

Daoist Philosophy from Ancient China

A) The Daoists are a group of modern people who believe in the ancient Chinese philosophy of Daoism. They have rejected city life and escaped to the hills of upstate New York where they hope to live in harmony with themselves and nature. Among the Daoists nothing is done in excess. There are no quarrels, no machines and no need to take medicine or anything else which might be regarded as unnatural. The Holy Dao, the spiritual leader of the group teaches that people should maintain balance within nature and not try to control it.

- Are you interested in joining this group? Why or why not?

B) A Daoist Lesson about the Universe

Man follows the ways of the Earth.
The Earth follows the ways of Heaven.
Heaven follows the way of Dao.
Dao follows its own ways.

- In your opinion, is Dao a God? Explain your view.

C) A Daoist Parable (story 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.

- What lesson does Dao teach with this parable?

D) Some early Daoists favored the hermit life. But by the fourth century AD the need to retire to a wilderness gave way to an acceptance of normal social life and the idea that detachment could be found anywhere. This statement is by the fourth century Chinese poet Taoi Qian.

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.

- In your opinion, can Daoism help simplify modern life? Explain your view.

E) Kuang of Laoshan is a contemporary Daoist High Priest

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.

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?