



The Tao

The Chinese word Tao literally means path or way, but has come to also refer to the essence of reality from which all things arise. The eternal Tao is our own true nature; indeed, Tao is nature! The Tao that can be spoken of is not the true Tao, for the Tao is beyond words and concepts. Indeed Taoists meditate to empty their minds of all concepts. Rather than contemplating the words of some sacred scripture, the Taoist would prefer to meditate by a stream and be enlightened by the eloquence of the flowing water. Indeed, nature demonstrates much wisdom. Sometimes the Tao has been referred to as the "watercourse way". A person of the Tao is said to flow like water. With a clear open mind, unfettered by plans and goals, the person of the Tao simply flows without hesitation around any obstacles.



Lao Tse

The most famous Taoist writing is the Tao Te Ching, written by Lao Tse (sometime between the fourth and sixth centuries BCE). One story has it that he was fed up with all the corruption and politics in the Emperor's court, and left all that behind to go meditate in the mountains. The Emperor ordered a border guard to not allow him to leave until he had written down his wisdom for the benefit of others. The first sentence of this poetic and often cited work is a sort of disclaimer. It's often translated as "The Tao that can be expressed in words is not the true Tao". Words can be used to point, but don't get too caught up in the words. Many famous "Chinese sayings" originated in the Tao Te Ching. To get a better feeling for Taoism, and how it has influenced our own culture, consider the following viewpoints expressed in the Tao Te Ching (as pointed out in Wikipedia):

- Force begets force.
- Live simply.
- Material wealth doesn't enrich the spirit.
- Self-absorption and self-importance are vain and self-destructive.

- Victory in war is not glorious and not to be celebrated, but stems from devastation, and is to be mourned.
- The harder one tries, the more resistance one creates for oneself.
- The more one acts in harmony with the universe (the Mother of the myriad things), the more one will achieve, with less effort.
- The truly wise make little of their own wisdom for the more they know, the more they realize how little they know.
- Glorification of wealth, power and beauty beget crime, envy and shame.
- The qualities of flexibility and suppleness are superior to rigidity and strength.
- There's a time and place for everything.
- The dual aspects of nature complement each other instead of competing with each other — They are two faces of the same coin — one cannot exist without the other.
- The differences of opposite polarities — e.g., the differences between male and female, light and dark, strong and weak, etc. — help us to understand and appreciate the universe.
- Humility is the highest virtue.
- Knowing oneself is a virtue.
- Envy is our calamity; overindulgence is our plight.
- The more you go in search of an answer, the less you will understand.
- Know when it's time to stop. If you don't know then stop when you are done.

When Buddhism traveled from India into China, it found a strong resonance in the native Taoist philosophy. And Buddhism provided meditation techniques that Taoists found useful in helping them realize the Tao. And thus Zen was born. Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of Zen (called Ch'an in Chinese), came from India into China, where he spent 10 years facing the wall in meditation in the Shaolin Temple (a Taoist monastery). Indeed, the first Zen monks in China were also Taoist priests. Much of the flavor of Zen comes from this strong Taoist influence.



Bodhidharma, a woodblock print
by Yoshitoshi, 1887

In the West Taoism has had an increasing impact. The hippies of the 60's were strongly attracted to Taoist principles. Lao Tse's words even became lyrics to the Beatle Song "Within You, Without You":

"Without going out of your door, You can know the ways of the world.
Without peeping through your window, you can see the Way of Heaven.
The farther you go, The less you know.
Thus, the Sage knows without traveling, Sees without looking, And achieves without struggle."

Further reading on Taoism:

Wikipedia's entry on Taoism: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taoism>

Good short summary of Taoism: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/taoism.htm>

Taoist Videos

Alan Watts videos:

Man in Nature:

http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=9D0643CDF6295275&search_query=Alan+Watts+%22Man+in+Nature%22

A Conversation with Myself - Part 1:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aufuwMiKmE&feature=related>

A Conversation with Myself - Part 2:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZ8WeLrtFnY&feature=related>

Eckhart Tolle, "The Tao Te Ching":

Part 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5LGgc6hyKQ>

Part 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Xt0KImkHnU>

Wayne Dyer: [Living the Wisdom of the Tao](#)

The early 70's Television Series, [Kung Fu](#) .

In this remarkable series, The Tao comes to the wild West!

[\[Back to Course Home Page \]](#)