



Linda's T'ai Chi Weekly Handout August 30, 2020
The Principles of Tao



This is a statue of Lao Tzu, a Chinese philosopher whose writings advocated humility and piety. Lao-Tzu, a curator at the Royal Library in the state of Chu, was a natural philosopher who believed in the harmony of all things and that people could live easily together if they only considered each other's feelings once in a while and recognized that their self-interest was not always in the interest of others. Lao-Tzu grew impatient with people and with the corruption he saw in government, which caused the people so much pain and misery. He was so frustrated by his inability to change people's behavior that he decided to go into exile. His philosophy grew from his observance of the natural world, and from that a folk religion developed out of a belief in cosmic balance.

Tao or Dao is a Chinese word signifying the "way", "path", "route", "road" or sometimes more loosely "doctrine", "principle" or "holistic beliefs." Tao is not a religion nor is it a person. T'ai Chi is not based on any religious belief or doctrine and has no ties to the folk religion that sprang from Lao-Tzu philosophy. T'ai Chi is based on the *philosophy* of Tao- a *path toward inner harmony, balance and tranquility*. That is the goal of T'ai Chi; seeking harmony, balance and tranquility through focused breathing, performing slow, choreographed movements in the here and now.

It is interesting to note that the folk religion based on the philosophy of Taoism was practiced mostly in the rural areas of China and became the official religion of the country under the Tang

Dynasty (618-907.) As a religion it emphasized doing what is natural and “going with the flow in accordance with Tao, a cosmic force which flows through all things and binds and releases them. Taoism as a religion later fell out of favor and was replaced by Confucianism and Buddhism. Today, China, a secular government, recognizes five religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam. Taoism is the only one of these that does not recognize a higher power or a god. Taoism is a philosophy and an approach to living life in harmony.

“Tao-Te-Ching” or the *Book of the Way* was thought to have been written by Lao-Tzu but that is probably a myth. It is not a doctrine or scripture but a book of poetry. Here is one excerpt: “The Tao-Te-Ching is an attempt to remind people; everyone could live together peacefully if people would only be mindful of how their thoughts and actions affect themselves, others and the earth. “

Here is another excerpted passage: “Yield and overcome/Empty and become full/Bend and become straight.” This piece of poetry attempts to guide the reader to a simpler way of living. Instead of fighting against life and others, one can yield to circumstances and let go of things that are not really important. Instead of insisting one is right all the time, one can empty one's self of that kind of pride and be open to learning from other people. Instead of clinging to old belief patterns and hanging onto the past, one can bend to new ideas and new ways of living.

For us, as we practice T'ai Chi, we focus on the present, empty our mind, soften our body, and relax fully. We are guided by the imagery of nature and the flow of the energy in nature. Tao is the cosmic force that is within all of us that allow us to enjoy nature, become soft and light, let go and relax. As a way of life, Tao encourages us to eat well, sleep well, move naturally, forest bathe, forgive, love , laugh and honor those who came before. Tao encourages us to be kind and loving to ourselves and others as symbolized by the peacock.



We practice some of these principles at the end of each session. We express gratitude for something in our lives and within the lotus; we express love, pride, honor and kindness.

Enjoy and Peace, Linda