

Sacred Threads

Lesson 8: Taoism

5.5.2019

Objectives: Introduction to Taoism.

Materials: Flipchart, basket of word pairs, lesson attachments.

Time allotments suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service.

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ Have you experienced acupuncture, herbal medicine, Feng Shui, Tai Chi, or any other forms of Chinese energy practice?
 - ▶ What is something you have accomplished by NOT overdoing it?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: Never Have I Ever (5 minutes max)

Youth play one round of “Never Have I Ever” (aka Five Fingers) to see how well they know one another:

- a) Ask everyone to hold up five fingers and keep that hand up throughout the game.
- b) The goal is to think of things YOU (not others) have **never** done or experienced that others will likely have experienced, thus making you unique. Go around the room, taking turns, each person sharing ONE “Never Ever,” hoping that others will have done it. Whoever HAS experienced that thing must put one finger down.
- c) After you go around the entire room, see who has the most fingers still up. That person is quite unique!

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from the *Tao Te Ching*, by Lao Tzu in 5th century BCE)

“We shape clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that holds what 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.”

4. Yin-Yang Charades (15 minutes)

Ask youth to pair up, and then each pair chooses a card from the basket containing word pairs. Give youth a minute to prepare. Then each pair of youth will act out their word pair, while the class tries to guess the word pair. This should be done solely by acting out the word pairs, without sounds or clues being given.

Question for Discussion:

- Do we experience these word pairs as strict opposites, or are they opposing directions on a continuum? (For example: Do we experience winter and summer as utterly distinct opposites or do they flow into one another?)
- How does having them side-by-side help to clarify each other? (For example, turning on the light when it is dark, or something wet that spills onto something dry.)
- (Using attached Yin-Yang diagram, teacher draws a large Yin-Yang symbol on flipchart.) How does the Yin-Yang symbol beautifully suggest something other than outright opposition? (*Hint: look for complementary, interdependent, cooperating forces rather than opposition. Note the two dots that also clarify each color.*)

5. Introduction to Yin-Yang (15 minutes)

Pass out attached handout on Yin-Yang, a familiar element in popular Taoism. Have youth take turns reading aloud the information on Yin-Yang.

Then ask youth to take 3 minutes to complete the exercise on the back page. When they have completed the exercise, divide youth into groups of 3-4 and share their work in small groups.

Questions for Discussion, back in large group:

- Is balance truly important to life, both personally and in the life of the world? Why?
- When you observe natural ecosystems or the cycle of life, would you say that there is a force, or dynamic, or some natural “way” that describes how the universe operates?

6. What is Tao? (15 minutes)

Pass out attached handout on Taoism. Have youth take turns reading aloud the information on Taoism.

Teacher summarizes: *Tao* is the “way” of ultimate reality, way of the universe, and the way of human life. *Tao* is the root source or first-cause of the universe. It is what makes things what they are and flows through all things, living and non-living, regulating natural processes and sustaining balance in the universe.

But having said this, *Tao* is basically undefinable because it is far greater than any intellectual knowing; it is experienced in the joyful acceptance of life and willingness to

yield to this “way,” becoming one with the flow of the *Tao*. When we work with the *Tao*, we discover “doing without doing” (*wei-wu-wei*).

- **Read attached excerpt from Chapter 2 of the *Tao Te Ching*.**

Questions for Discussion:

- From the excerpt, what are some dualities that people create that can cause conflict? (*Hint: first stanza*)
- From the excerpt, what are dualities that act more like *yin-yang* where forces complement and support one another (*Hint: second stanza*).
- How is it that the “master acts without doing anything, and teaches without saying anything”? Is *doing-without-doing* simply a contradiction? A form of passivity and giving up?

(*Hint: What if the master disappears into the doing and teaching? Consider the following statement by Stephen Mitchell, scholar and translator of the *Tao Te Ching*: “A good athlete can enter a state of body-awareness in which the right stroke or the right movement happens by itself, effortlessly, without any interference of the conscious will. This is a paradigm for non-action: the purest and most effective form of action. The game plays the game; the poem writes the poem; we can’t tell the dancer from the dance.”*)

- Lao Tzu teaches that humans should live in harmony with nature rather than trying to control the natural environment. What do you think? (*Next class, we will see how Confucius differs in his view about the *Tao*, taking a more active role in governing social order!*)

7. Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”

8. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets