

CHAPTER 8: ETERNAL PRINCIPLES OF TAOISM (Sample of the Handbook)

The author does not aim to promote a form of Taoism that was relevant thousands of years ago, but rather show how the essence of this ageless wisdom is re-emerging in our society. For example, there is a growing movement towards regaining harmony with our environment and hence an increased reverence for the Earth. The Gaia Theory has a marked correlation to a Taoist approach to our planet. According to Taoism, not only is the Earth considered to be an interconnected, self-regulating system or process, but also each solar system and ultimately the whole universe.

The Great Tao is an Unbroken Seamless Web of Being,
in which every part is linked and mutually dependent.

Taoism and the Environment

The symbolism of the Yin/Yang Symbol is highly significant when we relate it to the world around us, or Creation (the Ten Thousand Things). Mostly due to growing ecological awareness, a world-view of wholeness or balance has begun to have practical application. One might say that we are starting to catch up with a Taoist view held for more than 5,000 years. For example, the Taoist maxim that: though the Ten-thousand things may change, the Great Totality remains the same is beginning to be appreciated.

Through such an awareness of Unity, life can be seen as an interrelationship –
an infinite Web of Being, in which nothing could be classified as non-spiritual,
non-sacred, separate, or unimportant.

In the West, we are inclined towards an extroverted, rational approach to life. Hence spirit is often regarded as unreality, or an illusion clung to by mystical types. The ability to go within, or to contact a deeper reality is devalued, even regarded by some as irrational nonsense. Whereas in the East, most religious doctrines hold an opposite more introverted view of life, in which matter is regarded as Maya or an unreality. In Taoist terms, both of these views are examples of a mind/body split, or a state of non-wholeness. The Taoist Sage Chuang Tsu wrote about harmony between these two aspects of Oneness in the following manner. As you will see, sometimes the words Tao and Great Tao are interchangeable:

"Tao is obscured when men understand only one of a pair of opposites, or concentrate only on a partial aspect of Being."
"Can a man cling only to Heaven
And know nothing of Earth?
They are correlative; to know one
Is to know the other.
To refuse one
Is to refuse both."

Chuang Tsu ¹



According to Taoist philosophy, we are (at the deepest level of our being) completely at one with the Great Tao or the wholeness of Creation, which endlessly recreates itself. Thus in Taoist terms, **the great illusion or maya is not matter but separateness**. It could also be stated that a major cause of imbalance in our society, is the feeling of supremacy, e.g. over other people, animals, or the environment – as discussed below.

The Great Tao

"What there was before the universe, was Tao. Tao makes things what they are, but is not itself a thing. Nothing can produce Tao; yet everything has Tao within it, and continues to produce it without end. And the endless love of the Sage for his fellow-man is based upon this same principle." ²

It is a Taoist tenet that: the Tao that can be named is not the Eternal Tao. This alludes to the fact that there is a transcendent factor beyond all things, which cannot be conveyed in mere words. It implies that **books like the I Ching can suggest ways to rectify imbalances, but the real power to change hearts and minds comes from direct experience of harmony with the unifying power of the Tao**. As human beings have to use language, the following terms have been used by authors in the East and the West to describe the Great Tao. They are merely an aid to poetic insight, or a pointer to a unifying principle beyond words:

The Great Light, or the Ocean of Light
 A Great Oneness (T'ai Chi T'u)
 A Seamless Web of Being
 The Ultimate Harmony or the Great Design
 The Mother of All Things.
 The Unified Field

As you can see there are many ways one could describe the Great Tao. The word God could be used, if it does not imply the anthropomorphic image we sometimes hold. In a collective sense, our image of God or the Ground of our Being changes as we change in consciousness. The images that were useful in the past (whether of a God or a Goddess) are no longer as meaningful or powerful in an age of science and cosmology. New words and symbols are bound to emerge, especially as religious and scientific ideas come together as two aspects of one whole, within the Tao. For what else could they be!

The Cyclic Unfoldment Of Consciousness



The Taoist view of life and death is sublimely beautiful. Each lifetime (or manifestation in the Tao) is regarded as a wave on an infinite Ocean of life. A wave on an ocean appears to be a unique formation, but it slips back into the main body of water. Likewise, each seemingly separate identity exists for a while, then merges into the Ocean, which forms yet another wave. This does not imply reincarnation on a personality level, but a deeper teaching.

Firstly, the universal Self (at one with the Great Tao or Ocean of Light) is an Us rather than an I. For example, Zen Masters constantly emphasize that ultimately there is only one Universal Mind, could we but experience it. The concept of the Collective Unconscious, as put forward by Dr. Carl Jung, has a correlation to this teaching – from another perspective. It is the Ocean of Being that eternally re-creates itself in streams of energy, with different evolutionary streams for humans, animals, plants, etc. Yet each manifestation has a link to a previous one, in the Tao of their unfoldment, according to the Great Law. This evolutionary progression is based on a constant cyclic movement towards wholeness and balance.

"Man goes back into the Great Scheme, from which all things come and to which all things return."

Chuang Tsu ³

The Ocean of Being

Taoist writers often use the term the Ocean of Being as a symbol of the Great Tao, water being symbolic of the flow of life. Another metaphor is that of a river. For instance a stream can represent a particular individual, whereas the Ocean stands for the Whole. (Similarly in India, a devotional mantra states that: God is an Ocean that refuses no river.) The personality is thought of as a stream of consciousness, which manifests on earth, then in the after-death states gradually withdraws into the main Ocean of consciousness. Symbolically the whole Ocean of Life is enriched by the various rivers, or else affected by a state of imbalance if they are polluted. Another stream (or personality) then forms, when the process recycles. Contemplate the following verse, which in material terms is speaking about rivers in China. Yet considering the Taoist symbolism for the ocean or the sea, it can be understood in a deeper context.

"No argument can demonstrate the unknowable. .. The sea [the Great Tao] does not reject the streams [personalities] which flow eastward into it. Therefore it is immeasurably great. The true Sage enfolds the universe in his bosom. His good influence benefits all throughout the empire, without respect to persons. Born without rank, he dies without titles. He does not take credit for realities."

Chuang Tsu ⁴ (The words in brackets inserted by the author)

Another relevant metaphor is that of a Tree of Life. For example, individual leaves on a tree, live and die. The new leaves (symbolic of personalities) are not reincarnations of the old leaves, but they are a manifestation of the whole tree process. Each leaf is slightly different, yet fundamentally based on the patterns of the former growth of the tree. In Taoism these patterns or designs are a reflection in principle, of the Great Scheme as Chuang Tsu described it. Also, a tree does not suddenly emerge from nothing. Each one is part of a whole evolutionary process. There is a continual progression of life – death – and new seeds sprouting.

Thus a primordial blueprint of a tree type is transmitted through each generation. Likewise, each personality or manifestation in the Tao represents an individual rung on a spiral or stream of consciousness; yet an overall pattern is unfolding.

Thus growth and change occurs, both as the result of seeds sown in the present and patterns woven in previous cycles, according to the Great Law of Unfoldment.

As mentioned in *The Holistic I Ching*, notions in Taoism about physical immortality or elixirs of life are metaphors, often superficially interpreted, or even used as intentional blinds to truths kept private for the serious student. John Blofeld discovered this for himself and wrote about it in his excellent, often amusing book, *Taoism – The Road to Immortality*.⁵ Only the Tao is immortal, while the true elixir is the transforming power of the Self merged in Tao. Nothing could be more powerful. As regards perfection, only the Tao or Way of unfoldment is considered to be perfect, not individual things — the Ten Thousand Things or Creation. Even the Great Sages are described as forever growing towards the perfection of the Tao, rather than being in a fixed state or a permanent perfect manifestation. Nothing is regarded as permanent in the eternal flux of life, not even the Universal Self.

The Great Law of Harmony

We often regard what is happening in Nature as heartless, cruel and indifferent to the fate of humans or animals. However, we are seeing only one half or one side of the process. Seen from a higher state of consciousness (which is possible) life is a constant flow of energy in waves, from more-spiritual states of being to the more-material — from male to female — from life to death — from cause to effect. Taoist Sages and many other religious luminaries wrote about the Great Law of Harmony or Equilibrium, which operates from within all life and is intrinsic to Creation.

"The Great One is omnipresent.....
The Great Space is all Receptive.
The Great Truth is all-exacting.
The Great Law is all-binding."

Chuang Tsu⁶



"What others teach, I also teach, that is:
A violent man will die a violent death.

This will be the essence of my teaching."⁷

(Lao Tsu)

"All who draw the sword will die by the sword." (Matthew 26:52)

"Happiness is not ready made, but arises from your own actions." (Dalai Lama)

The above quotes depict a principle, rather than how events are likely to unfold within an individual lifetime. Motive is the all important key. Stated simply: sow the seeds of cruelty and violence and a condition of imbalance, dis-ease or suffering will follow, in the cyclic unfoldment of consciousness. Yet sow the seeds of kindness and happiness will follow. The Law of Equilibrium does not control us from the outside, in terms of reward or punishment. Rather it is an innate re-balancing movement of energy. By using intuitive observation and patience, the workings of the Great Law can be seen – rectifying imbalances – redressing injustice – and restoring states of balance.

This is portrayed in the Yin/Yang Symbol, which denotes movement that always returns to a state of balance. Lao Tsu wrote about the Great Law thus:



As it acts in the world, the Tao [or Great Law]
is like the bending of a bow.
The top is bent downward;
the bottom is bent up.
It adjusts excess and deficiency,
so that there is perfect balance.
It takes from what is too much
and gives to what isn't enough.
Those who try to control,
who use force to protect their power,
go against the direction of the Tao.
They take from those who do not have enough
and give to those who have far too much.

Lao Tsu ⁸ (The words in brackets inserted by the author)

Another quote from Chief Sealth of the American Seattle Tribe is appropriate:

All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves. All things are connected like the blood which unites a family. Man did not weave the Web of Life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."

Albert Schweitzer expressed similar views when he stated:

Until he extends the circle of his compassion to all living things, man will himself not find peace.

Lao Tsu taught that those who sought simplicity, social justice and harmlessness would not be damaged or overly affected by the workings of the Great Law. For he wrote:

"What is firmly established cannot be uprooted.
What is firmly grasped cannot slip away.
It will be honoured from generation to generation. ⁹



The Great Law is portrayed as a wide net that allows nothing to slip through. Adjustments of the Law of Equilibrium can take decades, lifetimes, or even epochs to work out. Therefore it is often not immediately obvious in one human lifetime — personality levels of awareness are too restricted and our time-frame is too short. The Top Line in any I Ching hexagram often refers to these karmic patterns in one's life.

This Law (transcending and yet including the laws of Nature we know about) is said to be at the heart of all life, shaping individuals, groups, nations, as well as whole natural systems. It is regarded as impersonal, yet nurturing of all potential. Whether called or uncalled, acknowledged or derided, Tao is present.

A Taoist View of Good And Evil

The original Taoist philosophy did not have a concept of good or evil in the same vein as in the West. Instead a more universal concept was put forward. This does not imply that good and evil do not exist. Later, in some Taoist literature and in Commentaries on the I Ching, this view was almost obliterated, to the extent where the inferior or evil was often equated with the feminine or Yin! (Yang and Yin — good and evil.) Whereas evil is an imbalance or excess of either Yin or Yang qualities. What are some of the ways that good and evil were portrayed by the original proponents?

Goodness could be considered as:

- ★ that which is in harmony with the Great Law of Equilibrium, Justice or Balance.
- ★ a flowing with the eternal rhythms of Nature.
- ★ contentment, humility, compassion and wisdom.
- ★ a balance between complementary opposites such as body/soul – mind/heart – masculine/feminine – the material/the spiritual.

These principles form the basis of I Ching texts. The psychology of Carl Jung (which is also concerned with order and balance in the psyche) has striking parallels with this philosophy of harmony. As already mentioned, he was inspired and strongly influenced by a study of the symbols from Taoist alchemy.¹⁰ The true goal of alchemists, East and West, was to transform the lead of their personalities (through uniting the above opposites) into the gold of the Philosopher's Stone or an Elixir of Immortality – a metaphor for the transforming power of the Self. The most comprehensive study of alchemy and its rich symbolism, one could ever read, is the book *The Philosopher's Stone*.¹¹ Transformation is undertaken in the cauldron of the psyche or soul, which is the meaning of I Ching Hexagram No. 50. The goal for Taoists was to become an Immortal – a synonym for the Great Sage or illumined one.

In the West, the word sin means missing the mark. Likewise imbalance in Taoism is being off centre. We are sometimes off centre because we have lost an unconscious link to Nature and have yet to regain it in a fully conscious way.

Evil could be seen as:

- extremes and excess.
- resistance to the cyclic flow of life, or swimming against the tide.
- trying to disregard the Laws of Nature (the current world dilemma).
- ignorance, e.g. of the Unity of All Life, resulting in feelings of supremacy.
- interaction with other humans, animals and the environment, as if they were not part of the Great Totality and we did not share a common destiny.
- organization (whether in a cultural, political or business sense) which divides and separates, acting as though there was not a social responsibility to society.

In this vein Chuang Tsu wrote:

"Excess is the real enemy of stillness. To be puritanical, no less than being licentious, is to stray from the Tao." ¹²

The next chapter outlines how Taoism can be made apparent through gardening and landscaping. There is literally more to a Zen or Chen garden than meets the eye.

***Taoist Gem: The Ten Thousand Things
appear, disappear, then appear again. Only
the Still Centre of Creation abides.***

