

### 10.4 Daoist Philosophy from Classical China

**Source:** <http://www.tao-in-you.com/tao-te-ching-translation.html>

**Background:** Lao Tzu or Old Master is a legendary figure from classical China who might have lived sometime between 600 and 300 BC. He is credited with developing the eighty-one sayings of the “Dao-De Ching” (The Way of All Life), a Daoist philosophy based on respect for the laws of nature, reverence for ancestors, compassion, moderation, and humility. According to legend, Lao Tzu, saddened by the evil of mankind, decided to leave human society to live in the desert. When he arrived at the gate of the Great Wall of China, a gatekeeper persuaded him to write down his philosophical principles.

**Instructions:** Some of the principles of Lao Tzu are presented in the four statements that follow. Read the statements and complete questions/activities 1 – 3.

#### Questions/Activities

1. Identify the “lesson” presented in each of the statements.
2. Write a paragraph explaining your understanding of Dao and Daoist philosophy.
3. In your opinion, is this a philosophy that supports or challenges government, family, and other social institutions? Explain.

<p>A. Being and non-being produce each other. Difficult and easy complement each other. Long and short define each other. High and low oppose on each other. Fore and aft follow each other.</p>	<p>C. Fill your bowl to the brim and it will spill. Keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt. Chase after money and security and your heart will never unclench. Care about people's approval and you will be their prisoner. Do your work, then step back. The only path to serenity.</p>
<p>B. Humanity follows the earth. Earth follows Heaven. Heaven follows the Dao. The Dao follows only itself.</p>	<p>D. If you overly esteem talented individuals, people will become overly competitive. If you overvalue possessions, people begin to steal.</p>

#### Daoist Parables (stories that teaches a lesson)

The duck's legs are short, but if we try to lengthen them, the duck will feel pain. The crane's legs are long, but if we try to shorten them, the crane will feel grief. Therefore we are not to cut off what is by nature long, nor to lengthen what is by nature short.

I have built my hut beside a busy road / But I can hear no clatter from passing carts and horses.

Do you want to know how? When the mind is detached, where you are is remote also.

Picking chrysanthemums by the east hedge I can see the hills to the south a long way away:

It is sunset and the air over the mountains is beautiful;

Birds are flying in flocks back to their nests. This tastes real. I would like to talk about it, but there are no words.

#### Questions

1. What lessons does Dao teach with these parables?
2. In your opinion, can Daoism help simplify modern life? Explain your view.

Lao Zi was a wise man with great intelligence. He used to say, “Discover how nature acts by observing the Way of Nature.” He observed how yin and yang in the universe match each other. Birth is due to the intercourse of man and woman. The combination of yin and yang is life. The deep breathing exercise is used to coordinate yin and yang. You will enjoy long life without old age if you keep practicing this exercise. You need to sit in meditation. Out of the depth of extreme tranquility comes activity. When you are full of energy, your nerve center will produce heat. With your hand you can cure sickness. We should absorb the natural essence of the universe and store our own energy.

#### Questions

1. How can people learn the “Way of Nature”?
2. How does a Daoist discover truth?
3. In your opinion, what does "yin and yang" mean?
4. Do you think the Daoist philosophy can work in the modern world? Why?