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The SHEN BIBLE

*A practical manual for harmony of consciousness, emotional
balance and longevity*

Editor Sebastiano Vottari

PREFACE

On the art of inhabiting oneself in an age of confusion

There is an image that the Taoist tradition has jealously guarded for millennia, an image that, despite its apparent simplicity, holds the key to understanding the entire edifice of Eastern thought on health, longevity, and consciousness. It is the image of clear, still water. When water is perfectly still, it becomes a mirror: it reflects the sky, the clouds, the riverbanks, and, above all, the face of anyone who bends over it. But if we throw a stone into that water, or if the wind ripples its surface, or if restless hands continue to stir it, the mirror shatters, the image dissolves, and what it reflects is no longer reality but a chaotic distortion of it. Water is still water, of course, but it has lost its noblest function: that of reflecting the world as it is. So, say the sages, is human consciousness. Our mind, in its original, uncorrupted state, is capable of absolute clarity, pure perception, and full presence in the here and now. But it is constantly being hit by the rocks of obsessive thoughts, the gusts of unprocessed emotions, and the restless hands of desires we no longer know how to listen to or control. And so, paradoxically, we live immersed in the world without seeing it, we inhabit our bodies without feeling them, we go through our days without truly being present to ourselves.

This book stems from a simple yet dramatic observation. Never before in our modern era have humans had such powerful tools to understand the external world: telescopes that peer into the deep universe, microscopes that probe matter down to its subatomic components, computer networks that connect every corner of the planet in real time, databases that preserve the

knowledge accumulated over thousands of years of civilization. And yet, seemingly paradoxically, never before has humanity felt so lost within itself. Statistics on the prevalence of anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, addictions, and psychosomatic illnesses tell the same story across the industrialized world: we have conquered outer space, but we have lost the map of our own internal space. We know how a galaxy billions of light-years away works, but we are unaware of what is happening inside our own chest when a worry wakes us at three in the morning. We know the details of how a cell works, but we no longer recognize the moment when our body is gently warning us that we have gone too far.

It is in response to this profound fracture, this divorce between humanity and its most intimate home, that this manual was conceived. Let it be clear from these first lines that this is not a nostalgic collection of ancient Eastern precepts presented as an exotic panacea for the ills of the West. Nor is it a self-help manual in the most superficial sense of the term, one of those that promise miraculous transformations in a very short time and which, after an enthusiastic reading, are forgotten on some shelf along with the good intentions that accompanied them. Rather, this is a patient and thoughtful attempt to restore to the modern reader some ancient yet surprisingly relevant tools: tools that the philosophical and medical tradition of the Far East has honed over over two thousand years of observation, experimentation, and refinement, and which today, stripped of any folkloristic patina and restored to their practical essence, can still speak clearly to our daily experience.

At the heart of this theoretical and practical edifice is the notion, as ancient as it is surprisingly modern, of the Three Treasures. Classical Chinese thought intuited, well

before Western science could confirm it through research in psychoneuroimmunology and integrative medicine, that the human being cannot be broken down into watertight compartments: there is no body separate from the mind, nor a mind separate from the spirit. Instead, there is a single vital reality that manifests on three distinct yet profoundly interconnected levels. There is *Jing* , the material essence, the biological and genetic substrate inherited from our ancestors, the profound reserve of vitality stored in the very roots of our physical being. There is *Qi* , the dynamic energy that constantly flows through our organism, nourished by breath, nourishment, and movement, and which constitutes the living bridge between matter and spirit. And finally, there is the *Shen* , the higher consciousness, the light of the mind that allows us to be present to ourselves, to perceive the world clearly, to love, to think, to choose. These three treasures are not separate entities but different manifestations of a single vital force, and their harmony, or disharmony, determines the quality of our existence with a precision that ancient wisdom knew well and that we, too often, have forgotten.

When the Shen—consciousness, attention, presence—is daily dispersed by the incessant stimuli of the external world, it can no longer rest in its natural temple, which tradition identifies as the Heart. And when the Shen cannot rest, the entire system enters a state of chronic alert: Qi becomes agitated and stagnant, emotions become blocked in the body's tissues, and Jing—that deep and limited reserve of ancestral energy—is prematurely consumed in a desperate attempt to compensate for a lost balance. This is, ultimately, the silent mechanism through which we age prematurely, fall ill without apparent cause, and feel exhausted even without having made extraordinary efforts. This is the hidden price we pay for having forgotten the ancient art of self-care.

The manual the reader holds in his hands does not intend to revolutionize his existence overnight, nor to impose a system of rigid rules to replace the already numerous ones that modern life imposes. Its ambition is both more modest and more profound: to offer a map, indicate some practicable paths, and suggest concrete practices that each person can adapt to their own pace, circumstances, and sensibilities. The five chapters that comprise it have been conceived as five stages of a unified journey, each with its own specific focus and each accompanied by a seven-day practical protocol, so that the theory is never confined to the realm of abstract ideas but can immediately enter the heart of everyday experience.

The first chapter invites the reader to make the most radical and, paradoxically, most overlooked gesture of our time: to stop and rediscover oneself. In an age that demands we always be reachable, always productive, always performing, the simple act of sitting in silence and listening to one's breathing becomes an act of resistance, a small internal revolution. Here the reader will encounter the Taoist principle of *Wu Wei*, non- forcing, and will learn to recognize the Lower Dantian as the anchor that prevents consciousness from dispersing.

The second chapter addresses one of the most painful and universal themes of human experience: the wound of separation, the suffering that follows the end of a significant relationship or the loss of a loved one. Eastern tradition offers a realistic yet comforting perspective on this subject: pain should not be numb or avoided, but rather navigated with awareness, and the work of healing consists in recalling the fragments of consciousness that the bond had projected onto the other, while simultaneously restoring to the other what belongs to them. It is a delicate task, requiring courage and patience, but it paves the way for an inner rebirth.

The third chapter delves into the map of the Five Elements and the subtle physiology of emotions, showing how each prolonged emotional state leaves a distinct mark on our internal organs, and how, conversely, caring for the body can become a path to healing for the soul. Here, the reader will discover how repressed anger congests the liver, how chronic worry weakens the spleen, and how unprocessed sadness settles in the lungs. They will learn specific somatic release techniques to dissolve these accumulated blockages.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the art of prevention, that ancient wisdom that views health not as something to be regained once lost, but as a balance to be cultivated every day. The reader will encounter the organ clock, discover the value of digestive fire, and learn the practice of Do-In, the self-massage of the meridians that awakens the body at the start of the day.

The fifth and final chapter leads the reader to the threshold of the highest practice, that of *Yang Sheng*, the art of nourishing life. Here, the discourse elevates from daily care to the conscious cultivation of longevity, understood not as a simple extension of years but as the fullness of existence until its natural conclusion. Inner Smile Meditation, one of the oldest and most profound practices in the Taoist tradition, is presented here as a tool for harmonizing the Three Treasures.

A final recommendation before the reader delves into these pages. Don't rush, don't expect immediate results, don't be discouraged if, at first, your mind seems more agitated than ever and your body more rigid than you ever realized. These are not signs of failure, but symptoms of an awakening: like a room that, after years of being closed, is finally opened and light shines through, revealing all the dust that had settled within.

That dust was already there; we simply couldn't see it. And now that we do, we can begin the patient work of cleaning. Each exercise proposed in these pages has been conceived as a small, sustainable gesture, something that can be integrated into daily life without dramatic upheavals. The path of Shen is not a heroic climb to a distant peak, but a path on a plain, made of small, regular steps, patient returns, and loving acceptance of one's own limits and pace.

May this manual be, for those who read it, not a book to be consumed once and then forgotten, but a discreet companion to return to in moments of confusion, a gentle voice that reminds us, when the noise of the world becomes deafening, that within us there always exists a space of silence, a hidden room where the Shen can find rest. That room does not need to be built: it already exists, always has. It is only a matter of remembering how to return there.

Have a good trip.

The Publisher

INTRODUCTION: THE THREE TREASURES AND THE NATURE OF THE SHEN

According to the ancient philosophical view, the human being is supported by three fundamental forces, called the **Three Treasures** (*San Bao*):

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1. **Jing (精):** The essence, the ancestral energy linked to the physical body, genetics and deep vital reserves.
 2. **Qi (氣):** The dynamic vital energy that constantly circulates through breathing, nourishment, and movement.
 3. **Shen (神):** Consciousness, the higher mind, the ability to be present to oneself and to perceive the world clearly.

When the Shen is....

END PREVIEW