

2. The Meaning of Seeking Dao

What does it mean to seek Dao? To seek is to pursue — to pursue and understand what this Dao truly is, where its source and origin lie, what its essential nature and true substance are, whether it possesses form and appearance, where within our own bodies it resides, what bearing it has upon humanity and all beings, how precious it is, how profound and subtle. One must earnestly and thoroughly pursue this understanding until everything becomes clear. Only then can one seek Dao with a sincere heart, hold firm faith in Dao, cultivate Dao with proper method, practice Dao with constancy — and the attainment of Dao will naturally become something one may anticipate with certainty.

Mencius said: "Benevolence is the heart of a person. Righteousness is the path of a person. To abandon that path and not walk it, to let one's heart loose and not know to seek it — how lamentable! People, when their chickens and dogs are lost, know to seek them; when their heart is lost, they do not know to seek it. The way of learning is nothing other than seeking the heart that has been let loose."

Seeking Dao is precisely this: to find and recover the lost Heavenly Principle and innate conscience.

The *Great Learning* says: "When things are investigated, knowledge is extended; when knowledge is extended, thoughts become sincere; when thoughts are sincere, the heart is rectified; when the heart is rectified, the person is cultivated." This tells us that one must first investigate things and extend knowledge; only then can sincerity of thought and rectification of heart emerge. With thoughts sincere and heart rectified, only then can one cultivate the person and cultivate Dao. This is the testimony left by the sages. From this it is clear: to cultivate Dao, one must first seek Dao — one must first know where to rest.

A verse:

“ With firm faith and diligent practice, Dao can be illumined;
once illumined, knowing where to rest, the heart is rectified, the thoughts
sincere.
With persevering will and mindful devotion, the Buddha's light shines forth;
through sincere thought and reverent cultivation, one becomes a worthy or a
sage.

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