

TAOISM AND GESTALT THERAPY

by

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ABSTRACT


This study examines the relationship between Taoist thought as expressed primarily in the writings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu and Gestalt therapy as expressed primarily in the writings of Fritz Perls.


The meshing of Tao concepts such as yin-yang, Li, and wu-wei with Gestalt theory and methods, reveals interesting and unique overtones for contemplation by Western society. As well, establishing a three stage structure within which to examine the yin-yang/figure-ground relationship, has afforded an opportunity for viewing Tao concepts in terms of their possible use as enhancers to the therapeutic process in general.

The study concludes that there are many similarities between Tao and Gestalt and finds value in the Tao-Gestalt alliance. Further research, specifically on the use of Tao as a set of phenomena for practical use within the therapeutic process, is recommended.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Preface

While undertaking the initial preparation of this study, I found Taoist ways and approaches to Western life obscure and complex. Only after extensive study and research did the meaning of Taoist concepts become more clear and manageable to me. A discussion of some of the difficulties inherent in such a study and in approaching Tao may help the reader to gain an understanding of Taoist concepts. This short, prefatory note is intended to serve as a bridge between what is intrinsic to Taoist thought and what is extrinsic: typical Western responses to Taoist concepts. A degree of openmindedness is required to fully assess and appreciate the value and depth of Taoist thought.

Taoist philosophy has many merits (i.e., it sheds light on process, clarifies conflict, and fosters a material simplicity and compassion for all creatures) and is a refreshing addition to the possible ways of viewing the process of being human. The difficulties inherent in presenting Taoist ideas are similar to the difficulties of the eye attempting to see itself and is a recurring theme throughout this study. It is necessary to look critically at these ideas.

Taoist thought, as represented in this study by Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, is often abstract, paradoxical, contradictory, and has various levels of meaning. At the outset, in Chapter 1 of Lao-tzu's Tao-Te-Ching, it is mentioned that the Tao itself can not be named nor spoken of. That is, no name can adequately express the Tao. Thus, Tao seems impossible to approach, or at least, can only be understood indirectly. It can not be expressed in concepts nor can it be followed. Ears can not hear it--Tao is inaudible. Eyes can not see it--Tao is invisible. It is limitless and knows no restrictions. Statements such as these about the Tao need not be taken in a strict, literal sense or there would be no possibility of studying Tao. They should be taken as indications of the paradoxical and opaque nature of Taoist ideas, principles and understandings.

In Western society, everyday life seems irreconcilably split. That is, there is a gap between ourselves and our activity or experience. We tend to see ourselves somewhere within our bodies: beyond the body is the non-self. Taoism, however, does not see such a gap: instead it talks about the interconnectedness of everything. It suggests a unifying principle whereby all things are simply a part of one whole. Thus, at first glance, the Westerner is likely to dismiss Taoist writings as strange and illogical bits of irrelevant silliness. For the serious

student, Taoism may still appear as confusing and ungraspable.

Our inability to appreciate Taoist ideas is rooted in our Western *empirical* approach to knowledge. Taoist thought uncovers a different view of reality, one which seems wholly irreconcilable with our procedures for empirical and well-established research methods. Although research into Taoism has revealed some original concepts and suggestions, this does not alter the fact there are no theoretical guidelines for their application and responsible use. This is very different from Western psychology which relies upon empirical validation for evidence of truth.

Finally, there is a problem of language in any scientific inquiry, and in this study it is even more critical. Ordinary language usage is severely strained in attempting to demonstrate Taoist ideas. (A parallel can be found in attempts to solve Zen koans with language or intellectual structures.) This study concludes that while Taoism does offer alternatives for individuals in modern life, and more specifically, can act as an enhancer to Gestalt therapy, it is unable to provide assurances for the conveyability of how it goes about things. Demonstrating the influence of Tao on one's inner process is possible but what interests a Gestalt therapist is how and in what areas that experience exerts such influence. This study

has provided groundwork for and encourages further research in this area. However, it is noted that this study has to contend with the lack of method (form) in which to introduce Tao into the practicalities of Gestalt process.

Despite the inherent difficulties and shortcomings, this study regards Taoism as an inspiring attempt to understand human-hearted behavior and the dynamics of personal conduct within the process of human development. Taoism can play an important role in attempts to expand and provide a wider view and appreciation of human existence.

Introduction

There is a sense that a hidden pattern is at work beneath everyday reality as it is known to most of us. This is reflected, for example, in the work of the German author, Hermann Hesse (1877-1962) whose writings bring intimations of greater meaning into one's daily life. In fact, Hesse writes about echoes of my own personal experiences in such novels as Demian, Klingsor's Last Summer, Narziss and Goldmund, and Siddhartha. As well, in his poetry books--Poems, Crisis, and Hours in the Garden, Hesse reveals what seem to be familiar kinds of experiences.

The possibility as I read, of a *pattern* at work, of a *unity* in experience and the possibility that I might be able to gain greater acceptance and understanding of these phenomena, led me to read, study, and reflect, as never

before. This was, in fact, the beginning of my thesis research project.

My notebook began to fill with ideas from the journals of Thomas Merton, Krishnamurti and Kahlil Gibran. During my initial years of professional life as a Child Care Counsellor at a residential treatment center for emotionally disturbed children, a subtle alchemy developed which found me returning, again and again, to Eastern ways of looking at everyday life. (The context of the word *alchemy* used here refers to that area of the human mind which is *attitude*.)

During my early professional years I read widely to enhance my skills in the areas of child care, play therapy, and the dynamics of Family Therapy. At the same time, I always remained ready to investigate the intimations of much greater meaning that Hesse's writing implied. By the time I began work at the Eric Martin Institute of Psychiatry (Victoria, B.C.) in 1974, my attempts to understand and appreciate Western approaches to therapy left me frustrated. The intriguing "something" that I searched for would not solidify and I could not discover a body of knowledge nor personal experiences to advance my understanding.

Then, I began to study Buddhism and the teachings of Zen masters. I became active in Kundalini Yoga and the meditative and spiritual practices of the Sikh faith as taught by Yogi Bhanjan. At the same time, I entered Graduate School which immersed me in Western therapeutic

ideas, giving me a knowledge of Behavioral, Client-centered and Gestalt therapy, Existential Counselling, and Transactional Analysis.

I do not recall when I first came upon the writings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu. I had discovered sprinklings of their words and hints of their Eastern wisdom in a number of writers. References to an apparent cosmic puzzle and the unusual approaches that attempted to comprehend the order and way of things was intriguing. It was not until I came upon the writings of Fritz Perls that I was stimulated to research Taoist concepts and their possible relationship with the theory and practice of therapy.

Area of Research

This study is an explication of the conceptual relationship between the principles of Taoist thought as expressed primarily in the writings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu and the principles of Gestalt therapy as expressed primarily in the writings of Fritz Perls.

The writings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu are representative of the particular stream of Eastern thought known as Taoism. Gestalt therapy as it is known today became internationally popular some years after the printing of Perls' first publication, Ego, Hunger and Aggression, in

1940 and more specifically, after he took up residency at The Esalen Institute of Big Sur, California in the 1960's. His writings have made a contribution, in the historical sense, to the continuing growth of psychotherapy. In Perls' own words, "Gestalt is as ancient and old as the world itself" (in Shepard, 1975, p. 5) and by this statement, he implies a link between Eastern and Western psychotherapeutic thinking.

Gestalt maintains a prominent place in current publications exemplifying the many and different variations of therapies practiced today (Corsini, 1984).

A blending of Eastern and Western approaches to counselling and their relationship to the psychotherapeutic movement has grown enormously since the 1960's.

A review of the literature reveals an abundance of material related to the integration of the non-empirical East with the empirical West. John Blofeld (1973) writes:

This is a time when the increasing open-mindedness of Western people, especially the younger generation, is leading to more sympathetic study of Eastern traditions, to greater humility in the approach made to them, and to new readiness to recognize excellence where excellence exists in unfamiliar forms. (p. 13)

An examination of the conceptual relationships between Taoism and Gestalt therapy may provide a basis for studying assimilative effects resulting from a blending of the two approaches. That is, in biology, the *assimilative effect* involves a process by which nourishment is changed into

living tissue. In Western society, the cliché *You are what you eat* is taken very seriously by those involved with Vegetarian and Holistic approaches to life-style. (The counterpart in Buddhist psychology is *You are what you think!*) This study entertains the notion of a similar *constructive metabolism* whereby Tao-Gestalt concepts possibly influence behavior.

This study invites such participation. Taoist concepts could possibly bring to the Gestalt therapist attitudes and ways of being in the world and in one's relationship and role as *helper* that would no longer be regarded as something separate from our basic being.

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide empirical evidence as to the effects of the East-West melding referred to by Blofeld. It is the author's intention to bring forth the spirit of Taoism, tempered by the principles of Gestalt therapy. It is possible that a basic attitude of trust in, and practice of, the concepts under study, can provide a powerful and dynamic understanding of therapeutic process and practice. Tao nature has a quality of *hard truth*; similarly, Gestalt is involved with the direct, simple experience of a here-and-now reality. Together, they appear to lead towards a path of accepting our world more openly and more thoroughly.

Finally, this study examines Taoism in the Gestalt process, which suggests that aspects of Taoism may be used to inform counsellors and therapists in their work with clients.

Goals of the Study

1. To examine the conceptual relationships between Taoism and Gestalt therapy.
2. To examine the possible value and usefulness of Taoist thought as an enhancer of Gestalt interventions.

A comparative study of Taoist principles and Gestalt therapy principles may provide a basis for suggesting positive variations in therapeutic practices--Gestalt specifically and the area of counselling and psychotherapy more generally. This variation(s) may offer greater flexibility in use of technique and approach for furthering that which has impact and is facilitative of what Brandon (1976) calls *the art of helping*.

Brief Historical Accounts: Perls, Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu

Dr. Friedrich Salomon Perls was born on July 8, 1893 near Berlin. He broke from his Jewish heritage early in life and declared himself an atheist. By late adolescence, Perls had considerable experience in theatre. After graduation he entered the University of Berlin to study

medicine. World War I interrupted his studies and at age 21, Perls initially volunteered to work with the Red Cross in 1915 and later enlisted to become a medic. He was promoted to a medical sublieutenant and by the end of the war in 1918, Perls had undergone a great change. Shepard (1975) writes:

His own suffering and the suffering he witnessed destroyed whatever personal stability he had achieved prior to his military service. The barbarity, contemptuous authoritarianism, racial indecencies, and pain he experienced would have a most profound effect on shaping his future existence--accounting, in large part, for his tremendous humanitarianism coupled with a deep cynicism about human nature. With no friends or ties to keep him in one place too long, he would spend the next thirty years of his life searching for direction, authenticity, and inner peace. (p. 29)

Perls returned to his studies, obtaining his M.D. in 1920 and began private practice as a neuropsychiatrist. After returning from a two year residence in New York, Perls began in 1926, psychoanalytic treatment with Karen Horney (and later Dr. Wilhelm Reich). In 1928 he established his own analytic practice. Five years later, due to the political turmoil in Germany, Perls fled and eventually took up residence in South Africa where he founded The South African Institute of Psychoanalysis in 1935.

Perls volunteered for duty during World War II and starting in 1942, served in the army for the next four years. He then returned to settle in New York in 1946.

For ten years, he and his wife, Laura, were in private practice having established The Gestalt Institute of New York. Perls moved to California in 1959 and began to teach at Esalen in 1963. By 1967 Perls was beginning to receive wide popularity in North America. He has published five books: Ego, Hunger and Aggression (1940), co-author of Gestalt Therapy (1951) with R. Hefferline and P. Goodman, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim (1969), In and Out of the Garbage Pail (1969), The Gestalt Approach and Eye Witness to Therapy (1973) was published after his death.

A detailed account of Fritz Perls' life is provided in Shepard (1975) titled, Fritz: An Intimate Portrait of Fritz Perls and Gestalt Therapy.

Perls has left the imprint of his personality on Gestalt therapy and although his personal therapeutic style sometimes seemed impersonal, brash, and insulting, the words *I and Thou, here and now* are immediately recognizable. In the article Gestaltting Psychotic Persons, Dublin (1973) writes that Perls was a "Therapist-teacher-existentialist" (p. 149) and calls Gestalt therapy the phenomenological method. The New York writer-psychiatrist, Martin Shepard (1975) describes Perls:

He was, for me, a perfect animal--not in a low but in a high sense. He could be nasty or funny, crude or kind, lewd or loving, cheap or extravagant, and he didn't bother to hide any of it. (p. 220)

Perls referred to himself as a gypsy. The many aspects of his personality are revealed in Shepard's biography (1975):

Fritz had donned the uniform of the West Coast Mountain hippies. A roly-poly five foot nine inch chain-smoking bald-pated long hair, with a full-flowing beard, sparkling eyes, and a gruff no-nonsense voice, given to wearing jump suits, Cossack shirts, and beaded necklaces, he looked like a combination of Santa Claus, Rasputin, elf, primordial Father Earth, sage, guru, perhaps Jehovah himself. By his own description a 'gypsy' and a seeker of new experiences, he had been through the drug scene, the Zen scene, and was still going strong within the sex scene. (p. 2)

Perls has been a model for those in the late 1960's and early 1970's who sought after the *courage to be*--to be as authentic and as real as the inner dynamics and conditionings would allow. For a few, his life-style and personality was abrasive and demeaning, but for the many, his insistence for authentic, direct communicating and touching of one another, brought fresh hope and promise to an alienating, lonely and separating world.

Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu

The long historical life of Taoism reveals a mingling of fact and heresy, of recorded stories and legends. A review of the literature indicates there has been a multitude of disciples and followers of Taoism, some reverently known and many, many others, unknown. Taoism has seen many directions and transformations, from an indulgence in superstition and magic to the practical, socially accepted teachings for community life. The immense and lengthy history of Taoism shall not be

presented in this thesis for such a consideration is far beyond the intention and scope of our concerns here. It will serve the purposes of this study, to surmise a brief account to place Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu within the context of this stream of history.

Controversy continues to surround the debate as to the actual founders of Taoism. Chuang-tzu himself suggests the Taoist beginnings are attributed to Huang Ti, the Yellow Emperor (2697-2597 B.C.). John Blofeld (1978) writes: "The Taoists themselves like to refer to their system of beliefs as 'Huang Lao', thus honouring both Huang Ti (The Yellow Emperor) and Lao-Tzu as their founders" (p. vi).

Legend tells us that almost twenty-five hundred years ago, a man named Lao-tzu compiled his philosophy about man and nature. His writings have come to be known as 'the Way' or 'Tao', or 'Tao Teh Ching'. There remains much controversy whether Lao-tzu was an actual living human being who was the sole author of the compilation of Taoist sayings, yet many acknowledge him as the founder of Taoism. On the other hand, Chuang-tzu is known as "the chief authentic spokesman for Taoism" (Merton, 1965, p. 244) and his writings date from the Third and Fourth Century.

Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu's poetic imagery often requires us to experience in a different kind of way--in concrete, living terms. That is, we are encouraged to participate

in the scene. Their words are rich in suggestion and like Gestalt approaches in counselling, they transpose abstract ideas into imagery which allows for our identifying ourselves personally with Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu's experience and values. In one sense, Lao and Chuang's 'poetics' are their own truth by presenting experience as experience. For example, Lao-tzu writes that the sage "lets go of that and chooses this" (in Feng & English, 1972, chap.72). This concept is not a concept in the ordinary sense. Its importance lies in its actuality, its manifestation in the real world and not in its written form of thought. The meanings of 'picking and choosing' rise out of the event as it happens and *what is happening* is a channel through which the meaning comes. The act of choosing can seem to have different meanings at different times, yet, in the Taoist sense, will always be expressing aspects of the same reality.

Taoism is an ancient Oriental system of thought and like "The Symbolism of the Taoist Garden" (Cooper, 1977) the writings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu are teachings about everyday life and an approach to living intended to reflect a heaven on earth. A summary by Blofeld (1978) points to the essence of Tao:

The Tao is unknowable, vast, eternal. As undifferentiated void, pure spirit, it is the mother of the cosmos; as non-void, it is the container, the sustainer and, in a sense, the being of the myriad objects, permeating all. As the goal of existence, it is the Way of

Heaven, of Earth, of Man. No being, it is the source of Being. It is not conscious of activity, has no purpose, seeks no rewards or praise, yet performs all things to perfection. Like water, it wins its way by softness. Like a deep ravine, it is shadowy rather than brilliant. As Lao-tzu taught, it is always best to leave things to the Tao, letting it take its natural course without interference; for, 'the weakest thing in heaven and earth, it overcomes the strongest; proceeding from no place, it enters where there is no crack.' Thus do I know the value of non-activity. Few are they who recognize the worth of the teaching without words and of non-activity. (pp. 2-3)

Lao-tzu indicates that the Tao of the wise person should mirror the Tao of the universe. That is, the wise person should go about things the same way the cosmos does, and should participate with life in a nonactive way. In this sense, Tao manifests from a description of the universe into a model for action.

Chapter II

The East-West Integration of Ideas

In 1931 Richard Wilhelm's The Secret of the Golden Flower was published. Carl Jung saw this as an attempt *to build a bridge of psychological understanding between East and West* and writes:

I know that our unconscious is full of Eastern symbolism. The spirit of the East is really at our gates. Therefore it seems to me that the translation of meaning into life, the search for the Tao, has already become a collective phenomenon among us, and that to a far greater extent than is generally realized. (in Wilhelm, 1972, p. 146)

A rapidly growing literature attests to the interest in the possible interface of Eastern philosophy with Western psychology. Students of modern Western psychology have become especially interested in Eastern approaches to the art of helping. This search is not a movement away from the empirical strategies of the West; it grows out of a recognized need to integrate the wisdom of the East with the empirical understanding of the West (Grof, 1983).

Similarly, around the same time, Geraldine Coster (1934) had linked yoga and Western psychology by comparing the yoga sutras of Patanjali with analytical therapy in her book titled Yoga and Western Psychology. She writes:

It may be that the psychological self-knowledge of the west, strengthened by the old psychological self-knowledge of the east, will eventually give to some people an experimental proof of the reality of the world beyond the drop-curtain. (p. 11)

This drop-curtain is the value between what is unconscious and conscious, between what Jung writes as *meaning* and its *manifestation* as everyday life.

More recently, Fritjof Capra (1976) explores the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism in his book The Tao of Physics. He writes of a world beyond the range of our empirical tools but Coster suggests it may be accessible with the aid of what she calls the *old psychological self-knowledge of the East*.

Specifically, Capra indicates that Westerners must re-evaluate their understanding of Eastern mysticism and specifically, the nature of mystical *seeing* which puts as much emphasis on observation as Western science does. This fact is reflected in our common use of the words *to see*. When asked if another *sees* what is being talked about, confirmation is often forthcoming, i.e., "Do you see the fence to the right of the trees?"

Yet, Capra invites us to see and observe in a new sense:

The experimental stage in scientific research seems to correspond to the direct insight of the Eastern mystic, and the scientific models and theories correspond to the various ways in which this insight is interpreted. (pp. 36-37)

Metaphorically, this way of seeing is more a way of experiencing than understanding. Often the eyes are not looking anywhere as though they are looking within.

The emphasis on a new way of looking at things suggests an astonishing change of outlook. It invites one to view the Western world through Eastern philosophy. Such is David Brandon's research (1976) from the field of Social Work. He explores the Zen, Buddhist, and Taoist elements and their application to the helping process in his book Zen in the Art of Helping. Brandon claims that "much of Western thought is alienated from natural processes and living experiences" (p. 79).

Does Brandon suggest that alienation comes from being too preoccupied with empirical evidence? This would be surprising because modern Western thought focuses upon and depends upon observation of nature (scientific empiricism). That is, we do not trust our minds to come up with scientific validation. Obviously, there is a recognized need to go beyond the empirical method in order to connect up with reality. This connects up with Jung's idea that we must search for the Tao and Coster's point that we have to go beyond the empirical data.

Finally, from a different point of view, Ram Dass (1978), at one time a Harvard psychologist who turned away from Western thought and embraced Eastern ideas, sees the need to tune into the East for moral and social-cultural reasons:

By the late sixties and early seventies many Americans had seen the limitations of seeking finite pleasures, and began looking for ways to break the cycle of wants. Western models no longer held; Eastern models very quickly became the fashion. (p. 105)

Perhaps modern psychology, in its efforts to be scientific, overlooks the wisdom of mankind's ongoing struggle to understand human reality. The study of Taoism as it relates to Gestalt therapy, is therefore, of special concern for it appears to go beyond the understanding of literal behavior and implies possible influence of implicit underlying principles upon our actions and behaviors.

Starting in the early 1960's and continuing into the present time, there has been a steady stream of books which represent attempts to apply Taoist thought to specific Western disciplines. While a thorough survey of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this study, the following list is representative of Taoist-oriented publications indicating the scope of the effort to apply Taoism to other disciplines:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Children's Literature | Hoff, B. (1982). <u>The Tao of Pooh</u> .
New York: Dutton. |
| Christianity | Tan, W. (1958). <u>Lao Tzu and Gandhi</u> .
New York: Novissima Lectio Books. |
| Creativity | Chang, C. (1975). <u>Creativity and Taoism</u> .
New York: Julian Press. |
| Mystical | Blofeld, J. (1974). <u>Beyond the Gods</u> .
New York: E.P. Dutton. |
| Painting | Sze, M. (1974). <u>The Tao of Painting</u> .
New York: Pantheon Books. |
| Philosophy | <u>Journal of Chinese Philosophy</u> . Hawaii:
Dialogue Publishing. |
| Physics | Capra, F. (1976). <u>The Tao of Physics</u> .
Great Britain: Fontana. |

- Photography Hoff, B. (1981). The Way of Life.
Weatherhill: New York.
- Poetry Merton, T. (1969). The Way of Chuang Tzu.
New York: New Directions.
- Psychology Bolen, J. (1979). The Tao of Psychology.
New York: Harper & Row.
- Sexuality Chang, J. (1977). The Tao of Love and Sex.
New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Science Siu, R. (1957). The Tao of Science.
Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Yoga Chia, M. (1983). Awaken Healing Energy
Through the Tao. New York: Aurora Press.

Tao and Gestalt Therapy

A review of the literature reveals underlying strains common to both East and West in the two modes represented by Tao and Gestalt. Smith (1976) remarks that "much of the flavor of Gestalt therapy comes from Perls borrowing from Eastern religion, or more specifically from Taoism and Zen Buddhism" (p. 33). Gestalt therapy seems to be a way (Tao) of living which involves a vigilance (awareness) and undertaking of certain practices that enhance experience by integrating conflict into the here-and-now. This in turn, facilitates holistic being.

Gestalt therapy has its techniques and games (Fagan & Shepherd, 1970; Yontef in Stephenson, 1975) which serve as enhancers to the therapeutic process. In a similar manner, the parallels and comparative concepts found in

Tao as presented in this study, tend to have the same general aim--to enhance the daily, living process.

Kelman (1959) examines the Eastern influence on psychotherapy and stresses the importance that "At all levels and in all aspects of human endeavor we must remain open to the old with fresh eyes, to produce a synthesis of the old and the new" (p. 75). His basic premise is that the Western psychotherapies need to adjust their theoretical basis in order to be more representative of human nature. As well, he calls for the creation of better techniques in order to humanize and better serve the therapeutic process. Much of the literature on Gestalt therapy and its concepts about human nature and techniques of intervention, seem to offer what Kelman calls for.

Tao aids the reaching of tranquility and self-unity. Gestalt aims at the integration and unification of people within themselves and their world.

Tao and Gestalt have similar trends of thought and certain aims and goals resemble each other. In both Tao and Gestalt is found:

1. A movement towards the immediacy of existence or a centering in the here-and-now. There is little concern for the past or future.

2. A focus on what is, on what is actually happening--the concrete, real-life experience.

3. The use of illogical concepts and absurdities rather than Western mind's rationality.
4. Intellectual efforts and forms of analysis are viewed as a hindrance to everyday life.
5. Striving for harmonious growth and an alliance with nature rather than creating adaptive measures.
6. Concepts such as comparing, contrasting, calculating and rejecting that are cited as interfering with the process of becoming one's true self.
7. Guidelines for tranquility, self-unity, and holistic living.
8. A movement from the projections of personality to view all things as an ultimate, undifferentiated wholeness.

Gagarin (in Smith, 1976) has written a short article titled Taoism and Gestalt Therapy in which he suggests a common ground between the two modes of thought:

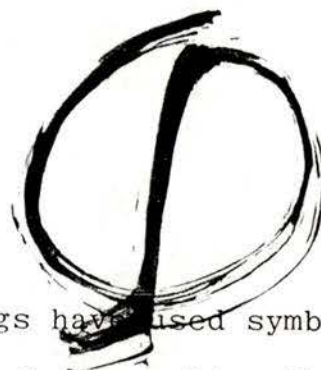
Taoism and Gestalt have much in common. Both aim at balancing the forces within the individual--reaching the zero-point or center. Both recognize that with this centering there is an improved perspective and increased awareness. Both believe in the wisdom of the organism, as opposed to rational intelligence. Both believe in being in the *here and now*. (p. 212)

There appears to be an overlapping and integration of Gestalt and Taoist concepts. This study views this as an expression of the creativity and growth of Gestalt theory and practice which seeks new ways to explore human nature, experience and the therapeutic process.

Taoism teaches the notion that human beings, all of their endeavors and therapies--as indeed, all things--exist in a vast and indivisible whole which is constantly interacting. Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu believe that for human beings to maintain mental, physical and spiritual health, they have to enter into a harmonious relationship with everything else. It would seem that such an all-encompassing approach would have much to offer all therapies (MacHovec, 1984).

Chapter III

Yin-Yang

The Yin-yang Symbol

Throughout the ages, human beings have used symbols as representations for understanding their world. The Tao symbol is also the great symbol of *T'ai Chi* and refers to two major forces in the universe--yin and yang. The circle is divided into comma-like halves, each containing a smaller circle representing that a part of each energy is present in its opposite. The design suggests two concepts--one unity, and that the state of oneness or wholeness depends upon the relation between yin and yang. Relatedness is the key to understanding what appears as a polarization of energies. However, their relationship is dynamic:

No matter what names are applied to these forces, it is certain that the world of being arises out of their change and interplay. Thus change is conceived of partly as the continuous transformation of the one force into the other and partly as a cycle of complexes of phenomena, in themselves connected such as day and night, summer and winter. (Wilhelm & Baynes, 1950, p. lvi)

The well-known I-Ching: Book of Changes, shows sixty-four combinations of yin and yang.

Careful study of the Tao symbol shows the yang with a yin center and the yin with a yang center. In terms of Jungian psychology this refers to the *anima* in men and the

animus in women. in Gestalt terms, a show of strength suggests insecurity; the feminine surrender tends to encompass and win. Lao-tzu says "That which fails must . . . be strong. . . . Soft and weak overcome hard and strong." (in Feng & English, 1972, chap. 32)

As well, the Gestalt therapist seems to have a similar working knowledge that:

Sometimes things are ahead and sometimes they are behind; Sometimes breathing is hard, sometimes it comes easily; Sometimes there is strength and sometimes weakness; Sometimes one is up and sometimes down. Therefore the sage avoids extremes, excesses, and complacency. (in Feng & English, 1972, chap. 29)

In the above quote, Lao-tzu is saying that within the play of opposites, there are immense variations of expression and behavior in the cosmic game of life. Too much force will impede the yin-yang interplay and too little force will not be facilitative. Avoiding extremes and initiating noninterventions is a particular kind of learning that requires a kind of *least effort*. For example, not forcing thread through the eye of a needle tends to enable the transition to take place.

The Unifying Principle

Tao is a unifying principle which differentiates itself into yin and yang. Lao-tzu writes:

The Tao begot one.
One begot two.
Two begot three.
And three begot the ten thousand things.

The ten thousand things carry yin and embrace yang.
They achieve harmony by combining these forces.
(in Feng & English, 1972, chap. 42)

That is, the complexity and multi-sidedness of the human personality and the myriad of expressive features of one's behaviors, all seem to have a sense of connection to this single principle. The manifestations of form and process open to infinite paths of possibility and potential. Change and harmony can then emerge.

This is why the range of Gestalt capacities, with all of its techniques and therapeutic concepts, principles, and guidelines, is able to embrace processes with all strata of the personality. There is a partnership between the unifying principle of Tao and that which manifests as process. This is no less than the discovery of a paradigm of the first order.

In this light, it would seem that what the client does and how one behaves during the Gestalt process, one's expressions and actions, rise from a singular source. These behaviors contain vast diversity and gradations of pattern whose process of emerging, manifesting, and ending is but a reflective phenomena of the source from which it came.

Yin and yang is one concept. It is a principle of polarity whereby there is no yin without yang, no male without female, no light without dark, no up without down, etc. What appears as a contradiction is simply a model, which demonstrates that yin and yang are inclusive and interdependent. Siu (1974) elaborates:

In reality . . . *yin* does not exist without *yang*, nor *yang* without *yin*. A truer model, then, would be one in which each of the actual *yin* and actual *yang* numbers is a resultant of many vectors, rather than being a singularity of its own. Thus, -1 may be the resultant of (+7, -8), (+8, -2), (+15, -22), and so on. One should not be surprised, therefore, to find contradictions within the same person or event. These are intrinsic to being. A is both A and not A. (p. 289)

There exists in Taoist literature the concepts of balance in imbalance, mutual arising, or inseparability. These are different names for one concept. Watts (1975) expands this idea:

They are thus like the different, but inseparable sides of a coin, the poles of a magnet, or pulse and interval in any vibration. There is never the ultimate possibility that either one will win over the other, for they are more like lovers wrestling than enemies fighting. (p. 23)

This idea is a part of the theoretical base in Gestalt that Latner (1974) writes about:

Therapy consists of learning to be aware of all the aspects of the gestalt process, from the undifferentiated field through the beginnings of destruction, through the polarizing of the elements of the field, through their unity in the new figure and its eventuation in making a new situation, and the final satisfaction and relapse into indifference. (pp. 152-153)

Lao-tzu writes "Know the white, but keep the black!" (in Feng & English, 1972, chap. 28) In this passage, Lao-tzu stresses the importance of remaining mindful of the inseparability of the forces in life. Watts (1975) expands this idea: "the art of life is not seen as holding to *yang* and banishing *yin*, but as keeping the two in balance, because there cannot be one without the other" (p. 21).

The ongoing Gestalt process involves working on the singular or mutually arising polarities in ways that lead toward the resolution of the dialectic. The therapist who remains deeply in touch with the yin-yang principle may possibly be more aware when a client has simply moved from one pole of an inner conflict to the other. What the Taoists indicate as "an explicit duality expressing an implicit unity" (Watts, 1975, p. 26) is for the Gestalt therapist "the resolution of both sides into unified functioning" (Latner, 1974, p. 221). On the other hand, Jung (1978) reminds us that the Western mind has not opened to this concept:

From a consideration of the claims of the inner and outer worlds, or rather, from the conflict between them, the possible and the necessary follows. Unfortunately our Western mind, lacking all culture in this respect, has never yet devised a concept, nor even a name, for the *union of opposites through the middle path*, that most fundamental item of inward experience, which could respectably be set against the Chinese concept of Tao. It is at once the most individual fact and the most universal, the most legitimate fulfilment of the meaning of the individual's life. (p. 302)

It follows then, that Tao and Gestalt stress the importance of internal process and the possible fundamental role played by the principle of yin and yang. Gestalt especially points out that a client's expressions are often not in contact with deeper, emotional states (Perls, 1951; Polster, 1973; Smith, 1976). Further, it is not considered unusual for a person to provide representations or appearances of how one thinks he should be. Yet, for both Tao and Gestalt, this is a misrepresentation of one's inner existence. Lao-tzu asks, "Which is more valuable, one's own life or wealth? He who is greedy for things and can never have enough will have little for himself." (Pi, 1979, chap. 44)

That is, studying the natural order of things and working with ourselves is more likely to provide inner security than is spending our energies obtaining material possessions. Sometimes a person does not know what is in one's own best interest. How one has learned to fulfill needs may not bring what is needed, nor what one believes is needed. It seems that, in Western culture, few people consider wealth to be less important than *Being*. Does wealth actually bring contentment and inner security? What is more important--acquiring more possessions or becoming more conscious?

If the principle of yin and yang does express the inner law of workings of Nature, it is obvious that the

Gestalt therapist knows about this polarity and its interaction and is "aware of and interested in the potential situations which extend in either direction" (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951, p. 52).

Hermann Hesse (1971) in his Autobiographical Writings, touches upon this most important aspect of Taoism--the interaction of yin and yang:

I would like to find expression for duality, I would like to write chapters and sentences where melody and counter-melody are always simultaneously present, where unity stands beside every multiplicity, seriousness beside every joke. For to me, life consists simply in this, in the fluctuation between two poles, in the hither and thither between the two foundation pillars of the world. I would like always to point with delight at the many-splendored multiplicity of the world, and just as constantly utter a reminder that oneness underlies this multiplicity; I would like always to show that the beautiful and the ugly, the bright and the dark, sin and holiness are always opposites just for the moment, that they constantly merge into each other. (p. 168)

One example of finding an appropriate expression for this duality can be found in using the yin quality of voice with children (and cats). Approaching a child with a harsh-heavy, yang voice would tend to have the child respond defensively, whereas, the soft, inquiringly-open, yin voice facilitates communication. (A cat will often run away if called with a low voice.)

Resolving Splits

The most active demonstration of yin-yang in Gestalt involves resolving splits: use of the two chair technique. This well known Gestalt technique is described in much of the literature (Perls, 1973; Fagan, 1970b; Polster, 1973) and Greenberg (1979) is quoted here:

In this Gestalt experiment the person plays the role of both sides of the conflict, usually locating each side in a separate chair, and proceeds to have an encounter between them. (p. 316)

Conflict arising from the client's inability to choose between alternatives, or from inner fragmentation and polarization, has an opportunity for resolution if the parts can come into contact with each other. The possible outcome is what Tao and Gestalt term the reconciliation of opposites. Perls (1972b) writes that when we have a dialogue between two opposing parts of ourselves, a person will eventually "come to an openness and integration of the two opposing forces" (p. 74). For the Gestalt therapist, the interaction of two opposite powers is not settled through compromise or having one side win at the expense of the other. The focus is on integration. This is very similar to what Chuang-tzu says about how a sage conducts affairs: "the sage harmonizes right with wrong and rests in the balance of nature. This is called taking both sides at once." (in Feng & English, 1974, p. 30)

Participating Phenomena

Tao and Gestalt can be known in terms of yin-yang. Tao is the mother of all things, gives rise to the ten thousand manifestations within the universe and provides for their cyclic returning and the continuing myriad of patterns resulting from the yin-yang relationship.

Gestalt is the father, the provider of form, substance and catalyst within which moves the yin and the yang. Gestalt brings that which is separate together, and allows distances to be more manageable.

The Tao of Lao-tzu is known as a *practical* philosophy (Blofeld, 1978; Wu, 1982) for its principles are applicable to everyday life. This is similar to the Gestalt way:

The principles of Gestalt therapy in particular apply to actual people meeting actual problems in an actual environment. The gestalt therapist is a human being in awareness and interaction. For him there is no pure patient-ness. There is only the person in relationship to his social scene, seeking to grow by integrating all aspects of himself. (Polster, 1973, p. 311)

That is, human beings are different manifestations of one essence. They are all the same essentially. They are different existentially. What can be heard in the deep Tao and in the echos of Gestalt, is that they are the *participating* phenomenal distinctions of one reality. This is why Gestalt is known as an existential, experimental and experiential approach. Hence:

Man is indeed a unity; and the body, the mind, the feelings, interpersonal behavior, and the spirit are all manifestations of one essence. Every thought, gesture, muscle tension, feeling, stomach gurgle, nose scratch, fart, hummed tune, slip of the tongue, illness--everything is significant and meaningful and related to the now. It is possible to know and understand oneself on all these levels, and the more one knows the more he is free to determine his own life. (Schutz, 1971, p. 1)

If one were to participate in what might be called a yin-yang experience it may be similar to what Robert and Kay Stensrud (1979) in their article The Tao of Human Relations call "intertwining":

The experience of intertwining exists as a preontological experience beyond words, beyond inferences, and beyond all our intellectual processes. Taoists claim we can sense when we are involved in such an experience but cannot explain or describe it. (p. 77)

Other examples of the conciliation of opposites can be found in the Christian cross as a manifestation of the intersection of two polarities, and in the meditator who sits in Zazen. These provide examples of what Claudio Naranjo (1972) has termed *unity in multiplicity*.

Thus, both Tao and Gestalt are interested in what brings things together rather than what separates them. Yin-yang is basic to the holistic concept Perls (1973) writes about:

In psychotherapy, this concept gives us a tool for dealing with the whole man. Now we can see how his mental and physical actions are meshed together. We can observe man more keenly and use our observations more meaningfully. For how much broader now is the surface which we can observe! If mental and physical activity

are of the same order, we can observe both as manifestations of the same thing: man's being. (pp. 15-16)

Perls recognizes that everything a person has learned, experienced, and assimilated has demanded a participation element on their part.

Aided by the concept of yin-yang, the Gestalt therapist might use his intuition and experience to better comprehend if a client is stuck in polarity, doing symbolically what he could do physically when functionally balanced in the homeostasis process, or if the client prevents carrying out the appropriate actions that struggle to emerge as foreground. Cua (1981) views yin-yang as a valuable compliment:

In the language of *yin* and *yang*, the *tao* points to a perspective for viewing contrasts and differences as eligible complements in a harmonious whole, since a *yin* contains seeds for the generation of a *yang* and conversely, *yin* and *yang* are by their nature different but not exclusive. (p. 129)

Thus, it would seem that, by its nature, the yin-yang concept would be a part of the ongoing, innovative process known as Gestalt therapy.

In summary, yin-yang is a very creative concept and has obvious similarities in Gestalt therapy. What is presented here is more than a symbolic interplay of Taoist thought with Gestalt for it has developed from an abstract concept into formations of Gestalt technique. Thus:

If such a teaching on the practical significance of *tao* as harmony of opposites is successful, the audience may be said to have acquired an ideal perspective for viewing opposites as complements. Such an insight may yield novel ways of thought, decision, and action, particularly on the occasion of perplexity of a reflective moral agent concerning the significance or meaning of his life. (Cua, 1981, p. 135)

That is, the techniques to recognize and utilize the process of change in our daily lives, seem inherent in the principle of yin and yang (Stiskin, 1971). In one sense, Gestalt can be seen as the modern application of the Way (Tao) in which one's well-being is closely linked to the harmonizing interplay of this concept.

Chapter IV

Wu-Wei

Not Forcing/Non-Action

The writings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu are sprinkled with Taoist concepts that function as guideposts in later Buddhist literature. The most paradoxical of these concepts is that of *wu-wei* or non-action. Lao-tzu writes: "Tao abides in non-action, Yet nothing is left undone." (in Feng & English, 1972, chap. 37). This kernel of eastern wisdom suggests that if one complies with the nature of things, then the true course of development and emergence of things will not be interfered with. That is, things will develop of their own accord, naturally and spontaneously.

Watts (1975) writes that "Tao is of a skillful and intelligent following of the course, current, and grain of natural phenomena" (p. 16). Thus, Tao would seem a model of Nature--an active model. How then can Tao actively not interfere with the great way of things?

The Tao brings to the foreground a person's sense of relationship with existence. In Gestalt therapy, a client is asked to observe this flow of experience. A synthesis is possible between the observer and what is observed. That is, the client increases awareness of self. This

observing is not an active observing and serves as a demonstration of wu-wei. Intense watching means tension within. Effortless watching implies not forcing. To gently lay one's eyes upon something is neither active nor passive--it is gentle and without effort, yet implies an alertness similar to a sense of urgency, or like the caution taken while crossing an icy stream.

Wu-wei is like the tail of Tao because it can be thought of as a shadow that follows behind and gravitates to its own natural distance from action. One difficulty in the practical application of this concept is that, like a shadow, wu-wei is difficult to grasp. Grasping is the opposite of no effort. Related concepts in Tao such as *letting go* and *non-interference* imply a difficulty with experiencing simply *Being*. Being who you are is a central aim of Gestalt therapy and this is more easily recognizable from the Taoist point of view, as *being simple*.

It is likely that the wu-wei concept has value and importance for those struggling with their lives. Learning to let go in a psychological sense and how to apply the least effort in situations and events, is perhaps the beginning of making the wu-wei concept visible in the world.

The effortlessness of Tao symbolizes participation in natural forces, a participation that is characterized by concepts such as *not taking credit* for what one does and

doing without trying. This does not mean that one who walks the path of Tao does not engage with the world or attend to things. Rather, responses are selective and consequent behaviors appear direct and simple, as if effortless.

Watts (1975) says wu-wei is "not forcing . . . what we mean by going with the grain, rolling with the punch, swimming with the current, trimming the sails to the wind, taking the tide at its flood, and stooping to conquer" (p. 76).

One of the characteristics of Lao-tzu's thought is that his words are usually comprehensible and practical. In the following passage, he is clearly referring to wu-wei: "A truly good man does nothing, Yet leaves nothing undone. A foolish man is always doing, Yet much remains to be done." (in Feng & English, 1972, chap. 38)

Lao-tzu never says "Do this!" Such an action would leave something undone by creating duality. Taoism is non-dual. Chuang-tzu says, "the perfect man can act without effort" (in Feng & English, 1974, p. 159). Neither Lao-tzu or Chuang-tzu give direct instruction. Their words are subtle and their direction is simply hinted at. Wu-wei seems an especially novel approach to things that happen.

Tao-Gestalt

Joel Latner (1973) links the experience of giving oneself over to ongoing experience to wu-wei:

We are completely present in the experience, we are involved, acting, but we are aware that the felicity and excitement of the event owes those qualities to something other than our intentions, or our wills, or the intentions of other participants. After all, in good lovemaking, it simply isn't the case that the mutuality, pleasure, and climactic excitement come from our plans about it. (Often they occur in spite of them.) We are not doing; nor are we being done to. We are neither active, nor passive--both, really, and yet not either. It is the wisdom of the Tao: Stand out of the way. (pp. 23-24)

Perhaps it is the practice of wu-wei that Stella Resnick is seeking when she writes: "Somehow we have to find ways of observing our process without being so immersed in it that we miss out on vital aspects of our living." (in Stevens, 1975, p. 233)

The writings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, like that of Perls, stress cooperation rather than competition, and spontaneous participation rather than direct force. For example, Lao-tzu writes: "Those who strive after it, fail. Those who try to grasp it, lose it." (in Cheng, 1981, chap. 29). Lao-tzu's comments are consistent with Perls' notion that "we cannot deliberately bring about changes in ourselves or in others" (1969, p. 20). That is, it is important to free oneself from entanglements when attempting to do something.

Lao-tzu teaches that to get things accomplished one has to go about things in a different way, the way of wu-wei. Perls elaborates on how Western culture has assigned values to being either spontaneous or deliberate: "*Being oneself* means acting imprudently, as if desire could not make sense; and *acting sensibly* means holding back and being bored." (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951, p. 285) Is it any wonder that Westerners do not participate in wu-wei--in the reflective self-activity that involves being.

The theme of wu-wei pervades much of the writing of Chuang-tzu and means to Watson (1968) "not a forced quietude, but a course of action that is not founded upon any purposeful motives of gain or striving" (p. 6).

Chuang-tzu writes:

If he who bursts out in anger is not really angry then his anger is an outburst of nonanger. If he who launches into anger is not really acting, then his action is a launching into inaction.
(in Watson, 1968, p. 260)

Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu are saying that attempts to possess that which is under Heaven by force will not be successful. One can not understand nor grasp things (Tao) by chasing after them. A gentle endurance creates pleasing flute sounds. Too much force ruins it. There is a point where the sounds from the flute seem to come of their own. The moment one attempts to grasp this, it is lost.

This is the way in Gestalt therapy when a client is asked to gently allow experience to be present in his

awareness. A client *trying to feel* can be a measure of the extent to which feelings are blocked. This prevents knowing the self as it is. Impatience is a force that leaves our feelings behind. The process of discovering, of being open to experience and allowing, may have very different outcomes than uncovering, forcing oneself to experience, or suppressing unfinished business. Latner (1973) writes:

We have seen that gestalt formation ends with the creation of a unified whole of meaning and activity that results in the gratification of the organism's needs. The beginning of this process is a different state of integration, the point of creative indifference. This is the zero point, *wu-wei*, the beginning and the center. (pp. 41-42)

The Dance of Wu-Wei

How can a Gestalt therapist intervene and not intervene at the same time? One answer to this apparent contradiction lies in the radically different way of thinking and reasoning in the East compared to that of the West.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) introduced his philosophy to the world approximately the same time as *the classic period of Chinese philosophy* (550-250 B.C.) was introduced from the East (Merton, 1965, p. 15). *Aristotelian logic* arrives at certain conclusions from premises based upon certain laws of reasoning. One of these laws, the law of non-contradiction, simply means that we cannot hold both

A and non-A to be true at the same time. For example, something can not be black and white at the same time, nor can we intervene and not-intervene at the same time.

Taoist philosophy however, reveals that one does not reason by the same laws of logic as one does in the West. Much of the writings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu are paradoxical. They seem to believe and teach contradictory things without concern. This is because they understand the natural laws of development. Ku-ying (1977) comments:

There is a principle of nature by which all things, on reaching an extreme, reverse their direction and move towards their antithesis. Thus, Lao Tzu observes that reaching one extreme is a portent of moving toward the opposite pole--being spread out is a portent of being gathered up; being prosperous is a portent of decline. (p. 38)

One approach to this dance of paradox is through wu-wei. In the advanced stages of T'ai Chi, a movement too soon or too late, simply occurs over and over again. Yet, there appears to be a harmonious flow of energies within and without. What occurs internally, is a continuous return to the refuge of wu-wei, of least effort in order to awaken and allow that which emerges to become one with the movement.

The following is my own professional account of the process involved in using wu-wei as a therapeutic intervention:

During the therapy session, the client has just finished a long, berating complaint about her mother-in-law. As *therapist* my response is simply "What can help?"

She considers this question for some time in silence. Suddenly, appearing quite pleased with herself, she resolves: "I could talk to her about it!" I nod and add "Looks like you have solved that one."

We continue on talking about other matters until she begins once again to complain and vent her resentments.

In this circumstance, would Lao-tzu or Chuang-tzu offer a solution in the form of a technique or guideline for therapeutic intervention? Remembering that the Tao asks us not to interfere, I whisper: "Keep talking just as you are. You will be able to hear me as you continue. . . . Now keep talking about this and begin to hop on one foot."

This instruction allows the client to step outside her stream of thought, yet allows her to continue venting. She was well into her fifth hop before bursting into laughter and shouting: "That is the kindest way anyone has ever shown me that I have already solved this problem."

This wu-wei concept of Tao seems to involve that which enables one to act out of one's own nature. An examination of Tao concepts such as wu-wei, wordless teaching, non-interference, and the formation of paradox, may be relevant to understanding the dynamics and process that free a person from the preoccupations that prevent emergence of one's true nature. John Blofeld affirms: "Yet some there are who know how to value the teaching without words, to cultivate the art of leaving well alone." (Blofeld, 1978, p. 17)

Taoist concepts seem to provide valuable insights when viewed as descriptions of guideposts to be used as a way out of the complexities of human experience. In both Tao and Gestalt is found a kind of blueprint of the

structure of experience in which the experiencer can experience experiencing. This is wu-wei at its best.

Experience

What appears to be one of the most important aspects of both Tao and the field of Gestalt therapy, is their potential for bringing one closer to the experiential core of matters. Alan Watts (1975) comments on how to approach Tao: "Simply be aware of what actually is without giving it names and without judging it, for you are now feeling out reality itself instead of ideas and opinions about it." (p. 36)

What one experiences and how one relates to that experience is a measure of personality. For example, it is not unusual for many people to refuse to enter a conversation about God. Perhaps they are objecting to ideas and not experiences. One becomes accustomed to discussing intellectual things which are simply ideas. Thomas Merton (1965) in The Way of Chuang Tzu, speaks of men talking about this and that, fighting back and forth. All their arguments are like *pissing in the wind* (Zen saying). The Tao suggests it is not much more because their concern is not with experience, but with ideas.

Chuang-Tzu is not concerned with words and formulas about reality, but with the direct existential grasp of reality in itself. Such a grasp is necessarily obscure and does not lend itself to abstract analysis. (Merton, 1965, p. 11)

Patricia Baumgardner worked with Perls at Lake Cowichan in the fall of 1969 and adds a Gestalt perspective to Chuang-tzu's way: "Gestalt therapy gives us a methodology. This way of working depends upon our differentiating *talking about* and experiencing." (Baumgardner & Perls, 1975, p. 11)

The fascination and movement of Nature (truth/perfection) has always found a kindred spirit in human beings. History is the needle that threads together the names of seekers from all ages who sought truth and perfection, and the deep, unnameable essence which some call Tao.

Is there a way to close the distance between everyday experience and the Tao? How can one grasp what is not graspable or know what is unknowable? One place to begin this enquiry is with the polarity that underlies Gestalt experiences. Another place to begin is in the center of the great Way (Tao) where everything is natural, without stress, and without the feeling that experience should be other than it is.

This doorway to the self seems to crystallize as wu-wei. No amount of striving can achieve the opening to self, which paradoxically, does not mean there is no need to strive. One's garden demands tilling and preparation of soil, but the sprouting and growth of seed seems to come of its own, when it will.

Being Oneself

Chapter 3 in Lao-tzu's Tao Te Ching recognizes the importance of being oneself. When one has ideas of one's own, is in touch with and acts from one's center, there is more likely to be an accordance with one's own character traits and personality structure in a much more grounded or real way. Gestalt therapy does not travel the analytic routes aimed at discovering when and why certain character traits were first labelled or altered by various experiences and events, nor does a therapist walk archeological paths into the past hereditary influences. Perls (1969) illuminates:

What is the use of making a man, haunted by unconscious fear of starvation, realize that his fear originated in the poverty experience in his childhood? It is much more important to demonstrate that by staring into the future and striving for security he spoils his *present* life; that his ideal of accumulating superfluous wealth is isolated and separated from the sense of life. (p. 96)

Knowing that our culture tends to value appearances, whether in the form of material success or the extremes of *affect* from *playing one's role* well, the Gestalt therapist is keenly sensitive to the difference between one who goes through the motions or attempts to create an impression, and one who simply speaks from a depth that rings from his whole being. Lao-tzu says: "Not exalting the gifted prevents quarreling. Not collecting treasures prevents stealing." (in Feng & English, 1972, chap. 3)

The importance of being oneself and the rather enthusiastic extreme in which Perls insisted on authentic behavior is well documented in Gestalt literature (Baumgardner, 1975; Shepard, 1975; Smith, 1976; Stephenson, 1975; Stevens, 1975). Much of the writings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu speak to the character and conduct of *the man of Tao* who is simply Being: "At no time in the world will a man who is sane over-reach himself, over-spend himself, over-rate himself." (Lao-tzu, in Brower, 1973, p. 32)

Chuang-tzu provides a detailed account of the attributes of *The Sage King* and the important considerations in being one's individual expressive character:

Do not seek fame. Do not make plans. Do not be absorbed by activities. Do not think that you know. Be aware of all that is and dwell in the infinite. Wander where there is no path. Be all that heaven gave you, but act as though you have received nothing. Be empty, that is all. The mind of a perfect man is like a mirror. It grasps nothing. It expects nothing. It reflects but does not hold. Therefore, the perfect man can act without effort. (Feng & English, 1974, p. 159)

To do it yourself and to be it yourself are themes common to both Gestalt and Tao. Perls suggests that the human being often lacks a gestalt. That is, not only do people have what Perls calls holes in the personality, but they are unaware of the many parts of self, thus preventing a unity of the person. For Perls, becoming oneself, a whole person, involves a reintegration of the dis-owned fragments of one's personality.

Perls (1972b) comments that "If you are centered in yourself, then you don't adjust anymore--then, whatever happens becomes a passing parade and you assimilate, you understand, and you are related to whatever happens."

(p. 30)

Through intuition and experience, one comes to know and sense when one is being oneself and when one is not. The Gestalt process that enables one to move from environmental support to self-support seems to be the same process one travels to become more fully who one is. In this sense, Tao and Gestalt travel in the same direction. Gestalt has methods whereas in Tao, the virtues seem to be the method (Chen, 1969).

This is why Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu teach wu-wei--to do without doing. All one needs to *do* is stand aside. Allowing is really then a matter of letting things simply happen. The task is to become the observer of all that unfolds as experience. It is possible for Gestalt to teach this as a practical exercise. The form and structure of the experiment would depend upon the receptive capacity of the client's organismic-signaling-symbolism composing the work. It is much like looking in a mirror and requiring of yourself to follow the slightest inclinations of movement, mood, or mind. This is one way to come to know oneself *as you are* and to rely on the wisdom of the organism. Mirroring is a potent experience, whether experience with oneself or with another person.

Chapter V

Li

Everything that exists is subject to the eternal vigilance of boundless Tao. Like the precepts of the Eightfold Path of Buddhism, Taoist concepts imply a kind of right understanding of which everything depends. One of the most important concepts that Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu call to our attention is *Li*:

That which shrinks
Must first expand.
That which fails
Must first be strong.
That which is cast down
Must first be raised.
Before receiving
There must be giving.
(Feng & English, 1972, chap. 36)

That is, *Li* is a *perception of the nature of things*. The distinctions that Lao-tzu writes about here, are the patterns of change from which everything emerges. Alan Watts (1975) further defines this principle:

Li is the pattern of behavior which comes about when one is in accord with the Tao, the watercourse of nature. The patterns of moving air are of the same character, and so the Chinese idea of elegance is expressed as *feng-liu*, the flowing of wind. (p. 15)

Needham (1954) translates *Li* as *organic patterning* or *principle of organization*. He examines this fundamental tenant of Taoism and writes that:

Li, then, is rather the order and pattern in Nature, not formulated law. But it is not pattern thought of as something dead, like a

mosaic; it is dynamic pattern as embodied in all living things, and in human relationships and in the highest human values. (p. 558)

Perhaps a Taoist works with Li by looking at the essence of reality in the same way a sculptor examines the grain of jade for the direction it will lead him in its depth. One would watch for expressions and the patterns of emerging combinations of yin and yang. Similarly, the Gestalt therapist observes appearances and surface behaviors while intuitively nudging beneath these expressions in order to contact the deep, underlying pattern of being. Needham (1954) develops the characteristic of Li:

The word *Li*, . . . in its most ancient meaning signified the pattern in things, the markings in jade or the fibers in muscle; as a verb it meant to cut things according to their natural grain or diversions. (p. 558)

This naturalness, of harmoniously flowing with the patterns of life and of *cutting things according to their natural grain* is demonstrated in Chuang-tzu's story about the butcher of King Hui:

Prince Wen Hui's cook was carving up an ox. Every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every step of his foot, every thrust of his knee, with the slicing and parting of the flesh, and the zinging of the knife--all was in perfect rhythm, just like the Dance of the Mulberry Grove or a part in the Ching Shou symphony.

Prince Wen Hui remarked, "How wonderfully you have mastered your art."

The cook laid down his knife and said, "What your servant really cares for is Tao, which goes beyond mere art. When I first began to cut up oxen, I saw nothing but oxen. After three years of practicing, I no longer saw

the ox as a whole. I now work with my spirit, not with my eyes. My senses stop functioning and my spirit takes over. I follow the natural grain, letting the knife find its way through the many hidden openings, taking advantage of what is there, never touching a ligament or tendon, much less a main joint." (in Feng & English, 1974, p. 55)

The experience in this story of a man who applies his craft by following order in Nature seems very similar to a Gestalt experience where all things have a sense of connectedness and flow as one harmonious whole. A basic premise of Gestalt therapy is:

A gestalt is a pattern, a configuration, the particular form of organization of the individual parts that go into its make up. The basic premise of Gestalt psychology is that human nature is organized into patterns or wholes, that it is experienced by the individual in these terms, and that it can only be understood as a function of the patterns or wholes of which it is made. (Perls, 1973, p. 5)

Thus, the experience and recognition of the significance of Li seems to have a central place in both Tao and Gestalt.

Patterns of Nature

Tao implies that there is no separation between existence and the patterns of nature. Chuang-tzu writes:

Spring and summer precede, autumn and winter follow--such is the sequence of the four seasons. The ten thousand things change and grow, their roots and buds, each with its distinctive form, flourishing and decaying by degree, a constant flow of change and transformation. If Heaven and earth, the loftiest in spirituality, have yet their sequence of honorable and lowly, of preceptor and follower, how much more must the way of man!" (in Watson, 1968, p. 164)

This continuing and constant flow and change is an essential feature of nature. Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu's writings offer the general view that all life is movement and change and that there is a *Great Pattern in which all lesser patterns are included* (Needham, 1954).

This is no less than *the pattern which connects* that Gregory Bateson (1980) writes about:

We *could* have been told something about the pattern which connects: that all communication necessitates context, that without context, there is no meaning, and that contexts confer meaning because there is classification of contexts. The teacher could have argued that growth and differentiation must be controlled by communication. (p. 18)

In the same manner, Watts (1965) links *Li* with the organic, common, everyday experiences:

Li may therefore be understood as organic order as distinct from mechanical or legal order, both of which go by the book. *Li* is the asymmetrical, nonrepetitive, and unregimented order we find in the patterns of moving water, the forms of trees and clouds, of frost crystals on the window, or the scattering of pebbles on beach sand. (p. 46)

Watts suggests looking at day to day activity and phenomena with a new sense of understanding. This includes a comprehension of the fabric of reality as having patterns of organic relationship. That is, *Li* is a common denominator in all things which implies a relationship or connectedness between that which exists in all things with everything else. It is in this light that Perls (1973) calls our attention to believe that the human being is a "unified organism" (p. 9).

He describes a unity concept which links the interplay between the multi-layered aspects of personality and behavior to the environment field. That is, the Gestalt approach holds that an individual and behaviors of the personality can not be viewed as isolated from the world at large. Rather, the individual is inextricably inter-related in ever-changing patterns within self and environment. Perls (1973) elaborates:

The gestalt approach, which considers the individual as a function of the organism/environment field, and which considers his behavior as reflecting his relatedness within that field, gives coherence to this conception of man as both an individual and as a social creature. The older psychologies described human life as a constant conflict between the individual and his environment. We see it, on the other hand, as an interaction between the two, within the framework of a constantly changing field. And since the field is constantly changing, out of its own nature and out of what we do to it, the forms and techniques of interaction must necessarily be fluid and changeable themselves. (p. 25)

The forms and patterns that emerge from this union and interpenetration of the universal and the particular, seem to commune in a similar fashion with the same nature that Li does.

Perls recommends that the individual respond from a holistic standpoint--contemplate as a whole, whether as integral parts or as a system. This is a kind of natural law of affairs of how things happen. Capra (1975) suggests becoming at one with this process and writes: "The sage recognizes these patterns and directs his actions according

them. In this way, he becomes one with the Tao, living in harmony with nature and succeeding in everything he undertakes." (p. 111)

Thus, Tao and Gestalt view human beings as part of an all-encompassing organismic movement that is able to comprehend the in-movement of multiple, complex inter-relationships that are themselves in a constant state of transformation and change.

Therefore, Li is common to all individuals and human affairs and is what Needham (1954) calls the pattern of human-hearted behavior (p. 411). In Gestalt therapy, one goal of the initial interview is to find such a pattern or theme in which to follow. This study will expand on this thought in Chapter VI.

The Li of Gestalt Language

Maturity is a term that Perls uses to describe growth of the personality into self-reliance. A basic principle of Gestalt views this as a change in the personality from environmental support to self-support.

It is during this process that the Gestalt therapist remains aware that the language patterns of an individual express personality traits such as self-image, personal values, and most important, maturity. That is, the words an individual uses and the way words are expressed, are a reflection of personality. By changing speech patterns,

Perls is able to enhance a client's movement from habitual, depersonalized expressions to the self-reliant speech and expressions characteristic of a more mature person.

Passons (1975) provides an excellent review of language approaches and experimental methods. These include:

1. Personalizing pronouns: changing *it, you,* and *we* to *I*.
2. Changing verbs: *can't* to *won't*; *need* to *want*; *have to* to *choose to*; *know* to *imagine*.
3. Changing passive voice to active voice.
4. Changing sentences: i.e., questions to statements; *but* to *and*.

How a person expresses personality with language is but one of a myriad of behaviors that are available to and are a part of, that person's life. The language approaches to therapy seem to have a similar aim as the Taoist concept of Li - to cultivate and to mature the truly human in human nature. Their effect upon the client is to facilitate and demonstrate an awareness of going with the grain of things. That is, the client is refraining from activity contrary to Nature and is learning (reframing) to respond in ways that shed inhibitory influences on one's own nature. Perls, in 1948, wrote about the importance of creating such language approaches to personality integration:

The dichotomy of the human personality can be approached from three angles: From the point of view of the dualistic structure of *personality*, of the dualistic *behavior*, and of the dualistic *language*. Man could regain his survival value if these dualisms could be reintegrated, if he could create a unitary language and a sufficient number of unitary personalities. Individually, we are already capable of doing the latter, but we are far from producing unitary personalities on the conveyer belt. The essential requirement for reintegration would be the production of an adequate tool, and this instrument would have to be the unitary language. (in Stevens, 1975, p. 45)

How people express themselves, the words they use and the manner in which they are conveyed, is a reflection of personality, self-awareness, and maturity. Our communication with others changes the personal environment in profound ways. It follows then, that changes in our personal language styles and patterns will be reciprocated in other aspects of being and in the environment.

The Li of Yin-Yang

The Tao symbol represents different ways of being, of experiencing the same thing. For example, a person might experience himself holistically or in terms of yin-yang will *exercise* feelings rather than *express* them (Polster, 1973, p. 226). In terms of Gestalt, a person might be integrated as opposed to being fragmented.

The foreground and background realities of experience provide a field where awareness flows to and fro. The form of this movement (Li) is our own intimate awareness

with the general pattern of experience and of how yin and yang combine to express themselves.

In Chapter 42 of Lao-tzu's writings, he tells of a basic and fundamental pattern occurring in the universe-- that the whole consists of polarities and their interaction. He suggests that this is the creative moment in life. This moment manifests as interaction which creates a third element. This element provides an orienting function in the concept of personal growth, i.e., rising from, upward movement or transformation. By using the concept of Li as a guidepost, the Gestalt therapist knows how the third element is made. In order to lead the therapist learns to follow the client. In terms of Li, every event and thing has each its own rule of existence (Needham, 1954, p. 559). The guideline here is to follow and by following, the therapist is led to the cyclic nature and patterns of Gestalt. Latner (1973) expands this idea:

The interaction between polarities functions as a dialectical process. The opposites become distinguished and opposed; then, in their conflict, a resolution is achieved that unites the poles in a figure that is greater than the combinations of the opposites--it is a new creation. The classic statement of this process is Hegel's conception of historical development as consisting of forces that form into a coherence called a thesis; the thesis is then opposed by the contradictions inherent in it, which cohere into its antithesis. The resolution of this conflict is a synthesis that transforms the opposing forces into a new and unified situation. (p. 43)

When Lao-tzu discusses the way of Tao, he is referring to a whole range of concepts and guideposts that attempt to bring one closer to an understanding and appreciation of how things are in the world (Hesse, 1978, p. 279). It is interesting to note the profoundly subtle connectiveness of these concepts. For example, the interplay of yin and yang is an activity that is itself, a pattern (Li). This is an experience of potential unity which extends itself into daily life. Polster (1973) elaborates on personal polarities as being a dynamic and integral part of Gestalt work:

There is nothing new about looking at polarities in man. What is new is the gestalt perspective that each individual is himself a never-ending sequence of polarities. Whenever an individual recognizes one aspect of himself, the presence of its antithesis, or polar quality, is implicit. There it rests as background, giving dimension to present experience and yet powerful enough to emerge as figure in its own right if it gathers enough force. When this force is supported, integration can develop between whatever polarities emerge in opposition to each other, frozen into a posture of mutual alienation. (p. 61)

Metaphorically, Li can be described as the *harmonious cooperation of one's inner orchestra*. The Gestalt therapist is seen as one who facilitates awareness of what is in tune and of what is not in tune, to what remains as a natural part of one's ongoing rhythm and to what deviates from it. The Gestalt therapist facilitates what is happening (Li) rather than forcing things to be otherwise. This interplay of the experience and understanding of

awareness and pattern, is what sustains the process of transformation.

To speak of Li as being paradoxical is to understand the dynamic exchange, process, and patterns created by the relationship between yin and yang. Thus, life as a singular experience (as wholistic being), as 'Tao', is seen to emerge from the Tao-Gestalt process and is found in persons who have the capacity to construct and persevere with complex, paradoxical systems of understanding.

Cyclic Change

The West adheres to the notion of linear, chronological development. Order is brought into our lives with the assurance that one event follows another in orderly sequence with the earlier events influencing (and conditioning) later ones. Eastern thought, however, has traditionally viewed life as a series of temporal cycles, each distinctly separate from the others. The logic of the West believes life to be linear and in the East, existence is viewed as circular. Blofeld (1978) writes about this as an aspect of Tao:

The Tao in its differentiated non-void aspect is seen as unending flux, everything being subject to unceasing change from moment to moment. Nevertheless, the changes proceed in orderly cycles, the outlines of each pattern being endlessly repeated. Whereas fallen autumn leaves never produce identical patterns on the earth, the comings and goings of autumn itself vary

only within narrow limits. Such cycles are foreseeable, as for example the alternation of day and night and of the four seasons. (p. 5)

The Taoist perspective brings one to the notion of timelessness where very little differentiation is made between recent theories and techniques and those of centuries ago. Tao embodies the concept of impermanence, of a continuously flowing energy of unceasing change which established an orderly, cyclic pattern much like the seasons of the earth or like night unfolding into day.

Lao-tzu writes: "The way is to the world as the River and the Sea are to rivulets and streams." (Lau, chap. 32) Hence, Tao in the world is like a river flowing home to the sea and remindful that the realm of the human being is in constant flux--inner and outer worlds are in constant movement. For the Gestalt therapist, it is important to understand that the unknown inner person is in constant motion. This can aid contact with others and "To be able to extrapolate what one knows or intuits about oneself as true also of others acknowledges human mutuality." (Polster, 1973, p. 81)

Nelson and Groman (1974) write that "The Taoist approach to life is to let behavior (internal and external) flow spontaneously, never forcing, never under strain. The Western notion of the process of *experiencing* might best communicate the meaning of Tao (The Way)." (p. 339)

Perls says that one of the universal constants in experiencing, is the tendency towards wholeness. This tendency is both constant and recurring in the sense that what manifests as foreground, when not appropriately dealt with, remains as unfinished business and follows a cyclic path of returning again and again throughout one's lifetime. Perls (1973) writes:

Gestalt therapy is an experiential therapy, rather than a verbal or an interpretive therapy. We ask our patients not to talk about their problems in the removed area of the past tense and memory, but to *re-experience* their problems and their traumas--which are their unfinished situations in the present--in the here and now. (p. 64)

In this context, Gestalt remains consistent with the Taoist notion involving cyclic change--that life unfolds in a circular fashion involving experiences of the past in the here and now.

Chapter VI

Tao-Gestalt

The following section describes how a Taoist concept can be blended with a Gestalt concept. Earlier chapters of this examination have presented an intertwining of Tao and Gestalt. A framework is now being presented to study the possible interchange between two unique concepts: yin-yang and figure-ground. Following this, a section of an initial interview between the author and client will then be examined as to how yin-yang and figure-ground interconnect.

This study has shown that a central theme of Taoism is the yin-yang phenomenon. Its counterpart is found in the figure-ground principle of Gestalt therapy. It is important to remember that the Taoist concept of yin-yang is one concept which is circular. The divisions and stages as presented here are interdependent and connective parts of a whole rather than isolated stages whose content appears separate and divided.

For the purpose of comprehension, a three-stage structure is presented to show the dynamics and possible potential of mixing the two concepts: yin-yang/figure-ground.

First Stage

The first stage of an initial interview can be seen as a beginning--an attempt to bridge that which exists as past and/or the anticipations of the future to the here-and-now. It is a kind of transition from all that has been to the *Now*. Beginning is the other side of a process that was the past. Thus, Lao-tzu writes: "The myriad things follow it to begin and complete its being." (in Pi, 1979, chap. 37) A parallel to this stage can be found in the bottom (beginning) line of the trigrams in the I-Ching.

The emphasis on Lao-tzu's writing is on the word "follow." The act of beginning might be compared to one thinking about opening a door. It can be an initial beginning, yet no action is taken. The action happens after the thought. Usually, beginnings do not have the characteristics of a here-and-nowness.

If what the client presents has a yin quality, the therapist's focus will be on the here-and-now expression rather than the ground of beginning. (Rarely does a person have awareness/contact with the ground as he begins a journey.) If what the client presents has a yang quality, the therapist's focus will concentrate on the ground of beginning itself. This is to focus upon an aspect that is other than the here-and-now for the material presented will have its connection with either the past or the future.

Lao-tzu reminds us that beginnings do not have an integrative element to them: "The ten thousand things carry yin and embrace the yang, and through the blending of the material force they achieve harmony." (in Pi, chap. 42, p. 128)

In Gestalt Therapy (1951) the words *remembering* and *anticipating* are the bridges to the here-and-now:

Remembering and anticipating are actual, but when they occur, they occur in the present. *What* you remember will be something seen or heard or done in the past, but its recapture or review is in the present. *What* you anticipate will be something which, if it happens, will happen at some time in the future, but such *foreseeing* is the *present* seeing of a picture which you have and now construct and label *future*. (pp. 37-38)

Paradoxically, a client's beginnings can be viewed as background to other things, even though the where-what-who-how-when expressions are responded to as foreground. For example, when a client's response is yin, the material can be obvious and easily understood. Generally, this elusive beginning has a flighty quality to it and can bring to the therapist a sense that things are not as they appear. That is, *how* the client present himself (form) does not match what he is saying (content). Polster (1973) explains the dynamics of this experience:

Whenever unfinished business forms the center of one's existence, one's effervescence of mind becomes hampered. Ideally, the unencumbered person is free to engage spontaneously with whatever interests him and to stay with it until this lively interest subsides and something else draws his attention. This is a

natural process and a person who lives according to this rhythm experiences himself as flexible, clear and effective.

There are two polar hindrances which may interfere with this process. The first is the obsession or compulsion which constitutes a rigid need to complete the old unfinished business and which leads to rigidity of figure/ground formation. The opposite interference is the labile mind, which leaves little opportunity for the person to experience what is happening because the focus is so fleeting as to prevent closure from developing and being experienced. (p. 37)

Thus, a client verbalizes being happy and content while appearing obviously sad and depressed. The client may be demonstrating a lack of awareness of and contact with a deeper, more clearly formed manifestation of self. Simply, that which remains contained or concealed tends to contaminate awareness and the spontaneous unfolding of oneself.

During this first stage, when a client's response is yang to such opening questions as "What is happening?" there is a tendency to deal much more with what is present (presented). This will also bring the dialogue away from the here-and-now while focusing upon this beginning point. For example, a client states being very upset due to a near car accident just before arriving for an appointment. The client's state of mind, feelings and anxieties, are not a function of the here-and-now experience but are blocking access to the Now. That is, the client is very much in touch with his *unfinished business*.

Second Stage

The second stage can be viewed as grasping or structured movement. A client *begins* by coming to the door of self and the second step is to apply pressure to the door knob in attempts to open it. This behavior is clearly an important stage although its importance to the therapeutic process is no more than our immediate concerns about the inner self as we go about our daily business. Opening the door to the self is known to be important and any difficulties at this point can be a fundamental issue.

The extent to which one manages opening this door to self is a measure of ability to contact the inner self or is a measure of the extent to which one will resist the contact. In Gestalt theory, five expressive elements of resistance are identified: introjection, projection, retroflection, deflection, and confluence.

One result of the focus upon the here-and-now is that the client is brought to pay attention to inner experience, to the bare bones of one's situation. This can be called second stage work and is a very fundamental and important formation of what is. It can be both a contact and a contract with the client that this is the initial work to be worked upon.

From the Taoist perspective, this stage is viewed as energy emerging from a fixed point within the yin-yang exchange. It is a statement of the client's reality and

is a clear sign of a fundamental issue with the client. The client's initial statement is an arrangement of yin-yang and is present as *potential force and activity* together embracing reality.

In the Gestalt context of *unfinished business* we might be referring here to the energy required to ensure that one's skeletons remain in the closet. We put things away in order to tend to them later and then often must contend with the nagging awareness of things being incomplete.

Usually, we are aware of our skeletons only when we knock against them and they tend to get in the way of our fluid, flexible, and familiar orientations. The skeleton's existence seems to have a life of its own and a client is often aware, however superficially, that *something* is going on internally. Because its nature is that of being *unfinished or incomplete*, this experience of "structure" remains something for the client to return to, even as a pivot point, for it is usually graspable in the simple here-and-now experience.

When the client's response is yin, the therapist's focus will not be on the depths of this particular issue of unfinished business. Contact will tend to be with the expressive-manifestation of the client. A parallel can be found with an audience viewing a stage drama: what is presented has *more feather to it* than usual (as in the

peacock's strut) and focus is here rather than into the substance and deep meaning of the skeleton's important role in this person's life.

When the client's response is yang, that is, when the skeleton is foreground or focus, the Gestalt therapist is *listening with the third ear* to the depth of the here-and-now and *how* its internal workings control appearances.

Third Stage

The third stage envisions a process of digestion and a tendency towards assimilation and new growth. Now the skeleton has flesh and bones and its journey towards wholeness has begun. The client is able to process experience and in a general sense, is now tending to seek outside the self. This stage is transition, the beginning of development of self in adequately expressing and communicating inner emotional currents while movement towards personal goals is clarified.

Perls might see this stage as a balance in the here-and-now of *cause* on the one hand, and *purpose* on the other. In his article on the Theory and Technique of Personality Integration, Perls wrote in 1948:

Unitary thinking does not recognize past, present, or future; it only recognizes processes to which we can artificially ascribe a beginning. If we like, we can call the beginning *cause* and the future event *purpose*. Unitary thinking recognizes, however, *recordings* of previous events and forms

as precipitations of previous functions. It recognizes as aspects of the so-called future; planning, hope, predictability and vectors-- but it maintains that these processes take place here and now. (in Stevens, 1975, p. 57)

This is the stage where need and desire are solidified and there is movement towards fulfillment. What manifests can easily be felt as a here-and-now reality for it appears true and sufficient in its own right. It is the stage that "Those who set about mending the inborn nature" (Chuang-tzu, in Watson, 1968, p. 171) find.

In this third stage, if what the client presents has a yin quality, the therapist has a tendency to dip his paddle into the gentler aspects of the process and *mark time*. That is, the therapist remains alert, yet quiet while the client takes stock of experience. The therapist *stays with* the client but does not interfere with the potential that seeks expression. If the expressions become channels for resistance and defences, Perls (1951) comments that:

They are really counter-attacks and aggressions against the self--are taken as active expressions of vitality, however neurotic they may be in the total picture. Rather than being liquidated, they are accepted at face-value and met accordingly man to man: the therapist, according to his own self-awareness, declines to be bored, intimidated, cajoled, etc.; he meets anger with explanation of the misunderstanding, or sometimes apology, or even with anger, according to the truth of the situation; he meets obstruction with impatience in the framework of a larger patience. In this way, the unaware can become foreground, so that its structure can be experienced. (p. 293)

If what the client presents has a yang quality, the therapist is actively aware of the potential-active-propelling power developing direction in the here-and-now. Thus, while remaining in the therapeutic process designed to restore the connection between aboutism and action, Perls is aware that:

In gestalt therapy we are in the paradoxical situation of always dealing with a two-part existence, what is awareness here and now, and what this awareness stands in relation to. Foreground implies background. The background shapes foreground. (in Stevens, 1975, p. 72)

In summary, the three stages of yin-yang/focus-background as presented in this section, find their parallel in the formation of trigrams from the well-known translation of the I-Ching or Book of Changes by Wilhelm and Baynes (1950).

Initial Interview

This section introduces the initial interview between the author and client and will serve as an example of Taoist influences within the Gestalt process. The interview commentary will interpret the ongoing dialogue. (T = therapist; C = client.)

InterviewComments

- T. Would you check out where you are at in terms of what that means to you and tell me what is going on?
- C. Immediately?
- T. Sure.
- C. I'm comfortable and I am warm.
- In Gestalt therapy, the focus is upon the here-and-now, continuously unfolding process. The interview begins *where the client is at*.
- To be in the present is a very important part of the ongoing process. The question may be more than an inquiry to clarify understanding. It may be intended in a defensive sense, to ensure that answers are *right* or appropriate.
- The point to remember is that therapist and client are in different places, together. This is an important issue in establishing the trust needed for a therapeutic alliance.
- As well, it is the therapist's task to focus the client's awareness to what emerges as his own process. (awareness is the primary tool for effecting change)
- The client's hands are clenched around the ends of the arm rest; the jaw appears *locked* and controlled, the face and torso seem tense rather than relaxed.
- In the initial moments of the interview, the client's responses are yin and the inner life needing expression remains as background.
- The voice sounds hyper and flighty as though the client was feeling put on the spot. Through this anxious layer the client reports being *comfortable* and *warm*. However,

indicative of her need to strengthen her capacity for expressing awareness of inner processes. In one sense, the client finds it easy to be *unaware* and *complex* yet has difficulty in being simply *aware*. Obviously, she is experiencing anxiety about underlying conflicts.

T. Want to share with me what is happening right now...I notice you seem to be doing a lot of thinking.

Tao-Gestalt knows that facilitating what is happening is more potent than forcing things to happen the way one would like them to. The last two questions from the therapist however, are indicative of pushing. The first question is a necessary one that initiates the client's choice of where to go and the second question facilitates the client to become unstuck in that she appears unable to free herself and move forward with her process.

C. This seems to be making things more complicated than they are.

First stage work as outlined in this chapter suggests that *beginning* contains behaviors that emerge from the concept of *preparing*. Perls points out that it is not unusual to experience ourselves rehearsing in our minds what we are about to say. That is, we engage in a continuous flow of activity that are rehearsals of the real way in which we would like to engage as an authentic being. The act of rehearsing is not what the Taoists call *wu-wei* or non-action--it is inaction.

Rehearsing in the mind is the other side of talking about one's experience. In Gestalt, *talking about* is storytelling and perpetuates passive symptoms called worry, dis-ease, conflict,

disharmony, etc. Continued inaction causes energy to stagnate and atrophy due to lack of use. Hence, any movement would be better than no movement. The Tao implies that allowing the relationship between mind and action to remain a simple one opens to the possibility that mind and action can function as one spontaneous arrangement.

T. In a sense we are fishing.

The client's body language confirms she is very much in contact with her inner complexities, yet she reports that nothing is happening. The client appears lost, blank and *stuck*.

C. And there is nothing biting.

T. You are aware that things come into your consciousness. All of a sudden you are aware of this or you are aware of that, and everything else recedes into the background.

At this point in the interview it became obvious that the client was unfamiliar with the concept of awareness and its use for contacting inner processes. The therapist spent some time here coaching the client in relaxation and awareness technique. The dialogue is not included here.

T. Could you begin (again) by saying to me "Right now I am aware of..."

We resume the process.

C. I am aware of the trees across the street and the wind blowing.

The outcome of instructing the client in awareness technique is clearly demonstrated in the strength to contact with sensory perceptions.

T. As you are reporting this, what else are you aware of?

During the silences, the therapist is actively working at listening and watching for expressions that aid understanding of what is heard. This helps allow the client to be where she is without interrupting the process. As well, this aids the timing of the therapist's responses.

- C. Pain in my chest that goes right down to my right hand. This is a yang response and the client has good contact with self in the here-and-now. The second stage of this process as outlined in this section suggests that the therapist be in touch with the depth of the moment with the client.
- T. It starts at the chest and goes down the arm? Formulating what seems to be the central feeling of the client (and using her language expressions) and reflecting this back, tends to heighten awareness of what is being experienced.
- C. Hummm.
- T. Can you stay with that for a moment? Stay with the pain. Remember how you watched your breath? See if you can stay with the pain...enter into it and let me know what happens. The client is challenged to add duration to her awareness.
- C. The pain is not consistent. It's lessening.
- T. I would like you to form a question in your mind that you would like to ask the pain, and when you are ready, I would like you to ask the pain the question out loud. Because there appears to be a strong connection between the client's awareness and the inner process she is directed to begin a dialogue as one way of promoting her participation with this contact.
- C. (pause) Why do you come at all? What is the reason?
- T. Very gently, I would like you to get up, come and sit in this chair over here...I want you to be the pain in this chair and answer the you that is over there. Client moves to other chair.

- C. I can't talk about it. Client shakes her head as though refusing to answer. Anxiety appears to increase.
- T. Tell it that you won't talk to it.
- C. I am not going to answer you. The client nods, gestures with her hand in determination. Her face winces, tears form in the eyes. Her lips become tightly held.
- T. Tell her you are not going to cry.
- C. I am not going to cry.
- T. Tell her you are not even going to look at her. Client is facing away from the chair. Therapist continues to watch for indication of how to follow the client's process as it emerges. The series of questions are used deliberately for the purpose of promoting the client's participation in the Gestalt process. All directives are reflections of what the client appears to present. This is not redefining the client's problems, nor is it putting words into her mouth. All the time, the client is signalling via body language what is happening and the therapist is simply asking her to do verbally what she is doing symbolically.
- T. Tell her how come.
- C. Because I don't need to. I don't need to do any of those things because you're (pain) forcing me to give answers I don't want to give. The client is displaying strong, mixed emotions--anxiety, fear, vulnerability, angry determination.
- T. Tell her how strong you are. At this point in the interview, the therapist recognizes the deeper, underlying tension developing in the client and suggests that this would be a good place to terminate the

interview. The client showed immediate relief. It is important to remember that this has been the client's first interview and she is more susceptible to being overwhelmed by the Gestalt process.

The client begins to feel very threatened and her defenses help her resist contacting her pain. She reports to the pain that she is feeling "forced to give answers I don't want to give." This may also be a directive for the therapist. The client withdraws from her active participation in the process and becomes silent. Again, this is the client's first interview and experience in Gestalt process. The therapist exercises caution in not overwhelming the client by bringing the session to closure. Polster (1973) comments:

"There is no precise yardstick to identify the limits of an individual's power to assimilate or express feelings which have explosive possibilities, but there is a basic safeguard. This is a solid respect for the self-regulation of the individual, not forcing or seducing him into behaviors which he himself has not largely set up." (p. 68)

From the point of view of the therapeutic task, the integration of the individual begins with small and effective doses of awareness. The Taoist writings reveal how difficult is the task of coming to know ourselves as we are:

"Those who pay attention to their weaknesses gain strength. Those who neglect their strength become weak. Wisdom and strength come from the courage to see things as they are."
(Hoff, 1981, p. 65)

- T. How was this for you? The therapist closes the interview by asking what the experience was like for the client.
- C. It's really a lot of hard work...to deal with those things that you find (difficult) ...and if you have been fairly good at hiding those things for a long time you don't even realize you're hiding them. So in effect, you feel there is maybe not so much to deal with after all... But, they are there! Then there is the risk of dealing with those things...dealing with those things could really unfold a whole lot of other things... and it could really snowball. It's a lot safer just to ignore it. The client is remembering the difficulties around contacting her pain during the interview, while anticipating pain in the future. Although the client remains at stage one as outlined in this section, it is clear that she has made some movement towards contacting her yang in the second stage. That is, she has increased her awareness of ground (pain) and demonstratively brought into focus her excitement and anxiety about future contact.
- T. Sometimes we create all kinds of fears around
"Why should I deal with these things here because it might be a scab on a whole sore and then I will open a can of worms."
- C. That's right!
- T. Is that one of your fears?
- C. Oh, I think so! Oh ya!
Definitely.

T. So it would make sense for you to keep sliding by some of this stuff.

C. Well see, I just don't know that because it just may not be

The client's initial awareness was of being "comfortable and warm." Perhaps this is what she *thought* she experienced or *should* experience. At the end of the interview she states her hesitancy to *experience a whole lot more pain than she feels right now*. In Gestalt terms, the client has had some contact with her own inner dynamics and continues to experience a vague sense of inner pain which appears more as memory in the here-and-now. In terms of yin-yang, what the client says continues to sound as though she has no contact with the pain she is reporting to experience at the moment. That is, her voice (yin) has no pain (yang) tone. However, the client has extended her awareness to contact inner process. In a general sense, the client seems more aware there is a deeper reality within that she is capable of contacting.

T. And what are you risking?

C. Of causing myself a whole lot more pain than I feel I experience right now. I have no sense of adventure. (laughter)

The therapist detects a slight but definite sense of confidence in the client's concluding remarks, as though her pain did not turn out to be the monster she thought it might. She seems both surprised and delighted at the impact of the process itself and to have experienced her pain *and survived*.

Knowing the value in what is opposite, the therapist might have continued by having the client explore her sense of adventure after she has stated that she has none.

In summary, the above interview represents the more structured form/process of an initial Gestalt interview. The commentary attempts to link aspects within the interview to the yin-yang stages as outlined at the beginning of the Chapter. One of the difficulties encountered herein is that there has not been developed an analytic vocabulary to explore and understand Taoist elements in a therapeutic process. Further study in this area is recommended.

As well, the author recognizes that Gestalt remains a young science and that the experimental aspects of the therapeutic interview are initiated in an effort to learn whether this is "true" therapy. Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951) write that:

Interview therapy is experimental. Consider the tremendous control of *variables* introduced by the deliberately simplified setting of the therapeutic situation as compared with the full complexity of everyday living. The doctor and patient are alone in an atmosphere cleared of distractions. The customary admonitions of the clock are in abeyance and, for the duration of the session, time is open for whatever may come to pass. For a period society is diminished to two persons. It is a genuine society, but, for this hour, there is respite from ordinary social pressures, and the customary penalties for *misbehavior* are humanely withheld. As the experiment of therapy proceeds, the patient dares more and more to be himself. He voices the statement that elsewhere he could only think, and thinks the thought that elsewhere he could not acknowledge even to himself. (p. 16)

Finally, although the primary focus of this study has been to explore the conceptual relationships between Taoism and Gestalt therapy, some attempt has been made in this chapter to explore Taoist influences within the Gestalt process. This attempt has been met with limited success. The dialogue and interview commentary point to no obvious examples of Tao influences within the Gestalt process (other than the yin-yang presence). Future research, designed specifically to study Taoist influences within the Gestalt process is recommended.

Chapter VII

Discussion

The Dance of Existence

Many of the principles, concepts and implied attitudes of the Gestalt orientation are reflections of modern versions of the concepts of Taoism. Tao is simply the way the universal spirit goes about things and can be measured as the movement in a field of wheat, as the yearnings of companions caught in fear, or as our individual responses to memories and the music of the past. Thus, Chuang-tzu writes: "The ten thousand things change and grow, their roots and buds, each with its distinctive form, flourishing and decaying by degree, a constant flow of change and transformation." (in Watson, 1968, p. 146)

Simplified, there is an interconnectedness in our lives which allows a natural *affect*. Tao is how things work. Chuang-tzu says that: "The sage looks at the unity which belongs to all things, and does not perceive where they have suffered loss." (in Brower, 1973, p. 25)

How things work in Gestalt therapy emphasizes a similar point of importance as the client "moves between a synthesized experience and the awareness of the elemental pieces which make up his existence in a dynamic and continually self-renewing cycle." (Polster, 1973, p. 211)

Tao teaches that all existence is a single unity. Once again, a dynamic concept of Tao is found to be an indispensable aspect in Gestalt therapy. Shepard (1975) comments:

Gestalt is a German word that implies *wholeness*. It is akin in many ways to the Eastern concept of Tao. It recognizes that foreground and background form a complete whole and cannot be separated from one another without either losing their individual meanings or destroying the wholeness that was. (p. 5)

Hence, it is not unusual for one's active mental processes--interpretation, fantasy, desire, clinging and craving, etc., to severely limit attempts to become unstressed and to lessen the tension between yin and yang.

Perls (1972b) is not the first to suggest that "Every individual, every plant, every animal has only one inborn goal--to actualize itself as it is." (p. 33) This idea finds expression in the process (Way) of becoming and Perls further warns that "as soon as we leave the basis of nature--the universe and *its* laws--and become artifacts either as individuals or society, then we lose our *raison d'etre*. We lose the possibility of existence" (1973, p. 34). It is clear from a historical perspective that those who have *actualized* or become *enlightened* beings, have brought a different kind of quality to the world. Tao-Gestalt suggests that there is available a certain kind of cooperation between individuals, society and *the dance of existence* which

can overcome the difficulties inherent in human behavior and human communities.

If, as Tao suggests, all things belong to a single unity, then the result of the integration as presented by this study might be represented by the term *Tao-Gestalt*. This connectedness is found in the following concepts of (a) awareness, (b) guideposts, and (c) transformation.

Awareness

Awareness is the vehicle in Gestalt therapy for discovery. Tao can not be named but it can be discovered. Tao and Gestalt seem to like to keep things simple. Therapy is simply a process of discovering where energy is blocked and learning ways of *letting go* and freeing it.

Perls writes that *everything is awareness*. Gestalt awareness is like a light focused on one's inner process. Taoist writings do not suggest any attempts to avoid suffering or to eliminate experiences in the living process. Lao-tzu suggests how to avoid troublesome events and situations. The Buddhists view complexes as knots on the thread of awareness. The Taoists teach how not to tie the knot in the first place.

Gestalt uses the term IGNORE-ance to indicate the tendency in people to ignore their individual attributes and aspects of personality. An ignorance of how one is and what one is about seems the usual way of things.

However, it is the nature of Tao and Gestalt to return one to who he is. One becomes aware of what is not oneself and what is oneself clarified through awareness.

Thus, Perls (1972b) writes:

And I believe that this is the great thing to understand: *that awareness per se - by and of itself - can be curative.* Because with full awareness you become aware of this organismic self-regulation, you can let the organism take over without interfering, without interrupting; we can rely on the wisdom of the organism. (p. 17)

When awareness becomes a part of one's process, the emerging synthesis becomes a part of the potential for both discovering and being *self*. Chuang-tzu writes: "man is thick-skinned and hides his true form deep within" (in Watson, 1968, p. 358). The emergence of this inner being is a central aim of Gestalt therapy and it is the Taoist approach that Jung implies is a way to achieve this. He writes: "If we take the Tao to be the method or conscious way by which to unite what is separated, we have probably come close to the psychological content of the concept." (in Wilhelm, 1972, p. 98)

Further to this, the most fruitful meeting ground between Taoism and Gestalt therapy is the here-and-nowness of individual experience, rather than the conceptual formation and/or interpretation of this experience. The profound affinity that bridges the yin and the yang on this basic level of experience Perls (1975) calls awareness:

You can enjoy the yin or the yang of opposites in this Chinese symbol, or experience it as a unified balance, which we call, simply, awareness. As the yin and yang interplay our consciousness is rich, varied, changing, exciting, not quite predictable, surprising. . . . In most Gestalt work we find and exercise the split, so that the parts of unity may come together. Yet, away from our own questioning and demands we can enjoy the unity of awareness in which the division within self disappears as do the splits between self and others, self and the rest of the world. One awareness. (in Stevens, 1975, pp. 73-75)

Perls is concerned with unnecessary polarization because it keeps one entangled in outdated and inept patterns of behavior. This prevents real growth and contact with the ground of existence. If one's energy is going into maintaining a defensive style of interacting with the world--the maintaining of emotional blockages and self-created, behavioral rigidities--then the authentic expressions of being fully alive are stifled. Perls (1972b) writes that the behaviors that lie outside our awareness are available for comprehension:

The discipline is simply to understand the words *now* and *how*, and to bracket off and put aside anything that is not contained in the words *now* and *how*. . . . The technique is to establish a *continuum of awareness*. This continuum of awareness is required so that the organism can work on the healthy gestalt principle: If we prevent ourselves from achieving this gestalt formation, we function badly and we carry hundreds and thousands of unfinished situations with us, that always demand completion. (p. 54)

The awareness required in order to discover personal needs, is similar to the stage switch capable of dimming or brightening in intensity. Increased awareness has the

capacity to make clearer one's wants as well as the behaviors involved in having them met. As one stumbles about in the darkness of unawareness, the search for authentic self continues. To discover what is yin and what is yang within ourselves and in our interrelationships with others, is to begin to trust what is nurturing and distrust what is intuitively toxic. Coming to know ourselves as we are is a process that slows to a point where one would be hard pressed to say there is choice involved. One simply does what one does, choicelessly. In this way, one follows the Tao and intimacy with oneself would appear to be the same intimacy Nature has with all things.

Guideposts

The Taoist writings of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu do not provide readers with precise instructions for using these guideposts for becoming apprentices of the *Way*. Although their words and concepts are clear and aesthetically poetic, even after much study, their writing remains mysteriously uncomprehensible, paradoxical, and metaphorically abstract. Watts (1975) uses simile to explore how Tao provides a means for investigating our own nature. For example, Tao:

Implies that the art of life is more like navigation than warfare, for what is important is to understand the winds, the tides, the currents, the seasons, and the principles of growth and decay, so that one's actions may use them and not fight them. (p. 21)

As well, Hermann Hesse (1971b) describes his personal experience of Tao as a kind of spiritual grace, suggesting that one go beyond the search for guideposts and on into a confrontation with an active world:

The miracle had appeared in the form of Lao-tzu, for him grace bore the name of Tao, and if there was still anything like a law or a morality for him it was the command: Remain open to all things, despise nothing, condemn nothing, let all the rivers of life flow through the heart. For anyone who attains it, especially for the first time, this state of mind has the character of absolute finality and is closely related to a religious conversion. All questions seem answered, all problems soluble, all doubt banished forever. This finality, however, this victorious *forever*, is an illusion. The doubts, the problems, the battle will go on, life unquestionably has become very much richer but not a bit less difficult. It was at this point that the disciple of Lao-tzu seemed to stand: still borne aloft and wholly transformed and renewed by his experience of freedom and grace, he was obviously already pursued by shadows and on the point of plunging headlong from blessed exaltation back into the world of conflict. (pp. 257-258)

Lao-tzu suggests that things evolve naturally. Yet, the Tao is also a vehicle for *stepping out of our own way* in order to facilitate the emergence of this naturalistic tendency. Tao is like a sword--we step forward, *choose this and let go of that*, and cut the doubt. In Gestalt, this behavior is viewed as one taking response ability (two words) into the way of one's action. That is, experience emerges from and merges into, one process. This is also the Taoist point of view, i.e., the various manifestations of this process unfold according to the same unifying principle of Tao.

However, something more than a common technique called *picking and choosing* needs to evolve in order that the focus of what goes on *inside* a person is viewed in a larger context of understanding human behavior. Stephenson (1975) elaborates: "Picking and choosing, however, is not enough; we need also to chew up and swallow those parts of what is out there that we find edible and to our liking and thus make it . . . part of ourselves in here." (p. 5) That is, considering all things, one then chooses (responsively), among the matrix of choices available and integrates what agrees with one's nature. Tao-Gestalt, as presented in this study, considers that everything arises from a singular principle and offers such a context, even though the *ideal of the unity* (Gestalt) *of existence* is not yet explicitly recognized as such. Polster (1973) implies that Gestalt therapy is at least, a step in the right direction:

It is a healthy sign that many people are not taking established theory as seriously as they once did. Nevertheless, what they lack now is a theory which can reflect practical concerns. They need ways to orient themselves articulately about what they and their contemporaries are thinking and feeling and wanting. Gestalt therapy provides such an orientation. (p. 5)

In Gestalt therapy, there is one particular difficulty retarding the development of unity (authentic-holistic-being) and responsibility. A typical fusion process in Gestalt views learning as a kind of digestion. That is, one needs to digest experience so that what is nurturing

becomes assimilated, and what is toxic, becomes eliminated. Thus, picking and choosing becomes a simple or a complex process, depending upon what one has or has not assimilated to date. To keep something within which is not of one's nature then, would be a form of unhealthy introjection. Once this position is attained, personal conduct takes on a specific (acquired/different) form.

The interconnectedness and possible integration of everything that arises from a single principle seems a necessary preliminary to the establishment of Taoist guideposts. The holistic concept combines a great number of elements and by holding such a crystal-concept against the sun, one could imagine the emerging concepts and principles of Tao radiating spontaneously and simultaneously. In a similar way, daily life can be said to merge with experience.

But how is one to learn the ways that will lead to healthy functioning? Lao-tzu's guideposts suggest: *Give up learning and put an end to your troubles*, (chap. 20) and *In the pursuit of learning, everyday something is acquired. In the pursuit of Tao, every day something is dropped.* (chap. 48) In Gestalt therapy, Lao-tzu's idea would be linked to *ground*. That is, "unlearn our cluttered ground" (Joslyn, in Stevens, 1975, p. 253) is a concept found to be facilitative and therapeutic in Gestalt process. Thus:

We could say that the reason a child's actions are so spontaneous is that his experience of ground is less cluttered with concepts, fixed hopes and fears, etc. As we grow older we tend to accumulate more fixed memories and to impose more fixed expectations on our immediate experiencing, gradually crowding out the awe, wonder, newness, freshness, and surprise which accompany intense gestalts. In terms of communication theory it is as though increased background static makes it difficult for clear messages to come forth. (Joslyn, in Stevens, 1975, p. 252)

Lao-tzu writes that if you want to achieve something you begin with its opposite (chap. 36). That is, not only does achievement begin with the first step, it begins *in the opposite direction*. In this study, yin has been approached by stepping towards yang (in the section on the initial interview). Gestalt demonstrates this concept in various ways. For example, a client can acquire greater awareness of a particular behavior if the behavior is exaggerated. In order to *achieve something* a client may be asked to actively pursue not-wanting to achieve as an attempt to get what is wanted. This also involves applying the Taoist concepts of non-action and letting go. The paradox of establishing a connection with a part of that which is the opposite of what one would like is basic to Tao and Gestalt. Thus, Lao-tzu writes: "Yield and overcome; Bend and be straight; Empty and be full; Wear out and be new; Have little and gain; Have much and be confused." (in Feng & English, 1972, chap. 22)

In a similar manner, Tao suggests that the reverse of things can also be true. An example of how this works

in Gestalt is found in the exercise of exaggeration which can potentially enable one to remain unaware rather than increase awareness. For example, one might inflate personal needs to the extent that they remain forever out of reach. The more vague the want, the more unspecific, generalized-unawareness persists.

Thus, at one extreme, a client is unaware of inner process. At another extreme, a client could be stuck in expressing a specific feeling, thought, or behavior. In the latter case, the client is already exaggerating.

Transformation

The occurrence of the same themes and associations in both Gestalt and Taoism is significant in that each represents a pathway of and towards transformation (Metzner, 1980). That is, the relationship of Gestalt and Tao in our lives is more than a simple conceptual existence for they bring together a metaphysical reality and a standard for human behavior. Gregory Bateson (1980) writes his agreement: "systems theory, cybernetics, holistic medicine, ecology, and gestalt psychology offer demonstrably better ways of understanding the world of biology and behavior" (p. 241).

Ch'en Ku-ying (1977) makes a similar observation of Tao: "after it (Tao) has actualized in the phenomenal

world we can discern many of its characteristics. These manifested characteristics can serve as a standard for human conduct." (p. 14)

Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu say that the perfect person (sage) is one who has learned to follow the watercourse way of Tao. This person is centered within himself and within his world while maintaining a sense of the inter-connectiveness of all things. From a deep and peaceful harmony, this person knows that growth and change are intrinsic to the human condition. He accomplishes much, exerting little effort, as though knowing the secret of *not pushing the river*. If he has a motto it is *action through non-action*. The grass grown by itself and he is content to leave it that way.

The following Gestalt approach is the substance of transformation for it has the effect of changing the potential into the actual:

The possibility that if these things are let be, in contact with the actuality, even their current derangements will tend to right themselves and come to something valuable, is met with anxiety and rejected as a kind of nihilism. (But we reiterate that the suggestion is a spectacularly conservative one, for it is nothing but the old advice of the Tao, *stand out of the way*.) (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951, p. 291)

This is why Lao-tzu teaches *to do without doing*. All one needs to do is to simply stand aside. Allowing is really a matter of letting things happen, of not interfering.

Kopp (1971) adds to this idea:

There is so much worrying over whether a man is one thing or another, whether he is in one place or another. So much of a man goes into making needless distinctions, when transformations need not bother us so long as they free man to lose himself in the Tao, just as all a fish needs is to get lost in the water. (p. 62)

Thus, accomplishment would seem to happen by understanding that life is to be lived wholly and not with the mind caught in opinions, judgements, and shoulds. Tao-Gestalt recognizes these divisions and facilitates a sensitivity to all the implications of life demands in order to heal them.

Another important guidepost is the Tao concept that *change is cyclic*. This is a well-known notion in Gestalt therapy and can be seen especially in the cyclic interplay of figure/ground. Here, everything flows in a continuous unfolding. This emphasis of continuous change is most vividly demonstrated by the "Now I am aware . . ." exercise in Gestalt process. Capra (1975) comments on Tao change:

When we talk about the Taoist concept of change, it is important to realize that this change is not seen as occurring as a consequence of some force, but rather as a tendency which is innate in all things and situations. The movements of the Tao are not forced upon it, but occur naturally and spontaneously. Spontaneity is the Tao's principle of action, and since human conduct should be modelled on the operation of the Tao, spontaneity should also be characteristic of all human actions. Acting in harmony with nature thus means for the Taoists acting spontaneously and according to one's true nature. It means trusting one's intuitive intelligence, which is innate in the human mind just as the laws of change are innate in all things around us. (p. 122)

This cyclic nature of Tao is viewed as intrinsic to the endeavors and actions of human situations. Lao-tzu writes: "Functioning everywhere means far-reaching. Being far-reaching means returning to the original point." (in Pi, chap. 25) The motion of Tao is seen as *returning* just as the sea is in a continual movement and pattern of ebb and flow, coming and going, of expansion and contraction.

The difficulties of Tao learnings do not lie in evaluating the individual principles; this has been worked out over thousands of years of practice. The most difficult task is to perceive Taoist principles accurately and to free them from the fetters of cultural conditioning and the deep conformities inherent in Western behavior and living experience. Fortunately, as Lao-tzu indicates, "the words of Tao possess lasting effects, Though they are mild and flavourless, Though they appeal neither to the eye nor to the ear." (in Wu, 1961, chap. 35)

In order that reality and appearance be identified our attention must be that of the open-minded individual (Rajneesh, 1976). The strong impression that awareness makes provides incentive to look underneath the expressive content of another person's behavior--to UNDER-stand as a perspective that can aid awareness of what is happening and *how* this is being clothed with expression. Lao-tzu's approach to the world is really quite simple: "oftentimes without intention I see the wonder of Tao. Oftentimes

with intention I see its manifestations. Its wonder and its manifestations are one and the same." (in Chang, 1975, chap. 1) The Western approach to the world seems to carry impressions that are often interlaced with assumptions, prejudices and bias. In order to see clearly, to understand deeply, it is important to put aside these locks on the mind.

Chuang-tzu reminds us that our nature is whole and our pattern of flow is present amongst growth and decay. He writes:

Your will must be one. Do not listen with your ears but with your mind. Do not listen with your mind but with your vital energy. Ears can only hear, mind can only think, but vital energy is empty, receptive to all things. Tao abides in emptiness. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind. (in Feng & English, 1974, p. 68)

As well, Taoists admire those who acquire the skills of following Li. Needham (1954) writes: "The Taoists probably saw in those who exhibited these skills a certain admirable self-forgetfulness arising out of an extremely close contact with the processes of Nature." (p. 122)

Tao is like a river. It has direction, volume, rhythm, and is in a state of perpetual change and motion. Tao is a process, an approach to everyday life and all that is. The philosophy behind Tao is often described by metaphoric stories, paradoxical statements, poetic images and by Taoist characteristics such as yin and yang, cyclic change, and unification of multiplicities. These

qualities are embodied in the words of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu and have combined a great wealth of subtlety with the great riches of certitude--a complete assurance about how things are.

There is a profound relationship between Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu's work and teachings of Fritz Perls. The ground of this relationship is the one unifying principle, or as Perls names it--Gestalt! Perls is a Taoist therapist in the sense that he applies a practicality to Taoist concepts which allow for their learning and practical application for everyday life. That is, he teaches by example rather than lecturing, he does not force things to make them happen, but creates a process for things to unfold of their own, he does not insist that things turn out a certain way, but lets things simply be as they are and emerge as they do.

By providing experiences (experiments) awareness is increased and a client moves more toward *coming to his senses*. Perls' aim is to bring about closure, a Gestalt or wholeness of being where there is no intellectual overlay to obscure things as they are. When these experiences appear paradoxical, what emerges seems complementary of the interconnectedness and suchness of all things.

The well known experiments that are basic to Gestalt therapy, will often provide the experience necessary to embrace both alternatives to a paradox at once. The

ability to encompass, simultaneously, all parts of a paradoxical understanding, rises as experience out of the structures brought to bear as an intentional and unique intervention strategy with a client.

Taoism is a very humble, sensitive, and practical wisdom (Durell, 1980). Concepts like yin-yang and wu-wei are easily comprehensible, yet their simplicity unfortunately makes it very difficult for the Western mind to engage in practice of these ways. The Gestalt therapist knows that the Western mind is complex and paradoxically makes things difficult and complex for clients (introducing frustration).

Alan Watts (1958) writes that, in the "world of Tao, things are what they are in relation to each other's presence (p. 122). The point is that *interconnectedness* is a given! Unconnectedness and our experiences of being separate within ourselves and from the external world is the emerging phenomena that appears out of the process. *What* and *how* does the one underlying order of reality manifest? The answer lies in the useful set of images and concepts from Tao and Gestalt. What appears as separate, is really a contextual manifestation of a larger reality, i.e., the whirlpool is not separate from the undivided flow of the stream.

It is fair to say that certain Taoist concepts are a part of Gestalt therapy and can be seen as a basic

underlying ground from which the Gestalt process can be nourished. To have a Taoist image of yin-yang in the room of mind while allowing the many variations of form and name and movement to pass through freely, may enhance the therapist's capacity to more effectively provide the kind of process the client requires. The Tao-Gestalt therapist knows that all behavior consists of opposites or polarities, thus allowing for a great amount of creativity in approach such as Perls' techniques of exaggeration and repeating something over and over until its polarity appears.

Perls is interested and concerned with more than the experience of awareness, responsibility, and authentic existence. He is also concerned with what we do and how we block these states of being. As one comes to know the subtle and powerful inner mechanisms and the connectedness of mind, emotion and body, he can become more able to recognize the many parts they play in their own drama of life. That is, one is more able to choose consciously the choices one makes in the here-and-now. As one's awareness develops, the capacity to form and sustain new (integrative) behaviors facilitates the growth process.

Tao is interested in this interplay of experience and transformation. More than any single concept of Tao, most impressive is its capacity to construct and preserve complex, paradoxical systems of understanding. The stories

of Chuang-tzu especially, reveal how easily *the man of Tao* moves among events and statements clothed with implicit paradox.

The nature of all things as realized by these two wonderful Chinese sages. Lao and Chuang, is also the vision of the Gestalt therapist. He does not attempt to put the true nature of Gestalt (single principle/whole) in words. Therapy is alive and participative. What can not be said will be demonstrated. Because he knows that all existence is a single unity, the Gestalt therapist knows how things work and thus, works with a *steadfast quietude* (chap. 16), *disguards extremes* (chap. 29), and *accomplishes without any actions* (chap. 47). Because the Gestalt therapist understands the nature of things and knows to go along with the nature of things--by not interfering, things are accomplished as though no action were taken.

Have we come to a closer understanding of the Gestalt principles? Certainly a comparison of Taoist concepts with Gestalt concepts has shed light upon the efficiency of the Gestalt approach. This study shows that Taoism lends itself well to the psychological methods of Gestalt therapy and adds insight to Gestalt process. Despite the fact that Gestalt therapy can not be completely divested of its subjective character, its approach and way of working within the therapeutic milieu is of the integrity the Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu have written about.

This study has compared Tao and Gestalt concepts and consequently, has provided an expansive understanding of what Tao-Gestalt process might unveil. As well, the potential cooperation between Gestalt and Tao has been unearthed. An important aspect of this study is to encourage further research of the integration of Tao into the therapeutic work of Fritz Perls.

Chapter VIII

Conclusion

The main intellectual effort embodied in this thesis is based on the assumption that Tao is a possibility for the Western mind to better understand and from which to take guidelines. I would like to close this study with a brief outline of some arguments for and against the reality of Taoist influences in Western life and activity--especially in the area of counselling.

This study mentions in Chapter 2 the comments of Jung about the tendency towards building a bridge of psychological understanding between East and West. It is obvious that Jung is impressed with the flavor of Taoism and its insights gleaned from another way of understanding--that which comes from living experience. However, given his distaste for "the Western way of hiding one's heart under the cloak of so-called scientific understanding," Jung is also very critical of "anyone seeking to minimize the merits of Western science and scholarship." (in Wilhelm, 1972, p. 81) Jung speaks out against people who make the mistake of rejecting Western science. He suggests and encourages attempts to build up Western culture rather than mimic and imitate the East. To support his argument, Jung writes: "The East came to its knowledge of inner things in relative

ignorance of the external world. We, on the other hand, will investigate the psyche and its depth supported by a tremendously extensive historical and scientific knowledge." (in Wilhelm, 1972, pp. 120-121)

Western society is primarily an intellectual culture and it finds difficulty meeting with the heart of Eastern mentality. In one sense, it is the difference between seeing life as a problem to be solved and life as something to be lived. Westerners tend to be sensitive when asked to simply *let things alone* as a way of dealing with problems. Such a philosophy might be seen as belonging to an *Age of Decadence* in that Western society is currently plagued with difficulties and extensive problems, that if left unattended, would result in an escalated deterioration of the culture. In this sense, it is not likely that Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu's ideas will gain in popularity or consideration as a contemporary option for living one's life in the West.

To add to this, Jung was also very critical of the ways and means of Taoism and finds them inappropriate for Westerners. Goleman (1981) quotes Jung on this point:

People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own souls. They'll practice yoga and all its exercises, observe a strict regimen of diet, learn theosophy by heart, or mechanically repeat mystic texts from the literature of the whole world--all because they cannot get on with themselves and have not the slightest faith that anything useful could ever come out of their own souls. (p. 134)

However, Stensrud and Strensud (1979) point out that our social structures are designed for *disciplined people* and that this is different than structuring the fabric of society as a way of supporting *authentic people*. Their conclusions support the Taoist way of life: "Taoists do not work toward great and grand objectives, nor do they seek high political office. They concern themselves only with the people they meet." (p. 81)

It is not surprising though, that it is difficult for Western society to suspend its collective myths, i.e., its historically formed character. First, the methodologies of acquiring knowledge differ significantly between East and West (Siu, 1957, p. 81). Jung also points out that "the strangeness of the material is so arresting that our embarrassment as to how and where the Chinese world of thought might be jointed to ours is quite understandable." (in Wilhelm, 1972, p. 82) For example, understanding how to accomplish goals without working at it (*wu-wei*), to have "ends without means" (Hall, 1978, p. 280) seems difficult to comprehend. Another uncommon idea in Western philosophy, one which we *do not know what to do with*, concerns the Taoist idea about the *uselessness* of things (Major, 1975).

Westerners like to know where they stand on an issue whether it be dogma, opinion, or rhetoric. Chuang-tzu

however, advocates a state of mind that is one step away from making such distinctions:

Where neither It nor Other finds its opposite is called the axis of the Way. When once the axis is found at the center of the circle there is no limit to what is it, on the other no limit to what is not. That is why I say, *The best course is to throw things open to the light.* (in Graham, 1970, p. 153)

Second, Taoists saw practical advantages in remaining apart from society whereas Westerners tend to be rewarded and encouraged to participate as concerned, contributing members of the community. The cleavage between the ideal of reclusion versus the prestige and status conscious participants in Western society is wide. Chuang-tzu is viewed as "being concerned with the salvation and freedom of the individual with little or no concern for the social orders" (in Legge, 1979, p. 11). That is, Taoism is seen more of the way of the recluse and the hermit as opposed to the Westerner who is expected to live a life of full participation in the norms of society. In the Western psychological tradition, the social construction of reality exposes individuals to the process whereby people become good citizens and reproductive contributors to the social order.

Not surprisingly, the Western impetus creates models for how a person should be and how life should be lived. This is contrary to the Taoist teachings that one should not strive to become *something*, especially to strive to

become something one is not. In this context, Western society is especially interesting for the feelings, actions, ideas, people, and places, need not be real; they only need to seem so. Maurice Freedman (1976) writes: "Our wholeness is not a state of being but a presence, an event, a happening that comes into being again and again in our contact and response." (p. 13) This is representative of the heart of Taoist movement in daily life. Perhaps the Western error is in believing that the experience is something to achieve or conquer, which, once tamed and harnessed, remains with us throughout our lifetime. "Poetic" is a term used to often describe experience (Benton, 1962).

However, apart from the image of a Taoist recluse living life in a cave, there is the living Taoist ideal of personal freedom and communal peace which can be found as a mainstream in Western society. If taken to the extreme however, "the Westerner who wishes to start upon this way, . . . has all authority against him--intellectual, moral, and religious" (Jung, in Wilhelm, 1972, p. 95).

Thirdly, Westerners seem far too concerned with *knowing* and seem to struggle relentlessly in their attempts to make known the *Unknown*. This is an attempt to institutionalize the Tao (Carter, 1981). Western mind has a very different way of going about things. For example, in order to overcome obstacles, the Westerner brings much

effort to the task and likes to link definitions to understanding and form to solutions. But Tao has no form and cannot be defined. As well, "It is characteristic of the Western mind that it has no concept of Tao." (Jung, in Wilhelm, 1972, p. 97) Even Chuang-tzu does not mention being a Taoist, perhaps because the Tao can not be tao-ed. Chuang-tzu's writings are within the realm of the ideal and what is the use of learning what is ideal if it cannot be attained, even when known?

The approach of Tao is quite unusual for Westerners and is in many ways not an appropriate path for the troubled Westerner. O'Hanlon (1981) writes that: "if the tradition in which one lives is a closed one, and there are aspects of reality to which it is not allowed to be open, ecumenical dialogue can be a disturbing threat." (p. 93) In order to overcome obstacles, the sage would begin by returning to a life that was in harmony with natural law. But Taoist concepts such as Li, yin-yang, and wu-wei, seem unacceptable to Western tradition that prizes ambition, activity, striving and accumulation of material wealth. *To be no one special* is not something a status-conscious Westerner would likely strive for. As well, because there are spiritual connotations connected to Taoism, avoidance can be an issue as Westerners "tend to disdain devotional practices" (Blofeld, 1974, p. 159).

Fourth, although Western metaphysical thought continues to be dualistic in nature, the Eastern modes of thinking are finding their way into the modern trends of scientific thought (Grava, 1983). Current interest in Eastern thought is by no means a new phenomena, and yet it is noted that Westerners continue to write pioneering texts on non-Western religions, philosophies, and psychology. However, Western psychiatrists tend to dismiss certain Eastern modes of therapy because they do not connect with established psychiatric theory (Smith, 1981). As well, "Modern western psychology has emphasized the study of neither wisdom nor the wise" even though "Extensive practice with states of meditation and pure awareness can open wide the doors to profound insight, wisdom and enlightenment." (Shapiro, 1982, p. 202) These remain important considerations for those attempting to integrate and synthesize Eastern and Western approaches to psychology and therapy.

What seems to be a typical and continuing Western response to viewpoints from the East can be found in Daniel Goleman's account (1981) about sharing particulars of a lecture given by Richard Alpert (Ram Dass) with his clinical professor while a student at Harvard:

The next day I was at lunch with one of my clinical professors. He had not been there the evening before. He wanted to know what Alpert (now Ram Dass) was talking about--what did he say? Very much in the style of a

clinical supervision I gave my account of what he said, and he listened carefully and asked well-chosen questions. Then, after listening for a while he looked at me, leaned across that table and in a confidential tone he said, "Tell me, is he psychotic?" (p. 125)

One of the goals in Western therapy is towards learning to accept things as they are. Many clients who have successfully come to terms with their problems would likely verify this to be a worthwhile achievement (Dolliver, 1981). However, from the Taoist viewpoint, the client has perhaps simply shifted polarities and has unknowingly fallen back into dualistic confines. For Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu the alternative to opposing, grasping, struggling, etc., is *letting be*. This would be difficult for Westerners to follow through with for the Western mind has a strong drive to attach itself to mental images and motivations. The fact that this notion also appears to carry people along in healthy functioning ways for long periods of time is of no consequence to Tao. For Kronsky (1975) the Western therapeutic approaches contain an addictive quality. She writes: "Insofar as our Western therapies are based upon the notion of an infinite progression of problems and solutions, we create therapy addicts." (p. 33) As well, the here-and-now of Gestalt therapy and the discipline required for Westerners to live, not only day to day, but in the Taoist view, to create each moment anew, seems far too high a demand on individuals in a social system designed so that activity and thought is future directed.

In conclusion, Western therapy is based on helping people. On the other hand, Taoism confusingly suggests we do not interfere with another's way. The Taoist therapist would not *do* therapy, he would live it (Stensrud, 1979). Guidelines for the *Tao of Human Relations* would design an atmosphere where client sat with therapist in the openness of interhuman contact. The therapist would not insist that things be a certain way and would tend to not be defensive nor attacking. The 'work' would be to help the client find their own inner security by allowing things to be as they are rather than interpreting events. In short, clients discover how to let themselves be, without having to be something.

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