Taoism

Taoism (also spelled Daoism) is a philosophical and religious system based on the writings of philosopher Lao Zi (also spelled Lao Tse) who lived in China in the sixth century BC. It has had a strong influence on the cultures of East Asia for more than two thousand years.

The word Tao means “path” or “way”. One central concept of Taoism are the “Three Jewels of the Tao,” namely compassion, moderation and humility. Important ideas in Taoism are nature, and man’s relationship to the universe. It also stresses health and longevity.

Taoist philosophy embues many Chinese traditions including astrology, cooking, martial arts, traditional medicine, feng shui, Tai Chi and Qigong. Qualities people should cultivate, according to Taoism, include naturalness, vitality, peace, wu-wei (which means action through inaction), emptiness, detachment, flexibility, receptiveness, and spontaneity.

Taoists believe that the Tao is a force that flows through all existence, and people strive to live in harmony with the Tao. There is no deity in Taoism, as the Tao cannot be represented as one thing or image. So Taoists do not pray. They look for answers to their questions and problems through meditation and observation of the world around them. Taoists take a cyclical view of time, rather than the linear view of Western thinking.

A person’s most important task, according to Taoism, is to become more virtuous. Taoists also believe in letting nature take its course through wu-wei. Improper actions upset the balance of nature and cause problems. Sometimes the best course of action is to do nothing at all. It is important to know when to act wisely, and when to do nothing.

The yin-yang symbol is used in Taoism to represents the Taoist belief of a balance of opposite forces: dark and light, male and female, hot and cold. When polarized forces are in equilibrium, all is calm. When the balance is upset, there is chaos. And since nothing in nature is pure black or pure white, there is a black spot in the white swirl, and a white spot in the black swirl.

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Choose the best answer for each question.

1. When did Lao Zi live?
   a. Sixth century AD
   b. Second century AD
   c. Sixth century BC
   d. Second century BC

2. What does “Tao” mean?
   a. Immortality, or reincarnation
   b. Path, or way
   c. Virtue, or morality
   d. Wisdom, or knowledge

3. What are “the Three Jewels of the Tao”?
   a. Lao Zi’s students
   b. Naturalness, peace, wu wei
   c. The three phases of life
   d. Compassion, moderation, humility

4. What is the Tao, according to Taoism?
   a. A force that flows through all life
   b. God
   c. Action through inaction
   d. Enlightenment

5. What is our most important task, according to Taoism?
   a. Become more virtuous
   b. Find enlightenment
   c. Do nothing
   d. Create chaos

6. What does the yin-yang symbol symbolize?
   a. Equality of the sexes
   b. A balance of opposite forces
   c. Personal freedom
   d. Enlightenment
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Answer the questions using complete sentences.

1. Describe a situation in which doing nothing is better than doing anything.
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

2. From the way it is used in the article what do you think is the meaning of “deity”?
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

3. Write a short description of a society or culture that lives according to the principles of Taoism. What would it be like?
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

4. Compassion, moderation and humility are the “Three Jewels of the Tao”. Which three qualities do you think are most important for a person? Why?
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

5. What do you understand differently about East Asian cultures after reading about Taoism? How will you use this information in the future?
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
ANSWERS

Multiple Choice:

1. c
2. b
3. d
4. a
5. a
6. b

Short Response:

1. Answers will vary. Accept reasonable answers.
2. Deity means God.
3. Answers will vary. Accept reasonable answers.
4. Answers will vary. Accept reasonable answers.
5. Answers will vary. Accept reasonable answers.
Taoism

Across
1. Name for three qualities essential to a Taoist life
6. Avoiding excesses or extremes
7. Cultivating this quality is the main goal of Taoists
11. Pity, sympathy
13. Taoism is based on his writings
14. Symbol for opposites in equilibrium
15. Religion based on writings by Lao Zi

Down
2. Taoists seek to live in ______ with the Tao
3. Living in harmony with the Tao requires keeping opposites in this state
4. A force imbuing all existence
5. Means active inaction
8. Absence of pride
9. One translation of "Tao"
10. Sometimes this is better than doing anything
12. Alternate spelling of "Taoism"
Taoism

THREE JEWELS

ARQ

MODERATION

ONYJ

COMPASSION

LAOZIT

YINYANG TAOISM