

BLUE PAPERS

Dào 道

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The **Dào** 道 (Tao/Way) is the sacred and ultimate concern of Daoists. Pronounced something like *kə.lʰuʔ (Karlgren: *d'ôg) in Ancient/Old Chinese, the Dao is an impersonal and amoral process, reality, and presence. In its own suchness (*zìrán* 自然), “it” is neither a subject nor an object. In fact, Daoists are reluctant to speak about the Dao. “Forced to name it, we call it ‘Dao.’” More often than not, we prefer to say what it is not. Unsayings and unlearning. Beyond. “One who speaks does not know; one who knows does not speak.” So, perhaps **silence** is the most appropriate response and form of witnessing. Re-collecting.

From a Daoist perspective, the Dao has **four primary characteristics**: (1) Source of everything (*yuán* 元/原); (2) Unnamable mystery (*xuán* 玄); (3) All-pervading sacred presence (*líng* 靈); and (4) Universe as transformative process (*huà* 化). Daoists also refer to the **Dao-as-Source** as Ancestor (*zōng* 宗), Beginning (*shǐ* 始), One (*yī* 一), and Mother (*mǔ* 母), in the sense of that which gives births and nourishes all beings without distinction. It is that from which everything emerges, and that to which everything returns. It is the origin of the universe, of the world, of ourselves. The Dao is also an unnamable mystery. Mystery even more mysterious than mysteriousness. As Daoists, we recognize that “names are the guest of reality.” Although we use “Dao,” the sacred is beyond any name and every idea. It is ultimately incomprehensible and indescribable. However, we may experience it. We may participate

in this sacred mystery through a state of open receptivity. In fact, two of the indigenous Chinese names for “Daoism” are Xuánfēng 玄風 (Mysterious Movement) and Xuánmén 玄門 (Mysterious Gate), which may also be understood as the “Gateway to the Mysterious.” Daoism is a subtle current and a portal into reality beyond the known and knowable. The Dao also is a sacred presence underlying, manifesting through, and permeating everything that exists. Permeating our lives. When aligned and attuned with the Dao, we experience it as a felt sense, an energetic reality. This energy (*qì* 氣) supports our lives. It reveals a numinous, interconnected network between ourselves and other beings. Between ourselves and the world. And so the Dao is the universe as transformative process. In some sense, the Dao is the universe and world, and the universe and world are the Dao. The Dao manifests in/as/through the cosmos. This is the universe as continual transformation, with the only constant being change.

Thus, the primary **Daoist theology** (discourse on the sacred) is apophatic (negational/beyond), monistic (unitive), and panenhenic (immanent/transcendent). In Daoist terms, this means that, first, the Dao is not agent, person, thing, concept, and so forth. It is *beyond* any and all affirmations and characteristics. Beyond even negation. . Second, the Dao is a single, unified reality and energetic field. Everything is the Dao, at least to a certain extent. Third, and finally, the Dao manifests in/as/through everything. This includes our own bodies and the world. At the same time, when individual beings, the world, and even the universe cease to exist, the Dao is not diminished. It is both *within and beyond* each and every individual manifestation. For Daoists, our primary purpose involves connecting with, becoming infused with, and living through the Dao. **Mystery, Oneness, Silence.**