



Linda's T'ai Chi Weekly Handout March 21, 2021

The Tao of Pooh Part 2

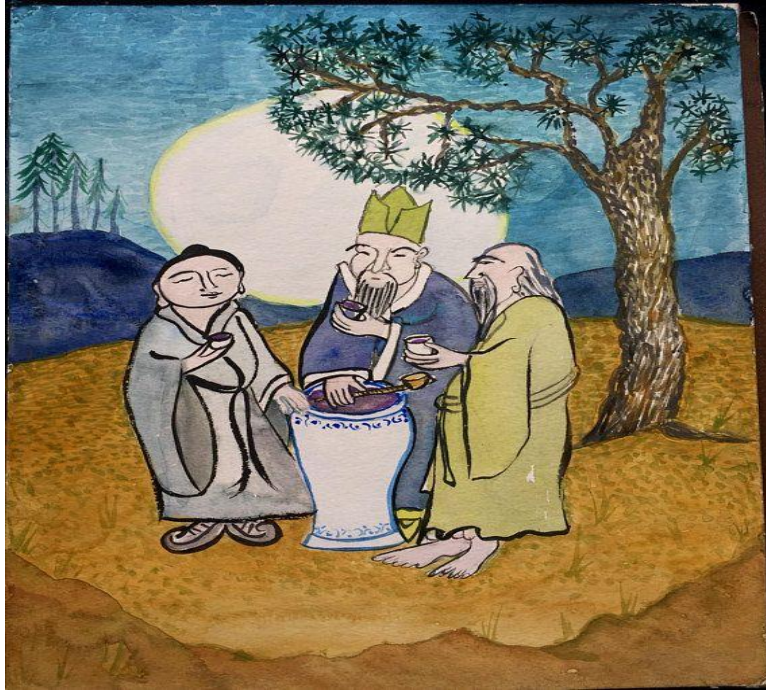
"The Tao of Pooh" by Benjamin Hoff (1982) is an introduction to the philosophy of Taoism by using the Winnie-the-Pooh characters to exemplify and explain these principles. The literal meaning of Tao is "the way", an approach to life and living.

Hoff wrote the book at night and on weekends while working as a tree pruner in the Portland Japanese Garden in Washington Park in Portland, Oregon. The book was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 49 weeks. Hoff later wrote *The Te of Piglet*, a companion book that also made the bestseller list.

The book starts with a description of the vinegar tasters, which is a painting portraying the three great Chinese thinkers, Confucius, Buddha, and Laozi over a vat of vinegar. Actually, there are many paintings of this popular story.

As the story goes, each of the philosophers taste the "vinegar of life". Confucius and Buddha were founders of the leading religions of China and Laozi, the founder of a traditional philosophy, Taoism.

Confucius dips his finger into the vat, wrinkles his nose and finds it sour, Buddha dips his vinegar into the vat, wrinkles his nose and finds the vinegar bitter, but Laozi, the dips his finger into the vat, smiles and finds the taste to be satisfying. It is often interpreted in this story that Taoism is the favored approach to life.



“The Vinegar Tasters”



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“The Vinegar Tasters”

This vinegar taster's allegory probably best explains the Tao approach to life in contrast to other philosophers. Confucius believed that life was sour and needed rules to correct the sourness of life. Buddha believed that life was bitter and dominated by pain. To correct this, Buddha believed that one had to give up desires and wants. Laozi, however, believed that life was fundamentally perfect in its natural state which is why the vinegar was satisfying to his taste.

Taoist thought focuses on genuineness, longevity, health, immortality, vitality, and harmony. At the outset, Hoff states the purpose of the book is to “stay happy and calm under all circumstances” Yet, he cautions that the truth will be obscured from the reader who tries too hard to understand. Hoff includes examples of each of the principles to guide readers toward an implicit understanding of Tao.

Hoff stresses that intuition is to be valued in all things, as a natural and even passive approach to life. Active or aggressive engagement is discouraged, he says. Those who fail to rely on intuition often find themselves discontent in their careers and unhappy in their relationships. Intuition is our sixth sense that guides our decision making.” Einstein believed in the gift and power of intuition. Einstein is widely quoted as saying, "The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant." ... "All great achievements of science must start from intuitive knowledge," Einstein once told a friend, "At times I feel certain I am right while not knowing the reason." Intuition is knowing without knowing why.

Winnie-the -Pooh is the ultimate example of living a contented life who uses intuition to guide his way. He helps his friends with his calm nature and the author employs Piglet, Owl, Eeyore, and Christopher Wren to show that knowledge and industry, traits revered by western society can stand in the way of contentment.

T'ai Chi is based on the Taoist concept of "effortless doing". Winnie is the gold medal winner of effortless doing. For Winnie, life is supposed to be fun and spontaneous and when lived this way, everything turns out just right.

By contrast, Owl and Rabbit over- complicate problems and Eeyore frets about his very existence and is unable to just "be."



"Winnie-the- Pooh Honey Tasters"

The lesson for us when performing T'ai chi is using our mind, body and spirit effortlessly and intuitively, setting aside our desire to be perfect. Approaching our practice with an open mind to learn, to progress and to enjoy each moment leads to satisfaction and contentment. A most important principle in Taoism is the 'uncarved block." This is the concept that simple things have their own power and wisdom. A block that is carved into a clock can only tell time, but an uncarved block has endless possibilities and potential.

As you explore your potential, a reminder that T'ai Chi is a journey not a destination. We strive for progress not perfection.



Peace,
Linda