

THE SOUL, THE TAO AND MAN

Before beginning any exploration of this subject, which is one that embraces mankind's path, there is a need to define what we mean by the words "soul" and "Tao", "man" referring to human beings collectively or individually and without implication of gender.

"Soul" is sometimes used popularly to mean that part of a person's makeup which contains and expresses inner feelings that may be quite deep. Although that may be the case, I would like to use the word here in a slightly more technical way – to mean the inner or spiritual side or aspect of the individual, beyond emotional vicissitudes, intellectual or discriminative thought and even beyond abstract thought.

"Tao" is a word of Chinese origin meaning "Way" but which also has other possible interpretations. Here it shall be used to mean the way or path that leads us all eventually to our source of being and thus to be unified or reunited with our true, highest nature.

Each of us has a soul, a spiritual side, that is sometimes said to be dormant or in a deep meditative state until a certain time in a person's evolution when it "wakes up" to draw them closer to their own inner nature or, as some would describe it, to draw them to God. This is only a partial truth, however, because, as we shall see, it is the human or physical brain consciousness that in comparative terms is sleeping and eventually awakes; beyond physical consciousness there is a state of pure awareness that is always alert.

But does the soul actually exist or is it merely a rather prosaic term for some quality or combination of qualities that forms part of our

makeup? What I would like us to consider is that beyond the human physical body there are many states of awareness, experience and expression, each of which requires some sort of apparatus, a type of body but far subtler than a physical body, in order that those states can be perceived and registered. To put it another way, in order for there to be consciousness of something, there has to be that which is conscious (the observer), the state or thing that one is conscious of (the observed) and the conscious link between the two (the process of observing). Just as we need a vehicle for experiencing and reacting with things in this physical world – the body with its sense organs, nervous system and so on – a vehicle is also needed to experience subtler states of life and consciousness. If we have a spiritual side to our nature, it must be possible for that aspect both to experience and to express itself and the vehicle for that is what we handily call the soul. It is not some fanciful idea or fairy tale but a true part of our internal mechanism as spiritual beings.

There are many teachings, such as those derived from the schools of theosophical thought and the Alice Bailey writings, that describe the soul and personality almost as two separate things, the latter being the sum total of the logical or lower mind, the emotional body or vehicle and the physical body. According to these teachings, many lifetimes occur where the personality aspect lives in total ignorance of the spiritual side of life – the soul – until a turning point comes when the personality begins to be drawn towards the soul and its attributes. It is said that the soul's light then begins to dawn in the mind. Thus the two sides of life, again through a number of lifetimes, gradually become closer and closer to each other until they are fully integrated. At that stage there is then a spiritual man or woman who is ready to begin the long

path to divine union, the highest possible state of consciousness for a human being.

Whether we take to that form of teaching or not (and I apologise for condensing a complex principle into just a few lines that can do it no justice whatsoever) what is probably clear to anyone who has felt drawn to read this is that a time comes when the higher qualities of human nature – selflessness, altruism, love and compassion, for example – become more appealing and eventually become the prime motivator in life.

The Tao has been used in Chinese philosophy to deal with the same subject albeit in an entirely different way. Leaving aside Chinese culture which has influenced the teachings on it, the Tao equates in many ways to the soul and the pathway to the soul. “Follow the Way” is the advice not only in things we might call spiritual but in the ways of the world also in which skill in action and ethics become of prime importance. In a sense, the Way is like a beam of light or higher expression that if followed results in right action, right thought and right speech. It is the stream of evolution, not the physical evolution of Darwin but the stream of evolution of consciousness that leads to total and utter fulfilment of our potential. Within us, the soul is like a source of light or a beacon. If we move towards it, the amount of light increases; then we can see more clearly and with fuller understanding. The Tao is the same – the source of light and the light itself. Either way, whichever view we take, whichever terminology we prefer, the truth remains the same: man’s real nature is a spiritual one. As he moves towards that spiritual nature and allows it to awaken within him, he makes less mistakes; he becomes less selfish and a kinder human being.

In Buddhist thought, enlightenment or the realisation of our full potential requires two

major aspects to be developed. One is wisdom and the other is compassion. Most works on the Tao tend to emphasise the wisdom aspect but as wisdom develops, compassion naturally arises. Other approaches place more emphasis on the development of compassion, a natural by-product of which is wisdom. They are two faces of the same coin. Neither approach makes much sense to the individual, though, unless the soul – that very high spiritual faculty – has sufficiently infused the mind. The reason for that is very simple; both wisdom and compassion employ the intuitive side of mind rather than pure logical thought or a ragbag of thoughts and emotional clutter.

Anyone who has read any of The Book of Changes – the I Ch’ing – will know that logic is of no use in any interpretation. The intuition has to be employed. Sadly, many people get “hooked” on the I Ch’ing and other divining works using them as a crutch. That means that the person isn’t ready; the lower mind and the emotions are too active and cloud the consciousness so that the light of the soul – the influence of the highest aspect of mind – is dimmed. When in that state, it is important to rest the mind until some clarity returns. Simple meditation or quiet sitting, regular lifestyle, sufficient rest and exercise are all helpful, if not essential, in establishing some stability and clarity.

So is the Tao separate from the soul? Are Tao and soul separate from the individual? All three are simply different ways of expressing the same thing. Each is an expression of life and is therefore Life itself. To our eyes and other senses the individual appears easy to comprehend or at least perceive. We can see a person, feel his or her touch and hear what is said. But this is only our perception of physical phenomena. We cannot *know* what another person perceives, what they are thinking or feeling, what their deepest desires are and so on. We cannot know

another person's state of consciousness. Less still can we perceive another's soul. If we cannot know their thinking, we certainly cannot perceive their spiritual nature. Yet it is there and is as much a part of their makeup as water is part of a snowflake. The soul and the individual are different aspects of the same thing. What becomes significant is which of them predominates. For many individuals, the lower mind and emotions predominate and govern life, perhaps with a faint whiff of the soul influencing things now and again. For a few, the soul predominates so that the outer form or personality of body, emotions and mind is heavily influenced by the soul and eventually become an outer expression of it.

What, then, of the Tao? The Tao is not individual and has no boundaries. In a sense we could say it is pure consciousness but then again it is beyond consciousness. It simply is and is beyond our possible comprehension. It is also the Way because the Tao draws the individual to it. If we are in a place of darkness, we are drawn towards the warmth and light of the sun. In a way the light and warmth are the sun and yet are not the sun. We could describe the Way as the radiance of the Tao, like sunlight is the radiance of the sun. How does the radiance of the Tao reach us and influence us? It is something that is sensed from within. Partly to do with the nervous system, including the brain, and certainly a great deal to do with our subtle energy system which is reflected in them, there are the equivalent of windows and doorways within us that let in light. When, for example, we are inspired to do something good for the sake of goodness and for no other reason, some of that light is reaching our physical brain consciousness. It isn't normally perceived as light in the ordinary sense but it is experienced as lightness and clarity in our awareness. None of these windows and doorways is the original source of light but each

manifests it and gradually, step by step, we are able to admit more of it.

The Tao is like the light, both the source and its radiance. The soul, often regarded as a source of light itself, in reality is like a vast doorway that admits the light into the mind of man. Through that doorway each of us must one day walk.

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November 2009

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