

# Chapter 6: Is There a Distinction Between the Heavenly Dao and the Human Way?

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The Heavenly Dao and the Human Way are originally without any distinction whatsoever. It is only because people's vision differs — in how far it reaches and how much it encompasses — that the two appear separate.

In terms of the Human Way: being filial to parents, friendly toward siblings, trustworthy with friends, and respectful toward teachers and elders — only then can one be considered to have fulfilled it. But people's circumstances vary greatly. If one has an upright father, a loving brother, a principled friend, and a teacher of noble character, then all share the same aspiration and walk in accord with Dao, each fulfilling their role, joyfully treading the great way of human relationships.

But what if the father is like Gu Sou, the brother like Guan and Cai, the friend like Sun Bin and Pang Juan, the teacher like Shen Bao? Must one not weigh the important against the trivial, distinguish right from wrong? Can one attend only to the lesser part for the moment and leave behind a foul reputation for ten thousand generations?

Especially now, when we personally encounter the extraordinary turning-point that comes once in sixty thousand years. If one has no far-reaching aspiration and seeks only to keep worldly relationships smooth, then once the Heavenly timing arrives and one's fruition is determined according to merit — those who nourished only the lesser part, whose name falls at the bottom of the list, will they not find their regret beyond all remedy?

Let me cite anecdotes of the ancient sages to verify this. Emperor Shun married without informing his hostile father. The Duke of Zhou executed one brother and punished another. When Patriarch Qiu Chuji's attachment lingered, Ma Danyang separated their meditation cushions, and each went their own way. None of these clung to the lesser convention; all nurtured the greater principle.

Each of you cultivates Dao in different circumstances. At this moment a thousand-catty weight hangs by a single hair — the turning point between ascent and descent. You must recognize your true aim clearly. Do not attend to the lesser conventions of worldly sentiment and thereby ruin the work of ten thousand generations.

Consider Shakyamuni Buddha, who left home at nineteen, abandoning his parents without looking back. On the surface this may seem unfilial, but in the end he became the founder of Buddhism, bringing glory to his name and honor to his parents, and together they returned to the heavenly realm. The Ancient Buddha of the South Sea defied her parents to pursue cultivation. She attained the fruition of the Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Buddha. Her parents benefited from her radiance, and her ancestors ascended together.

Seen from this perspective, not one among the ancient sages and worthies ever kept wife, friends, children, and companions close, the whole family gathered together, never departing from the yoke of attachment and the shackles of affection, entangled in love and sentiment — and yet attained fruition and transcended birth and death.

In ancient times, Gun labored at flood control without success, and Shun executed him at Mount Yu. Gun's son Yu did not avenge his father but instead carried on his father's mission and completed the work of taming the waters. Though away for eight years, passing his own door three times without entering, he ultimately became one of the Three Sovereign Officials.

Furthermore, when Jesus was preaching to the crowd, his mother brought his siblings to find him, wanting to speak with him. When someone told Jesus, he answered: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers and sisters?" And pointing to the listeners he said: "Look! Whoever does the will of my Heavenly Father — they are my brothers and sisters; they are my mother!" Jesus ultimately became the founder of Christianity.

Since all these departed sages cultivated and attained the true fruition, could their parents and ancestors possibly fail to transcend birth and death?

Therefore the old saying goes: "Attending carefully to the end of life and honoring distant ancestors — this is true filial piety. Serving one's parents in life with propriety — this is obedience. If you consider merely supporting your parents to be the fullness of filial duty, when they have passed and face the sorrows of the underworld, what share of that burden can the child bear?"

The Classic of Filial Piety says: "The body — every hair and patch of skin — is received from one's parents; one dares not damage or injure it: this is the beginning of filial piety. Establishing oneself, practicing Dao, and making one's name known to later generations, thereby bringing glory to one's parents: this is the fulfillment of filial piety."

From this we can see that the Heavenly Dao and the Human Way are deeply interconnected. Some fulfill the Human Way and thereby accord with the Heavenly Dao; others cultivate the Heavenly Dao and in doing so implicitly fulfill the Human Way. In the end, whether Heavenly Dao or Human Way, what accords with principle is right, and what violates principle is wrong.

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