

Thoughts on the Annual Candlelight Night

By Steve Austin

I would like to thank Master Lin and Master Lee for allowing me to share some of my thoughts with you this evening. It has been just over three years since I received the Tao. It would be wrong to say that I found the Tao three years ago, but I joined the I-Kaun Tao Foundation of America three years ago. I hesitate to call it a religion, because that can be a charged word. I prefer to refer to this place an organization.



Slightly more than three years ago, because of some of the things that were happening in my life, I decided to work on the spiritual side of my life. I started investigating spirituality and the first thing that I did was to buy myself "The Complete Idiot's Guide to World Religions." I read about all the great

religions of the world. When I read the section of Taoism, I was struck by the phrase "Taoism is often referred to as 'The Effortless Path'." I knew that this system of beliefs was the way that I have always wanted to lead my life. I've never really wanted to work hard. Effortless seemed a fine way to live one's life.

After I received the Tao and joined this organization, I learned how we regard all religions as different views on the same thing. I always thought that conflict between religions did not make sense. I was brought up as a Catholic and, as I understood it then, you were either a Catholic or a Protestant. I was told that I had to go to a Catholic school, because I would have been picked on at a Protestant school. It did not make any sense, because both Catholics and Protestants looked and talked the same. You could not tell if a

person was one or the other by talking to them, but you had to know by some other means. It was really, like supporting different football teams, but without wearing different colors.

Both Catholics and Protestants learned from the same Bible.

At the I-Kuan Tao Foundation of America, we study all theologies, because we know that they all have something valuable to say. Nobody would say that the teachings of Christianity are worthless any more than they would say that the teachings of Buddhism are worthless. Why choose to limit oneself to one set of teaching, when there are valuable lessons to be learned everywhere.

At the I-Kuan Tao Foundation of America in San Francisco, we mainly study Lao Tze's "Tao Te Ching" on the third Sunday of the month in Master Lee's English group. On the first Sunday of the month, we study other



spiritual works. This last year, we studied some of the Buddhist Sutras and other works, such as Geshe Michael Roach's "The Diamond Cutter: The Buddha on Managing Your Business and Your Life."

The main thing that I learned about Buddhism is that everything that happens

to us in our lives is Void and has Potential. This means that everything is, by itself, neutral and is neither good or bad. It is ourselves who put value on these things, by virtue of our past experiences. For instance, Geshe Michael Roach tells us that an experience such as being yelled at by one's boss is usually interpreted as a bad thing. Yet this is just our perspective and past programming influencing us to see this as bad. For instance, for a fellow co-worker or prospective employee, this might not be too bad. It is only bad, because we choose to see this event as bad.

If we can step outside our programming, we can realize that we can

choose to see everything as either good or bad. In Tao, we are encouraged not to judge things too early. When something seemingly bad happens, we might want to hold judgement and be open to the fact that it might in fact be to our advantage. If we had trust, we might also try to see the benefit in a seemingly bad thing that happened to us. In fact, if we realize that everything is, in fact, to our benefit, we might be more optimistic in our outlook.

Losing one's job and having one's car break down are usually seen as bad thing. Both have happened to me in the last three years, but I have benefited

from our lessons here in San Francisco and have turned both of these events to my advantage.

Now that I understand that all these seemingly bad events can be turned to my advantage, I realize that I always have exactly what I need to have. If it seems to me that I don't have something, it is only because I haven't fully thought about how to use what I do have.

I understand that this is what is means to follow the Effortless Path. My book did not lie.

Thank you.

