

BLUE PAPERS

Tiāndào 天道

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The Way of Heaven (*tiāndào* 天道) refers to both larger astronomical/cosmological cycles and cosmological attunement on the part of human beings and communities.

Tiān 天 literally refers to the sky, and the universe by extension. The character consists of an upper horizontal stroke 一, representing the sky/heavens, and *dà* 大 (“big”), with the latter depicting a human being (人) with outstretched arms (一). This invokes the so-called canopy-heaven (*gàitiān* 蓋天) theory, in which the earth and heavens are understood phenomenologically as a flat horizontal plane (“square”) and over-arching dome (“circle”), respectively. “Heaven” thus includes the **Three Radiances** (*sānguāng* 三光) of sun, moon, and stars and is located among the **Three Powers** (*sāncái* 三才) of heaven/earth/water or heaven/earth/humanity. The latter as vertical axis (|) connects the other two (工), which correspond to yang and yin, respectively.

On a human level, **cosmological attunement** involves aligning and harmonizing ourselves with **yin-yang** 陰陽 and the **Five Phases** (*wǔxíng* 五行), specifically as manifesting in/as/through the **four seasons** (*sìshí* 四時). The latter have the following correspondences: spring (Wood/minor yang), summer (Fire/major yang), autumn (Metal/minor yin), and winter (Water/major yin). Wood involves planting, with an outward pattern; Fire involves tending, with an upward pattern; Metal involves harvesting, with an inward pattern; and Water

involves storing, with a downward pattern. There are, in turn, the twenty-four nodes, or six energetic divisions of each of the four seasons. The beginnings of each season and the solstices (apex of yang/nadir of yin) and equinoxes (yin-yang equilibrium) are especially important.

This fundamentally relates to **food and sleep**. It is natural to eat more cooling and moistening food in spring/summer to balance yang with yin, and to eat more cooked and warming food in autumn/winter to balance yin with yang. We also eat bioregionally with attention to local seasonal offerings. This is Daoist **seasonal dietetics**. It also is natural to adjust our sleep in concert with **solar patterns**: Less sleep in spring; least in summer; more in autumn; and most in winter. This involves **following the sun**.

We focus more on activity and **movement practice** (*dònggōng* 動功) in spring and summer and more on rest and **stillness practice** (*jìnggōng* 靜功) in autumn and winter. Movement practice primarily relates to **Yǎngshēng** 養生 (Nourishing Life), or health and longevity techniques, while stillness practice primarily relates to meditation in general and quiet sitting (*jìngzuò* 靜坐) in particular. The former emphasizes body-training, including life-destiny (*mìng* 命) and vital breath (*qì* 氣), while the latter emphasizes mind-training, including innate nature (*xìng* 性) and spirit (*shén* 神).

Another dimension of cosmological attunement focuses on **lunar cycles**. Daoist practice primarily emphasizes the **new moon** (day 1) and **full moon** (day 14). These are key times for meditation and ritual, with each becoming infused with lunar light and energy. The full moon is particularly associated with spiritual realization. As lived and embodied practice, we discover the intersection of the full moon and winter solstice during the double-hour of *zǐ* 子 (11pm-1am). **Body-as-microcosm**.