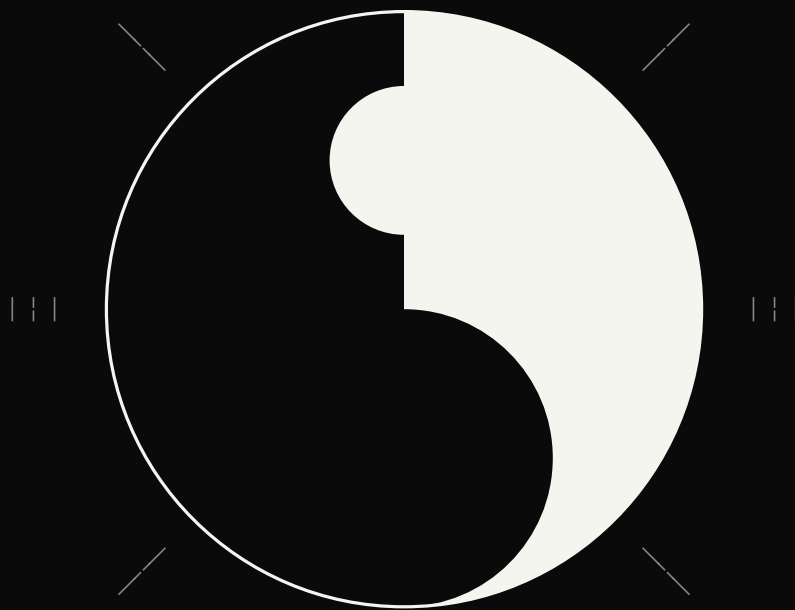


內業



NEIYE

Inner Training

Ancient Text · Foundational Practices · Modern Application



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The Neiye (內業) is the oldest known text of inner cultivation in the Daoist tradition, predating the Daodejing in its concerns even if not in its final written form. Housed within the *Guanzi*, it was composed during the fourth century BCE by practitioners of what Harold Roth calls the 'contemplative lineage' of early Daoism — those who sought to cultivate the vital breath, still the mind, and align the whole person with the inexhaustible source that flows through all things.

This document offers a faithful rendering of the Neiye's core teachings alongside a series of practices drawn directly from its methods — breath, stillness, posture, attention, and the gradual refinement of the heart-mind (*xin*, 心). It is offered not as scholarship but as instruction: something to be used, returned to, and allowed to deepen over time.



What Is the Neiye?

The title means simply *Inner Training* or *Inward Training*. Its subject is the cultivation of *jing* (精, refined vital essence), *qi* (氣, vital breath), and *shen* (神, spirit) — the three treasures of the inner body — through practices of stillness, correct breathing, upright posture, and the emptying of the heart-mind from agitation and desire.

Where the Daodejing speaks of Dao in cosmic and philosophical terms, the Neiye is strikingly practical. It describes what Dao feels like when it arrives in the body, what conditions allow it to dwell, and what drives it away. It is, in this sense, a practitioner's manual for the same mystery that Laozi could only gesture at.

Three concepts anchor the entire text:

Jing (精) — the refined, concentrated vital essence. The substrate of life itself, it is depleted by agitation, excess, and craving, and restored through stillness and breath.

Qi (氣) — vital breath or life-force, the medium through which jing moves and through which Dao enters the body. Breath is its most accessible handle.

Xin (心) — the heart-mind. In Chinese thought this single organ is the seat of both feeling and cognition. The Neiye's central discipline is the stabilisation and emptying of xin so that Dao can reside there.



Selected Verses from the Neiye

The following verses are drawn from Harold Roth's scholarly translation (Original Tao, Columbia University Press, 1999) and rendered here in a form that preserves their instructional intent for the modern practitioner.

I. The Nature of Jing

精也者，氣之精者也

Jing is the essence of qi.

When jing is present, life arises.

When it departs, life ends.

Vital essence is the source of the ten thousand transformations.

Above, it gives birth to the five sense organs.

Below, it establishes the five storehouses of the body.

When it flows, it gives life.

When it is stored, it becomes the holy man within.

II. The Arriving of Dao

道滿天下，普在民所

Dao fills all under heaven.

It is everywhere the people dwell.

Yet people cannot understand it.

When you understand this one word

You penetrate to heaven above and earth below.

It circulates but has no boundary.

When your mind is aligned and your qi balanced,

Dao can then come and stay.

III. On Stillness

能正能靜，然後能定

When you can be upright and still,

Only then can you be settled.

With a settled mind,



*With upright ears and clear eyes —
You will come to know the One
And perceive the ten thousand things.*

IV. The Aligned Heart-Mind

心全於中，形全於外

*When the heart-mind is whole within,
The body is whole without.
Do not encounter trouble from without.
Do not create disorder from within.
Make your heart tranquil and your will calm,
And Dao will naturally come to settle in you.*

V. The Condition of Dwelling

敬除其舍，精將自來

*Reverently clear its dwelling place
And vital essence will naturally come.
Still your thinking, still your knowing.
Be reverent and composed.
Then vital essence will stabilise itself.*

VI. On Breath and Eating

凡食之道，大充傷而形不藏

*In the way of eating,
Overfilling harms the body and depletes the vital essence.
Overrestricting causes bones to wither and blood to dry.
Between these two lies the mean.
This is where the cultivated person dwells.*

VII. The Four Postures of Cultivation

正形攝德，天仁地義



*Align the form. Gather virtue.
Heaven's way is benevolence, earth's way is righteousness.
When one is aligned in sitting,
 Aligned in standing,
 Aligned in moving,
 Aligned in reposing —
Vital essence arrives of itself.*



Foundational Practices

What follows is a sequence of practices drawn directly from the Neiye's methods. They are arranged from the most accessible to the more subtle. Begin where you are. Return daily. The text says: *Those who can transform through a single practice — they are called the numinous.*

Practice One

Arriving: The Settling Breath

精將來舍 · Vital essence will come and dwell

1. Sit or stand with the spine upright. The Neiye is insistent on this: *align the form* is the first instruction. Not rigid — upright. Let the crown of the head rise gently, as though suspended from above.
2. Bring attention to the breath without altering it. Simply notice: the inhale, the pause, the exhale, the pause. Four parts. Allow all four.
3. On each exhale, invite the muscles of the face to soften. Then the shoulders. Then the belly. The Neiye says: *when the four limbs are aligned and the blood and qi are still, unify your focus, concentrate your mind.*
4. Continue for five to ten minutes. This is not preparation for practice. This *is* the practice — the clearing of the dwelling so that what is subtle can arrive.

Do this before any other practice. Do it upon waking. Do it before sleep. The Neiye teaches that Dao does not force its entry — it settles where conditions allow. You are creating conditions.

Practice Two

Refining Qi: The Long Exhale

吹响呼吸 · Breathe in, breathe out, exhale long

1. Begin from the settled posture of Practice One.
2. Inhale slowly through the nose for a count of four. Let the belly expand first, then the chest.
3. Hold gently at the top for a count of two. The Neiye calls this the gathering — you are collecting qi.



4. Exhale slowly through slightly parted lips for a count of eight. The exhale should be silent, continuous, complete. At the very end, gently contract the lower belly to empty fully.
5. Pause at the bottom for a count of two before the next inhale.
6. Repeat for ten to twenty cycles. Over weeks, extend the exhale to a count of twelve or sixteen.

The Neiye's emphasis on the long exhale reflects its understanding that most depletion of jing happens through agitation and outward expenditure — the exhale is the practice of releasing what is coarse so that what is refined can accumulate.

Practice Three

Stilling the Heart-Mind: Watching Without Grasping

去欲則宣 · Remove desire and the spirit opens

1. From the settled breath, bring attention to the contents of the heart-mind — thoughts, images, feelings, sensations.
2. The instruction is not to suppress or force anything out. The Neiye is clear: *do not pull it, do not push it*. Simply observe what arises as you would observe clouds moving across an open sky.
3. When you notice you have become identified with a thought — when you have begun thinking rather than watching thinking — gently return attention to the breath and begin watching again.
4. The question the Neiye asks you to hold is not 'what am I thinking' but rather: *what is it that watches?* Rest your attention there.
5. Practice for ten to twenty minutes daily.

This practice cultivates what the text calls zhengxin — the aligned, upright heart-mind. Over time the heart-mind loses its habit of grasping and begins to function more like still water: reflecting clearly, disturbed by nothing permanently.

Practice Four

The Four Postures: Cultivation Through the Body

正坐正立正行正臥 · Aligned in sitting, standing, moving, resting



1. **Sitting (坐):** Sit without slumping. The spine holds itself. The hands rest loosely. The tongue rests lightly on the upper palate. The eyes are closed or softly downcast. Bring the settling breath here.
2. **Standing (立):** Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly unlocked, weight evenly distributed. Let the arms hang freely. Feel the contact of the feet with the ground and, simultaneously, the space above the crown of the head. Hold this dual awareness for five to fifteen minutes.
3. **Moving (行):** Walk slowly, preferably outdoors. With each step, feel the transfer of weight completely. Notice sound, light, temperature without naming or judging. This is Neiye's version of what the Daodejing calls *wuwei* in motion — moving without contrivance.
4. **Resting (卧):** Before sleep, lie on your back. Scan the body from feet to crown, consciously releasing each region. End with three long exhales. This is the clearing of the dwelling before the night.

The radical teaching here is that cultivation is not confined to a meditation cushion. The Neiye proposes that the entire day becomes the practice ground — that alignment, attention, and breath can be sustained across all four conditions of the body.

Practice Five

Moderate the Gates: The Practice of Sufficiency

知足者富 · To know sufficiency is to be rich

1. At the beginning of each meal, pause for three breaths before eating. This single pause begins to interrupt the unconscious momentum of consumption.
2. Eat to approximately seventy percent of fullness. The Neiye is explicit: *overfilling harms the body and depletes the vital essence*. The same principle extends to all appetite — for food, stimulation, conversation, information.
3. Once daily, deliberately abstain from one habitual reach: the phone, the scroll, the extra cup. Not as punishment but as inquiry — *what is here when the craving is not fed?*
4. At the end of each day, ask: *Where did I pour out more than I received? Where was there sufficiency?* Simply noticing, without judgment.

The Neiye's understanding is that jing — the refined life-force — leaks through the gates of sense and appetite. Moderation is not asceticism; it is conservation. What you stop pouring out, you begin to



accumulate. This is the paradox at the heart of inner training: less outward, more inward.

Practice Six

Reverential Dwelling: Living as a Sacred Act

敬除其舍 · Reverently clear the dwelling place

1. Choose one ordinary activity — washing dishes, making tea, walking to your car — and perform it each day as if it were ceremony.
2. Move slowly. Notice the temperature of the water, the weight of the cup, the sound of footsteps. Do not rush toward the end of the activity. Let each moment be its own completion.
3. The *Neiye* uses the word *jing* (敬) — reverence, seriousness, attentiveness — to describe the quality of the practitioner's relationship to the present moment. This is not religiosity. It is simply full attention, offered freely.
4. When the mind wanders into planning, remembering, or evaluating, gently return to the sensory texture of what is happening now. This is the clearing. This is the dwelling.

*Over time this practice begins to spread. The quality of reverent attention cultivated in one chosen activity gradually infuses others. The *Neiye*'s promise is simple: reverently clear the dwelling place and vital essence will naturally come. You do not manufacture the arrival. You only prepare for it.*



A Final Word

The Neiye does not promise transcendence. It does not offer escape from the difficulties of a human life. What it offers is something more modest and more radical: the possibility of being fully present within the life you already have, with the body you already inhabit, breathing the breath that is already moving through you.

Dao, the text teaches, is not elsewhere. It fills all under heaven. It is everywhere the people dwell. The only question is whether the dwelling place has been cleared — whether the agitation has settled enough for what was always already here to be felt.

Begin with the breath. Return to the breath. Let everything else arise from that ground. The ten thousand practices are ultimately one practice: becoming, again and again, a fit dwelling place for the subtle.

精將來舍

Vital essence will come and dwell.