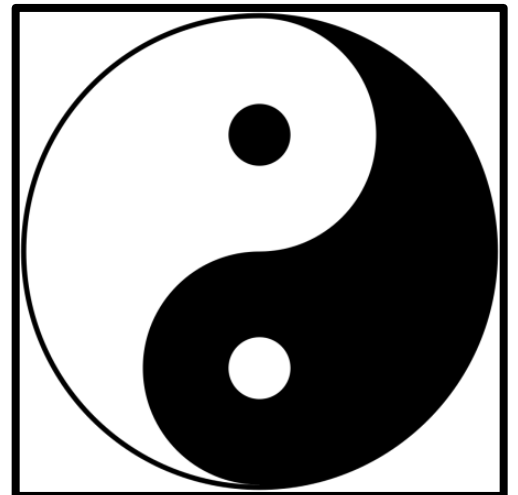


TAOISM (DAOISM)

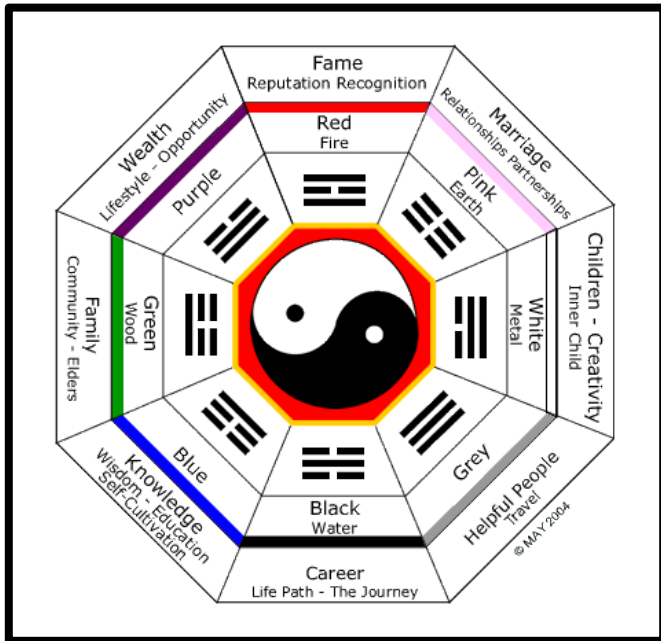
Taoism is a belief system based largely on the writings of a Chinese wise person, or sage, named Laozi (pronounced Lau-ZUH). Scholars know so little about Laozi's life that some people believe he is only a legendary figure. However, many scholars believe that Laozi was born in the late sixth century BCE, and kept records in the court of the Zhou (pronounced JOE) Empire. Laozi believed that striving for power and wealth was harmful because it was unnatural. He wrote down his ideas, which people later collected in a book called *Daodejing*, or "The Way and Its Power."



Taoism is a philosophy that teaches that people can gain peace and happiness by becoming one with the Dao, or the Way. The Dao is a universal force connected to nature that creates order for all things. Taoism teaches that people should see themselves as part of nature and lead a balanced life in harmony with it. Laozi believed that for people to discover how to behave, they should notice how nothing in nature strives for fame, power, or knowledge. Instead, nature accepts what comes its way, like a piece of grass that bends when the breeze blows. True harmony comes from balancing the opposite forces of nature, called yin and yang. Laozi taught that it is impossible to have good without bad, beauty without ugliness, or pleasure without pain. Because Taoists see good and bad as connected, they try to accept both.



Laozi taught rulers to make fewer laws. He called the way of ruling wuwei (pronounced WOO-WAY), or "action through inaction." Rather than attempting to take control and guide the people, a ruler should take very little action and only support the people in achieving what they naturally desire. Just as a farmer cannot force a plant to grow, Laozi thought that a ruler cannot force the people to prosper.



Feng Shui is the ancient Chinese art of placement (furniture, art, architecture, etc.) It aims to ensure that people live in harmony with their surroundings. Feng Shui is rooted in the Taoist wisdom of living in harmony with nature and its rhythms; of respecting Chi, or universal energy, as expressed in everything around us. Both Feng Shui masters and Taoist masters were practicing the same way of living. While Taoism is a philosophical body of knowledge as applied to one's way of being, Feng Shui evolved in a slightly different direction. It became the study of creating environments that are aligned with the natural flow of the Universe, environments that can nurture and sustain one's energy and quality of life.

During the Han Dynasty, from 206 BCE to 220 CE, Confucianism became the official belief system. However, Han rulers also adopted some Taoist principles. For example, they made fewer laws and fought fewer wars, believing that laws and wars do not naturally strengthen society. One emperor followed Taoist advice and eliminated a heavy land tax on poor farmers. For a time, this policy helped ease the hunger of poor people.

Over the next thousand years, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism (which had arrived from India) competed for the hearts and minds of the Chinese people and government. In Chinese philosophy, the phrase “Three Teachings” refers to when these three philosophies are considered as a harmonious combination. Though the term “three teachings” is often focused on how well Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have been able to coexist in harmony throughout Chinese history, evidence has shown that each practice has dominated, or risen to favor, during certain periods of time. Emperors would choose to follow one specific system and the others were discriminated against, or tolerated at most. A minority also claims that the phrase “three teachings” proposes that these mutually exclusive and fundamentally incomparable teachings are equal. Confucianism focuses on societal rules and moral values, whereas Taoism advocates simplicity and living happily while in tune with nature. On the other hand, Buddhism reiterates the ideas of suffering, impermanence of material items, and reincarnation while stressing the idea of reaching salvation beyond.

