

Cultivating Heavenly Dao

English translation of 養天 (Cultivating the Heavenly Way). Translated via the distill pipeline.

- [Cultivating Heavenly Dao](#)

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Cultivating Heavenly Dao is supremely precious, supremely exalted —
the foremost great matter between heaven and earth.

All Buddhas and myriad gods come to guard and sustain;
a thousand blessings and a hundred auspices descend upon the body.

Hosts of demons and multitudes of evil spirits recede;
a thousand calamities and a hundred misfortunes stay far away.

Transcending birth and death, freed from the turning wheel —
nine generations above and seven below rejoice with overflowing joy.

For a thousand ages and ten thousand years, never deluded or darkened;
in heaven and among mortals, free to wander at perfect ease.

Heavenly Dao is a priceless treasure —
who in the world knows to cherish it?

The multitudes receive the treasure and do not know its worth;
though they enter the gate of Dao, they bring no true heart.

Carelessly going through the motions, keeping up appearances;
getting by and getting along, registered in name alone.

Coming for the company and staying for the face of it,
muddled and confused, idling away the days.

Loving comfort, craving enjoyment,
indulging private desires, greedy without end.

Faults and errors — not a single one corrected;
gossiping endlessly, stirring up trouble.

For fame and profit they are most devoted;
the great matter of life and death, set aside.

Slaving as oxen and horses for their children and grandchildren,
the swiftness of impermanence concerns them not at all.

Burning incense and bowing — what use is it
when the body stands in the temple but the heart dwells in the world?

They speak of cultivation, yet their hearts are truly deluded;
worldly attachments entangle them beyond unraveling.

False sincerity and feigned devotion — they deceive only themselves;
the name without the substance harms none but their own selves.

If this auspicious season is missed,
you will wait another 120,000 years.

To receive the treasure and then lose it — the height of foolishness;
to cultivate without sincerity — the most pitiable thing.

Heaven possesses the virtue of loving life,
yet what can be done when you ruin your own prospects?

The ten vows taken upon entering Dao — left unfulfilled,
betraying the Elders' painstaking effort.

When the great catastrophe arrives — desolate and wretched —
wayward children are gathered and struck down without mercy.

At that hour, regret will come too late;
crying out to heaven and earth, all in vain.

Nine generations above and seven below fall together in ruin,
pressed forever beneath the dark mountain, unable to rise.

Cultivating Heavenly Dao means shedding the mortal shell and transforming to the bone — sweeping away all worldly ailments, restoring in everyone the original face of purity, radiance, and holiness: the innately true Buddha of one's own nature. Therefore in cultivating Heavenly Dao, one must be courageous in admitting faults, constantly reflecting and examining oneself. When a fault arises, correct it at once — and there is no fault. When an ailment appears, treat it at once — and the ailment is cured. Once worldly ailments are gone, the fruit of Dao takes form. But if one has an ailment and shuns the cure, that ailment will never heal, and in the end one brings ruin upon oneself.

Inconsistency between words and deeds is a great illness. The mouth brims with morality and righteousness, the speech sounds perfectly reasonable — yet one's every action and all manner of conduct run contrary to those very ideals, and one thinks nothing of it. One calls others disloyal

and unfilial, faithless and unreasonable — while one's own disloyalty, unfiliality, faithlessness, and unreason go unnoticed. One urges others to learn to bear loss, to endure and yield, to see through things and let go — while one absolutely cannot bear a loss, cannot endure or yield, cannot see through anything, cannot let go. Such inconsistency of words and deeds most easily corrupts the temple and causes people to look down upon Dao. For this sin of misleading oneself and misleading others, how could the magistrate of the underworld show leniency?

A narrow heart and small capacity, a scheming mind with many devices — this is a great illness. Unable to bear the slightest loss: a small loss feels like flesh cut from the body. Unable to hear a single word of criticism: one word of criticism may fuel resentment for months, even years. Unable to tolerate a single thing that does not go one's way: one frustration may weigh on the heart for ages. The mouth claims forgiveness while the face wears a smile; the heart harbors hatred while the face shows kindness — secretly harming others, stirring gossip and strife. When doing others a favor, one never forgets it, always hoping for repayment. When at fault, one pushes blame away completely; when there is credit, one fights for it. In doing good, one fears only that no one will notice; in performing meritorious deeds, one boasts everywhere.

Flattery brings joy; criticism brings anger. In one's own eyes, there is only oneself — trusting no one, suspicious of everything. Unable to tolerate anyone who differs. If one sees someone whose talent and wisdom surpass one's own, jealousy and resentment inevitably arise. Small capacity, small blessings; great capacity, great blessings. A narrow heart is a sea of suffering; a broad heart is paradise. A scheming mind of many devices is the way of ghosts and demons; a heart that is level and straight is the way of immortals and Buddhas. Since ancient times, all who attained Dao possessed broad hearts, great capacity, and a level, straightforward nature. The four modes of birth and the six realms of rebirth are the destination of those with narrow hearts, small capacity, and scheming minds.

Reckless greed and reckless seizing, selfishness and self-serving — this is a great illness. The eyes covet beauty and rare objects; the ears covet pleasant sounds and praise; the nose covets fragrance; the tongue covets fine food and the mouth's gratification; the body covets comfort and fine clothes; the mind covets stimulation, beauty, fame, profit, and sentimental love. In everything, calculating every last measure. In everything, seeking to gain advantage. Doing only what profits oneself; refusing what brings no personal benefit. The mind is full of self-calculation, never considering others. For the sake of personal gain, private desires, status, or family — even if it ruins the work of Dao, even if it ruins others' cultivation — it does not matter. One may even commit immoral acts, betray benevolence and righteousness, corrupt the temple, and drive others from the path — and do so without hesitation. The enormity of such transgression: pressed forever beneath the dark mountain, through ten thousand catastrophes unable to recover.

Karmic cause and effect — the principle of heaven is clear and manifest, not erring by a hair's breadth. If you take half a catty through greed, in the next life you must repay the full eight ounces. If you take one dollar through greed, in the next life you must return every dime. The Buddhas and Patriarchs of all generations relinquished body, mind, and dharma altogether — when even body, mind, and dharma are given up, how much more so material possessions? Since the beginning, there has never been an immortal or Buddha who harbored selfishness or greed.

Arrogance and self-importance is a great illness — regarding one's own talent and wisdom as a rank above the rest, one's own merit as surpassing all others. Toward those of lesser ability, one heaps contempt. When others err, one piles on scolding and ridicule. Yet in wisdom and foolishness alike, all share the same spiritual source: the spirit of the foolish is not diminished, the spirit of the wise is not increased. To use intelligence to look down upon the foolish is itself a failure to understand principle, a failure to embody the heart — and it runs contrary to Dao. The ancients taught: "Great wisdom appears as foolishness." Arrogance and self-importance, then, are not marks of the wise. Since ancient times, the great Buddhas and Patriarchs who attained Dao all held humility and compassion in their hearts. To rely on talent and lord over others, to claim credit and inflate oneself, to look down upon everything, to despise the Elders — all this is petty cleverness of the acquired nature, not the conduct of those who possess great wisdom.

Arrogance and self-importance make the marks of self and other weighty. When the marks of self and other are weighty, one cannot escape the hand of King Yama. Especially to look down upon everything and despise the Elders — this, heavenly principle cannot tolerate. Does the heart not consider: without the Elders' guidance and deliverance, where would you be today? To fail to repay the grace of their deliverance, forgetting the root and abandoning the source — no matter how great your merit or how high your talent, you cannot escape destruction in the catastrophe.

Not knowing how to reflect, and refusing to correct one's faults — this is a great illness. An ancient sage once said: "The sage finds many faults in himself; the worthy finds few; the fool finds none." The sage is not born a sage but is one who constantly reflects upon the self; the moment a fault arises, it is corrected. Over time, faults gradually diminish, until at last they approach none — and so every word and phrase, every gesture and movement, all accord with Dao. Among those who cultivate today, rarely does anyone reflect upon oneself. Faults of every kind are committed again and again. One knows only the wrongs of others and gossips at length, never recognizing one's own failings. Even when one does recognize them, one refuses to repent; instead, afraid that others might find out, one devises every means to cover them up. In this way faults grow ever more numerous, the stain sinks ever deeper — until finally there is no remedy, and one is pressed forever into the six realms of rebirth.

A restless heart and agitated temperament is a great illness. When the heart is restless, the power of concentration and the power of endurance are weak; one is most easily swayed by external circumstances, the heart turning wherever conditions lead. Seeing beauty and profit, the heart grows covetous. Seeing favor and praise, one is elated. Seeing adversity and slander, one is enraged. Gaining, one delights; losing, one grieves. When the temperament is agitated, the fire of anger is easily stirred. A mountainside full of green growth — one spark can burn it all away. Merit as vast as heaven — one flash of anger born from ignorance can destroy it utterly. This is what is called "fire burning the forest of merit." In the temple, nothing is more dangerous than reckless anger. Reckless anger most easily invites disaster: ruining the work of Dao, offending those in the Dao family, undermining cultivation — the transgression is not light. If a flash of anger born from ignorance erupts and one betrays the teacher and destroys the lineage, despises the Elders, corrupts the temple, and drives others from their cultivation — no matter how great your merit, you cannot escape the strike of the five thunderbolts.

When the heart is level and the temperament smooth, words forgotten and thoughts stilled, unmoved and undeluded by the world outside — immortals and Buddhas walk with you. When the heart is restless and the temperament agitated, words many and thoughts scattered, the heart shifting with every passing condition — demons cling to you on every side.

Stubborn delusion and failure to awaken, clinging rigidly and refusing to be transformed — this is a great illness. One takes one's own opinion as the only opinion, one's own view as the only view, one's own method as the only method. Whatever one thinks is how things must be; whatever one considers right is right. The opinions and approaches of others are entirely rejected. Advice goes unheard; rigidity remains unbroken. Even when one clearly knows that one's opinions, views, and methods are wrong, one refuses to admit it — stubbornly compounding error upon error, wrong to the very end. One clearly knows that slaving for children and grandchildren is wasted effort — yet cannot let go. One clearly knows that all bonds of love and affection end in emptiness — yet cannot relinquish them. One clearly knows that chasing fame and profit drains the spirit and invites disaster — yet cannot put them down. One clearly knows that gossip easily becomes a transgression and stirs up conflict — yet cannot stop; the mouth itches unbearably. One clearly knows that holding grudges brings the deepest pain — yet cannot forget; that indignation will not be swallowed. One clearly knows that flaring into anger offends others and ruins what matters — yet cannot restrain the impulse, cannot break the habit.

The Patriarch once said: "Do not fear being lost — only fear being lost for long. Do not fear being lost for long — only fear clinging to delusion." To cling to delusion admits no remedy — one sinks forever into the abyss of the sea of suffering.

Weak resolve and lack of perseverance is a great illness. Lao Mu has established trial-grounds in every corner of the world. Everyone must be tested, but the trials are different for each. Some are tried through wine and lust, some through fame and profit, some through temper, some through romantic love, some through gossip and strife, some through illness and affliction, some through career, some through family — and so forth, beyond enumeration. Among these trials, some come as smooth sailing, some as upheaval and hardship. Some come as success and prosperity, some as failure and decline.

Why does Lao Mu send these trials? Jade uncarved cannot become a vessel; iron unhammered cannot become steel. Without trials, how can it be known who truly cultivates and who merely pretends? Without trials, how can the virtuous be distinguished from the wicked? Without trials, how can karmic debts accumulated over tens of thousands of years be dissolved? Without trials, how can the 3,600 sages and 48,000 worthies be chosen? Without trials, how can the seed-people for the next cosmic era be identified? Without trials, how can it be determined who is to be pressed beneath the dark mountain, reborn wearing fur and bearing horns, cycling through the six realms?

This is a great reckoning for all things between heaven and earth. Those who do not cultivate, or who cultivate falsely, are tested until they become utterly vicious — tyrannical, committing every evil, exhausting all conscience, losing virtue and ruining Dao. True cultivators are tested with destitution and hardship, beset by illness and affliction, nothing going well, suffering slander and mockery — yet their Dao-heart never wavers. Poverty? Let it come. Hardship? Let it come. Slander?

Let it come. Mockery? Let it come. Illness? Let it come. Death? Let it come. Having weathered every demon and ten thousand trials, they neither blame heaven nor resent others, neither lose resolve nor retreat from the path.

In cultivating Heavenly Dao, one must not crave delicacies for the mouth, eye-catching finery for the body, luxury for the home, or the comfort of private carriages. In all things, choose what is simple, clean, plain, and practical. Moreover, in cultivating Heavenly Dao: relinquish fame and profit, sever sentimental bonds. Eradicate temper, eliminate gossip. Learn to accept loss, learn to endure and yield. Suffer injustice and grievance without defending yourself; suffer slander and mockery without anger. Accept all labor without complaint; give the good to others, bear the hardship yourself. In sum, in cultivating Heavenly Dao there can be no self, no selfishness. Toward all worldly affairs, one must be without interest and without craving — stepping back, and back again, plain and unremarkable, like a great fool.

Beyond all this, cultivating Heavenly Dao requires accepting every manner of trial. If one's resolve is not strong enough, if perseverance is lacking — if the Dao-heart cannot remain forever firm, constant from first to last — then one abandons the path midway, dragged down by karmic debts, plunging once more into the sea of suffering, never to rise again, cycling through rebirth for ten thousand lifetimes with no transcendence.

When toward all worldly affairs one is without interest and without craving, stepping back and back again, plain and unremarkable — then and only then does the worldly heart finally die. Then and only then has one shed the mortal shell. Then and only then does the fruit of Dao begin to form. How great the fruit of Dao becomes depends upon how much we perform meritorious deeds and fulfill our vows. The more we give, the more we fulfill, the greater the fruit.

If worldly ailments are not removed, the fruit of Dao will be riddled with leakage. Worldly ailments are like worms; the fruit of Dao is like a piece of fruit. No matter how large the fruit, if worms are inside it, it has little value. Though the fruit be small, if no worms are within, it retains its worth. If the fruit is large and free of worms, its value is great indeed. The very first step in cultivating Heavenly Dao, then, is to remove worldly ailments — for the purpose is to cultivate a fruit of Dao free of all leakage.

Heavenly Mother's grace is vast beyond measure — know this well:
she sent down Heavenly Dao to save all primal souls.

Miss this Great Deliverance,
and you will be pressed into the dark mountain for one cosmic cycle.

Nine generations above and seven below gaze with longing —
they pray you will not waste this precious chance.

Having received the One, you need only truly cultivate;
truly cultivate, and you truly escape birth and death.

Never go through the motions with careless pretense —
to deceive others and the teacher is in truth to deceive yourself.

Cleverness turns back and undoes the clever;
worldly ailments left unremoved are the root of birth and death.

Practice earnestly — do not speak in empty words;
when words and deeds are one, Dao accomplishes itself.

A narrow heart and small capacity is not the heart of a Buddha;
a scheming mind of many devices is the way of ghosts and demons.

Selfishness and self-serving run contrary to Dao;
reckless greed and reckless seizing lead surely to rebirth.

Humility and compassion are the foundation of cultivation;
arrogance and self-importance carry a first-degree transgression.

Failing to reflect, delusion compounds delusion;
refusing to correct one's faults harms none but oneself.

A level heart and smooth temperament invite good fortune;
a restless heart and agitated temperament invite calamity.

Flowing freely and responding to all things is the practice of Buddhas and Patriarchs;
clinging to delusion and failing to awaken admits no remedy.

When resolve is not constant, one falls into the sea of suffering;
lacking perseverance, Dao is difficult to achieve.

Truly cultivate, truly act — immortals and Buddhas will aid you;
the fruit of Dao perfected, you repay Heavenly Mother's grace.