

Taoism

Originated with Lao Tzu (604 BCE?)

Author of the *Tao Te Ching*, (*The Way and Its Power*)

Three meanings of "Tao"

1) The Way of Ultimate Reality

Indescribable, ineffable, transcendent, ground of all. Also immanent in the Universe.

2) The Way of the Universe

The norm and driving power in Nature. The ordering principle behind all life. It informs all things. Spirit rather than matter. Inexhaustible. Its workings are inevitable, but ultimately benign. Graceful, flowing, life-force and eternal law.

3) The Way of Human Life is actualized when human beings mesh with the Tao in the first and second sense.

Three Taoisms have existed in China. Like "Way", there are three meanings of "Power". The three species of Taoism correspond to these three senses of "power" All of these forms of Taoism are engaged in programs intended to facilitate the power of the way as it flows through human beings.

1) Philosophical Taoism: Efficient power. This form of Taoism is reflective rather than vitalizing. But, like the vitalizing forms, philosophical Taoism is a self-help program.. Philosophical Taoists try to conserve their Te by expending it efficiently. Vitality Taoists try to increase the supply of Te. Philosophical Taoism seeks knowledge of the kind that is power for the one who has it. This sort of knowledge may be called Wisdom. To possess Wisdom is if to know how to live so as to conserve life's vitality by not expending it in useless, draining ways, especially in friction and conflict. Its recommendations revolve around pure effectiveness or *wu wei* (sometimes translated as "inaction".) We will return to discussing Philosophical Taoism after discussing the vitalizing forms of Taoism.

2) Augmented Power : Hygiene and Yoga

"Adepts" are engaged in training programs. They are unwilling to settle for mere Philosophical Taoism. *Ch'I* is vital power of the Tao that courses through the

body/mind when it is not blocked. One must promote its flow. This will maximize the life force even to the point of achieving immortality. One must work on matter, movement and mind.

Matter. Perfection of diet as a source of ch'i. Some adepts have not only worked out medical uses of herbs, etc but allegedly have sought an elixir that would confer physical immortality.

Breathing exercises to draw ch'I from the atmosphere.

Programs of bodily movement such as Tai chi chuan (involving yin'yang philosophy) to draw Ch'I from the universe and remove obstacles to its flow. Goals of acupuncture are similar.

Meditation practices to remove obstacles to the flow of ch'I through the mind. Similar to Hinduism's raja yoga. Adepts hoped to accumulate ch'I that could then be transmitted mentally to the community to enhance its vitality and harmonize its affairs. To do this one must reverse all self-seeking and cultivate cleanliness of body and mind. Diminish disturbing emotions like desire, revulsion, grief, joy, annoyance, etc. Only peace and stillness are good for the mind. With the achievement of a perfectly calm and empty mind comes full realization, perception of the source of one's awareness. This provides supreme power to bring order and harmony to human affairs. Able to rule without being known to rule.

Religious Taoism

Deal with life's usual dangers and problems by means of the techniques of shamans, faith-healers, psychics. Several deities, including Lao Tzu. Formally instituted church, clergy, etc. Rituals having magical effects, not in the sense of working illusions or performing tricks to fool an audience but magic as genuine use of supernatural power to control or produce things.

The Mingling of the powers.

All three species of Taoism are concerned with maximizing the Tao's animating power. No sharp line separates them. They have interacted with each other.

Philosophical Taoism again.

Object is to align one's daily life to the Tao. Perfect a life of wu wei or non-action.

This does not literally mean doing nothing, idleness or mere abstention. Supreme activity and supreme relaxation must be combined in a creative quietude. Genuine creation comes not from conscious calculation and planning but emerges spontaneously from our subliminal self. The conscious mind must relax. Law of reversed effort. The harder one tries, the more likely one is to fail.

Wu wei is supreme action, simplicity and freedom resulting from allowing the self in tune with the Tao to act spontaneously. Pure effectiveness.. Requires cultivating extraordinary skill. No strain. Unforced. Seemingly effortless. Story of Prince's cook.

The natural phenomenon most closely resembling the Tao is water. Also like wu wei.