

**Discovering Tao**

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**Figure 1:** <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/84/d3/5a/84d35abc1c6de2faa044aa4f896892a5.gif>

### **Discovering Tao**

It is said that Tao cannot be taught, it has to be experienced. I loosely define Tao as the eternal, ineffable, and original characteristic of beingness that came before existence itself. Merriam-Webster defines Tao as: “The unconditional and unknowable source and guiding principle of all reality as conceived by Taoists.” Although a good Western definition, I prefer my own definition. And, I believe that one can know Tao, but one must experience Tao to understand it. With this in mind, I teach the concept of Tao, Qigong and wellness by providing students with experiences that lead them to a transformation which has immediate intrinsic rewards as well as life-long benefits. The transformations, which practitioners experience through the exercises and meditations taught, give them a pathway to what Tao may be, but they have to get to that knowledge and understanding by themselves through their own self-cultivation.

The art of learning Tao can be described as guided discovery, or discovery learning.

According to Chinn (2017):

Discovery learning sees students and learners exploring situations, performing experiments, searching for new information and raising questions. All of these practices are designed to build curiosity and interest in students, helping them to achieve new ways of thinking about problems and solutions.

This idea has constructivist roots. And constructivism has its roots in ancient Traditions. “Constructivism has its roots in the eighteenth-century philosophies of Immanuel Kant and Giambattista Vico, although some have traced it as far back as the fourth to sixth centuries B.C. in the works of Lao Tzu, Buddha, and Heraditus (Prince, et al., 2006).” Lao Tzu is the ancient sage most associated with Taoism in much the same way Buddha is associated with Buddhism.

Discovery learning is attributed to Jerome Bruner, who is also the founder of spiral sequencing as first described by Bruner in his book *The Process of Education* (1960). Reigeluth (1999) also highlights spiral sequencing and attributes it to Bruner. Learning about Tao is not only a process of self discovery, it is a spiral process of going deeper and deeper into one’s own self to know oneself better and therefore understand Tao more fully. Some have referred to this process as peeling an onion to reveal Tao.

No matter how you slice it, the student is in complete control of their own self discovery. The teacher (Master, Sifu, Guru, etc.) is the guide to offer them tools to attain greater health and self understanding. The teacher in this case must have their own understanding of Tao and a clear idea of the paths that lead a student to understand Tao in their own way. This method of teaching has its roots in the traditions of ancient China. It is similar to Vedic yoga instruction, shamanic teachings, and other methods of natural self-discovery. The key is to provide the

learner with a guided and perhaps more safe way to discover things about themselves. Self discovery that otherwise may only be attained at great peril to the student (physically, mentally, emotionally and/or spiritually), who may, if they survive, learn to understand the Tao without a human guide.

Ultimately, in Taoism, once we have a basic understanding, Tao itself becomes teacher to us all. Therefore, there are few concepts which could be considered more “Learner Centered.” Since this example of learning is an ancient Chinese tradition, it differs from what Western theorists refer to as the “traditional” role of a teacher in the learning process. In *The Shift in the Role of Teachers in the Learning Process* (Vighnarajah, et al. 2008), the authors clearly differentiate between the “traditional” teachers role, and the more learner centered role of a teacher as a facilitator. Here I take issue with how the word “tradition” is used. I submit that this concept of the “Sage on the Stage” is primarily a Western “tradition.” I propose that the “traditional” teachers role in the Taoist tradition is indeed learner centered already and represents the “Guide on the Side.”

In my personal teaching strategy, I blend the traditionally Eastern and Western roles of the teacher. I offer perhaps a bit more guidance in my lessons than a truly traditional Taoist master may do. Traditional Taoist teaching might be described as nearly exclusively a learner centered process where the student receives little direct guidance or feedback from the teacher, learning mostly through observation of the Master and trial-and-error.

My goal in my capstone project “Get Up and Move!” is to motivate learners, who may not be familiar with the more obtuse Eastern teaching traditions, by informing them of the dangers of too much sitting and unmitigated screen time (Table 1). “Get Up and Move!” has 6 sessions that sequentially relate to physical, emotional, mental and energetic cultivation:

- Relax
- Stretch
- Purge
- Tonify
- Meditate
- Store

Beyond my capstone project, I am also committed to inspiring learners to embark on a path of self-discovery that leads to true transformation and lasting beneficial change in some of their key paradigms in life. In my life's work, I endeavor to be a guide, not a sage. I do provide feedback on the actual exercises and I avail myself to learners' questions, answering them to the best of my ability. I also offer examples that are from western medical and scientific traditions that correlate to the more Eastern philosophical and energetic concepts inherent in Qigong and the Taoist methods presented.

*Table 1: Get Up and Move!*

Session	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6
Topic	Relax	Stretch	Purge	Tonify	Meditate	Store

## References

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