



The Mystery of Taoism (Daoism)

“Those who understand don’t talk; those who talk don’t understand.”

The founder of Taoism, Lao-Tze was born in 604 BCE and is often seen pictured riding on an ox, a Chinese symbol of spiritual strength. Taoism was a gentle philosophy which stated that one should allow the laws of nature to carry one peacefully through life. Tao, “The Way”, means one has to do nothing and accepting that weakness is truly strength, that happiness depends on disaster, and that being passive is true action. Taoism is oftentimes difficult to define because one of the axioms (1) is silence, even inaction.

In some ways, the religion of Tao resembles many western religions with ordained priests and a centralized religious text called the *Tao te Ching*, written by the followers of Lao-Tze, the *Tao te Ching* is a cryptic and esoteric text comprehensible to only those with special competence. After Lao-Tze’s death, the followers of his teachings made Taoism into a magical and mystical religion with an emphasis on immortality. Breathing exercises, potions of dragon bones, moonbeams, and mother of pearl were all supposed to be ways to live forever. Taoism grew into a religion as it merged with folk beliefs earlier animism (2) and worship of natural forces, belief in the supernatural, and a variety of mystical practices, religion more desirable to more people. They told fortunes, used charms and sorcery and made the earlier Taoists beliefs some thing hardly recognizable. Taoists even created eighty-one kinds of heaven to offset the thirty=three kinds which Buddhism offered.

According to Taoist tradition, the early Chinese worshipped nature. They watched the predictable powers of nature, the changing seasons, and thanked the god for good crops. They also watched and feared the unpredictable and violent turns nature could take. In an effort to explain why the universe operated in such opposing ways, ancient philosophers said that everything in the universe was made up of two forces-Yin and Yang. They are shown as a circle of two curved and equal parts. The Yang section is red and is the warm, positive, masculine, and sunny side. The Yin side is black and is described as feminine, mysterious, dark, and negative. All things contained both Yin and Yang. Within each was also the seed of the other, and when they worked in harmony all was good. When one was stronger than the other the balance changed. In this way ancient philosophers explained the workings of the universe.

1. An established rule, principle or law.
2. Any of various primitive beliefs whereby natural phenomena and things animate and inanimate are held to possess an innate soul.

Answer the following questions in complete sentences:

1. In your own words, define Taoism.
2. What were some of the rituals performed by Taoists to reach immortality?
3. Label and define the Yin and the Yang.
4. Winnie the Pooh is known for his Daoist qualities. Explain how each of the following excerpts are examples of Daoist ideals:

Excerpt #1 " Not like Pooh, the most effortless Bear we've ever seen.

"Just How do you do it, Pooh?"

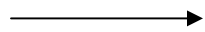
"Do What?" asked Pooh.

"Become so Effortless."

"I don't do much of anything," he said.

"But all those things of yours get done."

"They just sort of happen," he said



Excerpt #2 "Lots of people talk to animals," said Pooh.

"Not that many *listen* though."

"That's the problem."



Excerpt #3 "Rabbit's clever," said Pooh thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Piglet, "Rabbit's clever."

"And he has Brain."

"Yes," said Piglet, "Rabbit has Brain."

There was a long silence.

"I suppose," said Pooh, "that that's why he never understands anything."



Excerpt #4 "Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them," said Pooh.

