

Taoism

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Taoism (aka. Daoism) was developed in China by a man named Lao Tzu (also spelled Lao Tze, Laozi, Laotze, Laotzu). He lived at the same time that Confucius did, in the 6th century BCE, toward the latter part of the Zhou Dynasty. Lao Tzu, like Confucius, sought a way to avoid the constant warfare that was plaguing the Zhou Dynasty.

The Development of Taoism

•Lao Tzu, like Confucius, lived in difficult times, with constant warfare. He believed that people could find happiness and peace from *within* – regardless of one's personal economic or social success, and regardless of the political unrest in the country.



•Lao Tzu wrote his ideas in a book called the *Tao Te Ching*. The ideas in this book are considered to be the basis of Taoism.

•Taoism, like Confucianism, is not a religion according to western definitions, but it does have an intensely spiritual and meditative aspect to it. Ultimately, Taoism might be considered *pantheistic* – a religion that identifies God with the universe and with nature.

Symbol of Taoism

•Yin/Yang represents the opposing forces in the universe which exist together in a natural flow. Yin is dark, feminine, passive and earthly. Yang is light, masculine, active and heavenly. Yin & Yang help define each other, and as such, each contains a small bit of the other.



The Tao

•The Tao is literally "*the way*". It is the mysterious natural order of the universe. The Tao has no exact characteristics, yet it is not nothingness – rather it is everythingness. It is present everywhere and in all things.

•While the Tao cannot be defined, it can be felt and experienced. Laws of nature are not discussed, defined or taught to animals, they simply exist and are understood.

•Animals exist in harmony with nature. They understand their place, and they do what comes naturally to them. Like the flowing of a river, living in harmony with nature is effortless and peaceful.



•Nature, admittedly, is not always peaceful.




Storms are violent, and cause death and destruction, but this is part of the way – the natural ebb and flow of environment.

•Likewise, life is filled with the ebb and flow of calm and stormy periods. Death is merely seen as a natural part of the life cycle – part of the Tao.

•When one is following the Tao, one is in synch with nature, and it just *feels* right, although it may be defy explanation.

The Purpose of Life

•The purpose of human life is to live in accordance with the Tao. This is achieved through a study of nature, and by leading a balanced life in tune with nature.



•Taoism teaches that harmony comes from balancing the opposite forces in nature – yin and yang. The Tao, literally, is the balance, and thus the way. The Taoist, therefore, does not oppose, does not strive, does not struggle, but just goes with the Tao.

•A Taoist would practice *wu-wei*, or "action through non-action". The best course of action is often to do nothing but wait and see how events unfold, so as to better discern the proper path.

•Some common values include:

- Focusing attention on the body through diet, exercises & mindfulness
- Practicing humility & modesty to cut through the superficial
- Eliminating pride, greed, unnecessary action and worldly ambitions
- Behaving in a moral way that is in harmony with the Tao

•Death is seen as just another aspect of the Tao – it is simply a transformation from being into non-being – from Yin into Yang. It is neither to be feared nor to be desired.

•Unlike many other religions, Taoism has an individual and independent focus. Each person is to find their own way. No one can really help another.

•Finally, a Taoist believed it impossible to have good without bad, pleasure without pain, and thus, would not brag about good fortune nor complain about bad fortune.



View of Government?

•Taoists believe that the government that governs least, governs best. According to the principle of *wu wei*, a ruler's job was not to make policy and enforce it on the citizens. Rather, a ruler's job was to allow the people to govern themselves, and support them in achieving what they naturally desire.

Co-existence with Confucianism

•Although Taoism had a very different view of government from Confucianism, most people found a way to tolerate both or to be both. Confucianism was a guide for learning, relationships and government, while Taoism was a private philosophy.

•People were often privately Taoist, and in their public life, Confucian.

Impact of Taoism

•Art - Chinese painting reflects Taoist love of nature, and often depict serene mountains contrasted with violent storms. If humans appear in the paintings, they are small and almost insignificant compared to the power of nature.

•Medicine - Taoists believed that all people possessed 'chi', or life force. When the flow of chi is blocked in parts of the body, illness results. Thus practices like acupuncture, acupressure, and even Tai Chi were created to unblock chi and promote its healthy circulation.

•Martial Arts - Most martial arts incorporate ideas of yin & yang and the focused power of chi.

•Science - Taoists were also interested in immortality, and pursued scientific methods to discover an elixir of life.

