

Chapter 15: Subduing Body and Mind

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The mind is the sovereign ruler of the myriad spirits within the human body. The body is the instrument through which a person acts in life. Every movement of the body is governed by the mind's direction; every expression of the mind depends on the body to give it form. The Buddha said: "The myriad phenomena arise from the mind; the myriad phenomena are extinguished by the mind."

The movement and stillness of the mind are truly wondrous and unfathomable. Yet they do not go beyond two kinds of thought: the deviant and the upright. The upright accords with principle; the deviant drifts into desire. People of the world constantly lose their uprightness and drift into deviance; they are blind to principle and deluded by desire. The harm that deviant desires inflict on people is truly terrifying. In the Buddhist tradition we find: "Tether the monkey of the mind, lock the horse of thought." "Sweep away the three minds, cast off the four marks." In the Confucian tradition we find: "Examine yourself three times daily; restrain your mind with the four do-nots." All of these demonstrate that people must abandon the deviant and return to the upright, restrain desire and return to principle.

Now I shall explain the three minds and four marks, and the three examinations and four restraints, simply and by analogy, to elucidate the fundamental meaning of subduing body and mind.

The three minds are the minds of the past, the future, and the present — none of which should be harbored. The four marks: to be attached to form is called a mark.

First, whenever one schemes for one's own clothing and food, or schemes on behalf of one's children, bustling about all day long, muddled in fame and profit, chasing waves and forgetting to return, bound and unable to free oneself — this is called the mark of self.

Second, seeing others with power and influence, one endlessly seeks to attach oneself to them; seeing others who are weak, one endlessly despises and loathes them. Envying others for what they have, being stingy when others ask for help — this is called the mark of others.

Third, clinging to form, sensation, perception, and volition, hoping and unscrupulously seeking, speaking uprightly but acting deviously, professing goodness with the mouth while harboring evil in the mind — this is called the mark of sentient beings.

Fourth, kneeling in prayer and worship, seeking blessings and rewards in the present life. Burning talismans and refining elixirs, hoping for longevity and immortality — this is called the mark of the long-lived one.

The three examinations:

First, "In counseling others, have I been disloyal?" In terms of cultivating Dao, this means: In propagating Heaven's teachings on its behalf and saving sentient beings, have you fulfilled your responsibility?

Second, "In dealings with friends, have I been untrustworthy?" This means: in connecting those above to those below, in every word and action, has your own mind been free of deception and falsehood? Have you kept your word?

Third, "Have I failed to practice what was transmitted to me?" This means: the teachings of the heart transmitted by your teacher, the words and instructions your teacher gave you in daily life, the revelations conveyed by the immortals and Buddhas of all the heavens, and the teachings that the various Elders spoke to you — have you contemplated and penetrated them? Have you put them into practice?

The four restraints:

First, "Do not look at what is contrary to propriety." This means: since we cultivate the true Dao, we must recognize true principle and see through all appearances of form. Keep the mind always within the Mysterious Pass. Do not let it race outward. Then naturally it will not be harmed.

Second, "Do not speak what is contrary to propriety." This means: do not discuss the rights and wrongs of others, and naturally you will not bear the transgression of the mouth.

Third, "Do not listen to what is contrary to propriety." This means: do not rashly listen to others' words and let the mind give rise to resentment. A single deviation in thought, and dangers spring up in profusion.

Fourth, "Do not act in a way contrary to propriety." This means: in one's conduct, do not act rashly or recklessly. One must examine and inspect oneself within one's own mind, asking whether it accords with propriety, so as to avoid committing errors and bearing the burden personally.

All of the analogies above serve as warnings to us cultivators of Dao that we must constantly subdue body and mind. Once a person has fallen into the acquired realm, one is everywhere surrounded by sensory desires. The moment body and mind stir, it is either upright or deviant. If deviant, one sinks into indulgence and lingers there, and the future becomes perilous. The harm done by the mind is especially terrifying: it constantly gives rise to illusions, and the slightest external stimulus makes it most easily agitated. Therefore the Buddha said: "Demons arise from the mind; trials are self-invited." If one does not subdue body and mind, restraining the source of disorder, how can cultivation of Dao succeed?

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