Dao and Brahman – They are Non-Different

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The Chinese original spiritual tradition is Daoism. It is old. Perhaps not as old as the Vedas, but there are Daoist texts from as early as 2500 BCE. Most people don’t understand what Daoism entails. Some think of it as a pure philosophical system, while others think of it as an old ritualistic religion, while yet others know it as an alchemical practice whose purpose is immortality.

The truth is that just like Hinduism, Daoism is enigmatic, and contains within it components that would match all those descriptions from above, and then some.

As it turns out, there is a ritualistic Daoism, where deities are prayed to on a regular basis. There is an intellect-oriented philosophy-only interpretation of Daoist thoughts, which is primarily popular among westerners. There is also a practical Daoism, with inner alchemical concepts like Tantra and yogic traditions have in Hinduism. This article will focus on the philosophical and alchemical aspects of Daoism. In fact, I find that they are inseparable, much like Raja Yoga and Jnana are inseparable. One always leads to the other.

What is the Dao?

As a concept, the Dao is as enigmatic as the Brahman. Both are declared as not being concepts. In fact, if one could conceptualize it, it is not the real Dao or Brahman.

The magnum opus of Daoist thought - The Daodejing (The Classic of the Macrocosm and the Microcosm), credited to the sage known as Lao Tzu (Old Master), says this outright --

_The Dao that can be named, is not the real Dao. The name that can be named, is not the real name._

Dao when translated to english means "Path" or "Way". This enigmatic verse from the classic Dao de jing, is matched in the statement "Brahman is silence". Both these are labels assigned to that which cannot be labeled. Yet, the compulsion of language is such, that a label has to be assigned, in order for communication to occur.

The Daodejing then goes through much discussion, to more show, how one may remain in harmony with the Dao (or How one may follow the Dao). There is not much discussion of what the Dao is, because the dao is already explained as indescribable. However, it’s way can be followed if the individual is willing to give up all established forms of knowing and simply being.

Further, the first chapter of the DDJ (Daodejing) says --

_The Dao that can be trodden
is not the enduring and unchanging Dao.
The name that can be named
is not the enduring and unchanging name._
Conceived of as having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth; (conceived of as) having a name, it is the Mother of all things. Always without desire we must be found, if its deep mystery we would sound; but if desire always within us be, its outer fringe is all that we shall see. Under these two aspects, it is really the same; but as development takes place, it receives the different names. Together we call them the mystery. Where the Mystery is the deepest is the gate of all that is subtle and wonderful.

If we look at these verses, we see that the Dao is being called 'that which cannot be trodden' and 'unnameable'. When conceived of as having no name, it is is the source of heaven and earth. When conceived of as having a name, it is the source of all things. If one wants to get to the heart of this mysterious Dao, they have to give up the desire to know it.

Brahman is described as ineffable and unthinkable. It is a label to an enigma which cannot ever be an object of the senses or the mind. Why? Because it is the source of knowing. It can be only "known" (in the conventional sense of knowing) as a reflection. This reflection is our inner core, the knowledge that "I am", prior to any identification with name and form.

The Daoist concept of De is like that. It is often translated as "virtue", but is misunderstood to be some moral value, some traits of the character of a personality. It is none of that. The Grandmaster of the lineage I have spent many years studying in, Master Waysun Liao, describes the De as follows --

Tao is a part of everyone, whereas Te is your own internal version of this energy. As a result Chi has a personality due to being inside you. Chi does not vibrate on it's own, but rather as a result of the connection with the mind.

The example used was water. Water does not flow on it's own, but rather as a result of the outside energy. A mountain is not still on it's own, but again as a result of the outside energy. The work we do is designed to make this connection, each form was designed to teach the flow of energy as it used to be when we were born. We need to get rid of all the false knowledge we have picked up over the years, as it says in the Tao Te Ching, the sage loses knowledge rather than gains. It is important to read the classics and ask yourself questions, no matter how naive they may seem. In this manner you will learn to really understand what they are saying, and gain insights that you would never have if you had not asked the questions.

In the Daoist system, the primary component of the material universe is Energy, vibrating at different frequencies. This energy is intelligent/aware (contains information). At the highest level, it exists in the state of infinite latent potentiality - called "emptiness" or "void" (or Wu or Wuji). Out of this comes the One (Taiji), which is famously known by the yin-yang symbol (called the t'ai-tzu). The One contains within it, the polarities of Yin and Yang. As a result, a flow results between the two poles of Yin (Absolute reception) and Yang (absolute transmission), called "Chi" (or Energy). In this state, the One (Taiji) is known as Three (Yin, Yang and Chi). From these three are formed the "10,000" things. Here, 10,000 represents the material universe filled with all objects. Hence, the Daoist sayings like -
• From the void comes One, from One comes Two; From Two comes Three and from Three come the 10,000 things.
• Form is Void, Void is Form.

Daoist alchemy works on the level of three forms of energy, known as the San bao (Three Treasures). They are shown below and a correspondence of these to yogic counterparts are given.

• Jing - this is the condensed form of energy, just before the state of matter is formed. This is what is used to procreate. In yogic and ayurvedic terms, it is called "Ojas". It is often mistakenly considered as being "sexual fluids" of the body, but is actually not. This is energy, which further condenses into matter.
• Qi or Chi - This is the energy that results in Life. It's counterpart in yogic terms is prāṇa. This is what flows through our meridians and animates life.
• Shen - This is the spiritual energy, whose counterpart in yogic terms is tejas. This is sattvic energy and the more shen one cultivates, the more pure their minds become.

Through the vehicle of these three treasures, a Daoist practitioner approaches their inner alchemy. The primordial energy, manifest as jing which we are born with, and starts to decay as we age. From infancy to adulthood, it is responsible for growth (cellular division and reproduction), and after reaching adulthood, steadily decays, thereby eventually causing death. It also flows in our body as Qi and animates us, while also existing as Shen or spiritual power/Tejas.

Through a series of Daoist cultivation mind-body exercises called Neigong (Internal cultivation) or Daogong (Dao cultivation), it is possible to first conserve and focus the jing (celibacy, proper diet, reclusive living) to a sufficient degree, that an inner alchemical process can be fired. This involves cultivating (gong or kung) of what are called "elixir fields" (Dan Tiens). There are three major ones. Near the Navel, called the Lower Dan Tien (LDT), in the center of the chest (right of the physical heart) called the Middle Dan Tien (MDT) and between the eyebrows, inside the skull, called the Upper Dan Tien (UDT). There are other points of ingress and egress, but for what is considered the pre-heaven energy (what we are born with), these centers, along with the Crown point (Baihui) and the perineum (Hui yin), forms a system, wherein, energy can be raised to go to the crown.

There are many modalities of practice which a single article cannot capture. However, doing these exercises and meditations results in the purification of the mind. All the false knowledge (ignorance) needs to be let go of, and progressively with greater purity of the mind, the one's true nature is revealed as not being the body, mind, personality, identifications etc. It is Pure Energy, pure awareness.

The jing is refined into Qi, the existing Qi is stopped from being scattered by making the mind single-pointed and then the Qi is further refined into spiritual energy or Shen. When sufficient shen has been cultivated, it then takes one into emptiness, mind becomes empty of thoughts and objects, and in harmony with the Dao.

The practitioner is then called a "zhenren" or "True Person", and his/her actions are not actions anymore, as they just follow the Dao (The Way). The actions are spontaneous and arise as needed. They are called "wu wei" (or Non-actions).
If we consider this from the context of a Tantric perspective, we will find the concepts are identical, perhaps with the exception of the actual techniques being applied (which look different and may or may not have a different approach to attain the same objective).

Along with this also goes the Jnana part. The classic texts like the Daodejing are wonderful guides to Nonduality, and in fact help us transcend the chasm between duality and nonduality entirely.