

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

Page 3 • Thursday, June 13, 2002

Elvis: The man behind the crown

Texas A&M professor takes a look at the spiritual side of "The King"

By Denise Schoppe
THE BATTALION

ELVIS LIVES!

Elvis spotted at train station!

Elvis resides on closed second floor of Graceland mansion!

Stories about Elvis Presley continue to circulate 25 years after his death. Numerous people speculate that he faked his death in 1977. Others recall seeing him alive, be it a one-on-one relationship or in concert. Presley continues to be a staple figure in pop culture. Tourists from all around the world flock to Graceland, his home in Memphis, Tenn., in hopes of personally experiencing a little bit of what made Presley the icon he was, and continues to be.

David Rosen, professor of psychiatry and behavioral science and humanities in medicine at Texas A&M, had such an experience in 1989, the result of which is his new book, *The Tao of Elvis*.

"Elvis Presley was a very spiritual individual," Rosen said. "I would like people to realize that. He was very open to spirituality manifesting everywhere, in himself and outside."

After his experience at

Graceland,

Rosen proceeded to analyze

Presley's life

using Tao,

one of the

oldest religions in the

world.

Coming from

China, it

focuses on balance

between

opposites.

"We have to

make choices, and

ideally balance."

Rosen said.

"Tragically, I think Elvis

lost that battle."

Rosen's book plots out how

Taoist concepts apply to Presley's life

before

and after

his death.

It also illustrates how spiritual he was, revealing that Presley himself read Tao.

"When I found out that Elvis liked and read the *Tao Te Ching*,

I was amazed," Rosen said. "I started reading about him, and

doing research, and he struggled with opposites his whole life."

Over a span of 12 years, Rosen researched Presley by reading

books and interviewing people who knew him best,

including Presley's spiritual adviser, Larry Geller. Rosen also spent

time with Presley's dentist and his wife, Lester and Sterling

Hofman, both of which Presley considered to be like family. Rosen

said that Presley had "sort of adopted them as surrogate parents."

He also sought out Ann Finch, an old girlfriend of Presley's

whom had never been interviewed before. All described Presley as

a very spiritual man.

"She said he didn't drink alcohol or take drugs at that time, and

liked to play spiritual songs," Rosen said, in regard to comments

made by Finch. "He'd sit down at the piano and play". Finch said

that Presley's mother liked spiritual music.

Presley was close to his mother, and Rosen said that after she

died, he never stopped missing her.

"I think he, in many ways, saw going to heaven as being close

to his mother, and with his twin brother that died at birth," Rosen

said. "When his mother was alive, she always told him that he would live for both of them, and he may have. He accomplished so much."

Despite Presley's fame and achievements, he was often described as sad. In Rosen's book, he explains that Presley knew that very few saw past his public persona as "The King."

"People put this kind of archetype onto him, which I think is in a way unfair," Rosen said. "In a way, we had a hand in his death by increasing the pain that he felt, because he was very isolated."

Rosen does not describe himself as a Presley fanatic. He does not

collect memorabilia

associated with

Presley, but has

an appreciation

for the man

and his talents

that has

spanned

many years.

"As a boy,

like many

other young

people, I

remember

going to see

him in 1956,"

Rosen said.

"He came

along at a time

when we were a

very conformist

society. Post-war.

Mid-50s.

Segregated. You

could say an arid

culture."

Rosen

described

Presley as bring-

ing water to the

culture by breaking

down barriers in music

as well as in society.

"Elvis came along and

seemed good, but people

said he was bad," Rosen said.

"And as a boy I didn't think he

was bad. He initiated all these

movements, because he broke racial barriers

through music."

Presley, best known for his rock and roll hits, such as

"Heartbreak Hotel," "Teddy Bear" and "Hound Dog," only won

Grammy's for his recordings of Gospel music. Rosen's book

focuses on this spiritual passion.

"He felt God gave him his voice," Rosen said. "And God spoke

through him with his voice. He meditated for 30 minutes before

he recorded "How Great Thou Art" in order to get his ego out of

the way so that God could come through him."

Stories like that fill Rosen's new book. It is his seventh published

book, and was a long process that he worked on as a side project.

"I didn't do this as a primary activity," Rosen said. "It's just

sort of something I've worked on in addition to everything else."

He feels his book is one of a kind amid all the other books

written by Presley and the Tao religion. "I don't think anyone has

ever suggested that he had the propensity to balance his religion

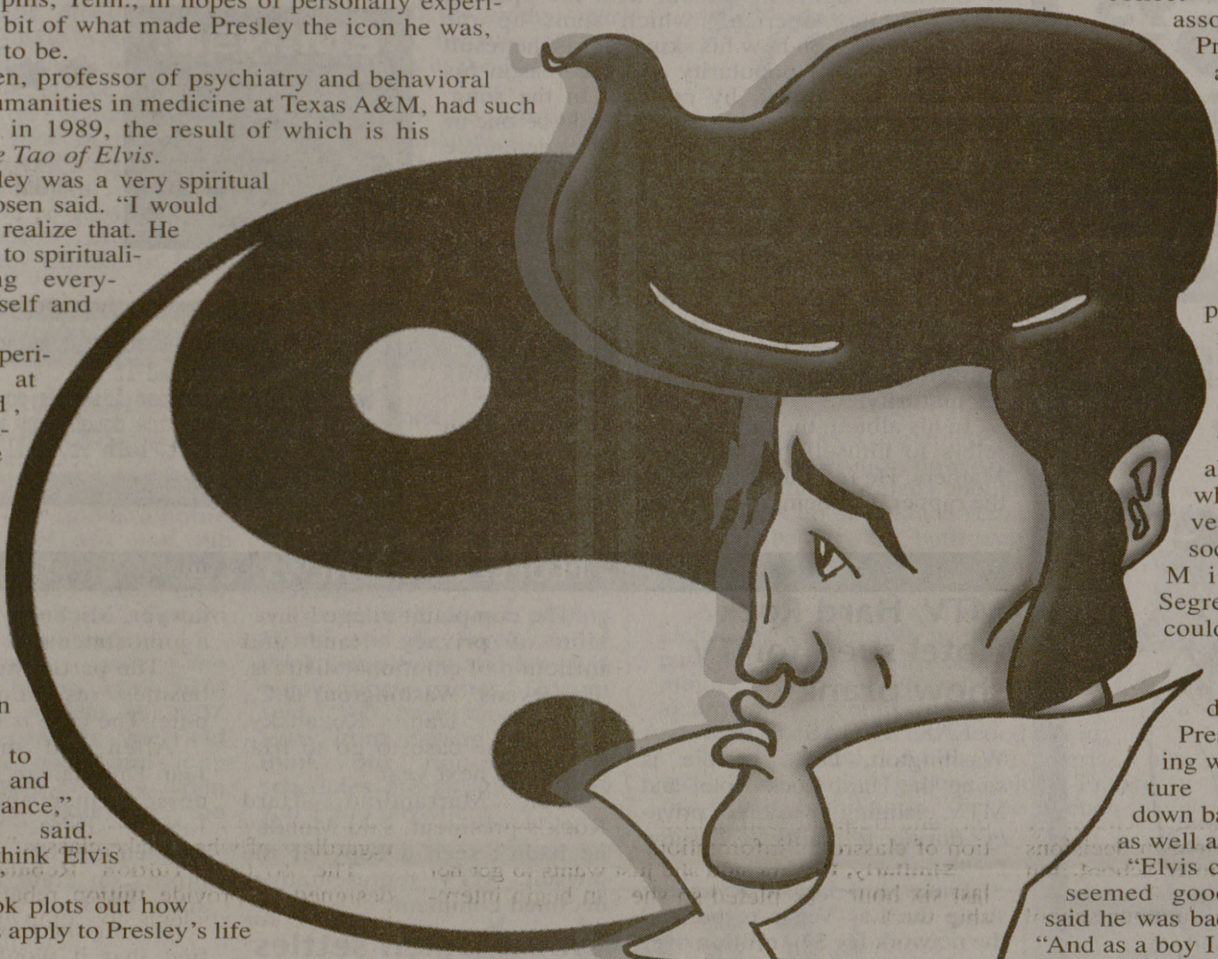
of origin with Eastern religion," Rosen said. "I think he spent his

whole life doing it. And people don't know that."

Rosen will be giving a presentation and signing copies of his

book, *The Tao of Elvis*, on Friday, June 14, from 7 - 9 p.m. at

Barnes & Noble in College Station.



ADRIAN CALCANEO • THE BATTALION



The Tao of Elvis
David Rosen, M.D.
Harcourt, Inc.

The Tao, an ancient Chinese religion, and Elvis Presley, "The King of Rock 'n' Roll," are not things one would generally expect to find in the same sentence, much less in the same book. However, David Rosen successfully ties the two together in his new book, *The Tao of Elvis*.

The book does not require the reader to be an expert on either Taoism or Presley to enjoy it. It's written in an easy to read and understandable format, consisting mostly of quotes gathered by Rosen over a period of 12 years.

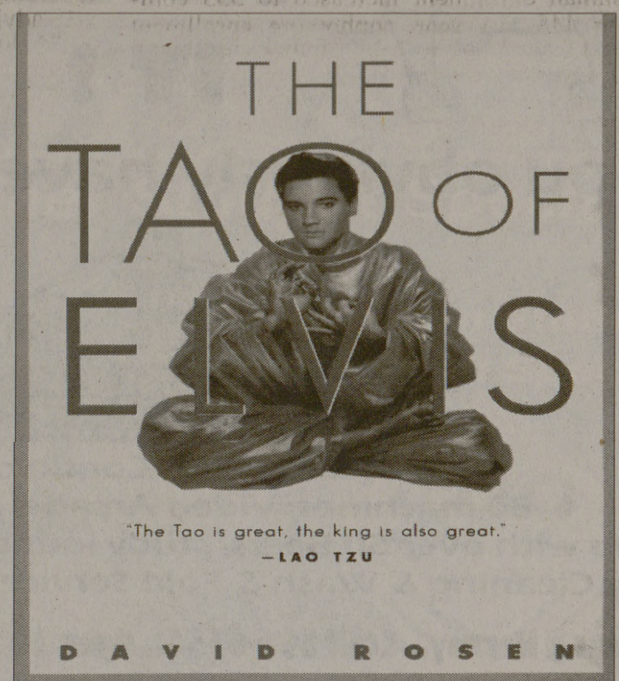
It gives readers knowledge of what Taoism is without confusing the audience. If the reader were to be reading it only to learn more about Tao, the use of Presley helps make the subject matter easy to understand and apply to the world around them.

In contrast, using Taoism to study Presley takes a unique look at this cultural icon. Instead of looking specifically at his fame and life in general, it focuses on Presley's spirit. His religious beliefs are flushed out using real life stories about him.

Much of the book is told using Presley and the original Taoist master Lao Tzu's own words. Each chapter involves a different element of Taoism, with final summaries of each point written by Rosen.

The Tao of Elvis is a fascinating look at both Presley and Taoism. Readers most likely will not only learn more about Presley as a man, but also about themselves as human beings.

—Denise Schoppe



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