



# The Perfection of Health in Chinese Medicine

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# Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic

## History of the Reference Text

- ▶ Compilation of medical literature dated from 700 BC to 100 AD.
- ▶ First appeared in the imperial library catalogue in 111 AD.
- ▶ Became fragmented and lost in the Chinese Dark Age 200-600 AD.
- ▶ Fragments were gathered, compiled, supplemented, and edited by a Taoist practitioner, Wang Bing, in 762 AD.
- ▶ The Imperial Court sponsored a national project to gather all available copies, compile, proofread, and published an authoritative edition in 1069 AD. This copy survives to the present.

# Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic

## Content of the Reference Text

- ▶ Total of 2 collections, 18 scroll (1 lost), and 162 chapters (9 lost).
- ▶ Written in a format of questions and answers.
- ▶ It serves as the very foundation of Chinese Medicine. It presents the foundational medical theories, human anatomy, physiology, pathology, epidemiology, clinical science, clinical diagnosis, clinical reasoning, clinical strategy & treatment... etc.
- ▶ It is especially important for Acupuncture – this work defines the location of acupuncture points, five systems of acupuncture channels, acupuncture needles, acupuncture techniques... etc.

# First Question in the Inner Canon

## Chapter 1, “Discourse of the True [Man] in High Antiquity”

余聞上古之人，春秋皆度百歲，而動作不衰；今時之人，年半百而動作皆衰者，時世異耶，人將失之耶？

“I have heard that the people of the High Antiquity, in [the sequence of] spring and autumn, all exceeded one hundred years; yet, there was no weakening in their movements and activities.

As for the people of today, after half of a hundred years, there was weakening in all their movements and activities.

Is this because the times and world are different? Or is it that the people have lost this [capacity]?”

(trans. Unschuld/ed. Tsaur)

# The Answer to the First Question (I)

## Chapter 1, “Discourse of the True [Man] in High Antiquity”

上古之人，其知道者，法於陰陽，和於術數，食飲有節，起居有常，不妄作勞，故能形與神俱，而盡終其天年，度百歲乃去。

“The people of high antiquity, those who knew the Way, they modeled [their behavior] on yin and yang and they complied with the arts and the calculations. [Their] eating and drinking was moderate. [Their] rising and resting had regularity. They did not tax [themselves] with meaningless work.

Hence, they were able to keep physical appearance and spirit together, and to exhaust the years [allotted by] heaven.

Their life span exceeded one hundred years before they departed.”

(trans. Unschuld)

# The Answer to the First Question (II)

## Chapter 1, “Discourse of the True [Man] in High Antiquity”

今時之人不然也，以酒為漿，以妄為常，醉以入房，以欲竭其精，以耗散其真，不知持滿，不時御神，務快其心，逆於生樂，起居無節，故半百而衰也。

The fact that people of today are different is because they take wine as an [ordinary] beverage, and they adopt absurd [behavior] as regular [behavior]. They are drunk when they enter the [women's] chambers. Through their lust they exhaust their essence, through their wastefulness they dissipate their true [qi].

They do not know how to be content and they engage their spirit when it is not the right time. They make every effort to please their hearts, [but] they oppose the [true] happiness of life. Rising and resting miss their terms.

Hence, it is [only] one half of a hundred [years] and they weaken.

(trans. Unschuld/ed. Tsaur)

# The Answer to the First Question (III)

## Chapter 1, “Discourse of the True [Man] in High Antiquity”

夫上古聖人之教下也，皆謂之虛邪賊風，避之有時，恬惔虛无，真氣從之，精神內守，病安從來。

“Now, when the sages of high antiquity taught those below, they always spoke to them [about the following].

The depletion evil & the robber wind: there are [specific] times when to avoid them.

Quiet peacefulness & absolute emptiness: the true qi follows [these states].

When essence and spirit are guarded internally, where could a disease come from?”

(trans. Unschuld/ed. by Tsaur)

# The Answer to the First Question (IV)

## Chapter 1, “Discourse of the True [Man] in High Antiquity”

是以志閑而少欲，心安而不懼，形勞而不倦，氣從以順，各從其欲，皆得所願。  
故美其食，任其服，樂其俗，高下不相慕，其民故曰朴。

“Hence, the mind is relaxed and one has few desires. The heart is at peace and one is not in fear. The physical appearance is taxed, but is not tired. The qi follows [its appropriate course] and therefrom results compliance: everything follows one’s wishes; in every respect one achieves what one longs for.

Hence, they considered their food delicious, they accepted their clothes, and they enjoyed the common. Those of higher and those of lower status did not envy one another. The people, therefore, were called natural.”

(trans. Unschuld/ed. Tsaur)

# The Answer to the First Question (V)

## Chapter 1, “Discourse of the True [Man] in High Antiquity”

是以嗜欲不能勞其目，淫邪不能惑其心，愚智賢不肖不懼於物，故合於道。所以能年皆度百歲，而動作不衰者，以其德全不危也。

“Hence, cravings and desires could not tax their eyes. The excess evil could not confuse their hearts

The stupid and the knowledgeable, the exemplary and the non-exemplary, none was in fear of other beings.

Hence, they were one with the Way. That by which all of them were able to exceed a lifespan of one hundred years, while their movements and activities did not weaken, [that was the fact that] their virtue was perfect and they did not meet with danger.”

(trans. Unschuld/ed. Tsaur)

# Short Summary

## Answer to the First Question

### Why is it that there are illness, premature aging, and premature death?

- ▶ “The fact that people of today are different is because... they adopt absurd [behavior] as regular [behavior]. ”

#### Physically

- ▶ “They take wine as an [ordinary] beverage... they are drunk when they enter the [women’s] chambers.”
- ▶ “Rising and resting miss their terms.”

#### Mentally

- ▶ “Through their lust they exhaust their essence... they engage their spirit when it is not the right time.”

#### Spiritually

- ▶ “People make every effort to please their mind, [but] they oppose the [true] happiness of life.”

(trans. Unschuld)

# Short Summary

How do we become healthy?

“Now, when the sages of high antiquity taught those below, they always spoke to them [about the following].

The depletion evil & the robber wind: there are [specific] times when to avoid them.

**Quiet peacefulness & absolute emptiness:** the true qi follows [these states].

When essence and spirit are guarded internally, where could a disease come from?”

(trans. Unschuld/ed. Tsaur)



# Four Ages/Yuga

THE GRADUAL DECLINE IN SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

# High Antiquity

## Satya Yuga: the Age of Truth and Perfection

In the High Antiquity there were True Men.

They upheld the heaven and earth, they grasped the yin and yang, they exhaled and inhaled [refined] essences.

**Being unconditioned**, they guarded their spirit. Muscles and flesh were like one.

Hence, they were able to achieve longevity surpassed that of the heaven and earth, without an end in time. Such was their life in the Way.

(trans. Unschuld/ed. Tsaur)

Spiritually: All men were saintly, they were not required to perform religious ceremonies. The Vedas were one. All mankind could attain to supreme blessedness.

Mentally: Humans were honest, youthful, vigorous, erudite and virtuous. There was no decrepitude or fear of anything.

Physically: Humans were gigantic, powerfully built, There was no disease. Human lifespan was 100,000 years and humans tended to have hundreds or thousands of sons or daughters.

Society: There was no agriculture or mining as the earth yielded those riches on its own. Weather was pleasant and everyone was happy. There were no religious sects.

# Middle Antiquity

## Treta Yuga: the Age of Diminishing Virtues

In the Middle Antiquity, there were the *Attained\** Men.

They were of pure virtues and of full accord with the Way. They lived in harmony with yin and yang, and attuned themselves with the four seasons.

They left the world and they departed from the mundane. They accumulated essence and developed fully their spirit.

They roamed between the heaven and earth. Their vision and hearing went beyond the eight reaches. This way, they added to their lifespan and were powerful.

They, too, are considered as the True Men.

(trans. Unschuld/ed. Tsaur)

\*至 zhì: means “arrived, perfect, highest” – Unschuld rendered it as *accomplished*.

Spiritually/Mentally/Physically:

People become slightly diminished compared to their predecessors.

Physically: Average lifespan of humans is around 1000-10,000 years

Society: Many emperors rise to dominance and conquer the world. Wars become frequent. Weather begins to change to extremities. Oceans and deserts are formed. Agriculture, labour and mining become existent.

# Near Antiquity

## Dvapara Yuga: the Age of the Tamasic Taints

Next, there were the Sagely Men.

They situated themselves with harmony between the heaven and earth. They understood and complied with the principles of the eight winds. They moderated their cravings and their desires within the mundane world. Their heart knew no anger.

In their actions, they had no desire to disassociate themselves from the world. They were clothed and served position of power; yet, in their bearing, they had no desire to observe that of the mundane.

Externally, they did not tax their physical body by committing any affairs; internally, they did not suffer from any [unnecessary] pondering. They made every effort to achieve peaceful relaxation and they sought self-realization as achievement.

Their physical body did not deteriorate and their essence and spirit did not dissipate. They, too, could reach an [age] of hundreds.

(trans. Unschild/ed. Tsaur)

Spiritually/Mentally/Physically:

People aren't as strong as their ancestors.

Mentally: Humans are discontent and fight each other.

Physically: Diseases become rampant. People still possess characteristics of youth in old age. Average lifespan of humans is around a few centuries.

Society: Vedas are divided into four parts.

# Contemporary Age

## Kali Yuga: the Age of Darkness and Ignorance

Next, there are the Exemplary Men.

They abide by the law of the heaven and earth. They take after the sun and moon. They identify the star arrays and the North Star. They choose to follow or counteract the yin and yang. They discern the differences of the four seasons.

They **WILL** follow after the [True Men] of the High Antiquity, and **WILL** one day reunion with the Way.

They, too, will be able to elongate their life to the fullest of their time.

(trans. Tsaur)

Spiritually/Mentally:

People become sinners and lack virtue. They become slaves to their passions.

Physically:

Humans eat forbidden and dirty food. Average lifespan of people is barely 100 years, though, by the end of the Yuga, it will be as low as 20 years.

Society:

Society falls into disuse and people become liars and hypocrites. Knowledge is lost and scriptures are diminished.

The environment is polluted, water and food become scarce. Wealth is heavily diminished. Families become non-existent.



# Health: An Analysis from the View of Spiritual Training

REVERSING THE DECLINING TREND OF THE YUGA

# Contemporary Age

## The Cultivation of Health of a Novice Practitioner

Next, there are the Exemplary Men.

They abide by the law of the heaven and earth. They take after the sun and moon. They identify the star arrays and the North Star. They choose to follow or counteract the yin and yang. They discern the differences of the four seasons.

**They WILL follow after the [True Men] of the High Antiquity, and WILL one day reunion with the Way.**

They, too, will be able to elongate their life to the fullest of their time.

(trans. Tsaur)

This is the Taoist cultivation of  
**“Ming – life,” physical cultivation.**

This is about how one observes the physical world, develops an understanding toward it, and then cultivate himself according to its physical laws.

The idea is to begin one’s spiritual journey with the support of a healthy physical body.

It is equivalent to the practice of **puñña** and **sīla**, where through accumulating merits, it supports further spiritual development.

# Near Antiquity

## The Cultivation of Health of a Journeyman Practitioner

Next, there were the Sagely Men.

They situated themselves with harmony between the heaven and earth. **They understood and complied with the principles of the eight winds. They moderated their cravings and their desires within the mundane world. Their heart knew no anger.**

In their actions, they had no desire to disassociate themselves from the world. They were clothed and served in positions of power; yet, in their bearing, they had no desire to observe that of the mundane.

Externally, they did not tax their physical body by committing any affairs; internally, they did not suffer from any [unnecessary] pondering. **They made every effort to achieve peaceful relaxation and they sought self-realization as achievement.**

Their physical body did not deteriorate and their essence and spirit did not dissipate. They, too, could reach an [age] of hundreds.

(trans. Unschuld/ed. Tsaur)

This is the Taoist cultivation of  
**“Xing – human nature,” mental cultivation.**

**Eight Winds** (Mahaprajanaparamita sastra):  
*“The eight winds are: pleasure and pain, praise and blame, fame and disrepute, gain and loss... their function is to provoke the mind of men.”*

This is when one looks into his mind. He understands and takes active step to overcome the grasp of anger and lust, with the aim of self-realization.

It is equivalent to the practice of **samadhi**, where through meditation, one look inward and takes control of their anger and lust.

# Middle Antiquity

## The Cultivation of Health of a Master Practitioner

In the Middle Antiquity, there were the *Attained\** Men.

They were of pure virtues and of full accord with the Way. They lived in harmony with yin and yang, and attuned themselves with the four seasons.

**They left the world and they departed from the mundane.** They accumulated essence and developed fully their spirit.

**They roamed between the heaven and earth. Their vision and hearing went beyond the eight reaches.** This way, they added to their lifespan and were powerful.

They, too, are considered as the True Men.

(trans. Unschuld/ed. Tsaur)

\*至 zhì: means “arrived, perfect, highest” – Unschuld rendered it as accomplished.

In term of Taoist cultivation, this is the  
**“the True Men of the Post-natal Origin”**

This is the ultimate state of the Taoist spiritual quest, where through spiritual development one is entirely with the Tao.

It is equivalent to the practice of **pañña** and **wisdom**, where through Vipassana, one sees directly the nature of realities, departs from the mundane, and attains the sainthood.

# High Antiquity

## The Perfection of Health, the Ultimate State of Being

In the High Antiquity there were True Men.

They upheld the heaven and earth, they grasped the yin and yang, they exhaled and inhaled [refined] essences.

**Being unconditioned**, they guarded their spirit. Muscles and flesh were like one.

Hence, they were able to achieve longevity surpassed that of the heaven and earth, without an end in time. Such was their life in the Way.

(trans. Unschuld/ed. Tsaur)

In term of Taoist cultivation, this is  
**“the True Men of the Pre-natal Origin”**

This is the ideal state of being in Taoist belief, where one is simply the Tao.

It is equivalent to the ultimate, unconditioned state of **parinibbāna**.

# 雜阿含經卷十五 第三八九經

Saṃyukta Āgama, Vol.15, Sutra 389

如是我聞：

一時，佛住波羅[木奈]國仙人住處鹿野苑中。

爾時，世尊告諸比丘：「有四法成就，名曰大醫王者，所應王之具、王之分。何等為四？一者善知病，二者善知病源，三者善知病對治，四者善知治病已，當來更不動發。云何名良醫善知病？謂良醫善知如是如是種種病，是名良醫善知病。云何良醫善知病源？謂良醫善知此病因風起、癘陰起、涎唾起、眾冷起、因現事起、時節起，是名良醫善知病源。云何良醫善知病對治？謂良醫善知種種病，應塗藥、應吐、應下、應灌鼻、應熏、應取汗。如是比種種對治，是名良醫善知對治。云何良醫善知治病已，於未來世永不動發？謂良醫善治種種病，令究竟除，於未來世永不復起，是名良醫善知治病，更不動發。

「如來、應、等正覺為大醫王，成就四德，療眾生病，亦復如是。云何為四？謂如來知此是苦聖諦如實知、此是苦集聖諦如實知、此是苦滅聖諦如實知、此是苦滅道跡聖諦如實知。諸比丘！彼世間良醫於生根本對治不如實知，老、病、死、憂、悲、惱、苦根本對治不如實知，如來、應、等正覺為大醫王，於生根本知對治如實知，於老、病、死、憂、悲、惱、苦根本對治如實知，是故如來、應、等正覺名大醫王。」

佛說此經已，諸比丘聞佛所說，歡喜奉行。

# Buddha, the Great Medicine King

## *Excerpts of Samyukta Āgama Sutra 389*

For those who have the four achievements, they are called the Great Medicine King.

- ▶ First, he knows well about the diseases
- ▶ Second, he knows well the source of the diseases
- ▶ Third, he knows well how to counter and treat the diseases
- ▶ Fourth, he knows well how to treat the diseases and prevent it from occurring

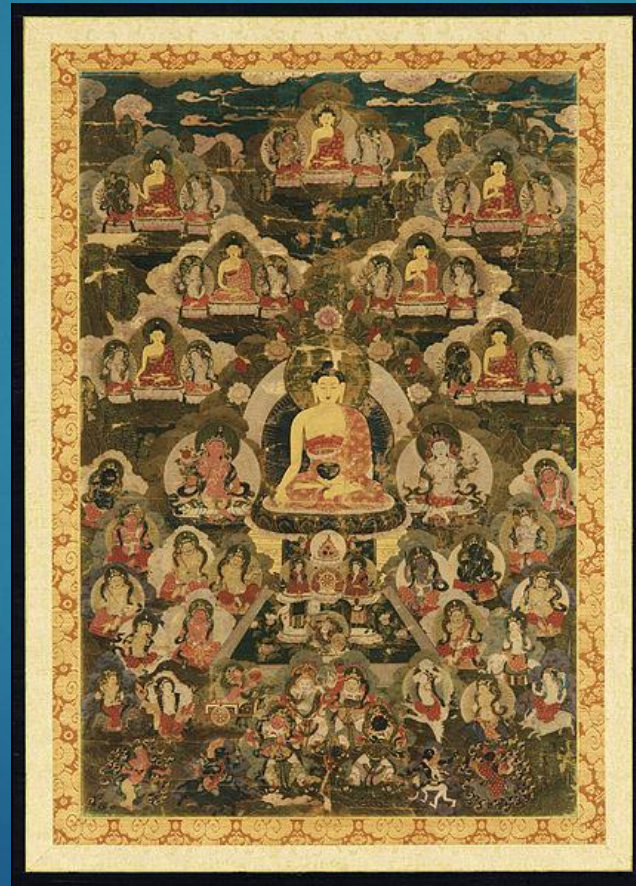
The Tathāgata, Arahant, Fully Enlightened One is the Great Medicine King, with the four achievements, able to heal the diseases of all sentient beings.

- ▶ [First], the Tathāgata knows “This is the Noble Truth of Dukkha” as real
- ▶ [Second], the Tathāgata knows “ This is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Dukkha” as real
- ▶ [Third], the Tathāgata knows “This is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Dukkha” as real
- ▶ [Fourth], the Tathāgata knows “This is the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Dukkha” as real

The Tathāgata, Arahant, Fully Enlightened One is the Great Medicine King, who knows how to counter and treat at its root the old age, illness, death, worries, grief, frustration, and pain... thus, [he] is called the Great Medicine King. (trans. Tsaur)

# Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha

“Medicine Master” Buddha



Thank You!