong determination, dedication, perseverance, and the deep desire to be the best they can be—they do not excel by magic. For example, Jordan always showed up for practice an hour before his teammates; Woods has been known to practice for two hours on the putting green following an intense eighteen holes; Armstrong suffered through workouts during extremely cold weather, knowing it made him a tougher competitor. All of these exemplary performers share a simple goal: to do the best they can to be the best they can be. This is the only goal that ultimately matters; from this, all is possible. This is because, as you will see, the heart overrides the ego (head) as the inner battles over fear, frustration, and self-doubt are

won with warrior virtues such as courage, compassion, persistence, integrity, and selflessness. This is the warrior journey, the journey to the extraordinary.



EMPTINESS • The most recognizable symbol associated with Zen Buddhism is the circle, whose empty center represents infinite possibility and growth. We chose the circle for our cover art because it is such a fundamental concept of the book. Notice: the circle has no beginning and no end, yet it is complete, much like the warrior path itself. The circumference represents your journey as you adventure along, only to return to where you began more evolved, wiser, and more aware.

The shape of the circle, the letter O, represents oneness in relation to all things, every aspect of the journey—its ups and downs, setbacks and advances, yin and yang. In Chinese, this empty space is called *wu ji*, the fertile void of everlasting potential. It is a place of not knowing that enables you to fill up, to learn, grow, and improve along the warrior path toward the extraordinary.

You must not be fearful of not knowing. If your cup is full, nothing can enter; you learn nothing, and expansion ceases. Not knowing is liberating, as you emancipate yourself from ignorance and become free and limitless. *Wu ji* gently gives you permission to face your fears, vulnerabilities, and insecurities in a light, humorous fashion as you flow to the vast empty sea of possibility. Here is the open space of profound growth and change, where you learn to let go of the steering wheel. This idea of going forward while not knowing helps you create enormous internal strength and wisdom. Sometimes you must take a leap of faith and trust that you will either land on two feet or fly.



We ask that you let your heart and mind remain open to vast self-expansion as you continually maintain an empty mind, realizing how little you know and how much there is to learn. Warriors remain empty so that their learning curve remains steep. From this humble heart-space, the sky is the only limit. Sometimes, as an athlete, you have to unlearn all you have learned and be open to new and better ways. For example, a few years ago, Tiger Woods changed his swing at the suggestion of his coach in order to help his game get to a new level. At first it was difficult for him, but by being open to the possibilities, he began to improve, winning several consecutive major tournaments in the process. Old habits are not easy to unlearn, and you may feel frustrated and impatient at times, but with an open heart and mind, you become pregnant with exciting growth, change, and potential.

All the great performers in sports, fitness, martial arts, and dance embrace—albeit with some fear—the sacred space of emptiness, the eternal empty circle. Now, in your visualization of this concept, remember to feel the feeling of emptiness and remain open to possibilities. Feel yourself going forward on your path to success.

DECLARATION: I refuse to let my fear prevent me from staying open to change that will potentially propel me to the next level in my physical endeavors. I am empty and open to filling up for self-expansion.

REFLECTION: If I changed things, what specific aspects of my game could potentially expand my possibilities? What fears do I have about admitting that I don't know?



GRATEFULNESS • How many of us arrive at the arena of performance with full minds and empty hearts? Minds filled with trivia, distraction, and minor details interfere with awareness and focus. In the grand scheme of life, what is truly important is this present moment: the breath that gives and sustains life, enabling you to perform. Zen is a practice of celebrating the present as you become conscious of what is genuinely important. The warrior's heart takes nothing for granted. When you acknowledge the gifts of life and hold gratitude deep within, you are ready to perform with a clear mind and a focused heart.

Jerry often conducts the following exercise on gratefulness with his teams prior to an important practice or a game that needs to be played with high-level intensity and integrity.

Before you begin your workout, training session, or work for the day, think of seven aspects of life that you appreciate. For example, your skills, talents, mind, health, family, opportunities, and work. Now, with eyes closed, connect to the feeling of appreciation. Imagine this feeling coming into your body in three deep breaths, as each breath surrounds the heart. Hold each breath

there as the feeling begins to expand. With this sensation of gratitude in the heart, make your performance today a reflection and extension of that appreciation.

Now, open your eyes and take on the day's tasks. If you are grateful and appreciative of your health, feel your vitality. If you are appreciative of your talents, be sure to use them consciously this day. If you have a great family, be certain you communicate: talk to them.

Notice the difference in how you perform. Such ordinary moments create the extraordinary in all you do.

DECLARATION: When I refuse to take things for granted and I focus on gratitude, I become aligned with my heart and connected to my performance.

REFLECTION: What are seven aspects of my life—the tangible and the intangible—that I truly appreciate? What does the act of identifying these do for me right now?



COMMITMENT • Many people in sports and fitness are complacent, content with their level of accomplishment; they lack the desire to discover their true greatness. It's fine to be happy with your level of competency, but if you wonder why you remain stagnant, consider the notion of committing to higher levels and all that it may entail. Taking your performance to another, higher level demands the attitude of a warrior: the commitment of the heart to the journey from merely competent to superb. We encourage you to commit to doing all you can to be the best you can be, regardless of sacrifice or suffering. Zen teaches that suffering is the path to awareness. In sports, it's the way of the champion warrior and the path to greatness. And besides, doing anything at a higher level is simply more satisfying.

In athletics as well as other aspects of your life, your level of commitment is constantly being tested. Some of the more easily recognizable indicators that you have made a commitment to a certain path are these: you insist that you will not make excuses for marginal performance; you view your competitor as a partner to help bring out your best; you thirst for new ways to improve; you are eager to put forth extra effort when

needed; you experience an absence of lingering doubt; you refuse to view discouragement and disappointment as anything but natural; you feel a natural and all-encompassing sense of joy and motivation to do all you can to be the best you can be.

The sky is the limit when you demonstrate a consistent, never-ending commitment to what you deeply desire and want to achieve. It is the main ingredient that separates ordinary performers from those who do extraordinary things. True commitment is devotion to a cause, an ideal, or a goal that may be more crucial than victory itself. German poet and philosopher Johann von Goethe once wrote: "Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back... there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one commits, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that never would have occurred... incidents, meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would come his way."

Consider whether your lack of commitment is simple complacency or whether you might want to look deeper to see if there is another sport or activity that will engender a higher level of commitment. In other words, lack of commitment may be a sign that it's time to move on to something else that's more appropriate to your development at this particular time. Remember, too, that if your performance consistently falls short of your potential, you may lack commitment. Anything that is truly important to you in life is worthy of your full commitment.

DECLARATION: If I am to discover the next level of performance in my sport, fitness routine, and work, I must commit to doing even that which I do not wish to do.

REFLECTION: What do I need to commit to that will kick my performance up a notch? What is required in order to make that commitment happen?



HSING • In Chinese, hsing refers to the unity of heart and mind, their coming together to affirm nature's

Respect is one aspect of love, and when an athlete feels respected and loved by a coach, he or she will go the distance—do what is asked and more. When you respect and love others, you don't lose power or control; you gain it. A lack of respect creates resistance, alienation, and resentment—even revolt.

According to the I Ching, the ancient Chinese book of change, respect of others creates a spirit of loyalty. Followers are motivated to take on hardship and sacrifice in the attainment of goals. Great coaches and leaders, such as our friend Phil Jackson of the Los Angeles Lakers, create environments that are trusting, open, and respectful. Jackson understands that he gains power by having respect for and listening to his athletes. They then mirror his behavior as they achieve high levels of performance. In your other roles in life, such as that of a CEO or a parent, you may have also discovered how respect creates the outcome you desire. In the case of parenting, what we notice is how cooperative our kids are when treated with respect. Listening with love and caring seems to mitigate rebellion in so many youngsters.

DECLARATION: When I demonstrate the heart-driven virtue of respect for myself and others, I create environments where great accomplishments are not only possible but inevitable. Success is the by-product of respect and love.

REFLECTION: Under what circumstances do I demonstrate a lack of respect for myself or others? What can I do to change that?



PARTNERSHIP • The I Ching tells us “working together, the interaction of your spheres of influence can achieve significant deeds.” We encourage you to relax and embrace and be thankful for your opponents, as they are your teachers who challenge you to reach heights you might never attain without them. True strength, like water, blends with opposing forces. A warrior does not view opponents as the enemy to be beaten or killed. Such thought patterns could cause you great stress and anxiety. Instead, remember that the word competition in Latin means “to seek together.”

The two Chinese symbols for partnership depict the two partners seeking each other to achieve wholeness, to become one, sharing the same spirit and goal for achievement. Opponents become partners in the same dance. In all of your competitive events, consider your opponents as partners who help you seek greatness. A good warrior opponent is someone who will challenge you to discover your best. A Buddha buddy will push the pace on a run or bike ride and attack the hill with intent. This invites you to push beyond what you thought were limits. Whether working out or working on a corporate team, you achieve so much more by working together.

Take your inspiration from nature. Remember that flocks of geese flying in V formation travel 71 percent farther by helping each other. Other birds, when flying as partners, can travel as much as three thousand miles in four and a half days nonstop, rest for a few days, and then repeat the process.

DECLARATION: I love my opponent because the better the competition, the more I discover how good I really am. Competition always brings out the opportunity for personal-best performance.

REFLECTION: What might I gain or learn from viewing my opponent as my partner, mentor, or teacher? In what ways can I teach my opponent to take it up a notch?



PERSEVERANCE • The Chinese character for perseverance illustrates strength and unwavering groundedness in the spirit of the performer. When you handle suffering with a warrior's heart, eventual success will be your reward. Know that talent, as important as it is, accounts for a mere 5 percent of most achievements.

As you have no doubt experienced, performance can become discouraging. The warrior's heart enables you to be resilient, to get back up again and again—in a deliberate, intentional way—when you feel down. The Chinese sage Confucius encourages us to not lose heart until the task is complete through steadfast movement on the path to extraordinary performance.

When you are discouraged with the level of development of your physical skills, change your focus from outcomes and results to the joy of the process, the worthwhile experience of development itself, knowing that fulfillment will come if you stay on course.

In his beautiful, enchanting novel *The Alchemist*, Paulo Coelho writes a dazzling fable about how people on a journey across a vast desert get discouraged and quit just before palm trees appear on the horizon. When tested, they give up. Spirit of the Dancing Warrior reminds you to not let this happen in your life. "The warrior accomplishes significant deeds through enduring effort in a consistent direction," says the I Ching. The Buddha, we are told, is still only halfway to his destination but keeps going regardless. When you seem to be stuck, not making progress in any of life's endeavors, compassion may remind you that you are not alone; everyone experiences blockage and obstacles that discourage forward movement. Can you sense that the experience, the journey itself is worthwhile? Rather than letting them annoy you, see the plateaus you reach along the way as essential periods of deeper learning and mastery. Plateaus appear as a level of performance that recurs until the body establishes muscle memory and inner intelligence. Notice that despite all its twists and turns, the river eventually finds its way to the sea.

DECLARATION: With strength, steady movement, and consistent hope, I await the dawning of a new day. I expect good things to happen when I persevere.

REFLECTION: What examples do I have in my life about being ready to quit but choosing to persevere instead? What aspects of my present life could benefit from my willingness to persevere? What's stopping me from hanging in there?



WARRIOR • Traditionally, the warrior embraced war as a way of life, using swords to defeat the enemy. Today, the modern warrior fights inner battles with weapons of the heart, and his war is the effort to include the subtle aspects of spiritual self-mastery in his way of life. Here we provide guidance for such spiritual training and transpersonal development, with self-aware-

ness as the cornerstone of growth and change.

The Buddha is the awakened one, and the warrior strives for such awakening through action, preferably of the physical kind. Action is only possible because the warrior has both the courage to fail and the compassion to heal. Failure is the teacher, emblematic of extraordinary possibility and free of regret in an environment where risk is the rule rather than the exception. Integrity is, perhaps, the most important trait of the warrior, who consistently lives by his word. Humility, loyalty, dignity, courtesy, intensity, perseverance, sacrifice, and suffering are some of the other elements that characterize the true warrior. In sports, being a warrior is not tied to winning; it means being in the process of competing and fighting, not for victory but for respect.

In athletics, the goal of the warrior is to do the best you can to be the best you can be. You position yourself for the possibility of victory within, against the inner demons of fear, failure, frustration, and self-doubt. Patience, diligence, and determination contribute to self-mastery. Ultimately, the warrior has no regrets as he walks away from the mat of life, journeying with heart as an indomitable spirit.

DECLARATION: My challenge in sports, fitness, and life is to practice the way of the warrior in pursuit of complete self-awareness and personal development.

REFLECTION: What can I do today to demonstrate the courage to take a risk in order to improve myself in sports, fitness, or life?



REFLECTION • All physical performance has its ups and downs, subject to the natural cycles of life. Periodic fluctuations in performance are sacred opportunities to reflect upon your relationship with sports, fitness, and life—their patterns and rhythms shift and change. The warrior understands life's patterns through reflection, asking, "Where have I been, where am I now, and where am I going?" The answers often lead to positive growth.

For the warrior, reflection is an inner voyage of

exploring new ideas, new experiences, a new career or role. It is a time to question and reevaluate, to check in on how things are going with your sport or fitness regimen and perhaps your life as a whole. Reflection is a way to tune in to your body, mind, and spirit and assess your training and competitive performance.

Following battle, the samurai warrior would ask two important reflective questions: What went well? What needs work? For example, you can assess how well you competed with heart from the start and continued throughout the entire contest, or how the defense played beyond expectations. You can also discuss on-the-field communication that needs work. Apply this same evaluation process to your work and home. These penetrating and evaluative inquiries will carry you from affirming the good (went well) to a proactive approach to moving forward (needs work). Like a brave, indomitable warrior, refuse to ride the windowless train, traveling blindly only to get off at the last stop and wonder, "Where have I been? What was that all about?"

The I Ching says, "Your inner stillness and reflection bring enlightenment... you see situations in a strange new light."

DECLARATION: When I go inside, I can move outside. I will stop, look, and listen to the inner voice of reflection.

REFLECTION: Today, how do I feel physically, emotionally, and spiritually? Why? How do these feelings impact me going forward?



COMPASSION • When two armies meet, the one with compassion is the one that tastes victory. These thoughts from the ancient Chinese sage Lao Tzu reflect the sentiments of legendary basketball coach Phil Jackson, who claims that without compassion, his Chicago Bulls would never have sustained such high levels of extraordinary excellence. The warrior understands that compassion ignites one's courage to take risks to excel because, regardless of outcomes or results, compassion

will help you to endure hardship and setbacks.

Compassion for self as well as others gives you permission to fail—not that you would choose such a path. It creates safe, understanding environments—inner and outer—that encourage you to trust yourself, your team, coaches, coworkers, and friends to continue their efforts in the face of adversity. The warrior surges ahead of the pack following devastating defeats because he performs in a culture of compassion.

One of the most important virtues of Buddhism and Zen is compassion for ourselves and for other human beings. The Chinese symbols for compassion depict a generosity of the heart followed by an active eagerness to participate in the opponent's joy as well as sorrow. Whether in victory or defeat, compassion for self and others is the key to success in attaining true well-being. When you win an athletic contest, your Buddha-nature might ask, How does my opponent feel right now?

Immediately following and in the midst of celebrating their national championship in field hockey, the University of Maryland women's team paused and noticed their dejected opponents, the University of Michigan team, clearly feeling the agony of defeat. At that sensitive moment, the victors went to embrace and thank the runner-ups for their courageous and fearless battle and for playing all out with heart. This gesture took the sting out of the loss, and two years later, the University of Michigan went on to beat Maryland for the championship. How does my opponent feel right now? helps us keep our battles in perspective.

DECLARATION: Rather than be critical of myself or others, I choose to put my heart on the line and act with compassion and love.

REFLECTION: In what specific ways and under what circumstances can I demonstrate compassion to myself and my teammates? What do I imagine I will feel as a result of this from-the-heart approach? What effect could this have on my future performance?



PATIENCE • How does the tortoise defeat the hare? He uses the inner spiritual qualities of slow,

steady, deliberate, patient movement. How does one eat an elephant? One bite at a time. So it is with sports, fitness, and life. Notice how all physical endeavors contain a natural flow. We know that rushing, forcing, or pushing for results often creates counterforces such as burnout, injury, setbacks, or failure. Doing too much too soon—that hurry-up syndrome—invariably leads to injury or illness, nature's built-in way of telling us to slow down and pause.

Simply put, whether you are an athlete, corporate worker, homemaker, or student of dance, take a day off from the routine. The pause is an essential aspect of high-level personal performance. We notice that when we become patient, we actually reach our goals sooner. We can do this when we immerse ourselves in the process, the flow of life, as it assumes its own form and shape, rather than forcing things to be what we think they should be.

Would you ever go into the garden, walk over to the daisies, and attempt to pull them upward to hasten their growth? Of course not. So why would anyone try to interfere with the natural growth and development of any physical or intellectual endeavor? For all of us, improvement in any experience always occurs not when we think it should, but when the time is right. This is when we are at our best. Warrior wisdom says: when you hasten the natural process, setbacks will occur. Your awakened Buddha self can enjoy the process, slow down, and arrive sooner; the journey is often the best part. Focus your heart-mind in the present and realize that the moment you have been waiting for is already here. Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu encourages patience and reminds us how all things occur at the appropriate time. Things happen not when we think they should but when we are ready. So slow down and arrive sooner.

DECLARATION: I am willing and eager to be at peace with the natural unfolding of my abilities. I refuse to place time constraints on my perfect progress.

REFLECTION: Why is it so important for me to force or try to make situations in my life happen more quickly than they naturally do? How will being impatient cause the plane to leave on time? How will it hasten the accomplishment of any endeavor?



FORTITUDE • We know that continuous, consistent strength and high-level performance are not possible. You may want to always be your best, look good, and be fast, but no one is capable of this all the time, not even the Buddha. During down times—times of strife, loss, setbacks, mistakes, uncertainty, and disappointment—the warrior adopts the virtue of fortitude, a sense of quiet inner strength, trust, and confidence, closely aligned with the warrior virtue of perseverance, that helps one to endure. We know from our own experience that this virtue will help you through a slump, a losing streak, an injury, or a disappointing result.

For the warrior, fortitude is a strong spiritual weapon that helps fight the inner wars of fear and self-doubt. It has helped nations throughout the world to survive amid devastation. Native American Lakota culture, for example, survives thanks to its strongest weapon, fortitude. This warrior virtue has won world wars. It is the virtue that gets you through the moment, that enables you to endure shock and disappointment. Parents who discover that their child has a fatal disease, athletes who sustain a season-ending injury, workers who lose their jobs in a tough economy: these are all examples of situations requiring fortitude, which helps those enduring such adversity to live one moment at a time. At its foundation are a quiet confidence and a deep belief that everything will work out. Think of bamboo and how it bends in a windstorm, yet survives. Fortitude, or bravery, is your ability to bend and dance in the wind of adversity—on and off the court and in and out of the gym, boardroom, or living room—and bounce back on your feet, hold your head up, and go forward. We call this dance the “Buddha Bounce.”

DECLARATION: I am brave and strong enough to endure all setbacks and adverse conditions. I have the courage and confidence to continue on the path and realize my true potential.

REFLECTION: In what specific ways can I apply the concept of fortitude to my present physical and emotional life? Whom do I know and respect who demonstrates this warrior virtue and in what way?



HUMOR • One of the greatest mistakes you can make is to think of the spiritual training in this book as deadly serious. Perhaps more than any other spiritual tradition, Zen Buddhism teaches us how to bring out our sense of humor. When you find yourself lost in a frowning cosmic space, take the s out of cosmic and laugh at your cheerless sobriety.

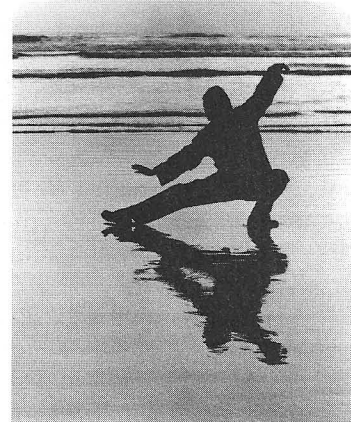
Many of us on a physical, emotional, and spiritual path take ourselves too seriously. If you run, bike, swim, or partake in any other exhausting activity, notice what happens and how you feel when you change your frown from the pain of exertion to a smile. Instantly, you are transformed: your body relaxes and the activity seems painless. When you are tired and hurting, picture the Happy Buddha, his belly shaking with laughter as if filled with jelly. In Chinese, laughter is depicted as a person with arms and legs flung wide open, head to the sky, vibrating with mirth like bamboo leaves in the wind. In Zen, the ability to laugh at ourselves and experience the humor in our mistakes and foibles is an indication of self-awareness and consciousness.

When your performance falls short of your high expectations, your ego interferes and you feel embarrassed by such setbacks. You begin to measure your self-worth as an athlete, performer, or person by your mistakes, errors, and failures. You may instead want to create expectations that are more process than product oriented. For example, expect to do well, have fun, and allow good things to happen. Rather than dwell on the darkness, affirm your efforts to be your best; affirm your health and the opportunities given to you and your friends. Laugh, knowing that after all, you are an imperfect, vulnerable, and sometimes silly human being.

The ancient Taoist masters always managed to check their own follies with a practice of letting their long knotted hair down and sticking out their bellies, roaring with laughter when they fumbled. Imagine great athletes and world leaders laughing Buddhalike when they stumble over their serious work. When they see the humor in it and don't take themselves too seriously, they usually begin to perform at higher levels. Humor relaxes the body, mind, and spirit and, as we know, this has the effect of improving outcomes.

DECLARATION: While I take what I do seriously, I refuse to attach my ego to the outcomes. I choose to laugh when I blunder.

REFLECTION: Why might some people think of spirituality as a serious experience? In retrospect, when have I taken myself too seriously and how would I handle that today? ☯



Reprinted with permission from *Spirit of the Dancing Warrior: Asian Wisdom for Peak Performance in Athletics and Life* by Jerry Lynch and Chungliang Al Huang, published by Amber Lotus Publishing, © 2110.

Jerry Lynch is an internationally known Sports Psychologist, Life Coach, speaker and national-class athlete. Over the past 25 years he has worked with professional teams, athletic coaches in the NBA, NFL, NLL and PHGA as well as 33 national championship teams and athletes.

Chungliang Al Huang began practicing Tai Ji and studying the Taoist classics as a child in China. His seminal book, *Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain: The Essence of Tai Ji*, published in 1973, a transcription of his teaching during the early days of Esalen Institute, has become a classic in 14 languages. His unique style of teaching his students to fulfill their "human potentials" has garnered accolades and nurtured students of life around the world. Thirty seven years later, this enlivening body of knowledge/wisdom, accumulated and crystallized into gems of structure guiding forces, are ready to be transmitted to those who truly wish to gain knowledge, wisdom and expertise to become what Chuangliang calls the "Living Tao Practitioners", the perpetual students of lifelong learning who have and will become mentors to others. For the very first time since the inception of the Living Tao Foundation 33 years ago, Master Huang is committed to continue with his teaching, to include a training program to be held in August of 2010 at the River House, the home base of Living Tao's Foundation's Lan Ting Institute in Gold Beach, Oregon. He will personally offer his lifelong learning, guiding those who are ready to be inspired by his work, to truly commit to concentrated in-depth studies, worthy to receive and take responsibility with this "Living Tao" legacy into their lives. Contact: www.livingtao.org or info@livingtao.org.