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**Beverley Edwards**

## Cloudwater: Taoist Gestalt Practice

'Clouds draw water up to heaven. Transformed to rain clouds the rain falls to earth, to rivers which flow to the sea and are drawn upwards again. So the cyclic process goes on and on. Each part is necessary to the whole.'  
Tamoura-jen Rōshi.

The Tao is the course, flow, drift or process of nature. The Watercourse Way. Studying the natural order of things and working with rather than against them.

Gestalt helps us recognise the conflicting split parts of ourselves, so that

in becoming aware of them, we learn to integrate them, and accept ourselves as we really are.

The basic approach of Gestalt fits neatly into the primal process of Taoism, and the two form an effective working combination. Taoist Gestalt Practice is a synthesis of East and West into an integrated Body/Emotions/Mind/Spirit approach to personal growth.

The fundamental philosophy of Taoism is accept what is in front of you, without wanting the situation to be other than it is. In the clarity of a still and open mind and the truth will be reflected. In other words, drop your 'ifs' and 'buts', be open to what is 'here-and-now', and work with that.

The Taoist teachings are reasonable, unfanatical and humanistic. nurturing a mellow, easy-going (not to be confused as sloppy) mentality. This elegance of going in accord with the flow differs from sloppiness because it combines relaxation, and lack of hurry, with alert presence of mind. To the Chinese humaneness was always felt to be superior to righteousness, since people are greater than any idea they may invent. This humanity is at variance with those people who have dehumanised themselves by becoming blind worshippers of an idea, ideal or person. They are fanatics whose devotion to abstractions make them the enemies of life.

The Tao is the ultimate reality and energy of the universe; the ground of being and non-being. Li (organic pattern) is the Tao principle as distinct from mechanical or legal order. Li is the asymmetrical non-repetitive order we find in the patterns of moving water, and forms of trees or clouds. The Taoists maintain, that seen as a whole, the universe is a harmony of patterns that cannot exist without each other.

Within this system of wholeness lies a unique principle of polarity, which is not to be confused with the idea of opposition or conflict. The two poles are yang (positive) and yin (negative), and are associated with the masculine and feminine, the firm and the yielding, the strong and the weak, light and dark, rising and falling, heaven and earth, and in food the spicy and the bland. The art of life is keeping the two in balance, because there cannot be one without the other. When regarding them as masculine and feminine, the reference is not to male and female beings but to characteristics which are dominant in, but not confined to each of the two sexes. The key to the relationship between yin and yang is called Hsiang Sheng (mutual arising or inseparability).

Gestalt Therapy is a way of attending to another human being in a way which makes it possible for them to be truly themselves. It is an existential therapy concerned with the problems evoked by our dread of accepting responsibility for what we are and what we do. Gestalt does not depend on 'talking about' or what 'should be'. It avoids concepts and rather works with observable behaviour. That is to say, what we experience rather than what we think. In this way the therapist becomes a catalyst who facilitates the client's awareness of what exists at this moment, and frustrates all varieties of avoidance.

The German word 'Gestalt' can be roughly translated as a configuration, pattern or whole. Gestalt can therefore be seen as a holistic approach to being, that works with unfinished situations that block us to being here now.

Awareness is common to both Taoism and Gestalt. Increased awareness helps you become centred and grow in harmony with your environment. Being centred and aware you stay in the here-and-now. The action that Taoism suggests is wu wei, or natural unstressed effortless action. This principle is basic to Gestalt. The therapist lets the client do the work and brings his, or her, awareness to that person.

Both Taoism and Gestalt stress self responsibility. Gestalt helps you remove the blocks that keep you from standing on your own two feet. The mature person is one who does not manipulate others for support. Gestalt is re-owning alienated parts of yourself, and as such is re-owning your own power as a whole person.

Having indicated the basic theoretical foundations of Taoist Gestalt Practice I would now like to say something about how I bring this theory to practice in group and individual work.

I use meditation as a tool for quieting the mind (getting out of your head) and centering. In the state of meditation we are very open to our on-going process with its dynamic of unfinished and emerging gestalts..

With chanting I use both Eastern and Western mantras, which are sometimes smooth and peaceful, and other times loud and cathartic. Sometimes I mix sound and movement work.

The practice of Tu sho (pushing hands) is a method used for centering in Tai Chi (a Chinese yoga and moving meditation). I have found it often useful also for non-verbally working on conflicts within the group.

Apart from using Gestalt in its common form I sometimes draw upon Taoist writings as a stimulus for fantasy work. The I Ching (or Book of Changes), the ancient Chinese classic of divination, is full of imagery that can form a meaningful basis for Gestalt work. In general the Gestalt work that I do is imbued with a Taoist feel, in particular the approach of non-striving or not 'pushing the river'.

Sensory Awareness focuses on heightening our consciousness of the simplest aspects of our functioning so as to create a constantly richer and more authentic experience of living. Sensory awareness being a Western adaption of the Zen approach bridges well Gestalt and Taoist practice.

In Creative Expression I use music, dance, mime, theatre, painting and calligraphy as means to release our natural creative and emotional expression. This expression can be very effective with people who use words as a defence, to cut off rather than make contact.

When I work individually, whilst using many of the approaches I use in group work, I am aiming for a sense of space, or 'room to breathe'. We have the opportunity to explore in depth on an on-going basis, your anxieties, fears, frustrations and blocks; as well as your capacity for warmth, contact, joy and insight.

In the synthesis of East and West I am attempting to overcome the difficulties and limitations I see in Zen, Taoism and Gestalt.

Zazen (sitting meditation) is a very powerful technique that touches deep repressed feelings by relaxing our normal defences. Zazen is done by deep abdominal breathing. The concentration and breathing allow very potent feeling to arise. In the practice of traditional meditation the meditator is discouraged, even forbidden to express the feelings contacted. In Taoist Gestalt the reverse is true and so meditation can often lead the person to work with the feelings contacted. Meditation is also useful if the person comes to realize their deadening of feelings.

Traditional Gestalt with its emphasis on 'I am I, and You are You' is very egocentrically based. However in dealing with the alienation and disowning of feelings, so commonly exhibited in group and individual work, it provides a unique methodology for integration and growth.

In Taoist Gestalt we would agree with the statement 'I am I, and You are You'. We would, however, also agree with Ed Elkin, founder of Transpersonal Gestalt when he suggests 'I am you. . . and You are Me'. This is an important point, for many of the issues raised in groups and individual work can be traced back to our erroneous belief in a skin encapsulated ego. The awareness of the non-existence of any permanent ego makes it obvious that the separation of thinker and thought, knower and known, subject and object is false perception. Through this realisation a true integration can begin to take place.

The majority of people who work in the growth movement tend to place emphasis on a particular area of the person be it the body or elsewhere. There is however a common agreement of the essential unity of body and mind.

Taoist Gestalt, whilst focusing on the body/emotions/mind/spirit places no emphasis on any area, each is seen as vital to the whole. It is an approach which is a holistic, organic, experiential learning process. It is non-dualistic, not therapy, non-analytical, non-interpretive. It denies the body/emotions/mind/spirit split. It denies the sickness"health dichotomy. It is not a way of life, rather a way of living.

Beverley Edwards has been a student of Zen and Taoism for over 12 years. His experience includes 4 years training in Taoist Gestalt Practice with a Tibetan Zen Master with extensive experiences of Western Growth work, in particular Gestalt Therapy. He is currently writing a book about his work and training.

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