
UNIT 2 TAOISM

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we explain about the Taoist religion. After a brief explanation on its origin founder, we see the sacred scriptures of this religion. We will deal with the philosophy of this religion in the doctrines and ethical teachings which we will look in detail. We also will deal with their belief in life after death.

By the end of this unit you will be enabled to:

- Have an overall picture of Taoism;
- The historical origin, the founder;
- The Sacred Scriptures of Taoism and its important teachings;
- The doctrines of Taoism with the special emphasis on an understanding of Tao;
- The ethical teachings with its positive and negative impacts;
- Their view of life after death; and
- And the present state of Taoism with its sects.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Taoism refers to a variety of related philosophical and religious traditions and concepts. These traditions have influenced East Asia for over two thousand years and some have spread to the West. The word *Tao* (*Dao*) means “path” or “way,” although in Chinese folk religion and philosophy it has taken on more abstract meanings. Taoist propriety and ethics emphasize the Three Jewels of the Tao: compassion, moderation, and humility. Taoist thought generally focuses on nature, human-cosmos correspondence, health, longevity, effortless action, liberty, immortality and spontaneity. Reverence for ancestor spirits and immortals are also common in popular Taoism.

Organized Taoism distinguishes its ritual activity from that of the folk religion, which some professional Taoists view as debased. Chinese alchemy (including *Neidan*), astrology, cuisine, several Chinese martial arts, Chinese traditional medicine, *fengshui*, and many styles of *qigong* breath training disciplines have been intertwined with Taoism throughout history.

2.2 ORIGIN

Scholars in recent times express their doubt about whether Taoism is only a philosophy or a religion. A scholar in Chinese language writes: “There is not a word in the *Tao-Teh-Ching* of the sixth century B.C. that savors either of superstition or religion” (Legge, *The Religions of China*, p.164). Taoism was not an organized, institutionalized religion in the earlier days. It was not considered as religion at all until the Han dynasty in China, shortly before the Christian era. Today it seems to be a dead religion because it has been steadily in decline for a long time. Though it has not yet disappeared, there is very little likelihood that it will come back. According to a Chinese scholar: “There is no doubt that Taoism is approaching extinction.”

2.3 FOUNDER

Lao-Tze is a prophetic leader and philosopher who founded Taoism and popularized it. Lao-Tze was not really a name. It is an appellation of “Old Boy” or “Old Philosopher”. There is hardly anything known about this humble mystic, Lao-Tze. The probable date of him is 604 – 517 B.C. He was the first among the teachers to teach the principle of universal good. The main source of our information about his teaching, is the short sketch of 248 Chinese words written by Ssu-ma Chien about 500 years later.

Lao-Tze was born in the province of Honan – central China about fifty years before Confucius. Some do not even regard him as a historical figure. Some scholars fix the date of his birth in the late 7th or early 6th century. Some even say that he belongs to 4th century. According to the older chronology of China, Lao-Tze was an older contemporary of Confucius and therefore Taoism is older than Confucianism. He was a librarian, recorder and historiographer at the court of the dynasty of Chou. One account of his official position and great learning he was visited by Confucius who wanted to make a research in the ancient history of China. Taoism is ascribed to him because of his famous book *Tao-Teh-Ching* (*Tao-Te-King*). He was a contemporary to Confucius, Zoroaster, Mahavira, Buddha and prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah. He was known as “the Venerable Philosopher” due to his great learning. Later he was divinized and sacrifices were offered to him.

2.4 SACRED SCRIPTURES

In the history of the World Religions there are few exceptions where the Sacred Scriptures are written down personally by the founder himself. It is said that *Tao-Teh-Ching* was personally written by Lao-Tze. Perhaps it is the shortest Scripture because it contains only five thousand and odd words. According to the tradition, Lao-Tze spent most of his time in Chou but when he saw the corruption of Chou, he resigned and departed. At the frontier the customs officer requested him to write a book. Lao-Tze wrote a book in which he discussed the concepts of reason and virtue. Then he departed.

Other Religions

There are several translations of the title *Tao-Teh-Ching*. Usually it is left as it is in its original form. The translations are: *The Classic of Tao and of Virtue*, *The Book of the Path of Virtue*, *The Providential Grace Classic*, *The Principle of Nature and Its Attributes*, *Thoughts on the Nature and Manifestations of God*, *The Way and Its Power*, *The Book of Tao*. Perhaps the simple and exact translation may be *Canon of Reason and Virtue*. These show that there is no exact translation.

The original name consists of three Chinese nouns. The word *Tao* is the most difficult to translate. It can mean “the Way” or “the Path”. These two meanings appear to be the most appropriate. It is also translated as “reason”, “nature”, “God” and “the word”. The word *Teh* means “Virtue” and *Ching* (*King*) can mean book, classic or canon.

The content of *Tao-Teh-Ching* is a series of unsystematically arranged generalizations and counseling spread out in 81 brief chapters. The chapters 20, 67 and 70 contain some autobiographical allusions. There are some general references to the contemporary social situation but there are no historical references at all. There are no references to a person or event.

However its intrinsic value can never be overlooked. Its style is very simple and clear. Yet it surpasses the latest teachings of philosophy and science. Its presentation, analysis, teachings and methods are really thought provoking.. The work as such is very lofty, vital and restful. It is a presentation of mystical and universal wisdom. It teaches the true wisdom of appearing foolish, the success of appearing to be a failure, the strength of weakness, the advantage of being humble, the benefit of yielding to one’s adversary and the futility of contending for power. Its philosophy of the rhythm of life is simply beyond match. This philosophy is expressed in sharp contrast to Confucianism.

Its content is also similar to Buddhists *Tripitaka* in many ways and there are 268 parallels between the verses of *Tao-The-Ching* and *the Bible*. It also deals with three kinds of purity.

- Jade (ornament) purity of saints
- Highest purity of those who unite with Tao.
- Greatest purity of immortals.

Besides *Tao-Teh-Ching* there are two other sacred books.

- a) *Chuang-Tzu-Ching*, the book written by Chung –Tzu a faithful disciple of Lao-Tze after two hundred years. The primary reason for this is that the teaching of Lao-Tze was eclipsed by a revival of Confucianism. The bold activism of Confucius was in sharp contrast to the passivism of Lao-Tze, expressed in his fundamental principle, *wu-wei* or non-action. To counteract this, Chung-Tzu came to the defense of the man he had so admired. He wrote extensively, setting forth in fresh terms what his master taught and to some extent went beyond his teacher. He was a brilliant writer and he is known for his brilliance, style and depth. This part of the Sacred Scripture is delightful to read. It is propound in its presentation with a powerful influence and effect upon Chinese literature, art and social life. Therefore it constitutes an important part of the Sacred Scriptures of Taoism
- b) *Tao-Tsang* (*Tai-Shang-Kang-Ying Pien*) – *Tractate of Actions and Their Retributions*, is another part of the Sacred Scripture which was written in its present form much later, as late as 1436 A.D. The reason is that its original canon was longer and many of its volumes were destroyed by Kublai Khan in 1281

A.D. Its ethical teachings are held in high esteem which are unsurpassed by any other non-Christian religions. It also contains some trivial and important commands.

2.5 DOCTRINES

Tao: Meaning and Significance

This is the central concept or doctrine of Taoism. The etymological meaning is Way, Path or Road. The same Chinese word in its simplest and non-technical meaning occurs in Shinto or *Shintao* meaning “The Way of the Gods”. Confucianism uses it as a way of life or method of life.

In Taoism there are at least three different principal meanings which are developed from the primary word “way”. The first meaning is the moral and physical order of the world. It is a principle, which underlies and controls the world order. In this sense it is closer to *Rta* in the Vedas. The second meaning is that it is the path of reason (logos) or the path of truth. In its third meaning it is the way of perfect virtue or the right way of life which Heaven approves and which Heaven itself follows. Thus it is a divine principle and not just the way that man follows.

Among all these meanings the term Tao in its highest technical meaning designates the philosophical Absolute and the religious Supreme Being. In this sense several shades of meanings are given to it – such as Reason, Providence and God. The French translation uses Supreme Being, Reason, Word and Logos to represent the Chinese Tao

Tao is Indescribable

In spite of all these meanings, Tao seems to be beyond description. As a matter of fact there is no appropriate description. We can have only closely interrelated and always obscure descriptions. The best way to understand Tao is to know it in the context it is used. Outside the context it may mean something else. Since the writing itself is highly mystical, the word is used in paradoxes. For example it is clearly stated that the Tao which can be expressed is not the eternal Tao.

“The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name.”(*TTC. 1.1*)

But there are many attempts to express it. It is described as the origin of all things. It is the mystic mother. It can never be exhausted. It is a stabilizing force, for where Tao is equilibrium is. It is invisible and intangible, yet there are forms, substance and essence in it. It is inherent and natural, motionless and fathomless. It stands alone and never changes, pervades everywhere (*TTC. 34.1*). It existed before heaven and earth. It is supreme. Heaven follows its laws, but it follows the laws of its intrinsic nature. Tao has its own Tao. It is ever inactive, yet there is nothing that it does not do (*TTC. 37.1*). It is the nameless and primordial simplicity (*TTC. 32.1*). It is eternal. The great way of Tao is very plain and easy (*TTC. 53. 2*). Tao is the source of all things, the treasure of good men, and the sustainer of bad men (*TTC. 62.1*). As Tao is to the world, so are streams and valleys to rivers and seas. It does not contend, yet it surely wins the victory. It does not speak, yet it surely responds (*TTC. 72. 2*).

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Point out the central teachings of *Tao-Teh-Ching*?

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2) Discuss the important meanings of the term Tao.

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Tao is the Supreme Principle

By this we must understand that Tao is the primary universal principle. It is original, primeval, before heaven and earth, the ultimate, still, formless, unchanging and nameless. (TTC. 25. 1-2)

It is also the primary principle of the harmony with the universal principle itself. This principle, this harmony and the ability to achieve this harmony is innate in every man. This innateness, this nature and this ability to find the way, the living “word” is man’s Tao. Just like the *Upanishads* found the impossibility of expressing (*neti, neti*) all the attributes of *Brahman* by a single name, so also it is impossible to describe Tao in any single word or phrase.

To illustrate this impossibility of describing Tao, we find three phrases used in one passage of the *Tao-Teh-Ching*: “The Tao of heaven”, “The Tao of man” and “The Tao of the sage”. In this regard any attempt to describe Tao in one single word would be a failure to understand the real nature of Tao.

In order to understand what Tao means in three different contexts, we must first understand the word “heaven”. In Chinese language the word for heaven is *Tien*. But the actual meaning of *Tien* is not “heaven” in the sense of paradise as it is used in other religions especially in Christianity. It means “the divine order which rules the universe” i.e. Tao itself in one of its meanings. If we keep this in mind we can find the true meaning of Tao in the above passage.

There is a contrast between the way of man and way of heaven. But there is a harmony between the sage and the divine order. The divine force which is within the sage due to the harmony which he has achieved acts but never contends.

Thus the passage can mean different things to different people. The understanding of Tao depends on the perception of Tao by each individual. If Tao is profound and obscure then its meaning depends upon the Tao of the perceiver.

Tao and Creation

In reference to creation, Tao is described as the *Mother of all things* (*TTC*. 1.1) because it issues the material things. Perhaps it comes close to the concept of great mother goddess of Mediterranean World. But there is a clear indication in the *Tao-Teh-Ching* about the traces of older religion when it says the gate of the female is the origin of all things. “Its gate, from which at first they issued forth, is called the root from which grew heaven and earth.” (*TTC*. 6.1) This refers to the earth or water goddess who gave birth to all things and took them back after death. This is interpreted as “the passing from not-being to being”. In this sense being originates from not-being and therefore all things return back to not-being. Consequently Tao is the source of all things and all things return back to Tao.

Here the essential feature of Tao is *Wu-Wei*: non-action or passivity. It means a kind of letting oneself or submission to one’s own nature. The most characteristic single phrase in Taoism is “wu-wei” i.e. do- nothing or non-striving or inactivity. Only quiet non-striving is successful.

“The kingdom is a spirit-like thing, and cannot be got by active doing.” (*TTC*. 29.1)

The nature acts through non-acting. It is effortless in its dynamism. For example water yields and flows to humble places but most powerful substance by its very inertia. Mother of all things is therefore the symbol of the power of passivity. The Tao is indeed ineffable (indescribable) and invisible but at the same time the origin of every thing.

But how this is possible? Taoism gives a concrete example: “All in the world know the beauty of the beautiful and doing this they have (the idea) of what ugliness is...” (*TTC*. 2. 1). In this sense rest is prior to motion and tranquility to action (See the opposites in *TTC*. 2.2).

Teh or Virtue

The literal meaning of *Teh* is Virtue. It can also mean Power or *Shakti*. By nature Tao is emptiness, not-being and above all non-action. This does not mean it is powerless or without efficacy. Teh signifies its efficacy. Tao though passive acts through its *Teh*. In this sense it is the *Mana* or the mysterious power. Due to this though Tao is not-being it does not mean it is nothing. On the contrary it is the potentiality of all beings. It only appears as non-being but it is all-pervading and Creative. In itself it is weak and humble but through *Teh*, it is strong and active. It is restful and peaceful but through its *Teh* it is creative and governs all things.

“All things are produced by the Tao and nourished by its overflowing operation” (*TTC*. 51. 1).

Teh can also be described as the prolongation of Tao. Tao which is empty and void becomes manifest through its *Teh*. Tao which is One when manifested through *Teh* becomes the multiplicity of beings. Tao becomes the unifying One through the power of *Teh*. It is Teh which causes all existing beings to be linked to an underlying unity. The *Teh* in things is always that which turns from outward to inward.

Supreme Being

At times Tao is also described as “supreme being” “the Absolute”, “*Yu-Huang*” (pure majesty) and “*Tien-Shih*” (celestial master). Does this mean that Tao is personified and identified with God? Tao by its very nature is essentially one, eternal and impersonal principle like the *Brahman* of the *Upanishads* or as the *Nirguna Brahman* of Shankara in the *Advaita Vedanta*. Yet Tao is described as the mystical Supreme Being. There is only one occurrence to the personal designation *Ti* in the whole of *Tao-teh-Ching* which means literally “Ruler”. *The Sacred books of the East* render this as God.

However, this does not mean there is a supreme being apart from Tao. Tao can be described as personal but this does authorize anyone to identify Tao and God. Tao is the originator of all life and therefore it cannot be lifeless and abstract. Tao is conceived as One and this One became the first personification of Tao. Tao is thus worshipped as the first and greatest God of Taoism. During the first Han Dynasty (206 – 8 B.C.) this “Greatest One” was officially worshipped. Later He came to be known as “Celestial Venerable of the Mysterious Origin” and finally as “Pure August”.

In the 3rd century A.D., He was enlarged into a Trinity. The reason is that Tao emanated itself into creation in three stages and each stage was personified. The first is “Celestial Venerable of the Mysterious Origin”. The second is “August Ruler of the Tao” and the third is “August Old Ruler” which refers to Lao-Tze.

However there is no definite form of worship of offering sacrifices to a personal God. Hence Taoism is not a religion of rituals and sacrifices. Yet Lao-Tze is divinized and temples are dedicated to him. He is venerated as the “venerable philosopher” and sacrifices were offered to him. In 156 A.D. the state itself officially ordered to offer sacrifices to him. The dogma of a supernatural conception was started in the 4th century A.D. and later he was canonized as “the Great Sage Ancestor”. But Lao-Tze did not teach a personal Supreme Being. What he taught to believe in and follow the principle of universal goodness. He who does so is divine. Yet millions of his followers in China have recognized in their great sage and religious teacher an actual manifestation of the Divine Being.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Explain the relationship between Tao and Creation ?

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2) Discuss the role of *Teh* or virtue in Taoism

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2.6 ETHICAL TEACHINGS

Ethical Ideal

The aim of life is to attain harmony with Tao. In order to do so, one must forsake all activism and retire within oneself. It is an inner participation, a sort of oneness or mystical union or harmony with the eternal Tao. Unlike Confucian social harmony, Taoism is an ideal Heavenly Harmony. One should become a “perfect” individual. This is possible only through “doing nothing, non-striving or inactivity”. Therefore the ideal is to become like Tao - peaceful and harmonious and consequently a blessed life after death.

This ideal is spelled out as a quiet, restful, simplicity like heaven itself. Tao is calm and peaceful and therefore ethical life consists in becoming calm and peaceful. There are at least eight Chinese synonyms which are used to describe the abiding admirable quietude of the eternal Tao and of the perfect individual. In all this humility is repeatedly stressed.

The humble man is a good man. Often he is well appreciated because of his lowliness and his intrinsic goodness. In this sense every one must be inspired with the friendly desire to love and do good to one another. When one is sincere in one’s purpose, the others will be happy. One who is in harmony with Tao becomes friendly to everything.

Ideal of Inaction

In spite of these positive ethical ideals in Taoism, there are certain negative attitudes which are very disturbing. Lao-Tze certainly gave certain noble ideals but he did not become an ideal person in certain respect. Lao-Tze lamented over certain social evils but he did not show the way out to meet these social evils. *Tao-Teh-Ching* mentions the following: “the poverty of the people”, “the greater disorder”, “crafty dexterity”, “thieves and robbers”. (*TTC*. 57.2). Instead of facing these social evils, he only gave some sage advice and walked away withdrawing from the difficult situation and did not organize a reform.

The perfect individual is also chiefly portrayed as placid, self-contented and indifferent towards all people. This is just the opposite of the ideal of *Bodhisattva* in Buddhism. The ethical ideal here appears to be indifference and irresponsibility. What is said is to aim at extreme disinterestedness and maintain the utmost possible calm.

“The sage... keeps his mind in a state of indifference to all.” (*TTC*. 49. 3)

Return to the state of natural simplicity, which is contentment, without war, government, writing, travel or fear of death.

Other Religions

Therefore the ethical ideal is also presented in a negative way. There is no adequate recognition of social evils of the world. There is no proper appreciation of physical facts and resources. The over emphasis on inactivity (*wu-wie*) belittles the human effort and as a consequence, the mostly negative advice shows a lack of a commanding principle for enthusiastic living. There is a lack of any moral principle to work for the uplift of the society. It appears that the advice is to return to the uncivilized simplicity. Finally there is a relapse into polytheism, demonolatry and practice of magic.

Belief in After Life

Life after death or belief in immortality or eternal life is one of strongest foundations of every religion. We see in Confucianism there is nothing concerning the belief in immortality. It emphasizes on present life and how to attain social harmony, yet it includes certain rules for the observance of the ancestor cult which implies belief in an ongoing life.

But Taoism as a religion has a great deal to say about the life after death. Certainly there is a doubt whether this belief grew originally out of the teaching of Lao-Tze or later. The scholars are of the opinion that it was primarily due to the influence of Buddhism, the belief in life after death came into existence in China. As a matter of fact, the belief in immortality is practically absent in the native religions of China and this is one of the reasons which made Buddhism so welcome to the Chinese people.

It appears that Taoism gradually came to place a very strong emphasis on the life hereafter. If Confucianism laid emphasis on this present social and this-worldly sanctions in its ethical ideals, Taoism invoked other-worldly sanctions. It believes in the form of numerous heavens and hells which rewarded the good and punished the evil conduct. One of the most prominent features of Taoism is that its temples are the physical representation of the fate, especially of the evil ones after death. These temples graphically present all the possible methods of torture. Perhaps this is a stern warning against those who indulge in all kinds of evil practices.

However we do not hear something outstanding about the life after death in Taoism. Some scholars are of the opinion that its doctrines concerning immortality are inadequate. It emphasizes only on a protracted or continued physical existence here on earth. The fundamental reason is rooted in the very culture of China. The Chinese people always believed that immortality means physical immortality. As a consequence, all rituals, cults, sacrifices, ethical ideals, charms and magic are concentrated on how to live a long undisturbed life or a life of tranquility.

Before Buddhism was introduced in China the concept of spiritual immortality was totally unknown. The physical immortality means a change into a body which is made of more durable or lighter material than the one we have in normal life. According to this belief, man after death leaves his old body as a snake sheds off its old skin and soars off to the spheres of happiness.

This physical longevity was achieved both by religious practices such as the observation of commandments, moral conduct, prayer and incantations and physical practices such as diets, medicines, chemicals, breathing methods and gymnastics.

Since immortality was taught in terms of physical immortality, so also paradise or heaven was conceived in terms of this world. They are known as "Blessed Islands". Three such islands are mentioned: Peng-lai, Ying-chou and Fu-sang. Every one was

immortal in these islands. The birds and animals were pure white. The palaces and gates are of pure gold and silver. Kun-lun Mountain is also considered as the abode of the immortals.

Belief in *Yin* – *Yang*

These two are primeval interacting complementary principles. The harmony of the universe depends on these principles. *Yin* is negative, female, dark and the earth. *Yang* is positive, male, light and heaven. Nature was considered as a single intricately balanced organism which undergoes continuous alterations and man had to learn to respond correctly. Thus actual living process of living depends on the harmonious blending of the *Yin* and *Yang*. *Yin* is considered as the source of darkness and death and *Yang* as the source of light and life.

2.7 SECTS

I-Kuan Tao - mainly stressed on unity of Tao and believed that cosmic prosperity and calamity follows one another.

Tao-Teh Sheh - Society of Tao. They preached a kind of community between heaven and men. Within oneself, it is an inner participation, a sort of oneness.

Unlike in other religions, the sects in Taoism do not differ radically. Today it appears that Taoism as a cult is deteriorating rapidly because for a long period there had been no priest, philosopher or teacher in Taoism. But there is no doubt that Taoism as philosophy will always remain.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

 b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What are the ethical ideals in Taoism?

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2) Discuss life after death in Taoism

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2.8 LET US SUM UP

Taoism is one of the three great religions of China. Its fundamental doctrine is Tao which is diametrically opposed to Confucian Tao. To begin with Taoism was not an organized religion. The founder Lao-Tzu is known as “Venerable Philosopher” or “Heavenly Teacher”. The primary text *Tao-Teh-Ching* teaches that Tao is the source of everything. It is beyond description and yet it is described in many ways. The most specific feature is it is active through non-action. Moral life consists in attaining harmony with Tao. Yet it does not offer any specific moral code, especially the way to uproot the social evils. Its emphasis on the ideal of indifference and irresponsibility appears to be negative approach to human life. Therefore it has been steadily in decline and in all likelihood it will not be revived. Yet its teachings are very powerful and have lasting effects.

2.9 KEY WORDS

- Alchemy** : Alchemy is both a philosophy and a practice with an aim of achieving ultimate wisdom as well as immortality, involving the improvement of the alchemist as well as the making of several substances described as possessing unusual properties. The practical aspect of alchemy generated the basics of modern inorganic chemistry, namely concerning procedures, equipment and the identification and use of many current substances.
- Creation** : Creation refers to a divine act by which the universe was brought into existence without the help of any pre-existing material thing.
- Paradox** : A paradox is a statement or group of statements that leads to an apparent contradiction that actually expresses a non-dual truth.

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2.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) The most important of Taoist scriptures is *Tao-Teh-Ching*. The content of *Tao-Teh-Ching* is a series of unsystematically arranged generalizations and counseling spread out in 81 brief chapters. The chapters 20, 67 and 70 contain some autobiographical allusions. There are some general references to the contemporary social situation but there are no historical references at all. There are no references to a person or event.

However its intrinsic value can never be overlooked. Its style is very simple and clear. Yet it surpasses the latest teachings of philosophy and science. It is a presentation of mystical and universal wisdom. It teaches the true wisdom of appearing to be foolish, the success of appearing to be a failure, the strength of weakness, the advantage of being humble, the benefit of yielding to one's adversary and the futility of contending for power. Its philosophy of the rhythm of life is simply beyond match. Its content is also similar to Buddhists *Tripitaka* in many ways and there are 268 parallels between the verses of *Tao-The-Ching* and *the Bible*. It also deals with three kinds of purity.

- Jade (ornament) purity of saints
- Highest purity of those who unite with Tao.
- Greatest purity of immortals.

- 2) The word *Tao* is the most difficult to translate. It can mean “the Way” or “the Path”. These two meanings appear to be the most appropriate. It is also translated as “reason”, “nature”, “God” and “the word”. *Tao* is the central concept or doctrine of Taoism. The etymological meaning is Way, Path or Road. The same Chinese word in its simplest and non-technical meaning occurs in Shinto or *Shintao* meaning “The Way of the Gods”.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) In reference to creation, Tao is described as the *Mother of all things* (TTC. 1.1) because it issues the material things. Perhaps it comes close to the concept of great mother goddess of Mediterranean World. In Taoism being originates

from not-being and all things return back to not-being. Consequently Tao is the source of all things and all things return back to Tao.

- 2) The literal meaning of *Teh* is Virtue. It can also mean Power or *Shakti*. By nature Tao is emptiness, not-being and above all non-action. This does not mean it is powerless or without efficacy. *Teh* signifies its efficacy. Tao though passive acts through its *Teh*. In this sense it is the *Mana* or the mysterious power. Due to this, though Tao is not-being it does not mean that it is nothing. On the contrary it is the potentiality of all beings. It only appears as non-being but it is all-pervading and Creative. In itself it is weak and humble but through *Teh*, it is strong and active. It is restful and peaceful but through its *Teh* it is creative and governs all things.

Check Your Progress III

- 1) The aim of life in Taoism is to attain harmony with Tao. In order to do so, one must forsake all activism and retire within oneself. It is an inner participation, a sort of oneness or mystical union or harmony with the eternal Tao. One should become a “perfect” individual. This is possible only through “doing nothing, non-striving or inactivity”. Therefore the ideal is to become like Tao - peaceful and harmonious and consequently a blessed life after death. This ideal is spelled out as a quiet, restful, simplicity like heaven itself. Tao is calm and peaceful and therefore ethical life consists in becoming calm and peaceful. There are at least eight Chinese synonyms which are used to describe the abiding admirable quietude of the eternal Tao and of the perfect individual. The humble man is a good man. Often he is well appreciated because of his lowliness and his intrinsic goodness. In this sense every one must be inspired with the friendly desire to love and do good to one another. When one is sincere in one’s purpose, the others will be happy. One who is in harmony with Tao becomes friendly to everything.
- 2) We do not hear something outstanding about the life after death in Taoism. Some scholars are of the opinion that its doctrines concerning immortality are inadequate. The Chinese people always believed that immortality means physical immortality. The physical immortality means a change into a body which is made of more durable or lighter material than the one we have in normal life. According to this belief, human after death leaves one’s old body as a snake sheds off its old skin and soars off to the spheres of happiness. This physical longevity was achieved both by religious practices such as the observation of commandments, moral conduct, prayer and incantations and physical practices such as diets, medicines, chemicals, breathing methods and gymnastics. Since immortality was taught in terms of physical immortality, so also paradise or heaven was conceived in terms of this world. They are known as “Blessed Islands”. Three such islands are mentioned: Peng-lai, Ying-chou and Fu-sang. Every one was immortal in these islands. The birds and animals were pure white. The palaces and gates are of pure gold and silver. Kun-lun Mountain is also considered as the abode of the immortals.