

# **Pink Lotus Yoga Professional Yoga and Teacher Training Major Texts Study Guides**

## **THE TAO TE CHING AND THE TAO OF POOH DISCUSSION/ STUDY GUIDE/ACTIVITY**

### ***The Tao Te Ching***

Primary sources: Writings by Stephen Mitchell and Meredith Sprunger

The chief *religious teaching* of the Tao Te Ching concerns one eternal Supreme Being: "Original, primeval, the Ultimate...sustaining source of all things...an All-Father...Makes its knower fearless, invulnerable, immortal." *The ethical teaching of the Tao Te Ching is for the human to achieve a quiet, restful, and humble simplicity in living.*

The teachings of early Taoism center around the following themes:

1. The basic unity behind the universe is a force called the Tao. Tao produces all things and all things go back to their common origin and blend into one. Absolute truth and absolute good are unknowable.
2. When man seeks his own plan rather than the eternal plan of the great Tao, he precipitates ills, suffering, and evil.
3. Live in primitive simplicity. Leave all things take their natural course. The sage can know the whole world without going out of his door. The further one travels, the less one knows. The Tao is characterized by its quietude of power, its *production without possession*, action without self-assertion, development without domination.
4. Pomp and glory are to be despised. The tree which stands higher than its neighbors is the first to be felled by the woodsman. The weak and humble overcome the strong and proud. The highest goodness is like water: it seeks the lower levels; therefore, it is near to Tao.

### **Excerpts from *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.

The unnamable is the eternally real.  
Naming is the origin  
of all particular things.

Free from desire, you realize the mystery.  
Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations.

Yet mystery and manifestations  
arise from the same source.  
This source is called darkness.

Darkness within darkness.  
The gateway to all understanding.

**If you want to become whole,**  
let yourself be partial.  
If you want to become straight,  
let yourself be crooked.  
If you want to become full,  
let yourself be empty.

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If you want to be reborn,  
let yourself die.  
If you want to be given everything,  
give everything up.

The Master, by residing in the Tao,  
sets an example for all beings.  
Because he doesn't display himself,  
people can see his light.  
Because he has nothing to prove,  
people can trust his words.  
Because he doesn't know who he is,  
people recognize themselves in him.  
Because he has no goad in mind,  
everything he does succeeds.

**When people see some things as beautiful,**  
other things become ugly.  
When people see some things as good,  
other things become bad.

Being and non-being create each other.  
Difficult and easy support each other.  
Long and short define each other.  
High and low depend on each other.  
Before and after follow each other.

Therefore the Master  
acts without doing anything  
and teaches without saying anything.  
Things arise and she lets them come;  
things disappear and she lets them go.  
She has but doesn't possess,  
acts but doesn't expect.  
When her work is done, she forgets it.  
That is why it lasts forever.

**We join spokes together in a wheel,**  
but it is the center hole  
that makes the wagon move.

We shape clay into a pot,  
but it is the emptiness inside  
that holds whatever we want.

We hammer wood for a house,  
but it is the inner space  
that makes it livable.

We work with being,  
but non-being is what we use.

When the ancient Masters said,  
"If you want to be given everything,  
give everything up,"  
they weren't using empty phrases.  
Only in being lived by the Tao can you be truly yourself.

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### **True words aren't eloquent;**

eloquent words aren't true.  
Wise men don't need to prove their point;  
men who need to prove their point aren't wise.

### **The Master has no possessions.**

The more he does for others,  
the happier he is.  
The more he gives to others,  
the wealthier he is.

The Tao nourishes by not forcing.  
By not dominating, the Master leads.  
In harmony with the Tao,  
the sky is clear and spacious,  
the earth is solid and full,  
all creatures flourish together,  
content with the way they are,  
endlessly repeating themselves,  
endlessly renewed.

### **When man interferes with the Tao,**

the sky becomes filthy,  
the earth becomes depleted,  
the equilibrium crumbles,  
creatures become extinct.

The Master views the parts with compassion,  
because he understands the whole.  
His constant practice is humility.  
He doesn't glitter like a jewel  
but lets himself be shaped by the Tao,  
as rugged and common as stone.

### ***The Tao of Pooh***

#### ***Winnie the Pooh* Characters:**

Winnie the Pooh, Piglet, Tigger, Owl, Rabbit, Kanga and Roo, Christopher Robin, Eeyore.

#### **Major Themes of Taoism in *The Tao of Pooh*:**

- The Uncarved Block (p. 10): Things contain their own simple state and have power that when altered lose that power. When we complicate things, intellectualize things, we are far from the essence of simplicity and naturalism.
- Inner Nature vs. Cleverness (p. 38): Cleverness is limited, inner nature unlimited
- Wu Wei (p. 67-8): without effort, without cleverness, without force
- Busy Backson (p. 108): rushing around is a waste.

#### **Exercise**

Read and illustrate the following poem. Don't worry if you don't think you draw well.

"Snow on the River"

Over thousands of mountains, no bird flies.  
Over thousands of paths there is no trail of footprints.  
On a lonely boat sits an old man with bamboo hat and cape,  
Fishing silently in the snowy river.  
~Liu Tsung-yuan (773-819 C.E.)