

Lecture 9

Taoism: Chinese Esotericism

As you know we're currently in the midst of discussing the East Asian family of religions. Our session last time was devoted to the Chinese tradition of Confucianism, founded in the sixth century B.C. by the Great Master K'ung—K'ung Fu-Tzu, or Confucius. I highlighted the Confucian idea of *Li*, which can be translated as both comportment and ritual. *Li* concerns appropriate social behavior, which is linked in turn with a cosmic or universal harmony pervading the entire universe. For the Confucian, acting in accordance with *Li* requires that people take seriously their respective places in the traditional Chinese social hierarchy, a hierarchy defined by the Five Constant Relationships, which are pairs of relations between ruler and subject, husband and wife, parent and child, elder sibling and younger sibling, and elder friend and younger friend. I compared the smooth functioning of this system to an aqueduct and to the circulatory system of the human body. In this case, of course, what is being transmitted is not water or blood but *Te*, or moral force, the force society needs to be healthy. Finally, I spoke about the prime Confucian virtue, which is *Jen* or empathy, and about the *Chun-Tzu* or Confucian saint, who as a master of empathy has established a deep kinship not only with his fellow men but with all living things.

Now we turn to a second Chinese tradition called Taoism—often spelled Daoism and pronounced *Dow-ism* (as in the “Dow” Jones Average). As I told you in the last lecture, Taoism is not really so much a completely separate religion as it is the flip side of Confucianism, its esoteric or inward complement. To change the metaphor, they're like two strands in one rope, each requiring the other for combined spiritual strength. The Confucian focus is primarily on outward behavior. Its interests are almost exclusively social: who does what, where, when, and to whom. Of course for Confucius these behaviors all have a deep spiritual significance, and we mustn't underestimate this fact. Nonetheless Confucians generally don't talk very much about the sort of spiritual issues that interest western religious people, such as the nature of life after death, nor does their tradition include much advice on matters like meditation or contemplative prayer. For this dimension of life the traditional Chinese turn instead to the religion of Taoism.

Taoism is said to have originated with a man called Lao Tzu, who was born about 604 B.C. I mentioned in the last lecture that Confucius and the Buddha were near contemporaries, and as you can see Lao Tzu was also on the scene at roughly the same time: he would have been about

forty years old when the Buddha was born (depending of course on which scholarly opinion one accepts as to the Buddha's dates) and about fifty at the birth of Confucius. I don't know about you, but I sometimes enjoy pondering the significance of historical conjunctions like this. Imagine knowing that right now, somewhere on the planet, there were three people whose teachings would have a comparable impact one day. Actually Lao Tzu, Confucius, and Siddhartha Gautama were not alone in that generation. Scholars believe that the Jewish prophet Isaiah may have been writing at about this time as well, and although it's hard to pinpoint the dates it's likely the ancient Greek philosophers Pythagoras and Heraclitus would have also been near contemporaries. If you figure that without Isaiah the whole tenor of Judaism would have been different and the Christian understanding of Christ as Messiah might not have been the same, and that without Pythagoras and Heraclitus there would have been no Plato, and hence nothing even remotely like western intellectual history as we know it, then this was indeed a most remarkable historical moment; the philosopher Karl Jaspers called it the "axial age".

Anyway, back to the founder of Taoism. As it turns out Lao Tzu is a figure whose life and teachings are wrapped in a nearly impenetrable shroud of legends and stories, and it's very hard to be certain of any historical core. I mentioned last time that Confucius's life was a relatively monotonous one, without any great drama or mystery. Almost the reverse is the case with Lao Tzu, who was mystery through and through. Even the name is not really a proper name like Siddhartha or Jesus or Muhammad, but a title. As I told you last time, the name "Confucius", too, is based in part on a title—the "Great Master"—but it's a title that still goes with a given name, Kung. In the case of Lao Tzu, by contrast, all we have to go on is the title, a phrase which simply means the "old man". *Lao tzu* is the Chinese equivalent of the Arabic word *shaykh*, the Russian *starets*, the Japanese *roshi*, and the Greek *geron*, all of which refer literally to any aged person but by extension to someone whom the years have made wise. This brings to mind, of course, the great value that Confucius placed on old age in his Five Constant Relationships. There's actually quite an interesting story about Confucius himself as a relatively young man going to visit the "Old Man", Lao Tzu, who would have probably been in his 70's or 80's. Confucius is said to have come away from this one and only audience amazed and in awe. "I know that an animal can run, a fish can swim, a bird can fly," Confucius reported. "And I know that for an animal a trap can be made, for a fish a net, and for a bird an arrow. But the dragon, which rises on the wings of the wind, is beyond man's comprehension. Today I have seen Lao Tzu, and he is a dragon!"

Setting aside some of the more fantastic stories and legends, what we can probably be sure of is that this “dragon” spent the early part of his life as some sort of scholar or teacher, passing his time as the keeper of the archives—a sort of glorified librarian—in the palace of one of China’s feudal princes, where he may also have served as tutor to the prince’s children. (This sort of thing always amazes me, too; imagine having such a person as your own private teacher when you were just a kid. I’ve often wondered what this prince’s children grew up to be. After all, if a mere Aristotle could produce an Alexander the Great, there’s no telling how the pupils of Lao Tzu may have turned out!) We’re told that this relatively quiet, unencumbered life in the court of the prince finally became a weary burden to Lao Tzu, however. Typically East Asian in his fundamental interests, he’d apparently hoped that his teachings might have some positive effect on people’s understanding of their proper social relationships, and like the young Plato he seems to have thought he could have some very particular influence on the political structures of his time by making the most of the patronage of a powerful ruler. But according to tradition he eventually gave up on this plan. He decided instead (rather like the Buddha) to abandon his former life: climbing on the back of a water buffalo and heading for the mountains, he resolved to live the rest of his life as a recluse.

If this had been the end of the story, of course, we’d know nothing about Lao Tzu today. Tradition tells us, however, that upon reaching a celebrated mountain pass leading to the western frontier of China, Lao Tzu was stopped by one of the guards, who seems to have realized intuitively (like Confucius before him) that this was no ordinary human being. The gatekeeper begged Lao Tzu to change his mind and not abandon society, trying to convince him how much he was needed, and when his pleadings failed he asked whether at the very least the Old Man wouldn’t set down his teachings in writing for the benefit of posterity. We’re told that Lao Tzu agreed to this request, retired into a nearby cave for a period of three days, and then came back, having penned the classic Taoist text known today as the *Tao Te Ching* (also transliterated as *Daodejing*). And he then rode away, never to return. Certain legends say he discovered another kingdom that more highly valued his gifts where he lived to be around two hundred years old; others say he has never died but continues to exist in the world even today as a hidden but health-giving presence—rather like the figure whom Shiite Muslims call the *Mahdi*, or perhaps like the mysterious Biblical being Melchizedek, or again like Jesus’s disciple Saint John (notice the rather mysterious wording in the Gospel of John: chapter 21, verses 22 and 23). Many traditions have analogous figures.

The term itself “Taoism”—the name of the religion—comes from the first word in Lao Tzu’s treatise, the *Tao Te Ching*. Since virtually all that I’ll be saying in this lecture is based on the *Tao Te Ching*, I should perhaps tell you something first of all about its title. Everybody agrees that the word *Tao* has no exact English equivalent, and in fact most translations don’t even try to find another word and just keep the Chinese term. The problem of translation is nothing new, of course. We’ve noticed before in this class how difficult it is to find English synonyms for many foreign religious ideas, but in this case the difficulty is more than academic or linguistic. It’s linked instead to the playful subtleties of the Taoist religion as a whole, which perhaps more than any other tradition resists our efforts to pin it down. Someone has said that the idea of *Tao*, and in fact the whole of the *Tao Te Ching*, is untranslatable into *any* language—even Chinese! And if that’s true it’s all the more ironic to note that with the single exception of the Bible the *Tao Te Ching* has been “translated” more often than any other book in the world.

Lao Tzu is careful to make certain that his readers are aware of the fundamental untranslatability and mystery of his book from its very start. The first chapter begins: “The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name.” And the same motif of paradox runs throughout the text: “If you want to be given everything, give everything up”; “when nothing is done, nothing is left undone”; “try to make the people happy, and you lay the groundwork for misery”. Perhaps the most famous, and most paradoxical, of such sayings comes in Chapter 56 of the *Tao Te Ching*: “Those who know don’t talk. Those who talk don’t know”—which is not unlike telling someone, “I’m a liar”, because if you’re telling the truth you’re not telling the truth, and yet of course if you’re *not* you *are*!

In any case, when a translation *is* attempted of *Tao*, the word is usually rendered in English by the term “way” or “path” (I’ll say more about this in my YouTube lecture), and thus understood it can have at least three different connotations or dimensions. It has a metaphysical dimension, a physical or natural dimension, and an ethical or moral dimension:

1. Metaphysically, it signifies the Way of Ultimate Reality, the way in which things are fundamentally organized or patterned throughout the cosmos. As you can see, I hope, this is very much like the Confucian teaching about the vertical or supernatural aspect of *Li*, and it’s related as well to the “Great Master’s” understanding of Heaven as (what I’ve called) an “impersonal cosmic template”. This is the transcendent dimension of *Tao*. From this point of view, it corresponds more or less to the word “Word” (*Logos* in Greek) in the opening verses of the Gospel

of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1, 3). In fact, when the Bible is translated into Chinese, this verse often becomes: “In the beginning was the *Tao*, and the *Tao* was with God, and the *Tao* was God.... All things were made by the *Tao* and without the *Tao* was not anything made that was made.” And of course this translation makes perfect sense since Christ, who is the Word, is also the “Way” (John 14:6).

2. Naturally speaking, *Tao* refers to the Way of nature, the Way of the natural environment, the way followed by plants and animals as they pursue their ecologically balanced behaviors. This you could say is the immanent dimension of *Tao*, the indwelling presence of *Tao* in the substance of the life around us and in the deep, dynamic structure of our own physical bodies. When your heart beats and your lungs fill themselves and are then emptied of air and you reflexively blink your eyes at bright light, these are all manifestations of the immanent *Tao*.

3. Ethically, *Tao* signifies the Way a man or woman should conduct themselves in their relationships with other people. Here we see once again the typical East Asian interest in the social question. The *Tao* is not just a metaphysical fact about transcendent Reality and not just a natural truth about our immanent environment; it also refers to the ideal pattern of human inter-relationships.

Now having made these distinctions, I should immediately clarify that these are not three separate ways or three different *Taos*. For Lao Tzu, it was all just one *Tao* and one Way. There is only one true Reality, and this Reality—like the Hindu *Nirguna Brahman* or the Buddhist *Nirvâna*—inevitably escapes from all the pigeonholes and categories with which we try to define and control it. This Reality lies at the very heart of man, and yet at the same time it infinitely exceeds the boundaries of the universe. It is both within us and outside us. Or better, it is neither within nor without, for in fact the *Tao* is itself in a place that’s “no-place”, prior to the very division of inside and out. Thus Lao Tzu can write in the *Tao Te Ching*, “Look, it cannot be seen; it is beyond form. Listen, it cannot be heard; it is beyond sound. Grasp, it cannot be held; it is intangible. It is indefinable and beyond imagination. Stand before it; there is no beginning. Follow it; there is no end. Stay with the ancient *Tao*.”

Tao (thus indefinably defined) is the creative Source of the universe: “All things,” we’re told, “are born from it.” For this reason, as I’m sure you can see, the *Tao* is comparable to the western idea of God. According to the *Tao Te Ching*, “The *Tao* gives birth to all things, nourishes

them, maintains them, cares for them, comforts them, protects them, takes them back to itself, creating without possessing, acting without expecting, guiding without interfering. That is why love of the *Tao* is in the very nature of things.” Notice the feminine imagery here: the *Tao* gives birth like a mother; in fact it’s specifically called “the Great Mother”, and the universe may be viewed accordingly as a child in Her womb. As you may remember, I anticipated this idea earlier, at the beginning of our discussions of Hinduism, when I was talking about the various conceptions of God, and I told you that Taoism would provide us with a good example of a panentheist religion, where the universe is understood to exist *within* the Divine. It’s interesting to note, however, that at one point Lao Tzu goes so far as to say that the *Tao* “is older than God”. Understood as a particular personal being, God is in some sense contained within the Great Way.

A second crucial idea is conveyed by the second word in the title of Lao Tzu’s classic, a word we encountered last time with Confucianism: namely, *Te*. I told you that in a Confucian context the term conveys mainly the idea of “moral force” or “ethical energy”. But there’s actually much more to it than that in Taoism. Like the word *Tao*, *Te* is elusive and resists any simple translation. The closest English equivalents include “power”, “strength”, and “virtue”. To use an analogy, you could say that *Te* is like the pent up and as-yet-unreleased force in a tightly strung bow. Or again, it’s like the explosive power of a waterfall. If you think of the *Tao* as a Way or Path, then *Te* is the motive force of movement along that Path. *Tao* is the riverbed, and *Te* is the current. Lao Tzu writes, “There was something formless and perfect before the universe was born. It is serene. Empty. Solitary. Unchanging. Infinite. Eternally present. It is the mother of the universe. For lack of a better name, I call it the *Tao*. It flows through all things, inside and outside, and returns to the origin of all things.” Notice that the “flow” is both away and then back again, like the tides. Whichever direction the *Tao* is moving, however, that movement is *Te*, and in this sense it’s like the rhythm of our breathing, with its alternating inhalation and exhalation, or again we could liken *Te* to the systolic and diastolic phases of one’s heartbeat. Thus according to Taoism there is one single Source of all things—*from* which those things come, *in* which those things are contained, and *to* which those things will eventually return. That Source is the *Tao*, and the out flow and return of all creatures is *Te*. The Taoist Bible, the *Tao Te Ching*, is thus the “Book”—that’s what the last word in the title, *Ching*, means—the “Book of the Way and Its Reciprocal Power”.

All of this is basic Taoist doctrine. Taoist method, on the other hand, consists in various efforts to enter into harmony with the movements of *Te*. As I've told you already, there's an "ethical" meaning of *Tao*, which refers to the way people should act, and here is where method or practice comes in. "Let's see," the Taoist reasons, "if the way I should act is in keeping with the ultimate *Tao*, and if the *Tao* itself acts by means of its *Te*, then I must try to attune myself to this *Te*. In other words, I should try to discern the subtle flow in things, and then 'go with that flow'." Traditionally, there are three distinct but overlapping Taoist techniques for achieving this attunement—three techniques, if you want to think of it this way, of surfing the waves of *Te*. Each of these methods gave rise to a distinct Taoist school of thought, three different "denominations" of Taoism, which scholars call philosophical Taoism, religious Taoism, and yogic Taoism.

1. The *philosophical* Taoist attempts to "flow" with *Te* primarily through reflection and meditation; the power she seeks is a contemplative power. She tries to pay close attention, for example, to the movements of animals and other creatures in nature in order to understand the secret of their spontaneity; and she comes to realize that the most intelligent and efficient use of power, no matter what the situation, is one in which all resistance and friction have been reduced to a minimum. By contemplating the world around her, she endeavors to imitate its frictionless flow. The *Tao Te Ching* itself, with all of its numerous insights into the workings of nature, is fundamentally an exercise in philosophical Taoism.

2. Meanwhile, the *religious* Taoist is the person who focuses on ritual power and who seeks to master the flow of Reality through the proper performance of sacred rites and ceremonies. This branch of the tradition was labeled "religious" by European scholars because it comes the closest to doing the sorts of things most westerners expect when they think of religion. In other words, it involves priests and temples and altars and sacred formulas and anointings of the sick and petitionary prayers. Of the three Taoist branches, it looks on the outside the most like its Confucian sister, for it's primarily interested in the correct practice of *Li*. The underlying assumption of religious Taoism is that *Te* is transferable, and that by close physical association with sacred objects and by chanting sacred words it's possible to tap into certain spiritual reservoirs and make use of their energy. Here again Christians might do well to think about the sacraments of their own religion and the sacred rites that provide their settings. "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53).

3. Finally, there is the *yogic* form of Taoism. This is a branch of the tradition that concentrates attention on the control of physiological power by means of various bodily exercises and physical disciplines. If you think back to Hinduism and to *yoga* in particular, with its stress on such matters as posture and control of the breath, you'll have a pretty good idea of what's involved in yogic Taoism. Basically, this school is interested in how to manage the *Te* that is present in the vital forces of our bodies. Taoists of this branch practice (among other things) extremely subtle breathing techniques so as to "go with the flow" of the air through their lungs, using its movement as a guide toward attuning their minds with the *Tao*. It's also typical for yogic Taoists to attend very carefully to the foods they eat, the idea being that certain foods contain modes of energy that can be used as spiritual, and not merely physical, fuel. Yogic Taoism may also include instruction in various esoteric sexual disciplines in order that its practitioners might benefit spiritually from one of the body's strongest forces. We're told that men and women Taoist adepts can become so aware of their bodily functions and so in control of them that they're able to redirect the force of erotic passion away from physical climax, transmuting sexual *Te* for spiritual purposes. In Hinduism, there are similar techniques, which come under the general heading of *tantra*. The yogic branch of Taoism also deserves credit for discovering and developing the principles behind such ancient Chinese healing techniques as acupuncture and acupressure—techniques, as you probably know, which also involve redirection of the body's vital energies and which are now beginning to be more and more recognized by the western medical community.

I could go on at some length about these intriguing techniques, but I need to get back to general principles. No matter their particular methods, all Taoists agree that the key to mastering *Te*—whether you understand this as a contemplative power, a ritual power, or a physiological power—is to be found in practicing what they all call *wei wu wei*. I quoted earlier the opening lines of the *Tao Te Ching*: "The *Tao* that can be told is not the eternal *Tao*. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name." Now consider for a moment what this mysterious claim implies.

We're Taoists, let's say, and we therefore want to conform ourselves to the *Tao*—just as a Christian seeks to "be perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). But the *Tao* is beyond language; it can't be described. No word and no collection of words (however eloquent) will ever be adequate. Better, therefore, not to say anything, right? Better to realize that the *Tao* is best known in the silences between all the words. Like *Nirvâna*, the *Tao* is so utterly different from everything we know that it's wiser, finally, just to keep your mouth shut!

We need to figure out how to use our energies in some other, more profitable, and more efficient way. We're not going to talk but to do, and what we wish to do is to act like the *Tao* with its *Te*. We want to flow with the Great Flowing that is Reality. But if this is our goal, we're going to have to act in a way that mirrors our silence before the awesomeness of the *Tao*. Think about it. What is silence? Silence is not speaking. How then should we act? We should act by *not* acting. Whoever intends to live harmoniously in tune with the *Tao* must act in accordance with its ineffability, but to do this he must act-without-acting. Well, this is precisely what is meant by the Chinese phrase *wei wu wei*. The word *wei* means "action", and the word *wu* means "not". You put it together, and what you get literally is action-not-action: this paradoxical state is the very essence of Taoist spiritual method. Other translations of *wei wu wei* include "motionless movement", "dynamic quietude", and "creative letting-be".

Like the *Tao* itself, there's no way to define what this method involves. So instead the Taoists typically resort to analogies. One of their favorite strategies is to compare *wei wu wei* to the movement of a young willow tree in the face of a mighty storm. Unlike a much taller, much more solid tree like an oak, which stands up to the winds and ends by being uprooted or broken, a willow simply bends with the force—goes with the "flow"—and as a result, when the winds have died down, it returns to its original position unharmed. This is *wei wu wei*. The unacting action of *wei wu wei* is also like the very center of the hub of a wheel, they say, without which the rest of the wheel couldn't move, but which itself remains unmoved; the movement of *Te* is paradoxically rooted in stillness. Probably the most common of all Taoist analogies for actionless action is taken from the nature of water. "The supreme good is like water," says Lao Tzu, "which nourishes all things without trying to. It is content with the low places that people disdain. Nothing in the world is so soft and so yielding as water. Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible, nothing can surpass it. The soft overcomes the hard; the gentle overcomes the rigid." Consider how water always takes on the shape of its container, never insisting (as it were) on having its own way but instead conforming to the conditions around it; and yet we should also remember the incredible strength of water—how a single trickle from a tiny spring can eventually wear a hole in even the hardest rock. This is precisely the power of *wei wu wei*.

Christian students would do well to recall what Christ says in the Sermon on the Mount about the uselessness of much of man's planning. "I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Look at

the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Matthew 6:25-29). This, the Taoists would say, is excellent advice! Or again the Christian might also think back to what Saint Paul has to say in the following passage: “Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:5-7). This “emptying” process, by virtue of which Christ lowered himself like the water, is precisely what the Taoists have in mind with *wei wu wei*.

One final Christian comparison. The Taoist sage Chuang-Tzu tells the story of a famous cook, the master chef of a noble prince, who was the marvel of everyone because his meat cleaver never grew dull. When pressed for his secret, he simply replied, “There are spaces between the joints of the meat, and my blade is thin and keen. When this thinness finds that space, there is all the room you need.” If you find this obscure—if you still can’t quite see the point—try pondering the following Christian counterpart: “When they heard [what Jesus said], all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put [Him] out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down headlong. But passing through the midst of them”—his thinness finding their space—“He went away” (Luke 4:28-30). Jesus was (among other things) a Taoist master!

Allow me to mention, finally, one more, very important Taoist concept—probably in fact the best known and most characteristic of all the “Old Man’s” teachings. According to Taoism everything that exists is a coincidence or synthesis of complementary opposites. You’ve seen this already in the outflow and return of the *Te* and in our comparison of this force to our breathing or heartbeat, and you can see it also in the paradoxical methods of *wei wu wei*. Actionless action is itself a combination of opposites: namely, intense stillness with dynamic movement—opposites that nonetheless can be united to produce amazing results. Taoists label these and other such opposite or polar forces with the words *Yin* and *Yang*, and they symbolize the interpenetration of these forces with a characteristic emblem, an emblem I showed you several YouTube presentations ago when contrasting images or configurations of the Divine in different religions. I’ll show it to you again in the presentation that accompanies this lecture. It’s an emblem you’ve probably seen

elsewhere a well: a circular image in which two “fish-shaped” parts, one dark and one light and with “eyes” of opposite shadings, appear to be “swimming” into each other.

The dark area of the picture is meant to represent the quality the Taoists call *Yin*. In Taoist philosophy, *Yin* is the name for responsiveness, darkness, silence, the earth, the feminine; it can also be found at the level of the atom, where *Yin* is expressed in electrons. *Yang* on the other hand is the light part of the diagram. It is initiative, light, sound, the sky, the masculine; in atomic terms *Yang* is expressed in protons. Once you get into the habit of looking at things this way, you find that these forces are present everywhere: the Sun is *Yang*, and the moon is *Yin*; gold is *Yang*, and silver is *Yin*; solids are *Yang*, and liquids are *Yin*; the closed is *Yang*, and the open is *Yin*. It's very important to add, however, that even though they are opposites, *Yin* and *Yang* are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, the whole point of the *Yin-Yang* symbol is to help us visualize the way in which the forces combine. The dark and light parts of the symbol are forever flowing into each other, and each contains an element of the opposite within itself. Only together do they constitute the circle of life as a whole. As human beings, we notice this complementarity especially in the relationship between the sexes. Women are *Yin*, and men are *Yang*, and it's for this reason that they complement each other, not only at the level of their physical bodies but in their characteristic psychological qualities. But at the same time, no woman is purely *Yin*, and no man is purely *Yang*. Each of us contains a certain element of the opposite gender in our makeup.

I've given you several examples of *Yin* and *Yang*. Let me add one more, a very important addition for the Taoist worldview. The complementarity that exists in all things also includes a balance between joy and suffering, hence between good and bad fortune. *Yin* is negativity not just in terms of atomic forces but also with regard to emotions: *Yin* is sadness or melancholy. And *Yang* is the positive not just in terms of the atom but also when it comes to our feelings: *Yang* is happiness or joy. You can see what this leads to, I hope. In order to be a good Taoist, one must come to realize that life is a combination of good and bad fortune, a combination that leads inevitably to an oscillation of emotional ups and downs. If we truly wish to be “in synch” with the *Tao* and its *Te*, we must learn to ride the crest of this flow, finding the placeless place of inward stillness where the downs of life don't get us down, and where the ups are accepted without seeking an encore. I'll tell you in my YouTube lecture a little story about a Taoist farmer that nicely illustrates this point.

I'm also providing you with a YouTube link to a short video on *Tai Chi Chuan*, an ancient martial art that is rooted in Taoist philosophy. I'm sure many of you have seen people practicing *Tai Chi*, if only in a movie, though perhaps you didn't know what it was. Meditate on the movements you see in the video. It's in the patterned flow of embodied life itself, not in the words describing it, that the deepest teaching of Lao Tzu can be fully realized.