

Ming-men/Tan-t'ien: Abode of Wisdom, Center of Power

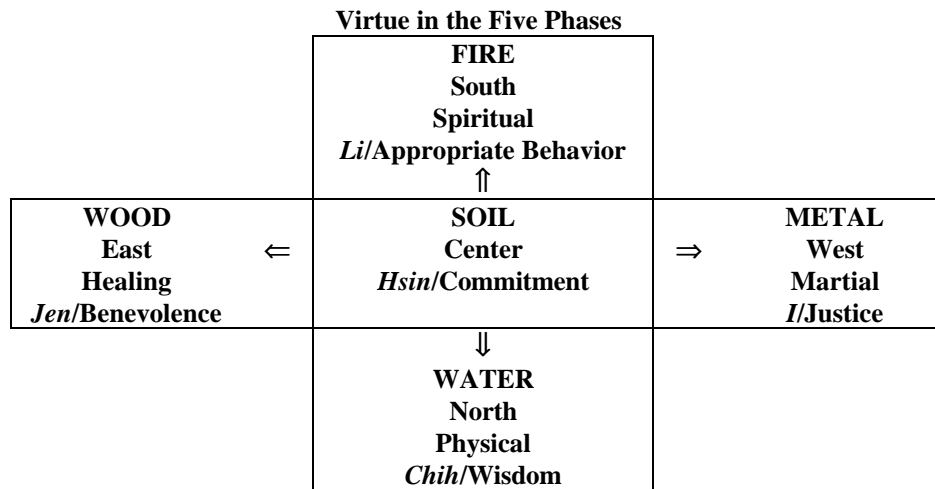
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An Energetic Paradigm

Because of its effect in fostering vitality, *Ming-men/tan-t'ien* is considered one of the most important energy centers in Chinese systems of meditation, healing, and the martial arts. Located in the center of the lower abdomen approximately two inches below the navel, and between the skin and the ventral surface of the spine, *ming-men/tan-t'ien* is an amalgam of two other important energy centers, *ming-men* and *tan-t'ien*, with close association with what is called the “Sea of Ch’i,” *Ch’i-hai* 氣海. *Ming-men/tan-t'ien* comes into existence at birth from the interface between the prenatal, and postnatal, aspects of self. *Ming-men* represents the prenatal, sacred, Yang, aspect, *tan-t'ien* represents the postnatal, mundane, Yin, aspect, and *Ch’i-hai* represents their integration through the abundance of Ch’i that is found here naturally, and that can be developed here through these disciplines. In his book, *The Way of Qigong: The Art and Science of Chinese Energy Healing*, Kenneth Cohen describes the effect of this area in energetic training (*Ch’i-kung*, or *Qigong*) which “stimulates the kidneys, . . . increases the body’s overall vitality and energy level (and) . . . primes the body’s major energetic pump so that qi can spread more efficiently throughout the body.”¹

The first steps in developing this energy consist of focusing ones intention on the area, usually through the breath. This is also the first of three steps in Taoist meditation, the transformation of *ching* to Ch’i (*lien-ching hua-ch’i* 煉精化氣), which involves concentration on the *ming-men/tan-t'ien* area in order to transform *ching* 精, “Generative Force,” or “Structive Potential,” to Ch’i, raw energy, and finally to spirit, *shen* 神. According to Jou Tsung Hwa, this first stage builds up sensations of heat or sexual excitation in the area after a while (from a couple of days to a year or more) which can then be used to circulate throughout the body for general well-being of martial strength, or through specific pathways in the body in the more advanced stages of meditation.² Although the value of *ming-men/tan-t'ien* in various forms of energy training is ultimately in the practical benefits derived from its use, it is also part of a detailed theoretical understanding rooted in the ancient interdisciplinary Chinese world view involving cosmogony, cosmology, philosophy, and religion, as well as the healing and fighting arts derived from them. An understanding of this theoretical background can increase ones awareness of the possibilities that can be achieved in this type of training, as well as intensify ones motivation to discipline oneself to the degree necessary in order to achieve results.

Traditionally, healing and the martial arts in the Chinese tradition branch off in different directions from a common center. Diagrammatically, this center spreads out horizontally and vertically like the two arms of a cross in which the neutral center polarizes into four different aspects or movements, *hsing* 行, in Chinese, with five, *wu* 五, in all, counting the center, that gives rise to what is called *wu-hsing* 五行, the “Five Elements,” or “Five Transformations.” The essence of these five aspects completes its development energetically in what are called the “Five Constant (Virtues),” *wu-ch’ang* 五常, which are Commitment, *hsin* 信, Wisdom, *chih* 智, Appropriate Behavior, *li* 禮, Benevolence, *jen* 仁, and Justice, *I* 義.³ Each of these four outer virtues develop internally from *hsin* 信, Commitment, which in its most pure expression is simultaneously one’s realization and actualization of one’s constant and ongoing connection to ones source in Tao.



From the center, *hsin* sends roots downward into the physical where it develops into Wisdom, *chih*, and then blossoms upward into the spiritual where it becomes Appropriate Behavior, *li*. These two movements constitute the vertical arm of the cross where matter and spirit connect to form the ontological basis of life. The horizontal arm of the cross conceptualizes the sacred movement of matter and spirit in daily life which expands outward in the development of Benevolence, *jen*, and contracts inward in the development of Justice, *I*. Benevolence leads things outward in order to actualize their hidden potential, while Justice leads them back to their core in an attempt to eliminate the unessential. Because this outward movement is also associated with the season of Spring and its aspect of giving birth, whereas this inward movement is associated with Autumn and death, the Chinese tradition places the Healing Arts in line with the virtue of Benevolence, and the Martial Arts in line with Justice. From this perspective Healing/Benevolence and Fighting/Justice form two poles of an energetic continuum connected by *hsin* to their common source in Tao, and grounded by their root in Wisdom. The practice of developing one's connection to Tao on the energetic level is called Energy Training, or Ch'i-kung. Whereas the root of all Energy Training is Wisdom, the spark inside this Wisdom is called *ming* 命, which can be translated as Fate, Destiny, or Mandate depending on the context. The place inside the body where this spark of *ming* is located is the energetic center known to martial artists (especially the Internal Martial Arts like T'ai-Chi Ch'üan which place more emphasis on the circulation of Ch'i than they do on muscular power), acupuncturists, Ch'i-kung practitioners, and philosophers alike as *ming-men* 命門, the "Gate of Destiny," and is regarded as the energetic source for the entire Body, Mind, and Spirit.

***Ming-men*: "Gate of Power"**

The name *ming-men* is used for three different points in acupuncture, all located on the centerline of the lower torso, one on the back and two on the front. The primary point, Governing Vessel 4 (Gv4), is located in the lower back between the second and third lumbar vertebrae on a channel of energy (Governing Vessel) associated with the "Sea of Yang" energy and Heaven, representing ones relation to the spiritual, or sacred. The two secondary *ming-men* points, Conception Vessel 4 (Cv4) and Conception Vessel 5 (Cv5), are located on the centerline of the lower abdomen approximately two inches below the navel on a channel of energy (the Conception Vessel) associated with the "Sea of Yin" energy and Earth, representing ones relation to the mundane world of everyday life. The fact that, in acupuncture, there are *ming-men* points on both the back and front of the lower torso suggests that these points are only "gates" to the real *ming-men* which lies somewhere in between, as some Ch'i-kung practitioners are prone to say. Acupuncture theory would tend to support this thesis because acupuncture points themselves are usually thought of as gateways to areas and functions that lie elsewhere, sometimes deeper within. For example, the *ming-men* point on the back is located between two other points, Bladder 23 (B23), that are considered the main entry points, "gates," into the Kidney organs.⁴

The juxtaposition of the back *ming-men* point between these two Kidney points has additional energetic significance in defining the function of *ming-men* as an emergence point of Yin and Yang Ch'i which has the capacity to balance the two. Although the B23 points are significantly lower on the back than the position of the Kidney organs, Chang Chieh-pin (1563-1640), the famous acupuncturist, defines *ming-men* as in the middle of the two (Yin and Yang) Kidneys.⁵ This definition has a double meaning and refers to both the location between the two Kidney points, B23, not the Kidney organs, as well as the idea of *ming-men* as a precursor to Kidney Yin and Kidney Yang Ch'i, and by further definition, of Yin and Yang in general since all the Yin and Yang of the body stem from the Yin and Yang of the Kidneys. These fundamental precursors to Yin and Yang energy associated here with *ming-men* are called the Original/*yüan-ch'i* 元氣 and the Source/*yüan-ch'i* 原氣. The Original/*yüan-ch'i* represents that sacred part of self just prior to polarization (birth), and synonymous with Original Nature. Since it is undivided in both Body and Mind, it represents the nature of self as pure potential. The point where this potential begins to manifest through outward circulation is where Yin changes to Yang, and the Original/*yüan-ch'i* 元氣 changes to Source/*yüan-ch'i* 原氣. Original/*yüan* is Kidney Yin, Source/*yüan* is Kidney Yang. Together, they form what is called Kidney-ch'i. That aspect of Kidney-ch'i referring to the ability to convert potential, i.e., sacred spirit, to actual, i.e., ones manifestation into daily life, is called Kidney *ching* 精. The transformation of Kidney *ching*, remember, is the first stage of Taoist meditation.

Because *ming-men* 命門 is the place, or "gate" (*men* 門), where this conversion takes place, it is often called the "Gate of Destiny," or the "Gate of Life." However, these translations are not quite accurate, and somewhat misleading in that they do not convey the full meaning of the Chinese term "*ming*." The translation "Proclamation Gate" would be more accurate, but it needs explanation. As far back as the Chou dynasty (1122-255 BC) the term *ming* 命 was related to the most important political and philosophical concept of its day which was called *t'ien-ming* 天命, or the Mandate of Heaven. The Mandate of Heaven was considered to be a command or proclamation from spirit (Heaven) through which kings received their destiny, and was based on three important ideas: 1)creating an alignment between Matter and Spirit so that spirit guides matter in life and not the other way around, 2)creating an ethical perspective so that actions done are for the good of all (*t'ien-hsia chih li* 天下之利) and not solely for ones personal gain, and 3)a balance between effort and effortlessness throughout ones actions.

According to the ancient doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven, the result of cultivating *ming* imparts a certain kind of inner magico-spiritual power in a similar way as that used by the old shaman-kings. This power was called *te* 德, and was defined at length in the *Tao-te Ching*, the *Classic of the Way and Its Power*, the first and most important book in Chinese Taoism. For the Confucians, *te* meant moral force; for the Taoists, it meant the charisma or efficacy of the spiritually evolved person. In Chinese, the word *te* 德 etymologically depicts one who "walks the straight path of the heart" and gives rise to the translation of *te* as Virtue, i.e., the resolve, purpose, stability, and morality of a virtuous person,⁶ especially in contrast to physical, economic, political, or legal force (*li* 力).⁷ *Te* is a type of primal cosmic power that has the capacity to spontaneously imbue the human form prior to the development of personality. Later, in childhood development, *te* can integrate with the personality through efforts of socialization, but the balance between effort and spontaneity to achieve this integration is crucial so that the primacy of its power is not destroyed.

This balance between effort and effortlessness in maintaining *te* has been debated by the Confucians and Taoists for centuries. In the *Tao-te ching*, Lao-tzu defines effortlessness as High Virtue where one is at one with himself and his environment. When one is in a state of High Virtue, things seem to happen by themselves. One is in a state of grace where ones inner nature is not separate from the environment so that one's needs are met without having to try. In contrast, Lao-tzu defines the Confucian person of Low Virtue as one who tries so hard to be virtuous that they not only lose touch with who they are, but trade in their true inner needs for a life burdened with toil even while their inner needs are never met.⁸ High Virtue was thought to be a "secret" or "concealed" virtue because those who were able to attain it did so through the paradox of renouncing reward. True inner power can only be attained through "yielding" and "giving up one's position"⁹ so that one egolessly blends his personal power with that of the social and natural realms. Those who could do this were called Authentic Persons (*chen-jen* 真人), and were like saints or highly skilled artisans capable of becoming one with their art.¹⁰

Because the Yin and Yang Ch'i of the entire organism is dependent on the Yin-Yang balance of the Kidneys, all of the primal Yin-Yang aspects of *te* are dependent upon the Kidneys as well including

the balance between Matter and Spirit, and that between effort and effortlessness. In addition, all of this balance is dependent upon *ming-men*. The polar junction between Matter and Spirit, and effort and effortlessness plays an important role in concerns of life and death, and the certainty or uncertainty of any outcome, especially in the domain of healing and fighting and the energetic phases of Wood and Metal. An important human function related to *ming-men* is that which concerns the ability to deal with this uncertainty of the world. How can one know with certainty the outcome of any given action, and given the relative certainty and uncertainty of any outcome, how can one apply oneself in a way that takes the certainty and uncertainty of any outcome into consideration? In acupuncture, the application of action to outcome is called Will, *chih* 志, and the knowledge of any outcome in regard to both certainty and uncertainty is called Wisdom, also pronounced *chih*, but with a different character 智. Will and Wisdom are considered to be the psycho-spiritual aspects of the Kidneys in acupuncture theory and, therefore, are within the domain of *ming-men*.

Will: Foundation of Wisdom

In another paper I have defined Will in Chinese medical theory as “the outward movement of Kidney *ching* (“Structive Potential”) in its ongoing attempt to manifest Heaven’s Mandate on the psychic level.”¹¹ The contrast, and sometimes conflict, between the impermanence of the mundane world and the constancy of the sacred world produces fear, the emotion related to the Kidneys. Fear of uncertainty produces the characteristic “fight or flight” response familiar to Western medicine. In acupuncture, the healthy person exhibits a balance between fear, Will, and Wisdom that comes together in a way that gives the possibility for manifesting *te*. Fear lets us know that the balance between certainty and uncertainty is in question; Will gives us the ability to move or not move in the required direction; Wisdom enables us to know and to accept that movement and direction. When fear, Will, and Wisdom come together, Heaven steps in from the uncertainty of the unknown to add the missing ingredient that makes reality complete. The power, *te*, which attracts Heaven’s response enables us to be as we are in the midst of conditions in balance between Heaven and Earth so that we maximize the potential to be as we are as well as to get what we need.

The primary reason that *ming-men* is used in Ch’i-kung and Martial Arts is to develop power and Ch’i. Because of its relation to the Kidneys and the Original-ch’i that resides there, *ming-men* can be used to build all kinds of Ch’i in general. Original-ch’i gives rise to Kidney *ching* which is also called Structive Potential¹² meaning that it has the capacity to modify itself according to need into other kinds of Ch’i. *Ming-men* acts like a reserve of energetic potential which can be drawn upon in times of need so that any specific type of energy can manifest. On the most basic level, the Original-ch’i, *yüan* 元, is Yin and generates first the Source-ch’i, also pronounced *yüan* but with a different character 原 and meaning, which is Yang, and then generates Kidney Ch’i, or *ching* 精 which is more balanced in terms of Yin and Yang. *Ming-men* is the root of all Ch’i. By focusing on *ming-men* in Ch’i-kung and Martial Arts, one taps in to a vast amount of energetic potential which can then be used to bring the situation into balance in either a Yin or a Yang direction.

In Taoist philosophy the ultimate generation of all things is found in Yin, the female. Tung Chung-shu, who first treated the universe as an organic whole,¹³ says in his *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (13):

“The origin (*yüan* 元) is the source (*yüan* 原) of all things, and the origin of man is found in it.”¹⁴

In Chapter 6 of the *Tao-te ching* (*The Classic of the Way and its Power*) Lao-tzu compares this original aspect of being with the feminine in nature which he calls the “mysterious, or original female”:

“The spirit of the valley never dies (*ku-shen pu-ssu* 谷神不死).

It is called (*shih-wei* 是謂) the mysterious female (*hsüan-p’in* 玄牝). [Sometimes the character *yüan* 元, “original,” is used in place of *hsüan* 玄, a taboo character in certain historical periods because of its association with the names of certain emperors, which would make it read “female origin” in place of the “mysterious female.”]

The gate of the mysterious female [“female origin”] (*hsüan-p’in chih men* 玄牝之門) is called

the root of Heaven and Earth (*shih-wei t'ien-ti ken* 是謂天地根).
It's existence is like preserving (*jo-ts'un* 若存) a drawn-out silken thread (*mien-mien* 綿綿);
But its utility (*yung* 用) is not this movement (*chih-pu-tung* 之不動).”¹⁵

In the beginning of meditation, focus at *ming-men* displaces ones attention from extraneous thoughts and emotions (often called false Yang), and places it directly at the female center of being where True Nature emanates. By keeping ones attention rooted here at the origin of things, one develops a deeper capacity to know who they are. Chapter 16 of the *Tao-te ching* defines this process as “returning to *ming*” in order to find enlightenment:

“While all things (*wan-wu* 萬物) contend with one another (*ping-tso* 並作),
Only I (*wu-i* 吾以) perceive this Return (*kuan-fu* 觀復).
For as much as things tend to proliferate (*fu-wu yün-yün* 夫物芸芸),
They will all return to their root (*ko fu-kuei ch'i-ken* 各復歸其根).
To return to this root (*kuei-ken* 歸根) is to find peace (*yen-ching* 曰靜).
This is called (*shih-wei* 是謂) Returning to Destiny (*fu-ming* 復命).
Returning to Destiny (*fu-ming* 復命) is called Constant (*yüeh-ch'ang* 曰常).
To know this Constant is called Enlightenment (*yüeh-ming* 曰明).”¹⁶

This first step in Taoist meditation stills the mind, quiets the emotions and prepares one for developing True Yang (the Source-ch'i) which can then be used to bolster Ch'i in general. In healing as well as in martial situations, one needs to be grounded (Yin) so that a true assessment of the situation is possible. In addition, the proper kind of Ch'i needs to be added to the situation so that there is enough positive Ch'i available in order to ameliorate negative Ch'i which otherwise will contribute to the eventual destruction of the body. For this purpose, the type of Ch'i necessary needs to be continually adaptable to changing situations. In acupuncture, this type of Ch'i is the Source Yang Ch'i, and the Kidney *ching*. Through more sustained focus (at one sitting as well as over long term practice) the True Yang develops strongly and can be used for this purpose. True Yang provides extra Ch'i necessary for healing as well as extra Yang-ch'i for martial activity.

The use of *ming-men* to develop Ch'i, especially Yang-ch'i is well-known in Ch'i-kung and Martial Art circles. What is not so well-known is some of its deeper aspects. These include bringing oneself into balance between the physical and spiritual in order to align the personal with the Divine Will, building and balancing the personal will, developing Wisdom, and attaining a universal power beyond that accessible by the mere strengthening of Ch'i.

The idea of using *ming-men* to align the personal with the Divine Will stems from the ancient Mandate of Heaven where the spark of universal creativity, called Heaven in ancient times and synonymous with the Original-ch'i of the cosmos, impregnates the origin of individual human life. Although this impregnation begins at the event of birth for each human, the importance of the Origin in Ch'i development is that this original event transcends history in order to become ongoing and constantly accessible. The idea of knowing oneself has much greater implications when one enlarges their perspective from the immediate to the universal. Chapter 30 of the *Tao-te Ching* places ones personal life in correct relation to the universe at large (Tao) so that ones personal will blends with the Will of all rather than contend with it:

“The consequence of using up strength (*wu-chuang-tse* 物壯則) (contentiously) is to grow old (*lao* 老).
This is going against the Tao (*pu-tao* 不道).
What goes against the Tao (*pu-tao* 不道) cannot last (*tsao-i* 早已).”¹⁷

Not only does one waste energy and life by contending with Tao, one also loses the opportunity to grasp what is essential in the moment as well as in the meaning of life as a whole. The reason for this is that Heaven is constantly giving input by directing the creative impulse of life from within. To use ones will and “strength” in denial of this input is to cut ourselves off from the source of life itself. What we are, as well as what we are to become is inherent within the creative potential (*ching*) of Heaven's impulse

within. Using the will correctly so that we can manifest what we truly are in potential as opposed to an illusory idea of what that is, or to act blindly and mechanically results in what in ancient acupuncture was called the separation between Body and Mind, the spiritual cause of all disease. To act this way in a fight is to act without skill, awareness, or morality. Either way, these actions go against Tao, and cannot last. To balance the will is to balance what we are inside as pure and specifically potentized potential with what we are aware we want to be. The balanced Will is what brings the internal and the external, the spiritual and the mundane, into alignment. We can know the mundane in each moment, but not what it will be in the next because the characteristics of that moment are always changing. We cannot know the spiritual in the concrete way we can with the mundane because while spirit is always becoming, the mundane is always departing. We can only develop a relation with the spiritual, and by doing so, observe what comes up in order to place it in relation to the mundane world until they come together as truth. The spiritual world should be cultivated for what it is, a mystery. Its utility, as it says in Chapter 6 of the *Tao-te ching* is “not in its movement,” or what it can “do,” but the fact that it grounds us, as well as our movement in the absolute truth of existence.

The part of will that can be known is the Yang Will and is analogous to the Source-ch'i. The part of the will that cannot be known is the Yin Will and is analogous to the Original-ch'i, the “mysterious female” of the *Tao-te ching*. Knowing that *ming-men* is the place within the body where the Original-ch'i and the Source-ch'i, the Yin and Yang Wills come together is knowing the beginning secret of obtaining Wisdom which is knowing the importance of balancing these two forms of will. This is the type of Wisdom that can only be had through practice. One must place one's intention at *ming-men* regularly over a long period of time in order to gain this type of balance and self-knowledge. The type of High Virtue thought to accompany this Wisdom in ancient China was considered to be a “secret” or “concealed” virtue because those who were able to attain it did so through the paradox of renouncing it as a reward. In fact, one of China's early philosophers, Hsü-tzu, said that true inner power was only to be had through “yielding” and “giving up one's position.”¹⁸ The result of this practice leads one to become what is called an Authentic Person (*chen-jen* 真人), someone who could merge the natural and human realms by egolessly blending his power with theirs,¹⁹ and to be able to act in accordance with Tao.

At this higher level of practice the material and spiritual benefits of *ming-men* practice start to blend together. In ancient China these spiritual benefits were called *te* 德, while the material benefits were called *ling* 靈. Both are material and spiritual aspects of spiritual power. *Te* can be thought of as the Virtue, or Power, obtained when a person is fully aligned with *ming*.²⁰ Tao is the source, *te* is the power, and *ming* is the investiture as Destiny of that power in man who keeps it according to his constant alignment between Heaven and Earth. This alignment is made possible, not by doing anything special, but by simply being who one is, a child (Son) of Heaven, who according to the tradition, rules not by active ruling, but by non-ruling or simply “facing South,” the direction of the actively creative force.²¹

Other interpretations of *te* describe the power achieved through focus,²² and the ability or skill²³ in one that enables them to straighten or overcome difficulties.²⁴ These interpretations are derived from Chinese etymology which emphasizes the eye part of the character *te* which looks straight ahead, undeviating in its direction. The “Great Commentary” of the *I-ching* links *te* by *ming* to Heaven and Earth when the Great Person, *ta-jen* 大人, aligns himself with them:

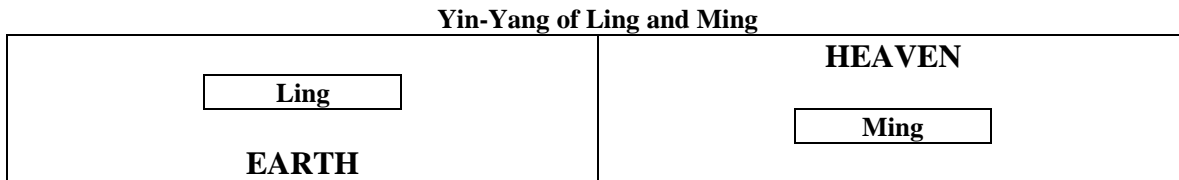
“The Great Man (Person) acts in advance of Heaven and Heaven does not contradict him, and when the Great Man follows Heaven, he adapts himself to the image of Heaven.”²⁵

It is at this stage that man becomes one of the three primal powers of the universe (together with Heaven and Earth) that enables him to act as a responsible member of one cosmic family.²⁶ In the Shang dynasty (1766-1154 BC), *te* was thought to be an activating power, the “inner heat” or illumination of the shaman which he uses in his battle against evil and sickness by giving him the ability to make Heaven respond, as in *Shi Jing* 256: “There is no Virtue that is not recompensed.”²⁷

Ling: Power of Grace

The connection that gives humans the ability to make Heaven respond is called *ling* 靈. *Ling-ch'i* 靈氣 is the capacity of humans to make Heaven respond, and in Japanese is called *Reiki*, a different pronunciation, but the same characters and meaning. In modern times *Reiki* is a method of Ch'i-kung healing in which one draws upon Heaven's power in order to make changes. Etymologically, *ling* refers to the ability of ancient shamans to create rain. Since rain is one of the primary natural methods in which Heaven nourishes living things, it symbolizes any type of response from the spiritual realm that comes in the form of blessing to human action and intent.

In acupuncture there are six acupuncture points with the word *ling* as part of their names, all in some way related to the spirit of the Heart, or Consciousness. The area above the diaphragm in acupuncture is ruled by the Heart and correlates to the South, while the area below the diaphragm is ruled by the Kidney and correlates to the North. The Original-ch'i is planted firmly into the physical body at birth at *ming-men* in the center of the Kidneys, the area of quiescence and non-activity. The message of the Original-ch'i encoded within each person is like a form of spiritual DNA which calls a person forth to be what they are a child of Heaven. After birth this message is consistently relayed from the Kidneys to the Heart so that we can have knowledge and awareness of what that message is. The Yang spirit of the Heart is called *shen* 神 and represents conscious awareness. The Yin spirit of the Heart is called *ling* and represents the unconscious, but highly spiritualized connection of each person's individual spirit to the universal spirit at large. *Ming* is Heaven's spirit in body, whereas *ling* is the human spirit within the body of Heaven. If Heaven is the Yang side of the *T'ai-chi* symbol, and Earth is the Yin side, then *ling* and *ming* are the dots within each side that make the diagram live.



In acupuncture, one place where *ling* and *ming* come together is the acupuncture point Kidney 24 (K24) which is called *Ling-hsü* 靈虛, or "Spirit Emptiness." K24 is located on the Kidney meridian in the area of the Heart (approximately one rib space below the nipple at the junction of the sternum). The most ancient acupuncture point compendium, the *Chia I-ching*, uses this point for fullness in the chest with coughing, difficulty breathing, and inability to get food to the stomach.²⁸ Another important text on acupuncture points uses K24 for "the sensation of having two opposed wills."²⁹ And yet another source on the use of acupuncture points states that K24 can be used for the resurrection of a depleted and flattened spirit.³⁰

Obviously K24 functions both ways, again like a gate that allows energy to come in as well as go out. In this way, K24 is the pivot between *ming* which rises up from *ming-men/tan-t'ien* to the Heart area and the *shen* of the Heart. *Ling* comes into being when *ming* is allowed to emanate from the depths of the inner sacred world and into the mundane world of everyday life through the virtue of the balanced Heart. The most critical aspect of this Heart balance here is that between control and spontaneity. The Yang spirit of the Heart, *shen* is likened by the ancient texts to the emperor who controls the officials of State, like the consciousness of the Heart, through the virtue of its being in non-action. When the Heart is free to be itself, it has the capacity to bring ones internal "Mandate" into particular existence, thus the "resurrection of a depleted and flattened spirit." On the other hand, when the Heart is stuck in illusory perceptions of self and other, and mired in false attitudes and belief systems, K24 can clear these away so the Heart is emptied and the ability to respond naturally is restored. These false attitudes and belief systems contend with ones True Nature so that it appears as though one has two wills. Over time, this conflict can impact upon the body creating the symptoms of fullness in the chest and related physical symptoms mentioned in the *Chia I-ching*.

When *ming* and *shen* are in balance, *ling* is operative and what is called the wholeness of Original Nature is returned. When one can operate from this self-so, *tzu-jan* 自然, aspect of being, then

one is aligned properly between Heaven and Earth, to the degree that all things will come to nurture this balance. In Chapter 22 of the *Tao-te ching*, it says:

“If you have really attained wholeness, everything will flock to you.”³¹

According to Cohen, this is when

“The continuous influx of universal qi helps to create a new self, a seed or embryo of wisdom and long life.”³²

This “embryo of wisdom” develops at *ming-men/tan-t’ien* through the balance of the Yin and Yang Willis attained through daily meditative focus, and brings one to a certain relation to life characterized by 1) “gaining by losing,” 2) “effortless action,” and 3) “spontaneity.” These three approaches define the correct relation to life in the *Tao-te ching*, in order to become either a Great Person, *ta-jen* 大人, or an Authentic Person, *chen-jen* 真人. In the *Tao-te ching*, the attainment of this stature was considered the goal of human endeavor, and the most favorable position to place oneself in, yet could be attained only through a characteristically Taoist paradox. One must “gain by losing,” act without effort, and be spontaneous. In order to receive benefit from Heaven, one must first achieve *te*, the power of self-so-ness, and then *ling*, the capacity to apply *te* in specific situations. But to achieve *te* and *ling*, one must establish a correct relation to spirit, i.e., Heaven, so that Heaven can work through man for the good of all. In order to use Heaven and receive Heaven’s blessing, one must first subordinate themselves to Heaven’s instructions implanted within as *ming*. When *ming* stands in right relation to the Heart and its desires, so that the desires of the Heart reflect the manifestation of spirit unfolding from within as *ming*, inner conflict is resolved. When the spirit of the Heart which is born from Heaven can be emptied of extraneous worldly influence, it is free to perceive that secret path within that grants the power to resonate inner potential with presented possibilities from the external world. When one is capable of placing themselves in resonance with the universe, their actions are effortless and spontaneous. As it says in Chapter 51 of the *Tao-te ching*:

“Tao gives things life,
Virtue cultivates them,
Things give them shape, and
Circumstance perfects them.
Therefore, everything without exception venerates Tao and praises Te.
The veneration of Tao and praise of Te, however, is not commanded, but arises spontaneously,
tzu-jan 自然.”³³

In fact, one appreciates *te* because it arises spontaneously, by virtue of its transcending the limited power of human effort in isolation from the whole. The virtue of acting in concert with the whole is the relative lack of effort things then require. In Chapter 63 of the *Tao-te ching* it says:

“Act without action (*we-wu-wei* 爲無爲), . . .
Serve without effort, . . .
Plan for difficult things when they are easy,
Take care of big things while they are small. . . .”³⁴

Concentration on *ming-men/tan-t’ien* takes ones attention away from the extraneous, and puts it on the center where things of the world fall into place with the spirit within. The dualities between action and non-action, effort and effortlessness, and gaining and losing blend together. Ones reference point changes from outer directedness to inward directedness even as one applies oneself to daily life. This reference point is reminiscent of the serenity prayer in modern AA groups:

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,

And the Wisdom to know the difference.”

Ming-men/tan-t'ien is both the location and function in the human body where the power to change, as well as the Wisdom to know the difference between what can be changed and what should be left alone resides. The cultivation of *ming-men/tan-t'ien*, therefore, brings about the capacity to be truly authentic beings, ones whose motivation in life is directed from ones True Nature within, and not by the manipulative efforts of those who would seek their egoistic gain by controlling others from without. *Ming-men/tan-t'ien* acts like a wellspring of energy and truth accessible to all. In ancient Taoism, the “Return to *ming*” was essential in order for one to find renewal in the source of self at one with the source of all things. *Ming-men/tan-t'ien* is literally the Fountain of Youth that one finds, not by traveling the world, but by looking deeply within.

Glossary

Ching (pronounced jing)
“Structive Potential.”

Ling
The ability to make Heaven respond; the unconscious, but highly spiritualized connection of each person’s individual spirit to the universal spirit at large.

Ming
Fate, Destiny, or Mandate depending on the context. Associated with the Mandate of Heaven, the proclamation from Heaven through which kings received their destiny.

Ming-men (pronounced ming-mun)
“Gate of Destiny,” the energetic source for the entire Body, Mind, and Spirit. Usually associated with the acupuncture point Governing Vessel 4 between the second and third lumbar vertebrae, but also with the points Conception Vessel 4 and Conception Vessel 5, or between them deep within the center of the lower abdomen. An emergence point of Yin and Yang Ch’i which has the capacity to balance the two. The place of conversion between the Original Ch’i and the Source Ch’i. The prenatal, sacred, Yang, aspect of *ming-men/tan-t'ien*.

Ming-men/tan-t'ien (pronounced ming-mun dan-tian)
One of the most important energy centers; located two inches below the navel, and between the skin and the ventral surface of the spine.

Original/*yüan-ch'i* 元氣
Self as pure potential, synonymous with Kidney Yin.

Shen (pronounced shun)
Spirit, conscious awareness.

Source/*yüan-ch'i* 原氣
Self as the movement toward actual, synonymous with Kidney Yang.

Tan-t'ien (pronounced dan-tian)
The postnatal, mundane, Yin, aspect of *ming-men/tan-t'ien*.

Tao-te ching (pronounced Dao-duh-jing)
The *Classic of the Way and Its Power*, the first and most important book in Chinese Taoism.

Te (pronounced duh)

An inner magico-spiritual power; moral force for the Confucians, charisma or efficacy of the spiritually evolved person for the Taoists. The Virtue, or Power, obtained when a person is fully aligned with *ming*.

Tzu-jan 自然 (pronounced like dzu-run)

Self-so-ness, spontaneity.

Author's Biography

Dennis Willmont has been practicing Oriental medicine in conjunction with *T'ai-chi ch'üan* and Taoist meditation since 1971. From 1977 to 1984 he directed the *Training Program in Shiatsu and Acupressure* at *The Acupuncture and Shiatsu Therapy Center* in Boston. He currently maintains a practice in acupuncture and Chinese herbs in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. Ideas and information in this article are derived from Mr. Willmont's extensive research into the cultural background of ancient acupuncture. Specifically, this article is adapted from a chapter in his work in progress called *Many Paths, One Center: Body, Mind and Spirit Integration in the Early Development of Acupuncture*.

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