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Body, Mind & Spirit

The Secret of Everlasting Life: The First Translation of the Ancient Chinese Text on Immortality
Richard Bertschinger
Singing Dragon
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There is a simple secret to everlasting life. In this fascinating work of Chinese alchemy, religion, and philosophy, Richard Bertschinger states it succinctly: "There is everlasting life, because there is no death; but if there is no death, there can be no life either! There is only one all-pervading and suffusing energy, which gives birth to and eventually consumes all things." Bertschinger studied with Taoist sage and Master Gia-fu Feng and is himself an acupuncturist, herbal healer, and teacher. From his research into the ancient text of *Can Dong Qi*, the author said that he found this body of work "was not only the oldest, but also the most revered, and the 'grand-daddy', as I call it, of them all. Also, it had never been translated, except as a chemical treatise."

The Secret synthesizes the wisdom of the alchemical tradition with better known aspects of Asian spirituality such as Dao (Tao Te Ching) and the Yi Jing (Book of Change). To a Westerner, Chinese philosophy can be quite perplexing with its many arcane terms, which are part and parcel of Bertschinger's work. But in essence, meditation is the technique for understanding and ultimately merging with the concept of everlasting life. "The genius of the Chinese sages was that they found a method, a technique akin to Indian Yoga, by which this experience could be cultivated, taught and developed, explains Bertschinger. "Of course, all this is now being verified by modern research, brain imaging and such like, and work on neuro-transmitters."

Alchemy, or turning lead into gold, is a metaphor for transforming body into spirit, just as yin and yang, midnight and midday, the tiger and the dragon, and other systems like numerology and the hexagrams of the Yi Jing are symbols for accessing the process of awakening the "congenital energy" of immortality. On the most basic level this is accomplished through control of breathing, and from there, to training the mind to become still and open. The

alchemy masters cited in *The Secret of Everlasting Life* speak of a mystical "inner Elixir." One wrote, "Hence once the Elixir is formed you must carefully protect and take care of it…every worry must be put out of your mind and no new projects must be begun." "Nourish yourself thus within," writes another master, "Tranquil and still in the void…Observe it there, the un-obvious – so close by and easy to seek."

According to Bertschinger, the Chinese believe that "any mechanism will last longer if it's cared for," so preserving our bodies through stillness and meditation is not just mystical, it's practical; and his translation reveals the technique for accomplishing it.

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