

Practices

Now repeat after me,
Repeat a thousand times the following exercise. Say it out loud:
“Remember *practice* makes perfect”...

Ahhh. That’s a clue: “Perfection”

Do we practice something in order to become perfect? Wow, now that’s something to consider isn’t it? Consider the desire people have to reach perfection, the absolute dedication that some people show in the practicing of a talent to achieve perfection.

Perfection is boring.

The secret to a practice is achieving a balance. Now mix in the mistaken belief that achieving perfection also will be a balanced state. Perfection is a very fleeting achievement: once a person practices their way to the top, nature and society practices kicking them back down.

Balance is challenging.

In Taoism, the goal isn’t a practice to achieve mastery. Taoism instead concentrates upon a personal set of practices which together move with harmony to achieve balance within a person’s life. This is a fine difference. Western culture is most definitely into being the best. Being the best is all about practice. Taoism is about balance. Learning balance often comes from a practice teaching stability. Being the best isn’t a very stable position to be within, as the process of becoming the best tends to come at the price of limiting personal development of other important traits.

I have a personal mantra that we are a balance of Body, Mind and Spirit. But I also believe we are actually more than this trinity. For practical purposes summarizing it as Body, Mind and Spirit helps make it easier to maintain a balanced lifestyle. This translates to a set of practices which aid in maintaining a Personal Tao. Typically these practices are a combination of activities which support the Body, Mind and Spirit equally.

A Personal Tao is not a set of practices you maintain. A healthy set of practices are merely activities a person uses to focus / flow smoothly to their own nature. The two are related, but practices are not required to achieve or find a Personal Tao. Practices are a very important tool for a Taoist to use, yet too much reliance on a single practice will at times blind a person to discovering their Personal Tao. A hammer is an awesome tool, but you can’t work with screws very well with a hammer. Likewise, a Taoist will meditate to open up an inner eye, but you still need your normal physical senses to interact with the world.

My personal practice seems simple to me, as it's something that has evolved over many years. Anyone else looking at my practice would be confused by the seemingly random way I skip between activities: Poetry, massage (giving and receiving), Jujutsu, Yoga (3 different styles), Patterning¹, Wandering, Mediation, Meditation, Love, Pastel Drawing, Dancing, Reading, Day Dreaming, Chi-Gung² and finally Listening. I have only really mastered three of these practices and within the rest I am just a novice or have only a very basic level of skill. The goal³ isn't to become a master. The goal is to flow with needs of life. If my body is feeling out of shape, I ramp up the Yoga and Jujutsu. If my body is extra sore I get some massage. If I can't stop thinking, then I write poetry or meditate. If I have an excess of positive energy "Chi" then I will help heal someone by giving a massage or perform some patterning. As the real world interferes unexpectedly every day, it means having access to a range of different activities permitting flexibility by matching a practice to my current needs.

I had no plan to learn so many different skills. Instead, over time, one skill led to another. Life kept introducing new skills due to traveling, having to balance work situations, or just sharing life experiences with other people. Interestingly enough, each practice in itself led to other practices. So the process of learning rapidly expands out in time. A person may only have a few skills until reaching a critical point and it all suddenly flashes over into many new areas at once.

===== Paths =====

Taoists take a "buffet" approach to living a practical lifestyle. Typically a Taoist will explore and try many different practices. Over time a collection of tools and ideas are gathered to keep everything exercised and in shape. There isn't a rush to learn something new: instead we learn practices that fit with both our personal style and needs.

As our bodies, mind and spirit change over time, these practices also flow and change over time for an individual.

- 1) Patterning is a term I coined for describing the practice of using a combination of patterns found in our lives to help unlock truth or ideas. Many different types of patterning exist. For example: Psychology is a form of patterning based on human mental processes. Feng Shui is patterning based on human nature, artistry and older lore. Divination is another form of patterning using I-Ching, Tarot cards or Rune stones to predict possible future events. I developed the term patterning as I discovered that my practice combines aspects of each of these different forms of traditional systems into a more comprehensive system. Patterning is a more generic name, which doesn't get tied down to preconceptions of a single existing practice.
- 2) I highly recommend the spin-cycle-washing-machine-slap-your-kidneys movement in Chi-Gung. (Ok, I purposely forget the movement's name) You learn so many things across the various practices: like how working your kidneys and liver with certain movements aids in solving allergy issues. This in turn helps relieve the stress on the body, which in turn helps reach a moment of peace, which in turn relaxes you to a point of realization of "hey I like this path I am living" which in turn helps a person discover a Personal Tao, rather than being in fight for survival mode as the allergies won't let me sleep, which interferes.... anyway, you can continue the run-on sentences with examples from your life.
- 3) The goal is never a goal; the purpose of any practice is supporting your essence with tools fitting the needs of the moment.