**Reflection Essay – Episode V – Taoism + Buddhism**

*What are some prominent Buddhist or Taoist themes in Yoda’s interactions with Luke in EpV? Be sure to use What the Buddha Taught and/or The Tao Te Ching in your answer.*

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In Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back, we see all different sorts of Taoist and Buddhist themes. In this paper, we will be examining a theme that is seen heavily in not only the film, but also in both Taoist and Buddhist tradition; this theme is the idea of removing personal attachment to achieve connection, enlightenment, and serenity.

In Episode V, we see many different places where Luke is encouraged to let go of his attachment for the sake of the greater good, or achieving power or enlightenment. When Luke receives premonitions from the force about his friends Han and Leia being in grave danger while training under Master Yoda on the planet Dagobah, he immediately tells Yoda that he must leave to aid them. Yoda and Obi-Wan’s force ghost who appears attempt to convince Luke to stay and complete his training: Stay and finish your training, forget your friends, and detach yourself from them. This idea of Luke needing to give up his attachment to his friends in order to achieve true connection and power through the force and complete his training is very similar to both Daoist and Buddhist views of personal attachment. However, the connection between this scene and these philosophies differs; The Taoist views attachments as a hindrance to connection with the Tao, and the Buddhist views attachment as a hindrance to achieving Nirvana and true enlightenment.

The following excerpt is from the Tao Te Ching. “The Master stays behind, that is why she is ahead; she is detached from all things; that is why she is one with them.” (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 7) This is connected to the reason that Luke will be unable to complete his training. He cannot fully connect with the Force/Tao, because he is too attached to his friends. But by letting go of all of his earthly attachments, he can fully connect with the Force/Tao, and through the force be fully connected to all things.

The Buddhist connection to this scene is found in the following quotation. “One is one’s own refuge, who else could be the refuge?” (WTBT, Chapter 1 pg 1) A Buddhist would look at this scene and understand that Luke’s attachment to his friends is ultimately bringing him nothing but pain. He is resting his emotional stability and his happiness on his mortal, imperfect, and distant friends. With this attachment, his emotions and his heart are constricted in a way that he will never be able to fully reach a state of peace and Nirvana, which is exactly what a Jedi aims to do in relationship to the Force. When Luke asks Yoda, “How will I know the light side from the dark?” Yoda responds “You will know when you are calm, at peace, passive.” This relationship to the force described by Yoda is very similar to Buddhist Nirvana.

There are countless other themes that are Taoist and Buddhist in this one departure scene from Dagobah alone. From the way that Luke speaks about his friends to Obi-Wan and Yoda’s encouragement to “let them (Han and Leia) go” and dealing with acceptance of loss. But the most correlative and recognizably contrastable theme between the Taoist and Buddhist traditions has to do with the Idea of detachment. A Taoist needs to remove attachment to achieve connection with the Tao, and a Buddhist needs to remove attachment to achieve enlighten, nirvana, and peace. According to Master Yoda, our young hero Luke needs to remove personal attachment for both reasons, so he can be one with the force and be one with himself, thereby completing his training and becoming a fully empowered Jedi Master. For it is only in this way that Luke can attain the power necessary to defeat Darth Vader and bring balance to the force.