

# INFORMATION SHEET ON THE DAOIST FOUNDATION

Prepared by Louis Komjathy 康思奇, Ph.D., CSO  
Daoist Foundation 道教基金會

Thank you for your interest in our work and community. Due to the large number of requests for information and interviews, we have prepared this information sheet. We hope that you understand the somewhat impersonal nature of this response.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Daoist Foundation (Dàojiào jījīn huì 道教基金會) is a non-profit religious and educational organization dedicated to fostering authentic Daoist study and practice and to preserving and transmitting traditional Daoist (Taoist) culture. Established in September of 2007, the foundation is a federal non-profit organization (501[c][3]) and public charity (170[b][1][A][vi]). The Daoist Foundation was formed by Louis Komjathy and Kate Townsend with the vision of establishing a viable Daoist community in America rooted in tradition-based Daoist practice-realization. Our principal objectives and purposes are as follows:

- (a) To preserve and transmit traditional Daoist culture.
- (b) To teach holistic and integrated Daoist religious and health practice.
- (c) To establish and maintain an American Daoist religious community, including various local Daoist associations, community centers, and a mountain retreat center.
- (d) To train and ordain an American Daoist clergy.
- (e) To provide spiritual direction to community members.
- (f) To educate the general public about Daoism as a Chinese and global religious tradition.
- (g) To engage in and support research on the Daoist tradition.
- (h) To collect Daoist materials and maintain a working archive.
- (i) To translate and disseminate Daoist scriptures.

In terms of the landscape of “American Daoism,” the Daoist Foundation is unique for a number of reasons. We are one of only a few communities with a root in and formal affiliation with the Chinese Daoist tradition. We are the only American Daoist community directed by a Daoist scholar-practitioner with a Ph.D. in Daoist Studies. Finally, we are the only Daoist community under the direction of both a male and female ordained Daoist priest. Our directors thus have extensive experience in China as well as a deep understanding of American culture, both its strengths and its deficiencies. Coupled with our reverence for the Dao, our commitment to Daoist cultivation, and attentiveness to personal life experience, these various details lead to a greater likelihood of authentic and profound Daoist cultivation and spiritual realization.

## OUR DIRECTORS AND SENIOR TEACHERS

The Daoist Foundation is under the direction of our founding Co-directors, Louis Komjathy and Kate Townsend. These individuals also serve as the senior teachers and ordination masters for our community.

**Louis Komjathy** 康思奇 (Xiūjìng 修靜 [Cultivating Stillness]; Wànruì 萬瑞 [Myriad Blessings]; Ph.D.; CSO; b. 1971) is a scholar-practitioner of Daoism and an ordained Daoist priest (26<sup>th</sup> generation) of the Huàshān 華山 (Mount Hua) lineage of Quánzhēn 全真 (Complete Perfection) Daoism. He began his Daoist training with Deneal Amos of the New Canaan Academy (Hanover, New Hampshire) in 1991 and continued his early study and practice with Harrison Moretz of the Taoist Studies Institute (Seattle, Washington) from 1993 to 1998. He received his Ph.D. in Religious Studies (Boston University; 2005) with an emphasis on Daoism and comparative religious studies under Livia Kohn. He received ordination in the Huàshān lineage in 2006, after which he lived as a visiting Daoist monk in the monasteries of Láoshān 嶗山 (Mount Lao; near Qīngdǎo, Shāndōng) and Huàshān 華山 (Mount Hua; near Huàiyīn, Shǎnxī). He has published extensively on Daoism, including the most recent *Entering Stillness* (with Kate Townsend; 2022), *Primer for Translating Daoist Literature* (2022), Twentieth Anniversary Edition (TAE) of *Handbooks for Daoist Practice* (2023), and *Dàodé jīng 道德經: A Contextual, Contemplative, and Annotated Bilingual Translation* (2023). He lives in semi-seclusion on the Northshore of Chicago, Illinois.

**Kate Townsend** 唐鄉恩 (Bào jìng 抱靜 [Embracing Stillness]; Wànqīng 萬清 [Myriad Clarities]; L.Ac.; LMP; CSO; b. 1962) is a practitioner of Chinese medicine and an ordained Daoist priest (26<sup>th</sup> generation) of the Huàshān 華山 (Mount Hua) lineage of Quánzhēn 全真 (Complete Perfection) Daoism. She began her Daoist training with Peter Moy of the Evanston Wu Tang Association (Evanston, Illinois) in 1985 and continued her early study and practice with Hsien Yuen (Xuányuán 玄元 [Mysterious Origin]) of the American Taoist and Buddhist Association (New York, New York) and Harrison Moretz of the Taoist Studies Institute (Seattle, Washington). She received ordination into the Huàshān lineage in 2009. Kate Townsend currently lives on the Northshore of Chicago, Illinois, where she oversees and practices Chinese medicine at Root Medicine, which is an acupuncture, herbal and massage therapy clinic.

Both Louis Komjathy and Kate Townsend were ordained by Chén Yǔmíng 陳宇明 (b. 1969), the former vice-abbot of Yùquán yuàn 玉泉院 (Temple of the Jade Spring; Huàshān, Shǎnxī) and now a Daoist recluse in Sìchuān. After a period of training and lineage transmission, their ordinations occurred at Hè míng shè 鶴鳴社 (Society of the Calling Crane) in Chéngdū, Sìchuān. Chén Yǔmíng is thus the master-father (*shīfù* 師父) of our directors, and his teacher, Xuē Tàilái 薛泰來 (1923-2001), is their master-grandfather (*shīyē* 師爺).

## OUR LINEAGE

Our primary lineage-affiliation is with the Huàshān 華山 (Mount Hua) lineage of Quánzhēn 全真 (Complete Perfection) Daoism, which is traditionally associated with Chén Tuán 陳搏 (Xīyí 希夷 d. 989) and Hǎo Dàtōng 郝大通 (Guǎngníng 廣寧 [Expansive Serenity]; 1140-1212). This affiliation is indicated by Louis Komjathy and Kate Townsend's ordination names of Wànruì 萬瑞 (Myriad Blessings) and Wànqīng 萬清 (Myriad Clarities), respectively. The charisma (spiritual signature) of Quánzhēn centers of the core Three Commitments/Vows (*sānshì* 三誓), namely, celibacy, sobriety, and vegetarianism. We understand celibacy as non-familial and social reproduction, rather than complete sexual abstinence. Drawing inspiration from its mountain

namesake, the Huàshān lineage emphasizes self-cultivation, mountain seclusion, expansive consciousness, and being carefree (*xiāoyáo* 逍遙). In terms of influential scriptures, the Huàshān lineage follows Quánzhēn in its emphasis on the core Three Scriptures (*sānjīng* 三經), namely, the *Dàodé jīng* 道德經 (*Tào-té chīng*; Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power), *Qīngjìng jīng* 清靜經 (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness), and *Yīnfú jīng* 陰符經 (Scripture on the Hidden Talisman). However, it also places emphasis on the writings of Wáng Chóngyáng 王重陽 (1113-1170) and his first-generation disciples (especially Hǎo Dàtōng) as well as those of Chén Tuán. It emphasizes lineage-specific practices, which require initiation to receive or discuss.

Louis Komjathy and Kate Townsend also are the founders and lineage-transmitters of the Clarity-and-Stillness Order (*Qīngjìng dào* 清靜道; CSO), a new American Daoist religious order. This affiliation is indicated by their Daoist names Xiūjìng 修靜 (Cultivating Stillness)/Chángdé 常德 (Constant Virtue) and Bào jìng 抱靜 (Embracing Stillness)/Chángróng 常容 (Constant Acceptance), respectively. The Clarity-and-Stillness Order offers Daoist religious training for those with an authentic vocation to become ordained clergy members. With roots in the Huàshān lineage, it draws its primary inspiration from the eighth-century *Qīngjìng jīng* 清靜經 (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness), including Komjathy's identification of clarity-and-stillness as a key connective strand through the entire Daoist tradition. The Clarity-and-Stillness Order is associated with Quánzhēn Daoism, but has its own defining characteristics, such as placing emphasis on the Nine Foundations (*jiǔgēn* 九根). For ordained members of the Clarity-and-Stillness Order, the core commitment focuses on dedicated and sustained self-cultivation and transformation. Practice-realization, rooted in clarity-and-stillness meditation, is primary. We also observe traditional Quánzhēn religious commitments such as vegetarianism, abstention from intoxicants, and sexual propriety.

## OUR COMMUNITY

Members of our community understand Daoism as a Chinese and now global religious tradition. We are a community of practitioners orienting ourselves towards the Dao-as-Source and committed to cultivating the Dao (*xiūdào* 修道). We are a community composed of priests, recluses, renunciants, householders, and families. Regardless of differences concerning familial and ancestral obligations, each of us recognizes the importance and necessity of self-cultivation and transformation. Without such personal commitment and responsibility, there can be no authentic community. As members of a religious community, we are dedicated to re-membering the sacred and to supporting and respecting each other in our process towards spiritual realization. As Daoists, we recognize that self and community are interconnected and interdependent. We remain attentive and responsible for the influence (energetic, emotional, behavioral, ecological, etc.) that we have on ourselves, community, region, and world. One aim of our practice-realization is to extend a beneficial and transformational influence to both known and unknown beings.

We are a Daoist religious community primarily comprised of diverse lay converts and practitioners from a wide variety of cultural, ethnic, and nationalistic backgrounds. Some community members self-identify as “Daoist,” while others are less committed to a specifically Daoist path. Our community also includes two ordained and lineage-based Euro-American Daoist priests, Louis Komjathy and Kate Townsend.

Most of our community members are married, some have children, and most work in “ordinary jobs.” The latter include professions in acupuncture and Chinese medicine, conservation biology, education, elder care, massage therapy, naturopathic medicine, and so forth. Most members are Euro-American, middle class, middle-aged, well educated (post-baccalaureate), and socially engaged. Most come from Christian family backgrounds, though the degree to which they ever self-identified as such is an open question. There is gender equity in our community, and we are committed to non-discriminatory forms of relationship, whether based on class, education level, gender, ethnicity, race, and so forth.

We welcome anyone with a sincere interest in tradition-based Daoist practice-realization.

## OUR COMMITMENTS

Within our community, reverence for the Dao as sacred is our primary concern. We maintain a commitment to self-cultivation and practice-realization rooted in such an orientation. Our religious practice includes respect for the adherents, teachers, communities, lineages, places, and scriptures associated with the Daoist tradition. If there is a hierarchy, it follows this order of importance: the Dao and its manifestations, our personal and communal practice-realization, and our locatedness in lineage and tradition.

We are a community of practitioners orienting ourselves towards the Dao as Source and committed to cultivating the Dao (*xiūdào* 修道). Practice-realization and reverence are primary.

Our identity as Daoists derives from our *being and presence*, from the Dao embodied and actualized in holistic and integrated Daoist practice. We are Daoists based on our alignment with and embodiment of the Dao in its multi-layered numinosity. We are Daoists based on our embodiment of Daoist principles and adherence to a Daoist *way of life*. For this, a commitment to self-cultivation and transformation is essential. Our practice-realization, our being and presence, locates us within the larger community of Daoist practitioners connected to each other as a historical, energetic, and transtemporal continuum.

## OUR PRACTICE

Our practice is an integrated, holistic, and soteriological training regimen and way of life. It focuses, first and foremost, on the Nine Foundations (*jiǔgēn* 九根) as articulated by Louis Komjathy and Kate Townsend. The Nine Foundations include cosmology and theology, astro-geomancy, practice principles and guidelines, health and longevity practices, dietetics, meditation, ethics, scripture study, and ritual.

At present, our community faces challenges due to geographical distance among members, lack of infrastructure (we do not yet have a formal practice space or temple), and work responsibilities. This has resulted in two primary approaches to practice: individual daily practice and seasonal community retreats. In both cases, the primary practice involves dietetics, health and longevity methods, quiet sitting (apophatic meditation), philosophical reflection, and

scripture study. We also engage in some ritual activities, but this is again limited by the fact that we do not have a temple and by a lack of advanced training.

The most dedicated members of our community adhere to foundational Quánzhēn commitments, including vegetarianism, abstention from intoxicants, and sexual propriety. We also maintain Daoist ethical responsibilities, such as those expressed in various Daoist precepts. These are complex, comprehensive, and all-encompassing. Simply stated, our ethical practice involves the cultivation of virtue as well as precept study and application. As an applied and ecological ethical practice, we endeavor to eat organic, locally grown produce and wild foods rooted in a seasonal and bioregional orientation. We cultivate awareness concerning sources and consequences.

## **OUR VISION AND PROJECTS**

Our vision involves establishing, nurturing and maintaining a viable Daoist religious community rooted in authentic, tradition-based Daoist practice. This includes preserving and transmitting traditional Daoist culture. It involves facilitating the practice-realization of the members of our community through spiritual direction. As an expression of Daoist religious commitments and affiliation, the viability of our community depends on the integrity of our teachers, including their ability to transmit the Dao and guide Daoist practice-realization, the commitment and training of our community members, and the continued dedication of future ordinands and practitioners. As is the case for the survival and flourishing of the Daoist religious tradition as a whole, it also depends on a larger pattern of interest, involvement, support and patronage. Honesty, transparency, and integrity are essential.

We have many projects underway. One of our most important undertakings involves plans for a mountain retreat center. This will enable place-specific, communal Daoist practice to occur. It will create a context where Daoists and non-Daoists may fully experience intact Daoist culture and lifeways, including Daoist aesthetics, art, and material culture. Such a Daoist place will enable us to train interested individuals, to conduct ordination ceremonies and other Daoist rituals, to tend to elderly and deceased members of our community, and to ensure that our Daoist community has a home into the distant future.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Additional information may be found on our website: Daoist Foundation 道教基金會 (DF; [www.daoistfoundation.org](http://www.daoistfoundation.org)). This includes the Center for Daoist Studies 道學中心 (CDS), the education and research branch of the Daoist Foundation, and Square Inch Press 方寸書社 (SIP), the publishing branch of the Daoist Foundation. This website includes accurate information and educational materials on the religious tradition which is Daoism. Our directors and senior teachers occasionally agree to personal interviews, class visits, and public lectures. You may help support our work and the flourishing of tradition-based Daoist research, education, practice, and community in America by making tax-deductible donations to the Daoist Foundation.