

For thousands of years, materialism has plagued our culture with philistinism and unhappiness. Materialists believe that one can attain happiness by acquiring, controlling, and holding on to material wealth. In contrast to this concept, a central element of Daoism is to accept wealth when it comes our way, but to avoid holding on too tightly to it.

Through the Tao we can simplify our lives and live in serenity. Daoism is a form of eastern thought put into writing by Lao Tzu during the Chou Dynasty, between the 11th century b.c. and 256 b.c. Lao Tzu's book, Tao Te Ching, is filled with a series of aphorisms based on keen observations of human nature and the Tao. The sixteenth aphorism in the Tao Te Ching deals with the concept of returning to a natural life in order to move happily and peacefully on our path. Lao Tzu calls this way of life the Tao, the source of all things. We must return to the Tao in order to attain a contented life.

Those who are bound by society's standards often meet with unhappy circumstances. *"If you don't realize the source, you stumble in confusion and sorrow."* Our lifestyle is based on achieving happiness through acquisition and accomplishment which never allow us to stay happy for more than a moment. Some may even submerge themselves into our popular culture so much that they no longer feel familiar with the serene and the worryless feelings that they once had as a child. Those who value the material above all struggle the most in life. Having achieved a goal, they are instantly dissatisfied again and pursue a new goal to top the previous success. After years of progress to reach each additional goal, the reward for doing so becomes less endearing, and causes unhappiness for them. Not realizing that they can return to the Tao, they dwell in their miserable lives and *"stumble in confusion and sorrow."*

Upon returning to this simpler life-style, one begins to take occurrences in nature and accept them as they are. *"When you realize where you come from, you naturally become tolerant, disinterested, amused, kind-hearted as a grandmother, dignified as a king."* One who walks the path of the Tao takes death as natural and does not fight it. An enlightened monk does not cry when a friend dies; the monk does not throw a fit of rage. He is tolerant and understanding of nature, and he accepts the processes which are part of life. On the other hand, one who strays from the Tao fears death and tries to immortalize himself with wealth. When this person's friend dies, he may cry and throw a fit of rage, because he realizes that his fight against death is vain, and that it will one day consume him as it did his friend. These two people live in the same world, yet one lives peacefully with the knowledge that he will one day die. The other lives a frantic life, striving to avoid a natural process, and in doing so takes advantage of others by allowing greed and dishonesty to take hold of him. If the enlightened individual were to receive wealth, he would not reject it, for he accepts everything in life. The materialist who strays from the Tao would take the fortune as well. The difference is that the materialist will hold on to that money as long as possible, because he centralizes his life around wealth. The enlightened individual finds his source with the Tao; he does not need the wealth, because it is not central to his life. He would take it, but just as easily he would let it go. Our society feeds on quick, cheap, and simple means to correct its problems. This is perhaps the reason that so many of us have been disillusioned as to what the source actually is. By returning to the Tao, we can live at one with nature and accept success and failure without letting either of them take hold of our life.

Despite the complexity of aphorisms in the Tao Te Ching, the Tao is a philosophy

for common people. You need not be a studied philosopher to grasp its message. If we return to the Tao, neither seemingly good or bad things shall take hold of our lives, for we will accept these happenings and continue along our path. *Immersed in the wonder of the Tao, you can deal with whatever life brings you, and when death comes, you are ready.*