

## **A brief introduction of philosophical Daoism, FAQ**

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### **Preface: Scope of this text**

This text was written as a partly humorous comment on philosophical Daoism to give a first introduction on the basic concept of Daoism.

It will not withstand the requirement of a scientific text and as such, will not necessarily cite proofs for all statements.

### **Preface: Pinyin vs. Wade-Giles**

We are going to cover a few thousand years of history and during that time the Chinese language and its access to the Western world developed.

In Chinese, you would only use Chinese characters, never any Latin letters.

To give the Western world easier access to the Chinese language, phonetic systems for those characters were introduced about just 100 years ago.

Thus, very often there will be multiple competing ways of writing Chinese characters in Latin letters. Most common used to be Wade-Giles (until ~1970) and now is Pinyin.

Unfortunately, many terms were completely mixed in the Western books / media, sometimes using either of them.

To keep the follow text readable, I will not always mention both ways, but will list the different terms once in both transcriptions.

During the text, I will stick to the now modern way of Pinyin without tones only.

- A brief introduction of philosophical Daoism, FAQ -

| <b>Pinyin</b> | <b>Wade-Giles / Wilhelm</b> | <b>Chinese (simplified)</b> | <b>English (literally)</b>          |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Dào           | Tao                         | 道                           | Way, path, course                   |
| Sān jiào      | San Chiao                   | 三教                          | Three teachings                     |
| Lǎozi         | Lao Tzu<br>Lao Tse          | 老子                          | Old Master                          |
| Dào dé jīng   | Tao Te King<br>Tao Te Ching | 道德经                         | Book of the way of virtue           |
| Yìjīng        | I Ging<br>I King<br>Yi King | 易经                          | Book of changes                     |
| Zhuāngzǐ      | Chuang Tzu<br>Chuang Tse    | 庄子                          | (Chinese name)                      |
| Wǔ dòu mǐ dào | Wu tou mi tao               | 五斗米道                        | Five pecks of rice                  |
| Wú wéi        | Wu Wei                      | 无为                          | Inaction                            |
| Dào jiā       | Tao Chia                    | 道家                          | Home of Dao<br>Philosophical Daoism |
| Dào jiào      | Tao Chiao                   | 道教                          | Teaching of Dao<br>Religious Daoism |
| Lièzǐ         | Lieh Tzu<br>Lieh Tse        | 列子                          | (Chinese name)                      |
| Tàijí tú      | T'ai Chi t'u                | 太极图                         | Symbol of the supreme<br>beginning  |
| Wújí          | Wu Chi                      | 无极                          | Without ridgepole                   |
| Yīn           | Yin                         | 阴                           | Dark                                |
| Yáng          | Yang                        | 阳                           | Bright                              |
| Qì            | Ch'i                        | 气                           | Gas                                 |

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**Q1: What is Daoism?**

Originally Daoism is a philosophy and one of the so-called "three teachings" (San Jiao) of China, beside Confucianism and Buddhism.

Later an additional, religious branch was added.

For more details please read the upcoming questions.

**Q2: What does the character of "Dao" (道) mean?**

If we look at the character "Dao" (道) in Chinese independently from Daoism, the character would be translated as "Course", "Path" or "Way".

It consists of the character „Shou“ (首, head, chief) and the radical „Chou“ (辵, to walk, to stomp a path).

However, the character is not exclusive for Daoism. There are other "ways" (to act in life) such as in Confucianism for example. The "Dao" as used in Daoism is defined differently than the original character's definition in Chinese.

**Q3: So how is "Dao" defined in Daoism?**

The Dao in Daoism will be talked about for example in the very first passage of Laozi's "Dao De Jing". It will be described as ever-changing and not being able to be defined by words. Even the name "Dao" is randomly chosen, it might as well be named by any other term.

One surely short-falling possible interpretation could be that the "Dao" is the entirety of a cosmic driving force that causes everything. Thus, it is the birth mother of everything in creation and everything that has the potential to be created, be it perceivable or not.

For a practical approach to get the idea of Dao, a little exercise:

Grab the first item you have nearby right now.

Look at it and take some time thinking about the path it has taken between being in your hands and all the way backwards step by step up to the point of the creation of the atoms that make up just one fiber of it, the creation of the quarks, that make up the atoms, the creation of a universe, that allowed the quarks to exist and whatever came before that.

Combine that myriad of steps of just one item in your hands with the entirety of not only everything that has existed until now but also everything that has the potential to exist in the future.

The driving force for all of that, the way all of those things take, is considered to be the Dao.

And while you thought about that, think of all the steps all those things have taken in just that short amount of time.

**Q4: Where does Daoism come from?**

**HISTORY TIME!**

Its first scriptures originate from around 3000-400 BCE, depending on which texts we allocate to Daoism. Classically the creator of the first scriptures called "Dao De Jing" is considered "Laozi", going back to about 400 BCE.

There is some discussion going on in the academia community whether or not Laozi was an actual sole existing person or a group of people under a fictional name of Laozi.

Other academic discussions include the possibility that the "Dao De Jing" is inspired by much older scriptures, called "Yi Jing" ("Book of changes") or whether or not the spark for Daoism was the anti-Confucian Mozi (Mohism) about 500 BCE.

After the relatively vaguely expressed texts of Laozi, came the texts of Zhuangzi about 350-290 BCE.

Unlike Laozi it's evident he actually existed as a single person; however, it seems likely the later scriptures were not written by his hand, but his disciples.

There is a pretty clear cut and strong differences in choice of words, style and even basic meaning, that support that allegation.

The scriptures of Zhuangzi are divided in three main parts, called:

Inner Chapters, Outer Chapters, Mixed Chapters.

As mentioned earlier, its only evident the "Inner Chapters" are surely written by him, while it seems that parts of the Outer Chapter and the complete Mixed Chapters were written by his students.

**Q5: What is the difference between the scriptures of Laozi and Zhuangzi?**

Laozi's Dao De Jing is rather vague on purpose, while Zhuangzi's writings are very practical, applicable and are full of fictive stories and parabola to express Daoism.

Both scriptures are absolutely compatible and complement each other.

The philosophical Daoism is completely based on those two authors.

**Q6: What is the difference between philosophical and religious Daoism?**

There are two competing concepts of Daoism, one being the philosophical Daoism (Daojia), the other being religious Daoism (Daojiao).

The philosophical Daoism ends with the writings of Laozi and Zhuangzi, the religious Daoism is often based on the scriptures of Liezi, who lived about in between Laozi and Zhuangzi. The latter branch of Daoism began to be really popular with a rebellion against the emperor of the Han dynasty in about 140 CE.

The rebels, called “Yellow Scarfs” and led by Zhang Jue and his brothers, included Daoistic sects, with the most important one being “Five pecks of rice” (the name originates from the membership fee of 5 斗 of rice, which equals about 50 metric liter).

Leading “Five pecks of rice” was Zhang Daoling, who claimed he himself was visited and chosen by Laozi (note: Laozi lived about 500 years earlier) and has received the task to cleanse the world of decadence and establish a new country with only chosen people.

He completely re-interpreted the original Daoistic writings to fit his agenda and established rules and dogmata, introducing immortality of humans, spiritual energy called Qi and central deity-like leaders called “Celestial Masters”; he also declared himself to be the very first Celestial Master.

In the end the rebels were beaten by the warlord Cao Cao of the Han dynasty.

However, the followers of the religion scattered among the continent and several further Celestial Masters founded several further branches of religious Daoism, each introducing their individual rules.

**Q7: How are philosophical and religious Daoism contradicting each other?**

Philosophical Daoism tried to break dogmata without creating a new Dogma. It is based on logic, observation, reason and cause. It does not have concepts of gods, a central authority, rules, morals or even any authority at all, it is all in flux.

Religious Daoism is based on a Dogma and has absolute rules and authorities, such as gods.

It includes elements of supernatural beings, magic, alchemy, eternal life / prolonging life indefinitely, worshipping, alternative planes of existence – so to say a quite a bit of mysticism.

I do not consider myself knowledgeable enough in religious Daoism to go into detail.

Thus, this FAQ will focus on philosophical Daoism, to which I will hence refer to as simply “Daoism”.

**Q8: What is the core idea of Daoism?**

Probably the first most important statement the idea of Daoism is based on:

There is permanent change in this universe.

What is one thing in one moment, can be a different thing in the next moment.

Nothing is permanently absolute.

This permanent change is driven by the idea of a cosmic balance.

However; that balance should not be understood as something that has to be well... balanced in the middle or in a resting position.

It just means that something will always cause something else to be influenced, a kind of cosmic interdependence ever driven by a force that causes everything that happens.

The permanent change is considered to be a peaceful and natural process, it does not have a will or morality, but will happen spontaneous and impartial.

**Example E8.1: A drop of water is impartial**

Take a drop of water for example. It will always freeze as soon as it reaches a certain temperature and it will always melt as soon it reaches a certain higher temperature – it doesn't decide that it will not do that today because you were mean to it just yesterday.

(Please note: Simplified as an example, many conditions such as ambient pressure and a nucleus to enable a beneficial energetic state for crystallization are required to freeze water.)

**Quote Q8.1: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 5**

Nature is not benevolent.

It regards all masses as the wind regards straw dogs.

The (daoistic) Sage is not benevolent.

He regards the masses as the wind regards straw dogs.

(...)

(note: Dog-shaped puppets made of straw were a common children toy in ancient times)

The very core idea of Daoism is to have your own actions and thoughts to be in tune with that harmonic driving force and thus be connected with all of what is part of that "natural order".

**Q9: That sounds pretty cool, how can I become a Daoist?**

5 hours of meditating.

3 hours of praying to the cosmic force.

5 hours of being absolutely silent.

3 hours of jogging.

8 hours of sleep under the night sky.

Every day. For 2 years. You might turn bald, but it will only make you stronger.

Why do you think so many monks are bald?

Sorry for that reference, but in a philosophy which is based on permanent change, how could there be a manual or fixed way?

I forgot where I read the following lines , but it befits the idea very well:

You cannot decide to become a Daoist, you will one day just discover that there is a word for what you have been doing all along.

**Q10: So is there nothing I can do to follow the idea of Daoism / can you recommend literature on the matter?**

There is but it might not be as clear and defined as in other philosophies or religions.  
As mentioned earlier, Laozi wanted to break existing dogmata without establishing new ones.

First and foremost:

Be sure to read the scriptures of Daoism.  
They are a short read, it can be done within 1-2 days.  
I will link some sources at the end of the FAQ.

I strongly recommend the following order, which is not the chronologically correct order:  
First Zhuangzi, then Laozi, then if you are still interested, Yi Jing (but not the oracle part, that was added much later).

That's essentially going from "very practical and precise" to "very abstract and vague".

**Q11: And after I have read the literature, what should I do / how should a Daoist behave?**

Let's start with the goal: You want to think and act in accordance with a cosmic balance.

WARNING: Anecdotes intensifying!

**Example E11.1: Sentient earth**

Take the earth as an example. Literally the earth you stand on, that sandy earthy stuff.  
What does it do? Probably not much, because you barely notice it consciously.  
Thankfully the earth is following the cosmic balance.  
But what could it do if it had a will of its own? Would that not be a terrifying thought?

Sounds a little too abstract?

Well it's what we humans do every day.

**Example E11.2: Rulers will be rulers will be rulers**

Let's take a ruler of a kind of kingdom for example.  
Our exemplary ruler has been living a lavish lifestyle, while his people were starving recently.  
Naturally, the people are starting to complain about that injustice and no longer support their ruler.  
The ruler is well aware of that, but does not want to give in. He suspects people of conspiracy and starts introducing a curfew and increases the presence of the military.  
His people now feel all the more subdued and start revolting against such treatment. Of course, the ruler will feel pressured and commands the military to use force. The people, confronted by such violence will react by weaponizing and organizing themselves.  
A civil war that lasts for years breaks out.

The entire ordeal spirals into a constant back and forth of reaction to an ever-changing balance.

**Quote Q11.1: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 30**

(...) Good leaders reach solutions, and then stop. They do not dare to rely on force. (...)



**Quote Q11.2: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 32**

(...) If princes and kings could follow it (Tao), all things would by themselves abide, Heaven and Earth would unite and sweet dew would fall. People would by themselves find harmony, without being commanded. (...)

**Quote Q11.3: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 32**

(...) When the sage stands above people, they are not oppressed. When he leads people, they are not obstructed. The world will exalt him and not grow tired of him. (...)

At the end of the day, the cosmic balance always wins.

The ruler can try to lean against that with all his might, which will cause unforeseeable consequences and usually a lot of suffering, but the outcome will be the same:

Sooner or later he will not be ruler anymore.

So how can I act in accordance with the cosmic balance?

Firstly, you need to develop a sense for the balance.

In the beginning, it is a very conscious process of awareness.

Later, it will become an instinct.

To get to that point, it is imperative to understand the concept of "true nature" of things.

And that's where the awareness becomes important: Very often we expect things to behave in a certain way which is against their true nature and are baffled, frustrated and angry because suddenly they don't behave as we expected.

Simplified example: Your hands feel quite warm and you want to cool them down. Your expectation of a fire is, that it is cold. Putting your hands into the fire will cause you nothing but suffering in that case.

Sounds far-fetched and way too obviously wrong?

How about this:

**Example E11.3: Love matters**

You feel like you have little value in this world and it makes you feel bad.

You think if just you could be together with that one girl you have a crush on, you are so sure that your life will become so much better and that girl would make you more of a valuable person.

Finally it happened and you are a happy couple. But after the initial feeling of butterflies in your stomach, the feeling of being worthless comes back. You expect the right relationship to solve that feeling but it didn't – so it must be the wrong relationship. You break up with your girlfriend to continue the search for a relationship that makes you feel better.

Or an actual example of Zhuangzi:

**Example E11.4: Useless tree**

A carpenter angrily told his friend about how useless that big ass tree on his field is. Its trunk and branches are all twisted and when he tried to make wooden planks out of it, they would turn out to be all crooked. He would have to steam-bend the planks, which is so much work.

Such a foolish tree and waste of space!

The friend simply told the carpenter that he is foolish one.

Instead of making wooden planks out of the tree, which you can do with a straightly grown tree, why not simply enjoy sitting in the shadow of that big tree in the hot summer?

The story tells us at least two things:

If something is used in accordance with its true nature, it's very easy to be used in that way (and a lot of effort if it's not used in that accordance).

Secondly, the beautiful straight tree got cut down because it's so straight, but no one is interested in cutting down the crooked one, so it might stand there for hundreds of years.

Or another quote of Zhuangzi, to show that a formerly correct expectation, can suddenly be wrong, given the situation:

**Example E11.5: Zhuangzi's Outer Chapters, The revolution of Heaven, paragraph 4**

Nothing is as good as a boat for crossing water, nothing as good as a cart for crossing land. But though a boat will get you over water, if you try to push it across land, you may push till your dying day and hardly move it any distance at all. And are the past and present not like the water and the land? (...)

Another story is behind the Chinese proverb “塞翁失马”.

It means literally: Sai Weng's lost horse and figuratively: a blessing in disguise.

**Quote Q11.4: Chinese proverb Sai Weng's lost horse**

A long time ago, a poor Chinese farmer named Sai Weng lost a horse, and all the neighbors came around and said, “well that's too bad.” The farmer said, “maybe.”

Shortly after, the horse returned bringing another horse with him, and all the neighbors came around and said, “well that's good fortune,” to which the farmer replied, “maybe.”

The next day, the farmer's son was trying to tame the new horse and fell, breaking his leg, and all the neighbors came around and said, “well that's too bad,” and the farmer replied, “maybe.”

Shortly after, the emperor declared war on a neighboring nation and ordered all able-bodied men to come fight—many died or were badly maimed, but the farmer's son was unable to fight and spared due to his injury.

And all the neighbors came around and said, “well that's good fortune,” to which the farmer replied, “maybe.”

Now we had a lot of examples of observations and thoughts Daoists deal(t) with concerning “true nature” of things and what implication they will bring forth.

While “true nature” sounds like an absolute term, it is important to keep in mind that very nature is ever changing. In mathematics, it would be a function with situation as variable, that’s heavily influencing the equation.

There are concepts in Daoism to attune your mind to develop the sense of that true nature and to act / expect in accordance with the cosmic balance. The most famous one is called “Wu Wei”, which is something most Daoists practice.

**Q12: What is Wu Wei?**

Wu Wei literally translated means “Non doing” as in “Non acting”.

Easily misunderstood it might be interpreted as “Inaction”, however it’s more a concept of “Action by inaction”.

Anything that is “done without doing something” is in accordance with the natural driving force. To “Wu Wei” means to not do something against the naturally happening process and when something is done in that way, it is effortless and very easy. Such actions are without desire, planning and consideration.

**Q13: How do I learn how to “Wu Wei” and how does it help me to gain awareness for the balance?**

Let's take the drop of water as example again.

It does not act in a certain way because of ulterior motives or because when it was young, it was taught that being diligent and following a moral code will yield a great life for it.

It reacts to the temperature and pressure, its surrounding humidity, whether or not it's in contact with solid material in any given moment.

When you do something as “Wu Wei”, it will be the right thing in that very moment, without much thinking and consideration, it will be easy and not complicated. It will always be right and you will never be disappointed acting “Wu Wei”.

You might do things as “Wu Wei” already without noticing it:

**Example E13.1: Am I sleeping right?**

For example: Did you ever sleep because you do not want to sleep anymore?

If we expect sleep to solve the sleepiness, we might be disappointed. We could have sleep apnea or terrifying nightmares or heartburn which will make us all the sleepier after having slept.

But what if we slept, simply because we were sleepy? Its without expectation, because we felt like it and without intend and goal.

Another example is meditation.

In some philosophies and religions fresh followers might expect to gain positive benefits from meditation, maybe even to get enlightened.

Of course it can lead to that (however likely not just because of meditation).

But it might more likely lead to frustration with that mindset, because you meditate and you meditate hard for years and years, yet there is no enlightenment.

While this is an oversimplification, I am using it to give an example of wrong expectations, against the nature of things.

Why not meditate for the sake of meditating, just like the sleeping when you are sleepy?

You will never be disappointed, because you wanted to meditate and you meditated. How can that possibly frustrate you?

In the beginning acting by “Wu Wei” you might have to ask yourself very often if you are doing something truly free of intend. It is important to be honest and not try to convince yourself of that being the case. If you have doubt, it's very likely not “Wu Wei”.

Acting in that way is a great exercise to get a sense of true nature and at the same time to awaken your instinct for natural behavior.

It is my suggestion for a first step.

And as a first exercise, you would have to ask yourself truly:

Why do I want to follow the path of the Dao and why do I “Wu Wei”?

If the answer still has an intend, such as “to feel better” or “I don't want to suffer anymore” or “same thing we do every night Pinky, try to take over the world!”, you are not quite doing it “Wu Wei” yet.

**Q14: The idea of “non action” and to adjust to the current situation and the cosmic harmony reminds me a lot of Stoicism. Is Daoism not just same as Stoicism?**

At first glance Stoicism and Daoism do look very similar.

However, the processes are quite different and contradict each other.

In short, Stoicism is something very active, where you would actively think and work to change and adjust your life accordingly and to have control over your affects to be free of your temperamental passion.

In Daoism you would be passive, be instinctively in tune with the cosmic harmony and automatically react to that balance without thinking. Feelings are natural, so is passion. If its required, they can burn as hot as the sun, there is nothing wrong with that. You want to do things without unnatural intend. Control is an illusion.

**Q15: Daoism sounds very deterministic. If I just follow a cosmic balance, is there no free choice and is everything predetermined?**

No, there are many free choices. However, not at any given time.

Timing is everything in Daoism.

**Example E15.1: Nothing is softer or more flexible than water, yet nothing can resist it**

Imagine you dropped into a raging river, you somehow were able to grab a piece of wood, but the river is very broad and the current forces you to follow the flow of the river mercilessly.

What are the options?

You can try to swim to the sides to get to the saving land without avail.

The current is strong and you become exhausted after some hours. You pass out. When finally, you arrived at a spot at which the river is much narrower and the land within an armlength's reach, you are still passed out and you miss the chance. A few hundred meters you slip from the wood.

You can also simply wait on your flotsam, using only minimum effort to hold yourself onto it. It is what in this very moment is the easiest thing.

Some hours later, you arrive at the spot where the river is narrower. You can simply grab onto the land and get off the river, without any effort.

But, there are options here as well. You can get off the river on the left side, on the right side or even not at all, to see what else is ahead.

Your choices matter.

But depending on the ever-changing situation, you need to adjust.

What is easy to do when having dropped into a quiet pond, might be exhausting and counterproductive to do when having dropped into a river.

**Q16: What about morals in Daoism? What is good and what is bad?**

Unlike in other Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism, morals are not of focus in Daoism. Any moral, that would be considered “good” these days, can be negative, depending on the situation and vice versa.

Thus such a fixed definition of what is good and what is bad has no place in Daoism.

**Q17: Does that mean Daoism is amoral or even immoral?**

Daoism is often accused of being amoral and to an extent immoral.

Firstly, Daoism does not endorse normatively positive morals, but it does also not specifically advertise normatively bad actions either.

Secondly, most humans are not monsters. Our inherent nature is that of a social being, depending on others and having compassion. The currently socially accepted morals and laws are not what made humans behave that way, but are the logical consequence of that very human nature.

Thus modern morals are nothing more than human nature written down.

**Q18: How about a god in Daoism?**

Just as with morals, the existence of a god is neither denied nor encouraged in Daoism.

**Q19: What happens after death in Daoism?**

I don't remember where I read that story, but to answer that question, a little shortened anecdote.

**Example E19.1: Peach in a pinch**

Imagine there was a princess once.

She was madly in love with her childhood friend Regis. But her father had different plans and told her she has to marry Damian, the sinister prince of the neighboring kingdom.

Knowing she has to marry that meanie she wept and wept every day for weeks. She was stressed, she barely got any sleep, was unable to eat and suffered badly.

But it did not help, one day she was married to Damian and moved to his castle.

Damian treated her to his best behavior, fulfilled her every wish and respected her. After a while the princess was the happiest, she has been in her whole life and had completely forgotten about all her worries.

We do not know what happens after death, aside of being able to observe the body rots away.

It is human nature to be afraid of uncertainty. But any change is just that: Change.

**Q20: How about you have not even once mentioned the Yin and Yang? What does it mean?**

The symbol itself is referred to as “Tai Ji Tu” (太极图) and consists of the hollow circle “Wuji” (无极) around it, the dark color of “Yin” (阴) and the white color of “Yang” (阳).

You will not find much about the Yin and Yang in philosophical Daoism, except one chapter in the Dao De Jing, where it is briefly used as a comparison.

It serves as an example, that for the existence of everything there is a reason, even if the reason is simply for the opposite to exist and also both can not-exist (yet), but are still possible.

The idea is that for something to be perceived, you will require a contrast, something that is different.

If for example the only color in existence was red, you would not be aware of it, because you could not find something that is not red.

Thus there are common thoughts on the Yin Yang symbol:

The existence of light causes the existence of shadow. But light would not exist with shadow in the first place.

And on the hollow circle (Wuji) around it: Without neither light or shadow being able to be perceived, they both exist and have the potential to be perceived, but cannot be perceived yet, because there is no contrast. Thus, the inside of the Wuji (which is just “nothingness”) has the potential to be “everythingness” and that is part of the inherent nature of nothingness.

Aside of that idea, the Yin and Yang has no further role in philosophical Daoism, but religious / mystic Daoism. As for philosophical Daoism, the Yin and Yang plays an extremely small role of essentially a foot note and has only “just” become popular in about the Ming dynasty, 1368 to 1644, which makes it rather modern.

**Q21: What about Qi? And Qi Gong / Taiji?**

“Qi” (气) as the “life force” or “breath that is life” plays a similar role in philosophical Daoism as the Yin Yang symbol. It is just mentioned briefly as a comparison by Laozi.

The heavy emphasize on it belongs to the mystic branch of Daoism.

Qi Gong and Taiji are both exercises of said mystic / religious branch.

They inherited the idea of philosophical Daoism of “movement like a flow in a harmonic way in accordance with a cosmic force”, but physically with your body, your breath and your mind in union.

**Q22: What is your personal favorite chapter / quote in the Daoistic scriptures?**

If I had to choose, I would say that I generally like Zhuangzi's chapter "Autumn Flood" of his "Outer Chapters" quite a bit, especially the following part.

**Quote Q22.1: Zhuangzi's Outer Chapters, Autumn Flood, various paragraphs:**

"In this case," replied the Spirit of the River, "what am I to do and what am I not to do? How am I to arrange my declinings and receivings, my takings-hold and my lettings-go?"

"From the point of view of Tao," said the Spirit of the Ocean, "value and worthlessness are like slopes and plains.

To consider either as absolutely such would involve great injury to Tao. Few and many are like giving and receiving presents. These must not be regarded from one side, or there will be great confusion to Tao.

It would be unfair only to regard, from the receiver's standpoint, the amount given. The intention of the giver must also be taken into the calculation.

Be discriminating, as the ruler of a State whose administration is impartial. Be dispassionate, as the worshipped deity whose dispensation is impartial. Be expansive, like the points of the compass, to whose boundlessness no limit is set. Embrace all creation, and none shall be more sheltered than another. This is the unconditioned. And where all things are equal, how can we have the long and the short?

"Tao is without beginning, without end. Other things are born and die. They are impermanent; and now for better, now for worse, they are ceaselessly changing form. Past years cannot be recalled: time cannot be arrested. The succession of states is endless; and every end is followed by a new beginning. Thus, it may be said that man's duty to his neighbor is embodied in the eternal principles of the universe. All he has to do is to be.

"The life of man passes by like a galloping horse, changing at every turn, at every hour. What should he do, or what should he not do, other than let his decomposition go on?"

"If this is the case," retorted the Spirit of the River, "pray what is the value of Tao?"

"Those who understand Tao," answered the Spirit of the Ocean, "must necessarily apprehend the eternal principles above mentioned and be clear as to their application. Consequently, they do not suffer any injury from without. They never oppose, but let all things take their course.

"The man of perfect virtue cannot be burnt by fire, nor drowned in water, nor hurt by frost or sun, nor torn by wild bird or beast. Not that he makes light of these; but that he discriminates between safety and danger. Happy under prosperous and adverse circumstances alike, cautious as to what he discards and what he accepts; —nothing can harm him.

(Continued on next page)



**Quote Q22.1: Zhuangzi's Outer Chapters, Autumn Flood, various paragraphs:**

"Therefore it has been said that the natural abides within, the artificial without. Virtue abides in the natural. Knowledge of the action of the natural and of the artificial has its root in the natural, its development in virtue. And thus, whether in motion or at rest, whether in expansion or in contraction, there is always a reversion to the essential and to the ultimate."

"What do you mean," enquired the Spirit of the River, "by the natural and the artificial?"

"Horses and oxen," answered the Spirit of the Ocean, "have four feet. That is the natural. Put a halter on a horse's head, a string through a bullock's nose, —that is the artificial.

"Therefore, it has been said, do not let the artificial obliterate the natural; do not let will obliterate destiny; do not let virtue be sacrificed to fame. Diligently observe these precepts without fail, and thus you will revert to the divine."

The walrus envies the centipede; Its many legs and nimble gait.  
the centipede envies the snake; Which moves without legs.  
the snake envies the wind; Which moves far more quickly even without body.  
the wind envies the eye; Which travels even without moving.  
the eye envies the mind; Which can comprehend the whole universe, past and present alike.

The walrus said to the centipede, "I hop about on one leg, but not very successfully. How do you manage all these legs you have?"

"I don't manage them," replied the centipede. "Have you never seen saliva? When it is ejected, the big drops are the size of pearls, the small ones like mist. They fall promiscuously on the ground and cannot be counted. And so, it is that my mechanism works naturally, without my being conscious of the fact."

The centipede said to the snake, "With all my legs I do not move as fast as you with none. How is that?"

"One's natural mechanism," replied the snake, "is not a thing to be changed. What need have I for legs?"

The snake said to the wind, "I can manage to wriggle along, but I have a form. Now you come blustering down from the North Sea to bluster away to the south sea, and you seem to be without form. How is that?"

"'Tis true," replied the wind, "that I bluster as you say; but anyone who can point at me or kick at me, excels me. As I cannot do as much to them.

On the other hand, I can break huge trees and destroy large buildings. That is my strong point. Out of all the small things in which I do not excel I make one great one in which I do excel. And to excel in great things is given only to the Sages."

Everything has its own natural qualifications. What is difficult to one is easy to another.

**Q23: Do I need to join a temple for becoming a Daoist?**

Most temples you will find, are focusing on the religious Daoism and you do not have to join any community if you decide to follow the path of the Daoism.

As a matter of fact, in ancient times, it was advised for beginning followers to leave their home, isolate themselves from their known society and to explore the world.

**Q24: There are so many translations of Laozi and Zhuangzi, which one is correct?**

There are many translations and many will translate the same paragraph completely different. The Chinese original scriptures are not written in coherent sentences, but rather single characters that form a sequence of words, thus is wide open to free interpretation.

Generally there is nothing wrong with reading different interpretations, since it will show many different angles.

However, beware that Daoism is free of religion, blind belief, mysticism, magic, ways to improve yourself or your life and putting anyone or anything above anyone or anything else.

If you spot such elements, it can be considered a “very far-fetched”, to the point of purposely wrong translation.

**Q25: TL; DR?**

1. Read the scriptures of Zhuangzi and Laozi
2. Sharpen your awareness of “True Nature” of things and humans
3. Understand the concept of Wu Wei and apply it
4. Continue doing 2 and 3 until it becomes an instinct
- 5.
6. Profit

**Q26: I have further questions, where can I ask them?**

I am strongly recommending the Discord community “Dying Lotus Philosophy” by Lauren for any inquiries on Daoism or other philosophies and religions: <https://discord.gg/ATZcAWb>

You can also personally contact me via Discord DM: Emilia [Emi]#8888

**Literature for further reading – History and introduction of Daoism**

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on Daoism:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/daoism/>

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on Laozi:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/laozi/>

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on Zhuangzi:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/zhuangzi/>

**Literature for further reading – Laozi’s Dao De Jing**

Chinese, English translation by Wikisource:

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Tao\\_Te\\_Ching](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Tao_Te_Ching)

English, French translation by James Legge:

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/T%C3%A2o\\_Teh\\_King](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/T%C3%A2o_Teh_King)

Chinese, English translation by James Legge alternative:

<https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing>

English translation by Lionel Giles:

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Sayings\\_of\\_Lao\\_Tz%C5%AD](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Sayings_of_Lao_Tz%C5%AD)

**Literature for further reading – Zhuangzi’s Inner Chapters, Outer Chapters, Mixed Chapters**

Chinese, Japanese, Korean, English translation based on Herbert Giles:

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Chuang\\_Tz%C5%AD\\_\(Giles\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Chuang_Tz%C5%AD_(Giles))

Chinese, English translation by James Legge:

<https://ctext.org/zhuangzi>

English translation by Burton Watson:

<https://terebess.hu/english/chuangtzu.html>

German translation with interpretation by Viktor Kalinke:

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