

Activity 4. Daoist Philosophy from Classical China

Source: <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/core9/phalsall/texts/taote-v3.html>, accessed March 15, 2010.

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.

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| A. Being and non-being create each other. Difficult and easy support each other. Long and short define each other. High and low depend on each other. Before and after follow each other. | 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. |
| B. If you over-esteem great men, people become powerless. If you overvalue possessions, people begin to steal. | D. Man follows the earth. Earth follows the universe. The universe follows the Dao. The Dao follows only itself. |