



“Human follows the Way of the Earth

Earth, the Way of Heaven

Heaven, the Way of TAO

TAO follows the Way of NATURE” ---From the Tao Te Ching

Founder of the Living Tao Foundation and internationally acclaimed Tai Ji master, Chungliang Al Huang is a man of diverse talents. He has been a best-selling author, a teacher, dancer, artist and architect, and as well as sharing a stage with the Dalai Lama, he has worked with people like Sammy Davis Jr, Bruce Lee, Joseph Campbell and Joan Baez. He has been described as a sage for the modern age and a master in the art of living and yet claims that he still hasn't decided what to do when he grows up. “I am interested in everything” he admits. “I'm a perpetual student of life. I don't want to be a professional, always a beginner”.

One thing that runs through all of Huang's work is his passion for sharing and communicating understandings that he calls 'world wisdom'. It's a bringing together of teachings from the East and the West that can help us navigate our way as global citizens towards an uncertain future. "World wisdom is made up of the understandings that cross culture and religions" he explains. "It's those things that every wise and thoughtful person knows are the truth. It's nothing to do with east or west, it's about crystallising the best of everything we know into a world cultural heritage and using it to live in harmony".





“We live in such a beautiful world and all of us in our hearts want to live in harmony and peace, not in conflict” continues Huang. “I think all the thoughtful people in the world are looking for ways to honour each other. We have to be able to respect others cultural heritages and to know that in essence we’re all the same; we are all looking for ways of being that are more tolerant, wiser and knowledgeable. In China we don’t call things like Buddhism,

Confucianism and Taoism religions like we do in the West. We don't become a Buddhist or Taoist to limit ourselves. We embrace the best from all of them as a life philosophy”.

Huang grew up with traditional Chinese philosophy instilled in him, spending his early years in the rural villages of China. It was here that his family fled after the Japanese invasion and the lifestyle that would follow them when they later had to leave mainland China for Taiwan after the Communist Revolution. “The simple peasant life of China has some wonderful qualities” he remembers. “I grew up learning Tai Ji, chanting Tang Dynasty poetry, Tao Te Ching and Confucian classics and being immersed in a deep appreciation of nature. Many children were not lucky enough to experience this at the time”.

He has now lived in the West for years, having arrived in America as a young man to study architecture. “I couldn't wait to see the world” he says. Soon after graduating he became interested in performance arts and whilst teaching dance at the University of California realised the extent to which western students were drawn to eastern philosophy and practice. “I taught Tai Ji and meditation techniques to the dancers” he recalls. “At that time I had no idea that what I learned as a child would be of so much interest to them”. But a chance encounter around this time with Alan Watts led to a life-long career teaching at the Esalen Institute. Here he collaborated with the likes of Joseph Campbell, Gregory Bateson, John Blofield and Huston Smith, and wrote widely acclaimed books on Tai Ji and Tao, including the best-selling *Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain*.

“There is something deep down in all of us that we want to share and communicate in this short run of life” he says, “and communication is way beyond words. To communicate you have to use everything, you have to keep finding new ways of sharing your understanding. My different careers have helped me to get the message across about how to build a bridge between East and West; how to achieve a balance between the two. I grew up as Chinese and became western to survive, but I relied on an eastern

heritage to balance my life in the world. I've been lucky enough to realise that westerners want to learn these things too, in order to find their balance. I can introduce eastern philosophy in a way that makes sense to westerners because I understand both sides. I have followed my bliss and doors have opened for me”.

“Westerners are doers - we invent, we create, we do” he continues. “We're good in science, technology and reasoning – look at all the things we've done - but we're missing the ability to step back and be more reflective. We miss emotions, feelings, art and cultural riches. We need to come back to family relationships, emotional intelligence and learning from the earth. Asian countries have something to teach us about finding these things and bringing them into balance. In Asian teaching we believe you must begin with the individual. First you must cultivate yourself and then you learn how to relate to other human beings one to one: siblings, spouses, colleagues, bosses. If you have harmony yourself, you can expand out to your family, then community, then the world”.

“In the West if we have a goal, we aim our bullet at the target, we go out to save the world. But in Asian philosophy the goal is inside. If you don't work from inside-out you are an off-centred person trying to do good and making things worse. But if you are centred you will hit the target. Miracles happen when people get close to their centred place and their lives change. With Tai Ji I help people to find centre. Once we embrace the whole palette of ourselves including the things we don't like and use them as tools, we can return to mountain and become grounded. Then, rather than always looking for the next mountain top, we just have to elevate our grounding”.

“I love the western heritage that's instilled in me” says Huang, “but I love the balance that comes from the East. I use the two to stretch myself and become integrated. If you want to be a whole person the best way is to open up to the opposite. Tai Ji is about how to integrate a pair of opposites - how to stretch yourself to the extremes. If you get pulled by dualistic forces you will be split,

but if you can balance opposites into centralised integration you become whole”.

His ideas for the need to centre and rebalance apply not only to westerners but also in the East where he teaches widely. “There are more people in the West that are aware of the need for balance than there are in the East where folks are now madly trying to catch up with the West in technology and overlooking their own cultural heritage” he says. “Ironically, as the East becomes more westernized and the West embraces eastern philosophy, we have come full circle in cultural synthesis. The task now in the world is to embrace diversity without losing ethnicity. We need to realise how rich and variegated our world is and to honour the multiple dimensions of being a Global Citizen whilst retaining our national and cultural identity at the same time”.

“In human nature we have this eternal conflict of not finding harmony” concludes Huang. “Even Adam had to be exiled from Eden. But we have to keep faith that collaboration is possible and that we can wake up to reality. We have a chance to live in harmony on this earth in every culture and we must choose to take it, otherwise we will become extinct like the dinosaurs. I used to be called a cock-eyed optimist and a dreamer in my youth and I was proud of it. I see myself now as a hopeful pessimist – I refuse to lose my belief in humanity. There is some good inside us that we must believe will evolve. There is definitely hope”.