

Title: Conversations

Subtitle: Taoism

Second Subtitle: Taoism

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Quote:

Quotations:

"Be still like a mountain and flow like a great river." Lao Tse

"Different Chinese philosophers, writing probably in 5-4 centuries B.C., and a way of life that are nowadays known under the name of Taoism, the between man and the tendency or the course of natural world." Alan Watts Watercourse Way."

"We believe in the formless and eternal Tao, and we recognize all persons human constructs. We reject hatred, intolerance, and unnecessary violence love and learning, as we are taught by Nature. We place our trust and our may live in peace and balance with the Universe, both in this mortal life Western Reform Taoist Congregation 1

History of Taoism:

Tao (pronounced "Dow") can be roughly translated into English as path, or indefinable. It has to be experienced. It "refers to a power which envelops through all things, living and non-living. The Tao regulates natural processes in the Universe. It embodies the harmony of opposites (i.e. there would be light without dark, no male without female.)" 2

The founder of Taoism is believed by many to be Lao-Tse (604-531 BCE), Confucius. (Alternate spellings: Lao Tze, Lao Tsu, Lao Tzu, Laozi, Laotzu for a way that would avoid the constant feudal warfare and other conflicts during his lifetime. The result was his book: Tao-te-Ching (a.k.a. Daodejing) a mythical character.

Taoism started as a combination of psychology and philosophy but evolved 440 CE when it was adopted as a state religion. At that time Lao-Tse became a deity. Taoism, along with Buddhism and Confucianism, became one of the religions of China. With the end of the Ch'ing Dynasty in 1911, state support for Taoism and Taoist heritage was destroyed during the next period of warlordism. After 1949, religious freedom was severely restricted. "The new government publicly confiscated temples, and plundered treasures. Several million monks were reduced to 50,000" by 1960. 3 During the cultural revolution in China from 1966 to 1976, Taoist heritage was destroyed. Some religious tolerance has been restored from 1982 to the present time.

Taoism currently has about 20 million followers, and is primarily centered in East Asia. There are approximately 10 million Taoists living in North America; 1,720 in Canada (1991 census). Taoism has influenced North American culture in areas of "acupuncture, herbalism, holistic medicine, and martial arts..." 3

Taoist Beliefs and Practices:

Taoism has provided an alternative to the Confucian tradition in China. Taoism and Confucianism coexisted in the country, region and generally within the same individual. Tao is the first-cause of the universe. It is a force that flows through all things. "The Tao surrounds everyone and therefore everyone must listen to find it." Each believer's goal is to become one with the Tao.

The priesthood views the many gods as manifestations of the one Dao, "represented as an image or a particular thing." The concept of a personified god as is the concept of the creation of the universe. Thus, they do not pray to God to hear the prayers or to act upon them. They seek answers to life's questions through meditation and outer observation.

In contrast with the beliefs and practices of the priesthood, most of the Taoists believe in a spirits pervaded nature...The gods in heaven acted like and were treated like men; worshipping the gods was a kind of rehearsal of attitudes toward the gods. On the other hand, the demons and ghosts of hell acted like and were treated like threatening strangers in the real world; they were bribed by the people and the martial forces of the spirit officials." 3

Time is cyclical, not linear as in Western thinking.

Taoists generally have an interest in promoting health and vitality.

Five main organs and orifices of the body correspond to the five parts of the universe: wood, metal and earth.

Each person must nurture the Ch'i (air, breath) that has been given to them.

Development of virtue is one's chief task. The Three Jewels to be sought are: simplicity, moderation and humility.

Taoists follow the art of "wu wei," which is to let nature take its course. "Do not allow a river to flow towards the sea unimpeded; do not erect a dam which obstructs the natural flow."

One should plan in advance and consider carefully each action before making it.

A Taoist is kind to other individuals, largely because such an action tends to benefit them.

Taoists believe that "people are compassionate by nature...left to their own devices, they show this compassion without expecting a reward." 5

The Yin Yang symbol:

This is a well known Taoist symbol. "It represents the balance of opposites. When they are equally present, all is calm. When one is outweighed by the other, there is disarray." 4 One source explains that it was derived from astronomical observations of the shadow of the sun throughout a full year. 5 The two swirling shapes give the impression of change -- the only constant factor in the universe. One represents the Yin; the dark side) represents the breath that formed the earth. Yang (the light side) represents the breath that formed the heavens. "The most traditional view is that 'yin' represents the earth and 'yang' represents the heavens."

feminine: being soft, cool, calm, introspective, and healing... and "yang" hot, energetic, moving, and sometimes aggressive. Another view has the 'yang' day.⁵ However, since nothing in nature is purely black or purely white, a small black spot in the white swirl, and a corresponding white spot in the black swirl.

Ultimately, the 'yin' and 'yang' can symbolize any two opposing forces in nature. Humans intervene in nature and upset the balance of Yin and Yang.

Tai Chi:

There is a long history of involvement by Taoists in various exercise and martial arts. Tai chi in particular works on all parts of the body. It "stimulates the central nervous system, relieves stress and gently tones muscles without strain. It also improves the elimination of wastes and the circulation of blood. Moreover, tai chi's rhythmic movements help to relax the internal organs and improve their functionality." Traditional Chinese medicine is caused by blockages or lack of balance in the body's "chi" (intrinsic energy). Tai chi helps to balance this energy flow.

Taoist Texts:

These include:

Tao-te-Ching ("The Way of Power," or "The Book of the Way") is believed to be written by Lao-Tse. It describes the nature of life, the way to peace and how a ruler should govern. Chuang-tzu (named after its author) contains additional teachings.