

Taoism - The Tao

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

When you study religions, you are studying various methods of approaching and thinking about the concepts and principles that serve to guide a culture and its traditions. Depending on one's cultural perspective and personal orientation, some religions may seem more straightforward and others more obscure and foreign. That being said, many ideas—in their pure form—transcend time and place. In this lesson, you're going to look at one of these ideas—the concept of the Tao and the philosophy of Taoism. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

[1. Confucius and Lao Tzu](#)

[2. Lampposts](#)

1. Confucius and Lao Tzu

Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, was influenced and inspired by Taoism and the writings of its founder, Lao Tzu. These two men were born 50 years apart in the sixth century before the Common Era, and their philosophies, taken together, form the basis of many aspects of Chinese thought and culture.

Confucianism is particularly concerned with the willful and worldly or society-based application of certain ordering principles. Taoism expresses the importance of intuition, spontaneity, and a creative understanding of balance, letting be, and action-less action.

Dao is a Chinese word. It is written in pinyin, a system used to transcribe Chinese characters into Latin. In English, it is usually written as "Tao." Dao means "the way," or "the path." Trying to fix the notion of Dao is misleading according to Lao Tzu. The Dao is the fundamental essence of the universe. It is timeless, nameless, and beyond our understanding. You can only let it be, trusting that everything you experience in the world are manifestations of the Dao. Your experiences are lampposts that may bring insight and understanding of the Dao.

Lao Tzu communicates this paradox in the first line of his writing, the *Tao Te Ching* (n.d.)

*"The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name."*

The title of Lao Tzu's book has been translated in different ways, such as *The Classic Book of Integrity and The Way* and *Tao and Virtue Classic* and *The Book of Virtue or Power*.



TERM TO KNOW

Tao

In Taoism, the “path” or “way” the worshipper must follow and with which the worshipper should attempt to become one.

2. Lampposts

The teaching of Lao Tzu expresses the importance of living in harmony with the universal force and essence. This includes receiving and responding to its actions with sensitivity and compassion, openness to the Tao, expressing one’s self modestly, and trusting intuition as a guiding manifestation of the Tao itself. In the *Tao Te Ching*, he says every being in the universe is an expression of the Tao.

He offers many lessons, or lampposts, to help one step out of the way of the Tao so that the Tao can be enjoined and followed with balance. The first lesson is stated in the first line of the *Tao Te Ching*. It says that the Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name.

Another important concept is the idea of the return to the natural state of being. This is referred to as returning to the **uncarved block**.

Secondly, is the concept of Wei Wu Wei, or Wu Wei. This points to a creative letting be or action-less action or effortless action. This is meant to be a practical guide in life. It involves notions of trust, watching out for ego desires, and settling into quiet but active attention.

In a chapter on Wu Wei, Lao Tzu says, “Practice not doing and everything will fall into place.” This can be interpreted in a variety of ways, but it points to the idea that to fully embrace and allow the depths of Wu Wei to be integrated, one must study, read, sit, and let be while entrusting accord and balance with the Tao.



TERM TO KNOW

Uncarved Block

In Taoism, the original state of the human mind, before and independent of experience.



SUMMARY

Taoism emerged in China in the sixth century Before the Common Era, at the same time as Confucian philosophy. The founder of Taoism is Lao Tzu, and it’s a philosophy based on the concept of the Tao,

which has been given the translation “the way,” or “the path.” **Confucius and Lao Tzu** created philosophies that helped form the basis of Chinese thought and culture.

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY TED FAIRCHILD FOR SOPHIA LEARNING. Please see our [Terms of Use](#).

REFERENCES

Lao Tzu (n.d.) *Chapter 1. Tao Te Ching*. <https://www.wussu.com/laotzu/laotzu01.html>



TERMS TO KNOW

Tao

In Taoism, the "path" or "way" the worshiper must follow and with which the worshiper should attempt to become one.

Uncarved Block

In Taoism, the original state of the human mind, before and independent of experience.