Name: _____

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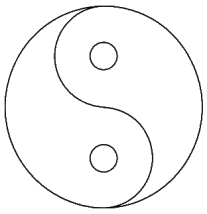
Taoism

You cannot stop tomorrow from coming. You can beg, complain, throw a tantrum, or refuse to get out of bed. The sun will still rise. This simple truth is the heart of Taoism. Taoists believe life's frustrations begin when people fight reality instead of understanding it.



Wu wei

Taoists believe humankind, nature, and heaven are interconnected, creating harmony when everything acts according to its nature. This is known as wu wei. A person who practices wu wei avoids aggression and bends to accommodate life's problems rather than break under their weight.

The Tao

The natural order is an unknowable force called the Tao. Tao can be translated as "the way." Taoists view the Tao as the connection that makes all life and movement in nature possible.

Yin and Yang

The world is full of opposites that depend on one another. We appreciate rest because we know work, warmth because we know cold, and success because we have experienced failure. The same patterns can be seen throughout nature. Day follows night, summer follows winter, and growth is eventually followed by decline. Taoists call these complementary forces yin and yang.

The interaction of yin and yang is revealed in the changing of the seasons, the flowering of living things, and their eventual decay. Unhappiness comes from people acting against the Tao by disrupting the natural order of life.

The Natural Order

Taoists believe these balances operate not only in human life but throughout the universe. Earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters are often viewed as signs that harmony has been disturbed. Yet Taoists also believe that nature tends to restore balance over time.

Taoism is a religious tradition that began in China about 2,500 years ago during a period of disorder in Chinese history called the Age of Warring States. Local warlords engaged in battles; greed was rampant and many Chinese people lived in constant fear.

Lao Tzu

Legends say the founder of Taoism is Lao Tzu, though it is possible he never existed. He is said to have been a scholar who worked as a keeper of records for a Zhou lord. Lao Tzu was unhappy with the growing chaos of his time, so as a very old man, he decided to withdraw from society to live as a hermit. While traveling, a gatekeeper recognized him and asked him to write down his wisdom. Lao Tzu wrote the Tao Te Ching, then rode through the gate, never to be seen again.

The Tao Te Ching means "the Way of Life." It is a concise book—written in ancient Chinese, standard English translations are often fewer than one hundred pages. The Tao Te Ching recommends bending to accommodate rather than breaking under the stresses of life.

Water

Many Taoists compare the Tao to water. When blocked, water seeks the weakest spot in an obstacle and flows around it. Given the slightest opening, water will pass through and widen the opening if possible. Yet water steadily finds the easiest path and follows it for as long as possible. The Tao Te Ching says, "There is nothing stronger and weaker than water, and yet there is nothing better for attacking hard and strong things."

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Name: _____

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Fill in the Blanks

Taoism began in China about 2,500 years ago during the A__ of W__r__i__g States. Taoists believe h__a__k__nd and nature are i__t__rc__n__e__t__d and we should live in harmony with the n__t__r__l o__d__r. Taoists believe u__h__p__i__e__s often begins when people struggle against r__a__i__y instead of a__c__p__i__g it. A person practicing wu wei avoids unnecessary conflict and adapts to challenges rather than *f__r__i__g outcomes. Taoists see *b__l__n__e throughout nature. O__p__s__te forces such as day and night d__p__nd on one another. These c__m__l__m__n__a__y forces are called yin and yang. The Tao Te Ching, traditionally attributed to L__o T__u, teaches that *fle__ibi__i__y and patience can be stronger than a__g__e__s__on.

Tao Te Ching

The Tao Te Ching is the primary text of Taoism. It is a remarkably short book. Rather than telling a story, the Tao Te Ching presents a series of brief sayings that readers have interpreted and debated for more than two thousand years. The Tao Te Ching was written in ancient Chinese and can be difficult for modern readers. The passages below have been slightly modernized for clarity.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

The softest thing in the world overcomes the hardest.

Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.

To lead the people, walk behind them.

The world is won by those who let it go.

Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know.

Answer in Complete Sentences

1. According to Taoists, what is the Tao?

*2. How would a person practice *wu wei*?

*3. Choose one of the quotes from the Tao Te Ching and explain how the quote is an example of Taoist philosophy?

*A higher order learning question. Any reasonable answer will be accepted.

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