

Ken Cohen: The Tao of the Meaning of Life

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Nicolae Tanase: Master Cohen, what is the meaning of life?

Ken Cohen: Life has no meaning, and it is full of meaning. Let me explain. From the viewpoint of Taoism, China's ancient spiritual tradition, "Heaven and Earth are unkind; they treat all phenomena like sacrificial objects." As in the Book of Job, life does not conform to an external set of laws and sometimes defies our sense of fairness or right and wrong. Life does not acquire meaning or reality from something external to itself, a Creator separate from Creation. Tao includes both; in the Chinese language it is both a noun and a verb. The meaning of life is thus experienced; it unfolds like a dance or a piece of music. In the fourth century BC the Taoist sage

Lao Zi said, "People follow the earth. Earth follows the heavens. Heaven follows the Tao. And the Tao is what is so of itself." Or we can say the Tao follows its own spontaneous nature. The meaning of life is realized when we allow ourselves to grow like a tree, rather than trying to mold and carve our natures, like a sculpture, according to rules and pre-set purposes.

There is also a logical problem with asking, "What is the meaning of life?" Since I am part of life, I have no outside perspective from which to describe it. Can a sword cut itself? Can you lift yourself up in the air by pulling on your own shoes? Can the subject be the object of its own knowledge? Thus, when you ask me, "What is the meaning of life?" perhaps we should turn this into a statement rather than a question. "What" is the meaning of life. Life is a question without an answer, a big "What". Life is a mystery. No meaning at all, and isn't that wonderful!"

Let's look at this from another perspective. "What is the meaning of "apple"?" Here's a dictionary answer, "a fruit in the rose family with a delicious crispy texture and red, green, or yellow skin." Now try biting into or tasting that definition! Can you eat the word "apple"? Obviously not. The real apple is neither a word, a concept, nor an image. You only understand it by experiencing it with a quiet mind. Then "apple" really means something.

Sadly, today many people confuse words with that which words describe. They assume that facility with words somehow makes them wise and trustworthy. "Those who know do not speak," wrote Lao Zi. But does that mean that a silent person is always a sage? Of course not. People can be silent for many reasons including stupidity or dullness. But a person who is silent because she/he realizes the limits of words, who hears the rain falling without the interference of intellect is indeed wise. So what is the meaning of life? Live and find out...

~**Ken Cohen** is an internationally renowned Qigong and Tai Chi Master, and a traditional healer, trained since his youth by Native American elders. He is a member of various indigenous cultural organizations and maintains close ties with his adoptive Cree Indian family from Canada. Ken has followed these two parallel paths– Chinese and Indigenous wisdom– for most of his 60+ years. Ken speaks and reads the Chinese language and was the principle apprentice to Taoist Abbot Huang Gengshi (1910-1999), from the Taoist Holy Mountain, Xiqiao. He is the author of the critically acclaimed books *The Way of Qigong: The Art and Science of Chinese Energy Healing* and *Honoring the Medicine: The Essential Guide to Native American Healing*, as well as popular audio/DVD courses and more than 200 journal articles on spirituality and health. In high demand as a conference keynote, Ken's sponsors have included, the World Congress on Energy Healing (Switzerland), the International Conference on Taoist Studies (Taiwan), Health Canada, the Mayo Clinic Medical School, and numerous universities. www.KennethCohen.com

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