

PUBLICLY SEEN ASCENSIONS



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Starting

Someone honestly tells me that lots of Caodaist believers would be ready and willing to leave their families and wholeheartedly practice Caodaism if God allowed them to win the lottery so that they could feed their families. He even deduces everyone would be absolutely religious and there would be no evil in the world at all if God's miracles were seen publicly. It sounds like a familiar idea, doesn't it ? You yourself might have the same idea sometimes, right ? However, if completely pondered, the question still is whether everyone would be completely moral persons after witnessing God's miracles or whether there would be no more evil. That is just like the argument that there would be no bribery or corruption if all civil servants were hugely paid. Obviously, you never have a game changer for those problems !

When it comes to religion, there are naturally two major trends. First, educated people who are interested in philosophy. There are not many of them and they easily become atheists. They tend to rely on another "God" called objective science. Second, commoners who pay much attention to miracles. As the majority of the population, they are God-fearing people, even religious fanatics sometimes. They absolutely loyal to their religions, most of which worship amazing, supernatural miracles usually said to be made by supernatural beings. For instance, Jesus Christ healed the sick, three children in Fatima saw apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary back in 1917, God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, God taught Caodaists through Ouija Boards and most recently the phenomenon of Our Lady of

Medjugorje in Bosnia and Hercegovina, which can be seen on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5lZFesKjyQ>



Medjugorje, where Our Lady was seen

In Caodaism, in addition to the publicly known Ouija Board and Automatic Writing, lots of miracles have been told everywhere, but they have not been officially recognized. Vatican's process for canonization, however, is very complicated in order to avoid superstitious phenomena. The sighting of Our Lady in Fatima,

Portugal was first reported on 13/5/1917, but not until 1930 did Vatican officially recognize it.

Presently, Caodaism has no agencies to take care of such miracles, so the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council only indirectly recognizes the descent to earth of heavenly beings by publishing Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển 1&2 (the Collection of Divine Messages 1&2), which contains the teachings from Ouija board sessions. Lots of divine messages have not been permitted to be published. In the future, when there are enough positions in the Caodaist Academy, there might be official decisions to recognize all of the divine messages as well as the miracles.

All of the divine messages (published and unpublished) can be read at:

<https://www.daotam.info/booksv/pdf/pdf2/TNST-TB.pdf>

From a sermon

Presently, as prophesied before, various local and overseas groups calling themselves Caodaism mushroom for different purposes. They unrepentantly ignore God's instructions that division among adherents is a major sin. Ironically, they urge everyone to be cautious about falling into the trap of the Devil, saying their miracles are uniquely holy or their divine messages are authentic. Also, they even say they are the ones who are God's real disciples.



The statues of Good and Evil

In the beginning of Caodaism, God prophesied a huge schism within the community where disciples would criticize each other, even take their religious brothers to court, but it was historically unavoidable. Thus, I now understand why the heavenly beings had the statues of Ông Thiện Ông Ác (Good and Evil) put on both sides of the door of the Tây Ninh Temple. I personally think this is the metaphor that says “*Resolve the matter of right and wrong before entering the Bạch Ngọc Kinh*”

(Heaven)” or “These statues are the key to Heaven”. Someone will hastily says “That’s easy. I would resolve the matter by saying I’m always right”. Of course, that answer will let him nowhere.

While waiting for the official decision about which miracles are authentic by the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council, what you Caodaist believers have to do is to rely upon the officially recognized Divine Messages or the Senior Dignitaries’ sermons. Now please read an extract from Đức Hộ Pháp’ sermon on the Divine Path to Eternal Life, in Tây Ninh Temple, on 9/2/1949.

“It is usually said that you will be able to make lots of miracles after enlightenment. For example, you can “Bạch nhứt chi thăng”¹. No, it’s untrue ! That’s only something to cheat you ! If that had been true, Đức Tam Tạng² wouldn’t have left his corpse in the river. We can become spiritually enlightened, not physically. Our physical bodies which are still animals cannot become enlightened. They must follow the physical law, that is they are born, grow up, become old and die. Only our second bodies (usually called spiritual bodies) become enlightened in the Eternal Life.

¹ *Rise to Heaven in front of everyone.*

² Xuanzang (Chinese: 玄奘) (6 April 602 – 5 February 664), a 7th-century Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, traveler, and translator, who is known for his journey to India in 629–645 CE to bring over Buddhist scriptures to China. Wikipedia 2023.

Therefore, in Ngọc Hư Cung³ which rules the universe, all souls follow the spiritual laws. The laws are unlike those of the earthly world. That is why the governmental agencies of the universe are different from those on earth though their politics are closely related to each other. The laws on earth cannot be imposed on your souls or vice versa”.



His Holiness Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc on the Seven-Headed Serpent Throne

³ The Huge Gem House - (roughly translated). The Caodaist term for Heaven.

Etymology

In the above extract, the Chinese Vietnamese phrase “Bạch Nhật Chi Thăng” may somehow trouble contemporary readers, even Vietnamese ones. I have searched Chinese Vietnamese dictionaries and found these: Bạch Nhật - during daytime, i.e. seen by lots of people. Chi Thăng - rising to Heaven. Consequently, the translation should be “Publicly seen ascension”. I keep wondering, however, where the phrase come from, who coins it and what it really means.

I have looked it up online and asked my friends, but not until recently did I find it. One day, I happened to find a book online that contains the answer. It was *Tính Mệnh Khuê Chỉ*, translator Nhân Tử Nguyễn Văn Thọ, published by Nhân Tử Văn in 2002, California, USA. The translator used to be a Major, military doctor in the Southern Vietnamese Army. In 1982 he settled in the US and passed away in 2014. The book is available in the US, Vietnam and at this address:

<https://nhantu.net/TonGiao/TMKC/DanNhap.htm>

Before showing the answer I found in the book, I would like to give a brief rundown on some essential details. According to Chinese legend, Đức Lão Tử⁴, the founder of Taoism, served as the royal archivist for the Zhou court. As an enlightened being,

⁴ Laozi (/ˈlɑːʊdʒə/, Chinese: 老子), a semi-legendary ancient Chinese Taoist philosopher, credited with writing the *Tao Te Ching*. He is considered the founder of Taoism. Wikipedia 2023.

he felt bored with the moral decay of life, so he rode a blue water buffalo to the West. At the western gate of the kingdom, the guard Doãn Hi⁵ stopped and begged him for instruction on religious practice. The guard's great enthusiasm won at last, so Đức Lão Tử stayed, wrote *Đạo Đức Kinh*⁶, gave it to Doãn Hi, then went into the desert and disappeared.

Thanks to the book, Doãn Hi practiced religion and become successfully enlightened. He then taught lots of disciples, who wrote how to practice Taoism in “*Tĩnh Mệnh Khuê Chỉ*”. The book was printed in 1670 and now translated into Vietnamese by Nhân Tử Nguyễn Văn Thọ.

In chapter 51 of the book, there is a drawing named as Phi Thăng Đồ⁷, in which many people are admiringly watching a man riding a crane in a cloud. Chapter 52 is Phi Thăng Thuyết⁸ saying that the ones who practice Taoism successfully can:

1. 飛升沖舉 .rise to Heaven with their families
2. 坐化尸解 die while sitting still
3. 投胎奪舍 enter a different corpse

5 Yinxi.

6 The Tao Te Ching (UK: /ˌtɑʊ tiː ˈtʃɪŋ/, US: /ˌdɑʊ deɪ ˈdʒɪŋ/) a Chinese classic text and foundational work of Taoism. Wikipedia 2023

7 the drawing of people rising to Heaven.

8 talking about how to fly up to Heaven.



Chapter 51 - Phi Thăng Đồ in “Tĩnh Mệnh Khuê Chi”

As for how to ascend, the book reports those enlightened people can ride a dragon, a cloud, a fish, a bird, a crane or a gust of wind. They even fly up together with their family, their house and possessions. Another book titled “*Khảo Liệt Tiên Phổ Truyện*” says more than 10,000 Taoists became Immortals and 8,000 flew to Heaven with their family.

Please remember translator Nhân Tử Nguyễn Văn Thọ adds “*I find the ascensions told in this book greatly bizarre, not to say*

absolutely unbelievable. No one has ever seen such weird phenomena before. They should not be taken seriously.”

Personally, I agree with him 100%. Anyway, I have found where the phrase comes from and what it really means. Consequently, Đức Hộ Pháp means it is rumored that a successful Taoist can rise to Heaven in front of a lot of people.

Cao Đài philosophy

Let's reread the above extract from the sermons on the Divine Path to Eternal Life. The view here clearly states the authenticity of Cao Đài philosophy. In the East, legend has it that enlightened beings can make lots of miracles, for example turning into another person, touching to heal the sick, knowing what other people are thinking, prophesying the future, even taking off like an airplane, etc.

Đức Hộ Pháp openly refuses to accept those legends, calling them fake dharma or cheats. He also says all physical bodies must follow the biological laws on earth. Enlightened beings' bodies must too. Only their spirits gain success in Heaven. He affirms earthly and heavenly laws are not interchangeable.

In fact, the Caodaist Sacerdotal Council sent Notice 67 to all Caodaists on 31/12/1930, saying that:

“...This Giáo Hữu Chính (or Ngọc Chính Thanh) enchanted other adherents, making them vow loyalty, writing them funny

amulets, pretending to train them to fly and practicing lots of eccentric work.

Also, this Ngô Đức Nhuận, 41 years old, from Mỹ Tho, who had joined the Minh Sư⁹, but now converted to Caodaism, enticed other Caodaist believers into eating only vegetables and fruits instead of rice. He told them to do superstitious things like having tattoos on their faces or noses.

The Caodaist Sacerdotal Council planes to expel these two persons together with their followers. Only when they repent of what they have done will the Sacerdotal Council reconsider them for their membership”.

“...The noble purpose of the true Caodaism is to teach people to worship spiritual beings, to live a moral life and to gradually become saintly persons...”

Obviously, the result of practicing Caodaism is to achieve morality, not to gain miraculous powers.

Fantasy and reality

Somebody may wonder who believe in practicing religion with amulets and miracles in the 21st century. Unluckily, lots of people, even the highly educated, do ! Once, I was asked to meet Master John Doe, who was said to be able to make me leave my

⁹ A division of Buddhism in China, which was spread to Vietnam.

physical body right away. That way I could go to Heaven without practicing vegetarianism and meditation for a long time. I have never read any Caodaist Divine Messages that tell the same story, so I found a polite way to refuse it.

People still are so thirsty for miracles that they do lots of eccentric things. I myself witnessed one in 2021. While reaching the Báo Ân Từ¹⁰, I saw five Caodaists or so kneeling in front of the temple. Being afraid of the security guards, they hurriedly took out a tiny boat made out of cardboard, put it on the ground, kowtowed to it and cried bitterly. I overheard them saying: *“Mother! Nobody wants to take the Bát Nhã boat¹¹ anymore”*. Since childhood I have witnessed similar strange events, for example, some guys sneaked into the temple and sat on the seven thrones. For me, those guys did not practice Caodaism. They are nuts !

What about the fact that some divine beings did prescribe the sick effective medicine via Ouija board, correctly prophesy some events or make some unexplainable things ? Aren't they miracles ? I do not reject those because I myself have witnessed some. In my experience, miracles are really granted to the chosen, not everyone. Only the chosen ones can experience them, but cannot show to others.

¹⁰ The Gratitude Temple, near Caodai Temple in Tây Ninh, Việt Nam, which is temporarily used to worship Phật Mẫu (God the Mother). The Main Temple for Phật Mẫu will be built in the future.

¹¹ Prajna boat - the boat of Wisdom, a Buddhist metaphor for the ultimate human wisdom.

Anyway, you cannot find miracles; they themselves will find the way to you. Usually, if officially recognized by an established congregation, they are more credible.

To prove what Đức Hộ Pháp said, I would tell a true-to-life story. This priest John Doe prayed to Buddha for a sight of miracle so that he would practice Buddhism more enthusiastically. Then he practiced meditation and put one of his hands into the flame of a kerosene lamp, hoping the Buddha would prevent the flame from burning it. Consequently, he was rushed to the hospital and had that hand amputated ! Though his brave is respectable, he underestimated the widely known rule in the world: flesh is burnt in a fire. Additionally, he forgot another important thing: no Buddhist scriptures say you will be safe in such situations.

End

Consequently, I can sum up what I have had so far. First, as a Caodaist, I should try to work for the Caodaist community, observe the Caodaist moral laws and write papers to spread its philosophy without having any disputes with anyone, making any criticism, bringing someone to court or establishing a sect. If I were lucky enough to witness a miracle, I would never tell anyone about it because I do not need fame or praise.

Second, I will not immediately believe if someone shows off some miracle. It is necessary to examine to see if it is dark magic. My worldly thoughts do not allow me to know whether it is an enlightened person or a cheater. Beside, His Holiness Hộ

Pháp says there are no publicly seen ascensions. Joining Caodaism means you secretly try to change yourself for the better for your life without hoping for any miracles, noble titles, fame, or even enlightenment. Although such idea can offend some people, I think that exactly is religious practice.

Từ Chơn

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