Torch of Enlightenment

- Chapter 1: What is Dao?
- Chapter 2: Dao and Human Beings
- Chapter 3: The Meaning of Receiving Dao
- Chapter 4: The Story of How Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan Received Dao
- Chapter 5: Why Dao Is Commonly Descended to This World
- Chapter 6: The Preciousness of Dao
- Chapter 7: The Meaning of Life, Birth, Aging, Sickness, and Death
- Chapter 8: The True Self and the False Self
- Chapter 9: The Story of the Kew Chow Master and Bai
- Chapter 10: Why a Kind Person Still Needs to Receive Dao
- Chapter 11: Human Nature
- Chapter 12: We See What We Have Within

Chapter 1: What is Dao?

There is no doubt that we are among the most fortunate group of people in the world today. Why is this? Because we have effortlessly received Dao, the most precious gift in the universe. Dao is the ultimate truth that the saints and sages of the past searched for. Let us remember the day we received Dao. For a few hours, we moved out of the chaotic world into the peaceful and harmonious environment of the Dao Temple. For many of us, as we knelt on the kneeling box while the Dien Chuan Shr unlocked our Heavenly Gate, the feelings we experienced were indescribable. There is a Chinese saying:

> “ Only the person who drinks the water can tell how warm or cool it is.

It is the same with receiving Dao. What we received and experienced in the Dao ceremony cannot be communicated in words. After the ceremony, as we listened to the explanation of the three treasures, the essence of the truth gradually revealed itself to us.

The saints and sages of the past received Dao just as we did. The only difference is that they were able to achieve enlightenment through receiving Dao and could therefore begin immediately to save other people and sentient beings. For us it is different. Receiving Dao is just the beginning of cultivation. We need to make an effort to learn and cultivate, otherwise the joy and awe we experienced on the day of the Dao ceremony will fade as time goes by. It would be a great pity for us to waste such a priceless treasure by not putting it to use or not realizing the vast potential we now have within us.

There are many reasons why cultivators in the past were able to reach enlightenment immediately after they received Dao. One of the factors is that, in the past, people had to cultivate for a long time before they could receive Dao. Theirs was a much more difficult path, requiring great dedication, strength and faith. We are very fortunate to be able to receive Dao in such an easy, comfortable way. But this in itself can be a pitfall. Human beings have a tendency to devalue things that come too easily, and so we often fail to cherish the precious gift that has been bestowed upon us. That is why it is so important for us to extend our understanding of Dao and explore its essence further. After all, it takes very little effort compared to the hardships and trials of earlier cultivators. If we don't take advantage of the opportunity to cultivate further, the doubts and problems which arise may begin to obscure the door of our wisdom.

To provide opportunities for us to learn together, Dao Temples provide seminars, talks and various classes. If we are prepared to spend some time participating in these activities, our understanding of the truth will grow and we will be able to fully appreciate the preciousness of the Dao we have received.

In Chapter 25 of the Dao De Jing, Lao Zi tried to explain the origin and nature of Dao. He said:

> There is something that was mysteriously formed.
>
> It was born before the creation of heaven and earth.
>
> It is silent and formless, independent and immutable, constantly moving and always harmonious.
>
> It is the mother of all the things in the universe.
>
> I do not know its name, so I have simply called it Dao.

Lao Zi gave a very detailed description of Dao, but the essence of Dao is beyond the power of words to define. That is what Lao Zi meant when he said:

> The Dao that can be said is not the eternal Dao; the name that can be named is not the eternal name.

Other saints and sages also attempted to define and describe the essence of Dao and although their words cannot convey that essence directly, they can give us some guidance and a greater understanding of the truth. Let's look more closely at Lao Zi's description of Dao.

There is something that was mysteriously formed.

The "something" in this statement refers to Dao. "Mysteriously formed" simply means that no one knows how it came into being. All things in the universe have a source. Everything must be created or born. The essence of Dao, however, has no source, because it is itself the source of all things. Dao is not created; it is that which creates.

It was born before the creation of heaven and earth.

Since Dao was not created, it must have been in existence before heaven and earth were formed. In other words, Dao is the essence that gave birth to heaven and earth.

It is silent and formless.

Dao is not a substance or a kind of material. It has no form and makes no sound, so it cannot be seen, heard or grasped through any of our senses.

Independent and immutable.

Dao is self-sustaining. It does not need to rely on anything for its existence. Being immutable means that Dao does not undergo change; it is constant, imperishable and therefore eternal.

Moves constantly and harmoniously.

Dao works ceaselessly. It governs and sustains all things in a harmonious manner so that there is no danger or conflict. As the source and underlying condition of all things, nothing can maintain its existence without Dao. This quality of consistency reflects the great benevolence of the Universe, which works unconditionally and never rests.

It is the mother of all things.

The title of Mother refers to the fact that Dao gave birth to all things. Sometimes we talk about Dao in terms of Mother Nature, who creates and nurtures the things of this world. Since Dao is our source and origin, we are children of the Universe.

I do not know its name.

Because it is impossible to convey the nature of Dao in words, Lao Zi said, "I don't know what it's called."

So, I simply call it Dao.

Although Lao Zi knew that a word could never fully represent Dao, he realized that he would have to give it a name so that he could teach people about it and guide them in their search for spiritual truth. He used the Chinese Dao to represent this essence. Dao simply means "the way, or path." By showing us that Dao is beyond words, and yet still giving it a name, Lao Zi demonstrates both the limitations and the necessity of language. He also shows great compassion in his effort to help us understand the essence of Dao without becoming attached to the forms of representation.

From Lao Zi's description of Dao, we can note the following points:

1. Dao is the source of all things.
2. Dao is the principle that governs all things.
3. Dao is the path that leads us back to our origin.

1. Dao is the source of all things.

As Lao Zi pointed out, Dao existed before the creation of heaven and earth. All living things are created by heaven and earth, and heaven and earth have their origin in Dao. Thus Dao is the mother of all things in the universe. We need to understand that all substances and physical forms come from heaven. Although science and technology have made great advances in recent decades, there is still no scientist who can create life. The things we see around us: the seeds, grasses, trees and flowers, all manifest the essence of growth and the vitality of life. People cannot manufacture this vitality and capacity for growth. It was not possible in the past; it is not possible now, and it will not be possible in the future. This is because the essence of life comes from heaven. Chinese people refer to this as the heavenly essence, while in the west it is more commonly called Mother Nature.

There is a Chinese proverb that says:

> “ Heaven gives birth to us and we are nurtured by the Earth.

It is easy for us to understand that the Earth nurtures us because all the food we eat and the water we drink, in fact all the things we need for our physical survival, come to us directly from the Earth. But why do we say that Heaven gives birth to us? Surely it is our parents who are responsible for us being born? Our parents give birth to our physical body, but the body needs to have the essence that animates it. This essence comes to us from heaven. It is the essence of life without which we cannot exist as living beings.

Seen from the point of view of nature, Dao can be described as the life force that is within all things. In human terms, God has given us life. In the Dao environment, when we speak of God or Heavenly Mother, we are using personalized terminologies for Dao. For us to deviate from the principles of Dao is analogous to children losing their parents and therefore their sense of direction. Put in another way, we all have a heavenly essence within us and this essence comes from our Heavenly Mother. Now, trapped in the karmic cycle of death and rebirth, we are separated from our Heavenly Mother. Receiving Dao reawakens the Heavenly essence within us, while our cultivation helps us to manifest it so that we can ultimately return to our origin.

2. Dao is the principle that governs all things.

In its active aspect, Dao is the law or principle that regulates and governs all phenomena. In the realm of heaven, Dao is the heavenly principle that governs all celestial bodies such as the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars. This heavenly principle also regulates the seasons and the weather patterns of our planet.

Here on earth, Dao is the principle that underlies the geological and geographical structure of the planet, activates the process of evolution and creates sentient life. The phenomena of the physical world all exist in accordance with physical laws. These laws existed long before people discovered them and classified them into fields of study such as physics, chemistry, geology, etc. When we understand the basic, underlying nature of physical phenomena, we can live and work with them more effectively.

Dao is the principle that governs us as humans, too. When we consult our conscience, we are aligning ourselves with this principle. This makes it possible for us to fulfill our role as the link between heaven and earth, and caretaker of all sentient beings.

From Lao Zi's description, we know that Dao is independent and immutable, and that it moves ceaselessly without creating conflict or danger. If all things move in accordance with Dao, their paths will be normal, smooth and harmonious. There will be no danger or trouble. On the other hand, if things go in opposition to the principle of Dao, they become abnormal and chaotic. Dao is the basic principle that all things must abide by. If we live by this principle and always act in accordance with it, we will become great beings between heaven and earth. There is a proverb that says:

> “ Acting in accordance with Heaven brings life.
>
> Acting against Heaven can only lead to destruction.

Heaven and earth abide by the principle of Dao and so they can nurture all things. As human beings who stand between heaven and earth, we have great potential. If we uphold our spiritual principles and work to balance the expression of heaven and earth, we can create a beautiful and harmonious environment. This is the true and ultimate goal of the human race. It is also the original nature of the realm we live in.

Unfortunately, since the decline of humankind, harmony has degenerated into opposition. We have deviated from the path of Dao and, as a consequence, our pure inner nature is contaminated with greed, violence and ignorance. The once harmonious state of heaven and earth has been shattered by the unrighteous behavior that is so common in the present world.

We have now received Dao and found the key to our true self and our inner wisdom. If we cultivate ourselves to remove the obstacles to express this essence of Dao within us, and act in accordance with it, we can surely resolve the negativity in our lives and create a harmonious world.

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3. Dao is the path to Heaven for lost souls.

We said earlier that the essence of growth that allows us to be born as living beings is bestowed on us by Heaven. This means that Heaven is where we truly originate. In the Dao environment we

refer to Heaven as *Wu Ji Li Tien*, the "Heaven of Truth," our home, or origin. Since this is where we came from, it is only natural that this is where we should return. But since the downfall of humankind, the pathway to Heaven has been obscured. For the same reason, the gates of Hell were opened. What this means in terms of human existence is that we are caught on the treadmill of death and rebirth, the karmic cycle of suffering, unable to return to the Heaven that is our true home. When we receive Dao, the gateway to Heaven is unlocked. Jesus Christ once said:

> Enter through the Narrow Gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.
>
> But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.
>
> — *Matthew 7:13*

We know now that we originate in Heaven and ought to return there, but since the downfall of humankind the gateway to Heaven has been obscured by our physical desires. These desires are related to the senses. We desire what the eye sees, what the ears hear, what the nose smells and what the mouth can eat. All of these desires confuse our spiritual heart. Because the world around us offers so many temptations, these four side-gates (the eyes, ears, nose and mouth) are wide open. They are the gates through which we seek physical pleasure, indulge our desires and often act irresponsibly. They are wide open and the path they lead to is easy to walk on. As Jesus said, "wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction." It is not difficult to follow the selfish path of the senses and, as Jesus said, many in the world choose this way.

If we use the gates of the senses and let them stand wide open, they will be the gates that our spirit leaves by, and that too, will be a path of destruction as we continue the cycle of suffering through one incarnation after another.

When we receive Dao our "narrow gate," which we also know as the Heavenly Gate, is opened. This gate leads to the path of heavenly truth. When we begin to act in accordance with heavenly principles, we are likely to find ourselves confronted with all kinds of obstructions. But as long as we persevere on our path of cultivation, we will be able to overcome all obstacles. Most importantly, just as a person must take care when walking on a narrow path, we need to be cautious in our actions. Remember, the road to eternity is narrow, and in all our history, few have lived in accordance with heavenly principles. That is what Jesus meant when he said that those who find it are few.

Now that we have received Dao and our narrow gate is opened, we can cultivate further and live in accordance with our true nature. If we can do this, then, when the time comes for us to depart from this world, our soul will naturally leave through the gate that leads us home. Dao is the path, the way that leads us back to our origin, the Heaven of Truth.

Conclusion

The material that has been presented here is still very superficial, and as Lao Zi said, words are no substitute for the real thing. We know that Dao is the ultimate treasure in the universe. It is an intangible, indescribable essence, which has the capacity to create all things. Many texts mention Dao and many wise teachers in the past have taught us ways to let this essence govern our lives. However, when all is said and done, the only way to truly understand Dao is to experience it in our own heart. We are so fortunate to have received Dao. Now it is time to explore it further.

The essence of Truth will become clearer as we work towards uncovering it. The clearer it becomes, the more it helps us in our cultivation. So the way to really understand the essence of Dao is to cultivate it and act according to its principles in our everyday lives.

Chapter 2: Dao and Human Beings

Although we have begun to study the essence of Dao, we may still find that there are some aspects that are difficult to comprehend or relate to our own lives and paths of cultivation. This chapter will focus on the subject of the relationship between Dao and humankind.

In Confucius's *Doctrine of the Mean (Proper Way)* we can read that:

> “What we call Dao cannot be separated from anything at any time.
>
> If it could be separated from anything, it would not be the true Dao.

This quotation can help us to clarify the nature of Dao and its relationship to us.

From our position as human beings, let us contemplate for a moment. What is the thing that constitutes us as humans? What is it that we cannot lose without losing our humanity? What, in effect, is our essential element? There are two main aspects to consider.

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1. In terms of its fundamental essence

> “Dao is the soul, the inner nature. If the soul is present, the person will live. If the soul departs, the person will die.

In essence, Dao is our true nature, our soul or spirit. The soul is the key to human life. It alone is indispensable. Other things like food, sleep, work and even breath sustain life, but we can be without them for various lengths of time and still continue as living human beings. The only thing that cannot leave our body for even a short period of time is our soul. As soon as the soul leaves the body, the body becomes a corpse. It is only when a person has a human body and a human soul that they can be considered complete.

Dao is the thing most closely connected to human existence. Dao is the soul, the owner of the body, while the body functions as a tool for the soul. It is the essence of Dao that infuses flesh with life and animates our body, enabling it to see, hear, talk and walk. If the soul's tool is damaged,

that is, if the body becomes ill or hurt so severely that the tool is irreparable and no longer usable, then the soul is forced to depart. This is simply the death of the body. The saints and sages, in their great wisdom, understood this principle clearly. They made full use of their body, their soul's tool, while it was available to them and used it to save the world and all people, and to bring joy and peace to us all. As a result, the spiritual achievement was truly glorious. Their bodies, like all bodies, eventually perished, but their virtue still shines in the universe. In this world, their contribution remains alive in our hearts and people everywhere remember them with reverence. At a spiritual level, they were able to attain enlightenment and thus they live on in freedom and heavenly harmony. These people are spoken of as having “accomplished Dao in heaven while leaving a virtuous name in the world.”

Lay beings, on the other hand, don't understand the importance of the spiritual essence and the transient nature of the physical body. They very easily fall into the trap of regarding the body as all-important, and spend their entire lives chasing worldly gain and pleasures. In this way they are led to jeopardize their integrity and conscience and commit unrighteous acts and illicit deeds. At the end of their lives, their bodies will perish along with all the transient pleasures and wealth they accumulated during their lives. At that moment, not only does the person depart from the world empty handed, with all the efforts of a lifetime wasted, but the soul must also face up to judgment and the consequences of its own karma. Such a soul remains trapped in the pain and suffering of the reincarnation cycle. This is a very different outcome from the one described for the saints and sages.

We have already received Dao and have had our Heavenly Gate pointed out by the Dien Chuan Shr. It is essential for us now to realize that the soul is real and the body only a temporary and very limited part of us. The relationship between the body and soul is rather like that between a master and a servant. In the case of a wise person, the master directs the servant well, so that life is a fulfilling and meaningful experience. When this is achieved we are able to elevate ourselves and, at the same time, help others by sharing the essence of Dao with them and making the world a more harmonious place. We need to shed the selfish desires of our body and nurture our spirit, and at the same time we can use this body as a tool to work for others and share the essence of Dao with them. By doing this we can establish our virtues and merits, making use of the impermanent body to cultivate the eternal spirit, putting the physical body to its most valuable and meaningful use. When the time comes for the tool to perish, the true nature can depart as a liberated soul, unencumbered by worldly attachments, living as free and glorious an existence as the saints and Buddhas, “accomplishing Dao in heaven while leaving behind a virtuous name in the world.”

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2. In its application, Dao is the law of truth.

Abiding by the law brings harmony; violating the law leads to suffering.

In its functional aspect, Dao is the law or principle of Truth. It is the yardstick for our actions. If we act in accordance with these principles, we can live in harmony, otherwise we will cause others and

ourselves to suffer. If the thoughts and actions of all people, at every moment, were in alignment with Dao, then all interactions and undertakings would be in accordance with the will of heaven; they would be in the interests of all people, and they would leave us with a clean conscience. Our lives would definitely be filled with joy and happiness. We would dwell in the tranquil and harmonious state of mind, the spiritual state of all the past saints and Buddhas. This state is known as “maintaining the heart of Dao at every moment.”

If, on the other hand, we deviate from Dao even for an instant, selfish and deviant thoughts can arise and prompt us to act in ways that contravene the law of truth. As soon as we do something like this we plant a seed of suffering, a karmic seed that leads us back to the cycle of birth and death. That is why we must always remember that “Dao cannot be separated from us, even for an instant, otherwise it would not be the true Dao.”

Let us explore this point further in the teaching of our Divine Patriarch. He taught us that:

> “Dao is the principle of truth. It is the essential path for humankind. When people act in accordance with the morals and ethics of Dao, it is like a train that runs smoothly on the rails, a ship sailing on water or a plane flying through the air.
>
> It would be disastrous if the train separated from the rail, the ship from the water or the plane from the air.
>
> If, while alive, people violate the law, they will suffer the consequences in this world.
>
> By the same token, if they go against their conscience, when they die they then fall back into the wheel of death and rebirth, circling endlessly in the various realms of reincarnation.

From the Divine Patriarch's teaching we can understand more clearly how closely we are related to the essence of Dao. If we deviate from the path of Dao, we will allow our egos and deviated hearts to run our lives. Our Dao Heart will diminish and the six senses (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, body, and mind) will run wild, out of control. Our eyes would be attracted to the colorful images of the world, our ears caught up in the bewildering array of sounds, our noses seduced by enticing aromas and our mouths would be tantalized by delicious food, the body would be captivated by pleasure while the mind wanders like a wild horse though the vast array of worldly phenomena. Indulgence of this kind has disastrous consequences. Because the principle of Dao is no longer taken as a guide, people become devious and ruthless in their undertakings. They come to act against the wisdom of their true natures and violate both the heavenly and human law. Not only will such people have to face the legal consequences of their actions, they will also incur the hatred of others. They will be reviled and excluded. The saddest consequence is that they will have to bear the grief of their own conscience when they die, and will suffer the full karmic force of their misdeeds.

The ancient saints and sages understood the law and principle of Dao. They were always careful in their actions so that they did not go against this principle. Confucius once said:

> “A virtuous person clings tenaciously to Dao even when threatened by death.

In other words, wise and virtuous people will abide by the Dao throughout their lives. Not even for an instant would they separate themselves from Dao. When Confucius's disciple, Yan Hui, received Dao, Confucius praised him for holding on to Dao with a tight fist and not letting go of it in all the years of his life. When Zheng Zi, who was another one of Confucius' disciples, received Dao, he said that he “cultivated cautiously as if walking along a cliff edge or on thin ice.” These examples show us the way the saints and sages approached their cultivation. It was their caution and discipline that enabled them to elevate spiritually.

When we receive and cultivate Dao, we search for our lost conscience and let the true heart govern our six senses. Then our eyes will remain unattached to the illusions of the world, our ears will be free of intrusive and bewildering sounds, our tongues will feel no urge to gossip or slander, and our bodies and minds will be free of negative thoughts and actions. If we can restore the authority of our true nature and use all our senses in accordance with Dao, our actions will benefit our society and the world. We will manifest great compassion to save all the sentient beings and thus establish our virtues and merits. Our lives will be meaningful. We will enjoy the respect of all people while we are alive in this world and attain the glorious fruit of enlightenment when we die.

Conclusion

We can see from this chapter that Dao is an essential part of us. Without Dao to animate our bodies we have no life. Without Dao in our hearts we will violate the law of truth and remain caught in the karmic cycle of suffering. If we can live our lives fully in the essence of Dao, they will be meaningful, valuable lives full of joy and harmony. As indicated earlier, Dao cannot be separated from us, even for an instant. If it could be separated, it would not be the true Dao. Dao is the spring of happiness in life.

Chapter 3: The Meaning of Receiving Dao

After "The Essence of Dao," and "The Relationship between Dao and Humankind," we can understand that Dao is the most precious gift in the universe, that it governs all matters, creates and nurtures all things. Everything in the universe has Dao. This includes people. For us, as human beings, Dao is our original nature or soul, and it is our source of life. In other words, we can live because we have Dao. Since we already have Dao in us, why do we need to receive Dao? This question forms the basis of this chapter.

1. The Abdication of God or Dao and the Loss of Conscience

In Heaven, Dao is known as the truth. When Dao is bestowed upon humans, it is known as "true or original nature." In "The Doctrine of Mean (Proper Way)" it was written:

> “The Dao bestowed on us by Heaven is known as nature. Following this nature is known as Dao.

This means that our soul or original nature is bestowed upon us by Heaven. If we act in accordance with our true nature or conscience, then we are acting in accordance with Dao. It is this soul or original nature that gives us life or spirituality.

What is the purpose of having this nature? It is there so that we can manifest or use it as a guide to all our actions.

What are the characteristics of our original nature? In Chinese, “character” is written like this, (1). It is made up of two characters, (†) and (4). (±) means "growth” or “life.” Heavenly nature contains the essence of growth and the ability to develop and we inherit this as part of our nature. As a capacity that comes to us from Heaven, growth is inherent in us and need not be learned. It is like other instincts that we possess, like the urge to eat when we are hungry, or putting on more clothes when we are cold. When there is danger we instinctively avoid it. Heaven bestows all these survival instincts on us. Animals and plants have them too.

But unlike animals or plants, human character has an extra quality, (†). This character represents the heart, (f). (†) is an upright heart. It represents the conscience or the godlike nature within us. ✓) is the crooked heart. In Chinese, upright is written (). Our upright heart, (†) is the ancient character for virtue.

We can see that we all have a capacity for survival bestowed on us. The essence of growth is to maintain the life of the body. But what is the purpose of maintaining the life of the body? It is to give us the opportunity to fully manifest our spiritual essence. In simpler terms, the reason we are alive is not just to work and earn money, but it is to allow the true nature, or spirituality, within us (†) to shine. In other words, "We eat to live, we do not live to eat.” If we only live to eat, we are hardly different from other animals or plants.

Mencius once said:

> “There are only minor differences between people and animals. Saints preserve them, common souls neglect them.

It is evident that people in the world today cling tightly to the satisfactions of the physical life. Generally speaking, people will go to great extremes in the pursuit of material pleasures and enjoyment, but will make little effort to nurture their spiritual essence. Consequently, the upright heart is neglected, and the conscience is lost.

In other words, we can say that the God in us has been obscured and, as a result, the wrong heart and intentions are employed in the running of our daily lives. When this happens conflicts arise between people and between humans and the natural world. When we look around us we see not only individual conflicts but also civil wars and strife between nations.

There seems to be an endless stream of news stories about people killing each other in the streets and violence within families. Such violence and antagonism creates a very negative force, which disturbs the equilibrium of the earth and can cause terrible disasters. All of this is because we choose to nurture our physical selves rather than attending to our spiritual development.

Attachment to worldly pleasures clearly does more harm than good and we will suffer the consequences.

It is for this reason that Dao has been passed to the general public. By receiving Dao we can come to understand the root source of our lives and our spiritual nature. On the one hand we can manifest the virtue within the upright heart by learning the essence of Truth and helping other sentient beings to nurture their spirituality. On the other hand, with this upright heart we can use our bodies to work so that we can nurture our physical lives.

With the emphasis on a balance between the physical and spiritual aspects of our lives, we can establish our virtues and also develop harmonious relationships with others and live a happy, fulfilled life. When we do this we have, in a sense, found our lost conscience and restored the

authority of the God within us. Only then can we consider ourselves as people who live according to our true inner nature.

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2. Transcending the Cycle of Life and Death

There is no doubt that we all have the spiritual essence bestowed on us by Heaven, that we all have Dao within us and the potential to attain enlightenment. However, without a *Dien Chuan Shr* it is difficult for us to understand the root source of our soul and the way to transcend the cycle of life and death.

The life and cultivation of Siddhartha Gautama offers a good example. Traveling to the four gates of his city, Prince Siddhartha became aware of the suffering of life and the unavoidable painful phenomena of birth, illness, old age and death.

In order to free himself from entanglement and attachment he renounced his throne, left the palace and set out to cultivate as a monk. For six years he lived as an ascetic practicing self-denial. He visited many masters and learned what they had to teach him, but still, in spite of all his efforts and deprivations, he failed to reach enlightenment.

It was only when he met another enlightened Buddha by the name of Ran Deng that he received Dao and was enlightened.

In the past, many cultivators journeyed for thousands of miles, over mountains and through jungles, with one intention in their hearts: to find an enlightened master to pass the Dao to them.

There was a Zen master by the name of Zhi Gong who was the spiritual advisor to Emperor Liang, (c.-560 BC). This Zen master said:

> “If one does not meet an enlightened master,
>
> It is futile to take the medicine of the Dharma.

The medicine of the dharma means the teaching that the Buddha left behind after 49 years of preaching and teaching. The Zen master stated very clearly that it is useless to learn all this material and gain the knowledge it contains if we do not meet an enlightened master to pass the Dao to us.

Finding such a master is critical. We can see this in the following story of Budhidharma and Hui Ke.

Budhidharma was the 28th patriarch and he lived in India. His master, Panatoro, the 27th patriarch, instructed him to take the Dao to China, so he traveled to China with the intention of passing the Dao to Emperor Liang Wu. However, it soon became clear to him that Liang Wu had no affinity for Dao, and he decided to go on to the town of Jiang Nan.

There he met a monk called Shen Guang who was giving a talk about the principles of Buddhism. He was obviously very well read and had a competent grasp of his subject and in addition to this, he was willing to pass on his knowledge of the sutras showing that he had virtue and generosity. For these reasons, Budhidharma decided to transmit the Dao to him.

So he stepped forward and asked Shen Guang, "What are you talking about?"

Shen Guang answered, "I am preaching the sutra. What I am saying is the Dharma."

Then Budhidharma asked, "Where is the sutra? Where is the Dharma?"

To which Shen Guang replied, "Both the sutra and the dharma are here on the paper."

Budhidharma then drew a picture of a biscuit on a piece of paper and handed it to the monk. "Here," he said, "Take this. It is a biscuit for you to eat."

"How can I eat a paper biscuit?" exclaimed Shen Guang.

"Well," replied Budhidharma, "if the paper biscuit will not satisfy your hunger, how can a paper sutra and a paper dharma enable us to transcend the cycle of birth and death?"

To this Shen Guang responded, "Even if it doesn't allow me to escape the cycle of birth and death, it may help me avoid the cycle of reincarnation."

But Budhidharma shook his head. "If you have the birth and death cycle you have the reincarnation cycle. If you can't resolve the endless succession of births and deaths, how can you transcend the reincarnation cycle? The paper sutra is useless, and the dharma that you preach is useless. I suggest you burn them both!"

Shen Guang was furious. "What I preach is the oneness to which all ten thousand dharmas return. How can you say that my preaching is useless?"

Budhidharma then replied, "Ah, but if all ten thousand dharmas return to one, where does one return to?"

Shen Guang had no answer to that question. He was extremely upset and so angry that he threw his metal beads at Budhidharma with such force that they broke off two of his front teeth.

At first, Budhidharma thought it might be time for him to retreat from the earthly plane, but he recognized that Shen Guang still had many good qualities and decided to pass Dao on to him.

So he took ten beads and transformed them into the ten judges from the underworld as they appeared in Chinese legends. Shen Guang finished preaching and the crowd who had come to listen to him gradually dispersed except for these ten people.

Shen Guang was curious and stepped down from the stage to speak to them. "The talk is over," he said, “Why are you still here?"

The tenth person answered, "We are the ten judges from the underworld and we've come to take you away!"

Shen Guang was terribly shocked. “I have been teaching and preaching for forty-nine years and still fail to rise above the level of the underworld? How can that be possible?"

The ten judges answered him, "What you preach is not the true dharma. Your sutra is not the true sutra. That is why you cannot avoid reincarnation."

Shen Guang then asked, "If I don't have the true dharma and the true sutra, who has them?"

The judges responded, "The very person you insulted and injured just now is an enlightened being. He has the true Dharma and the true sutra."

When he heard this, Shen Guang fell to his knees and pleaded with the ten judges. "Could you leave me here for a little while longer? I would like to find the master and ask him to teach me the true Dharma that can help me transcend the cycle of life and death. I would be very grateful if you would let me stay."

When Shen Guang stood up, the ten judges had disappeared. He knew then that their presence had been a lesson to him to seek the truth. He hurried to search for Budhidharma and finally found him in a cave on Mt. Xiong Er. He was meditating there and Shen Guang knelt down near the entrance of the cave to show his remorse.

It was wintertime, and snow fell in the night but Shen Guang did not move. So sincere was he in his wish to learn the essence of Truth, he knelt there till morning buried to his waist in snow.

Budhidharma was very touched by his sincerity and finally he spoke, “To acquire the true dharma, one must get rid of the left side."

What "get rid of the left side” means in translation is, that to learn the true essence of dharma, one must get rid of all preconceived knowledge and clear away any impure thoughts. But Shen Guang was so eager to acquire Truth that he took the words at face value and thought the left side meant his left arm. Immediately he took out his knife and cut his left arm off.

Budhidharma was very touched by his eagerness to learn and his sincere repentance, so he did finally initiate Shen Guang and pass Dao on to him. He also changed his name to Hui Ke, which means admirable wisdom.

Then Budhidharma covered Hui Ke's wounded arm with his cassock or kasaya, which became the symbol of dharma.

After receiving Dao, Shen Guang wrote this poem:

> The ten thousand dharmas return to one,
>
> But where does that one return to?
>
> At Mt. Xiong Er, I pleaded with Budhidharma,
>
> Holding the knife in my hand I cut off my left arm.
>
> With the direct one point passed to me,
>
> I escaped the hands of the angel of death.

From this story, we can see the crucial importance of having an enlightened master to pass Dao on to us. Now that we have all received the key to the Door of Wisdom, it is really up to us to open that door and fully manifest and utilize the essence that lies within.

From this chapter we can see that we need a *Dien Chuan Shr* to initiate us and to uncover our long-lost conscience. Then we can come to understand the true, original nature bestowed on us by Heaven. Furthermore, we can manifest its virtues, help to save all sentient beings and eventually return to our original home.

We have all received Dao. Of all the things we do or achieve in our lives, receiving Dao is the most significant and the most worthy of congratulation. It is the culmination of all our searches and what we find will be ours for eternity.

Can you remember the day you received Dao, in the pure and peaceful atmosphere of the Dao temple, surrounded by the radiant warmth of divine spiritual energy and the compassion of our predecessors? For many of us the reverence and tranquility of the Dao Ceremony makes a very deep impression, and yet, at the end of the ceremony, the only tangible things we carry away with us are books and an apple.

What, then, did we really acquire when we received Dao? This is the subject of this chapter.

Once, in a higher teaching, our Heavenly Mother communicated the following teaching to us:

> Imparting the mystical heavenly secret of the final period.

> Receiving the Pointer that opens the golden lock to reveal the golden body.
>
> Firstly, the Ancient Contract is passed on to give you the credentials you need to return to the origin.
>
> Secondly, the Heavenly Gate, the righteous way of the white period, is pointed out.
>
> Thirdly, you are given the Holy Mantra, the spiritual mantra that links you with Heaven.
>
> Think of the mantra and the divine spirits—Buddhas and Immortals will protect the body of the child.
>
> Once a person has received Dao, their name is recorded in the Heavenly Scroll.
>
> The person's accounts in the Book of Life are settled and they can transcend the Wheel of Suffering.
>
> With this one point, a person may receive Dao in the morning and die in the evening with no regrets.
>
> The priceless jewel is pointed out and returned directly to its origin.

The passage helps us to understand what we received in the Dao Ceremony. It tells us that the propagation of Dao is carried out in accordance with the Heavenly Decree, or the Will of Heaven. This work is not done in order to benefit any particular individual or to secure personal gains of any kind. What is transmitted in the Dao Ceremony is the most precious spiritual teaching that has been available to human beings since ancient times. It is the mystical heavenly truth, the ultimate treasure.

When we receive Dao, the *Dien Chuan Shr* unlocks our Heavenly Gate. This has also been referred to as our "true self" or "true Buddha nature." In the ceremony, the *Dien Chuan Shr* first passes the Holy hand seal, or Unification, to us on behalf of the Divine Patriarch. This gives us the necessary credentials or qualifications to approach the heaven of truth or our origin.

Secondly, when the Heavenly Gate is unlocked, we can begin to see our true Buddha nature. This one point that reveals our true selves to us also transmits the same ultimate truth that was passed down from generation to generation of saints and sages in the past.

Next is the transmission of the wordless sutra Holy Mantra. These words, passed on to us by word of mouth but imprinted in our hearts, are the spiritual mantra that connects us with Buddhas.

In this final period we face many tragedies and disasters. There are catastrophes like floods, earthquakes and famines; civil wars, AIDS, environmental disturbances like the greenhouse effect

and the pollution of our air, earth and water. Due to the compassion of our Heavenly Mother and the great vow of Maitreya Buddha, we can use the Holy Mantra to help us in life-threatening situations.

Since we have received Dao, our names are recorded on the heavenly scroll. If we cultivate our hearts and nurture our souls in accordance with truth, contribute our efforts with sincerity, and establish our virtues, we can be absolutely certain to transcend the cycle of suffering.

Confucius once said:

> A person who receives Dao in the morning may die in the evening with no regrets.

What did he mean by that? He meant that receiving Dao can lead us back to our origin and allow us to break the wheel of sorrow. This is made possible through the *Dien Chuan Shr* transmitting the ultimate truth. That is why this precious essence we receive is known as the priceless jewel of the universe.

So let us cultivate with sincerity so that we may all return to the kingdom of truth. This is the teaching and guarantee given by our Heavenly Mother that we can one day return to our true home.

From this passage we can understand that during the Dao Ceremony we received the Three Treasures. The meaning of these Three Treasures was explained to us when we received Dao. Because of limited time, it may have been a rather brief explanation. Let us take the opportunity here to refresh our memories.

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1. The Heavenly Gate

The Heavenly Gate is the point at which humankind is linked together. It is where our true nature resides, where our conscience manifests itself and where our virtues arise. This is also the doorway through which our soul enters and exits the body.

Proof of the significance of the Heavenly Gate can be found in the texts and doctrines of various religions. In Buddhism it is known as the righteous dharma hidden in the eye. In Confucianism it is known as the land of goodness. Taoists refer to it as the spirit of the valley or the mystical door. For Christians it is symbolized by the crucifix or the narrow gate. In Islam it is called the land of returning.

There are many names and descriptions but they refer to the same point, the Heavenly Gate. Sentient beings have been trapped in the worldly realm for so long that the Heavenly Gate is covered with layer upon layer of worldly dust. Because this dust obscures our true nature, the

voice of our conscience is suppressed and so our conscience is weak and often fails to function properly. Our shining pearl is covered in dust and its brightness can no longer be seen. The true ruler is displaced while an unrighteous usurper ascends to the throne.

This creates a great stumbling block on the path to heaven and opens up the way to hell. Consequently, sentient beings remain trapped in the various realms of the reincarnation cycle and cannot return to meet the Heavenly Mother. Only by receiving Dao can our Heavenly Gate be opened and our true Buddha nature be found. If we persevere in our cultivation from now until we leave this world, our souls will leave our bodies through the Heavenly Gate and go directly to the Heaven of Truth.

There is an ancient saying:

> “The way of Dao is simple. People make it difficult for themselves.
>
> To a person who is lost it is as if ten thousand mountains block their way.
>
> When the enlightened master unlocks the Heavenly Gate, one can return to heaven with ease.

This tells us that Dao is inherent in all beings. It is our personal jewel. Unfortunately, sentient beings persist in looking for Buddha in the external world, and in doing so drift further and further away from Dao. This is what is meant in the excerpt above when it states that "people make it difficult." The foolishness and delusions of sentient beings are like mountain barriers that block their way.

When we receive Dao and our Heavenly Gate is unlocked, heaven may be far away but we can reach it in an instant. That is what is meant by the statement “One can return to heaven with great ease.”

Gwan Yin, The Buddha of Mercy, said:

> “Observe the existence of the self within the bamboo forest.
>
> Understand the mystical essence of the vase and willow.
>
> The Bodhisattva always lives in the forest in the valley.
>
> Remember this and do not deviate from the truth.

We all know that the Buddha of Mercy has great compassion and that she carries with her a pure white vase. She uses a sprig of willow to spray the water of truth over all sentient beings so that it

will nurture them.

There is a popular legend which explains the significance of the vase and the willow. Before she became enlightened, the story goes, Gwan Yin was once a princess named Miao Shan. When Miao Shan traveled into the snowy mountains to seek Dao, she met a Taoist who gave her a white jade vase and encouraged her to put more effort into her cultivation. He told her she would reach enlightenment when the vase was filled with water and a willow grew in it.

Let us think for a moment about the essence behind the Taoist's words. What does the vase and the willow represent? Surely they refer to something more than a vase and a willow. If we examine the poem more closely we may find the answer.

Buddha Gwan Yin said, “Observe the existence of the self within the bamboo forest." The meaning of this line was explained to us after receiving Dao, so it is not necessary to explain it further. The next line says, "Understand the mystical essence of the tranquil vase and willow." What can this mean? We know that a vase cannot fill itself with water. The water must come from an outside source. The tranquil vase is not an actual vase, but a metaphor for the nose.

The poem is telling us that the Heavenly Gate must be open to receive the heavenly essence just as the vase must be empty to receive the water. When we receive Dao and have our Heavenly Gate pointed out by the *Dien Chuan Shr*, this allows us to be able to receive the "refreshing dew" or the "water of truth."

The next line of the poem says, "The Bodhisattva always lives in the forest in the valley." This means that within each of us there dwells a Buddha of Mercy. If we take a look at the character for "valley", () it becomes clear that it refers to the Heavenly Gate that is set within a bamboo forest.

The last line tells us not to deviate from the principle of truth. When we have found the Buddha within, we need to be with it and follow its guidance at all times. We can also emulate the great compassion of Buddha Gwan Yin by helping sentient beings and showing them sympathy and care. In this way we can help to resolve the pain and problems of others. This is the principle that true Dao cultivators abide by.

Now we can more clearly see that the pointing out of the Heavenly Gate is a truly priceless and incomparable jewel. This is where the Buddha within us dwells, and from here we make our connection with heaven. If we cultivate sincerely, when the time comes we can depart for heaven with a smile and leave behind a body that is as soft and supple as if it were peacefully sleeping. This is what happens when the soul can make its exit through the Heavenly Gate and return to heaven free from the cycle of life and death.

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2. The Holy Mantra

The Holy Mantra is passed on to us in the form of the spoken word, but must be imprinted on the heart and not spoken. The words of this sutra will never be found in any scriptural text or doctrine.

That is why cultivators in the past had to travel thousands of miles to find an enlightened master who could pass it on to them.

The mantra has had a different form at different stages of time. We are now in the white period and it is Maitreya Buddha who supports us and gives us protection at this time. The Holy Mantra is passed on so that cultivators in the white stage who face life-threatening dangers can reach for help.

In one of the Holy Teachings, the Buddha stated that:

> Once the Holy Mantra is used, Buddhas and Immortals will all respond and arrive to help.

The Holy Mantra has a very powerful effect. Do not underestimate it. Please memorize it and treasure it always. It also bears the essence of a direct way of cultivation that we can discuss in the future.

To summarize, the Holy Mantra is the mantra of great brightness and tranquility whose mystical effect is boundless.

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3. The Hand Seal – Unification Seal

In ancient times royal officials carried special seals as proof of their position. In cultivating Dao, we need the contract or the seal of God. It is the verification that we have received Dao and acknowledges that we are the children of the Heavenly Mother.

When we hold the hand seal, heaven, earth and humankind are united. This seal also enables us to transcend calamities and ultimately leads us back to our origin.

Jesus said:

> Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. (Mark 10:15)

When Jesus says "child" he is not referring simply to children but also to the third treasure, which encompasses the qualities of childhood innocence. When we receive Dao, we are given the third treasure and recognize that we are the children of our Heavenly Mother.

But having received this gift, we need to cultivate, to purify our souls, curb our selfish desires and shed our vices in order to return to the original, pure heart of a child. Returning to this tranquil

state we acquire, once again, our innocent original character and features. Only then can we go home to the Kingdom of God.

Conclusion

When we receive Dao, we are given the three treasures. This is a real and eternal gain. The ancient Chinese character for "gain" is (4). It means to "discover an inch." There is a Chinese proverb that says "There is a square inch of treasure land". This is the land of our heart.

The treasure land that is opened to us when we receive Dao is a gift for all time. The material riches we gain in our lives—wealth, reputation, and pleasures—are not true riches because they are impermanent. Remember the words of Confucius?

> “ When we receive Dao in the morning, we can die in the evening with no regrets.

This shows once again that receiving Dao and seeing that square inch of treasure land is truly a precious and eternal gain. Hopefully we will treasure and cherish it.

Chapter 4: The Story of How Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan Received Dao

In the past, people who wanted to receive Dao had to forsake their families and their worldly pursuits in order to seek a master who could pass Dao on to them. For us today, receiving Dao is a much less difficult process. Rather than having to search for the essence of Dao, we are fortunate enough to have introducers who come to us and invite us to a Dao Ceremony. The majority of Dao relatives receive Dao in this way. It is rare to find someone who actively seeks this spiritual essence. Why is it so much easier for us to receive Dao than for cultivators in the past? It is because of the blessings of heaven, the great vow of Maitreya Buddha and the hard work of our predecessors to support and sustain our spiritual growth. The story of the Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan, and how he came to receive Dao, shows us the difficulties and struggles faced by cultivators in the past and helps us to appreciate our present blessings more fully.

Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan, is regarded as the ancestor of the entire Chinese race. He had a pure heart and a very kind nature, and, most importantly, a strong affinity for truth. Throughout his life he searched for masters to guide him in his cultivation. At one stage he had as many as seventy-two masters. They all taught him ways to cultivate so that his good deeds and the purity of his heart would have a positive influence in his future incarnations. However, none of them could teach him how to transcend the cycle of life and death, to liberate himself from the endless wheel of suffering. So Emperor Xuan Yuan kept searching for an even wiser master who could help him to achieve this ultimate goal of cultivation.

One day he set up a notice outside the palace gates, which said "*Whoever introduces me to a true enlightened master who can guide me to enlightenment, shall receive a great reward.*"

A few days later a man by the name of Yang Ma Jun came by and read the notice. He looked very pleased with himself as he took it down from the wall, and asked one of the guards to show him the way to the emperor's palace. When Emperor Xuan Yuan saw Yang Ma Jun, he asked,

"Do you really know an enlightened teacher?"

Yang Ma Jun answered very confidently, "Yes, I have a nephew whose name is Guang Cheng Zi. He is the master. He is very virtuous, and I have heard people say that he is enlightened."

"How old is this nephew of yours?"

"He will be thirteen this year." Yang Ma Jun replied. The Emperor thought to himself, "How much can a thirteen year old boy know? This man is probably trying to fool me so that he can get the reward."

He then said, "I have already had seventy-two masters. They are all between fifty and sixty years old, and not one of them can tell me how to transcend the cycle of birth and death. Your nephew is only thirteen. How much virtue can he have acquired? How much can he know? I will visit him tomorrow and ask for his guidance. If he can enlighten me in three days, I will give you a position at court and reward you with great wealth. But be warned! If he fails to enlighten me within that time, you will be publicly executed."

On the following day Xuan Yuan set out for the monastery with an escort of five hundred royal guards. Somehow Guang Cheng Zi knew about the Emperor's intentions, and he had instructed his disciples to chop down all the trees along the way so that they blocked the road. When the royal guards saw the trees piled up in their path, they realized that they could go no further and hurried to inform the emperor of the obstruction. Xuan Yuan thought to himself,

"*My purpose in traveling today is to seek teaching and guidance from an enlightened master. Why do I need to bring five hundred guards with me? Such a pompous approach shows that I am not very sincere.*"

So the emperor ordered his troops to return to the palace.

The next day he instructed his personal guard General Juan Lian to accompany him to the monastery. This time the emperor decided to take a different route, and the two men set out along a track that took them through bush land. But once again, Guang Cheng Zi had anticipated the emperor's actions. He told his disciples to tie the tall grasses together in knots, all along the path. Before long, the Emperor and his General found that this was a serious obstacle to their progress.

General Juan Lian was terribly upset. He could see that this and the incident with the trees on the previous day were deliberate attempts to prevent the emperor from reaching his destination. Being very loyal and dedicated to the wellbeing of the emperor, the general was furious at the thought of Guang Cheng Zi's rudeness and disrespect. He drew his sword and prepared to cut the knotted grass that blocked their way, but the emperor stopped him.

"Wait! Don't do that. Remember, I am here to learn. I must be considerate and sincere in my actions. Why don't you untie the knots by hand, one at a time, and each time you untie a knot, I will kneel down and pray. That will show my master that I am truly willing to learn."

Reluctantly and with barely restrained impatience General Juan Lian untied each knot by hand. There were seventy-two knots, and the emperor knelt down to pray seventy-two times. When they finally reached the monastery, the emperor approached a young monk near the door and asked him,

"Revered one, is this the Xiao Lin monastery?”

The monk replied with a poem:

> Xiao Lin is isolated and not many people know about it.
>
> There is a hidden teaching behind the doorway of the bush.
>
> For truth is impartial, it recognizes no personal rank.
>
> One who wishes to be arrogant should never enter this door.

When Xuan Yuan heard this he realized at once that a person must be humble in order to learn. He entered the monastery and walked across the front yard to a second doorway. In the yard he saw another young monk hitting a tree with a stick. He thought this was rather strange behavior, so he asked the monk "Why are you hitting that tree?"

The boy replied, "I'm hitting it because it won't bear any fruit."

"It doesn't look old enough to bear fruit." The emperor said, "When was it planted?"

"Just three days ago," answered the boy.

"Just as I thought," said the emperor, "how on earth can you expect a three day old peach tree to have any peaches on it?"

The young monk then replied, "If it is impossible for a three day old peach tree to bear any fruit, how could a person expect to be enlightened after cultivating for only three days? Open up your heart, nurture it peacefully and wait till the time is right. When the roots are deep and the branches are strong, fruit will naturally appear. "

The emperor was quite embarrassed when he heard this, and realized that he had been much too impatient with his demand for quick enlightenment. With these thoughts in his mind, he moved on until he came to a third doorway. An old monk was there sweeping the floor. The emperor approached him and asked, “Revered one, can you please tell me where I can find the master?"

"He is in the room in the east wing of the building," the old monk answered, pointing the direction for Xuan Yuan to take. Xuan Yuan bowed and thanked the man, then he made his way to the room in the east wing.

When he entered, he saw a young boy serenely meditating. With deep respect, Xuan Yuan bowed down before him.

"Who is kneeling here?” Guang Cheng Zi asked.

"It is your disciple, Xuan Yuan," the emperor replied. Guang Cheng Zi then asked, "I have heard that you have had seventy-two masters. Can you tell me which of them understood the essence of Dao?"

To which the emperor replied, "All of them understood the essence of Dao, but unfortunately, I was not wise enough to learn it from them. May I ask you, my master, to teach me how to transcend the cycle of birth and death?”

Calmly and quietly, Guang Cheng Zi replied: "If we can detach ourselves from illusion, we will never grow old. Wood will never burn if we keep it away from the fire. If you study the essence of Dao with care and dedication, and cultivate with great discipline, then you will surely become enlightened."

At that point in time, Guang Cheng Zi transmitted the essence of Dao to the emperor. He went on to explain to him that our true nature is beyond birth and death and is neither young nor old. Our problem is that we are too attached to the physical body and physical desires, and cling to the illusions of the material world. When we realize that our true Buddha nature transcends all physical illusion, we see that our true self is not born, does not age, and never dies. Like the analogy of the wood and the flames, if a tree is kept away from the fire, it remains green. Knowing this, what we need to do is to learn and cultivate, following the method with discipline and care, and then surely we can attain enlightenment.

After receiving Dao, Emperor Xuan Yuan experienced a great realization. He thanked Guang Cheng Zi and left for his palace. When he had gone, all Guang Cheng Zi's disciples gathered around him, congratulating him for having an emperor as his disciple. But Guang Cheng Zi wasn't smiling. He said. "I'm afraid this means more trouble than good. Didn't you see how furious that general was? I think he plans to come back tomorrow to kill us all. "

The disciples, shocked and terrified, exclaimed: "We'd better run! We'll have to escape!"

“That won't solve the problem," Guang Cheng Zi replied.

"Why don't we ask the emperor for help," some of the students suggested.

Guang Cheng Zi calmly replied, "Don't worry. Tomorrow, all you need to do is to follow me. Each of you carries a joss stick, and I will take care of the rest."

The next morning, as they expected, General Juan Lian rode his horse at a furious gallop all the way to the monastery. He was still seething with anger at the humiliations his emperor had endured. As he approached, Guang Cheng Zi and all his disciples knelt down on the ground. The general dismounted and stormed over to the prostrated figures.

"What are you doing kneeling down there?" he yelled at them. "Who are you?"

"I am the young monk, Guang Cheng Zi. I have come here to honor your arrival, general."

"When the emperor came here yesterday you were rude and disrespectful to him. My rank is lower than his and yet you all kneel down here before me. Why this sudden change of attitude?" asked the general.

“The life of the emperor is in my hands,” said Guang Cheng Zi.

"Then whose hand is your life in?" the general asked.

"My life is in your hands, general," replied Guang Cheng Zi.

"Now tell me, whose hand is my life in?" asked the general.

"Your life is in the hands of the angel of death!" said Guang Cheng Zi, and he read out the following poem:

> "The emperor seeks the teaching of the Dao because he is afraid of birth and death. He came for one word to escape the angel of death. Now, general, you would come here intending to kill. Since my life is in your hands, I kneel here before you and beg.' "

After listening to the words of Guang Cheng Zi, the general achieved a certain level of realization. He said, "Now I wish to become your disciple. What do you think of that?"

"Are you sure you want to cultivate Dao?" asked Guang Cheng Zi.

"I too would like to find a way to transcend birth and death, a way to end the cycle of reincarnation," said General Juan Lian.

"Since that is your intention," Guang Cheng Zi said, "you can follow me back to the monastery. "

Guang Cheng Zi entered his room and sat on the bed. The general followed a little way behind. When he came to the door he stopped and asked, "Master, can you guess if I will step in or remain outside? "

"Step in and you're in heaven. Stay out and you're in hell." Guang Cheng Zi answered.

When he heard this General Juan Lian had a sudden deep inner realization. He said, "I understand that I have done wrong in despising my master. I now repent and beg for my master's compassion. Then I shall kill myself with this sword so that I may transcend all suffering forever.

He drew his sword and said, " "I thank you, my master, for your compassionate teaching. Please initiate me. "

Guang Cheng Zi was touched by the general's sincerity in admitting his fault. He initiated him and led him to the path of enlightenment. Sometime later, Emperor Xuan Yuan also came to the monastery to cultivate, and he eventually gained enlightenment as well.

We can learn a great deal from this story.

1. The essence of Dao cannot be transmitted without an enlightened master who holds the heavenly decree. Although the Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan was very pious in his cultivation and had seventy-two masters, none of these masters held the key to enlightenment and so could not lead him beyond the cycle of reincarnation. Fortunately, his efforts and his sincerity were rewarded when he eventually found a virtuous master, Guang Cheng Zi. Through receiving Dao and the guidelines for cultivation given to him by Guang Cheng Zi, he was finally able to achieve enlightenment. This shows very clearly how difficult it was for people to receive Dao in the past. It was necessary not only to have a good foundation in cultivation, and great integrity, but also to search tirelessly for an enlightened master. In Chinese this is described as:

   > “Traveling for a thousand miles in search of a master,
   >
   > Wandering for ten thousand miles to acquire a word of wisdom.

This is no exaggeration. When we compare this with the way we come to a Dao temple and receive Dao today we can see that, for us, it is a much easier and more comfortable process.

2. The essence of the truth is impartial. Although, in our physical being, we manifest all kinds of differences such as status, wealth, abilities, rank, health and so on, these differences do not exist in our true nature. Unless they receive the essence of the truth, even a person as highly regarded as an emperor is no more than a worldly sentient being. This story also shows us that an emperor and an army general have to go through the same process as anyone else when it comes to receiving Dao. They receive no special treatment, because in the eyes of truth, the essence of our inner nature is the same for us all.
3. Although Guang Cheng Zi was only a child of thirteen, very young indeed when compared to the other masters who were all older than fifty, the emperor still had to learn from him and accept his guidance. This is because Guang Cheng Zi held the heavenly decree and had cultivated his virtue to a very high level. From this we can see how precious the heavenly decree is.
4. General Juan Lian started out as a rather rough and impetuous character, but he eventually came to his inner realization through the subtle teaching of Guang Cheng Zi. His courage in recognizing and admitting his own mistakes is a quality we should respect and emulate. It was this courage which led him to enlightenment.

Conclusion

It may seem that receiving Dao was very easy for us, but we must remember that the essence we received is exactly the same as the essence that the Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan and the ancient Saints and Buddhas received such a long time ago. The only difference is that we live in a different historical period, so the conditions in which we receive Dao are different. Today we have boundless heavenly blessings, countless virtuous predecessors and Dien Chuan Shr's who have paved the

way for us. The ease with which we are able to receive Dao is something we should never take for granted. We need to cherish this opportunity to cultivate ourselves. If we are conscientious and persistent in our efforts, we will surely succeed in our path towards enlightenment.

Chapter 5: Why Dao Is Commonly Descended to This World

New Dao relatives and people who are just beginning to get in touch with the Dao often ask what religion Dao is associated with. Some even have the idea that Dao itself is a new kind of religion.

In our present society, with all its complexities and contradictions, with its often rampant materialism and its New Age culture, the work of Dao has flourished in a remarkably short time. Even though there are many prominent, established religions for people to turn to, the widespread growth of Dao has created considerable interest from people in all walks of life. “But what religion is this?” they ask, “and how has it been able to attract so many people in such a short time?” What is it about Dao that appeals so strongly to people individually and to society at large?

Dao does not belong to any existing religion, nor is it a new religion recently established. It is neither a recent phenomenon nor a continuation or altered version of any religion. Dao has a lineage. It pre-exists heaven and earth. Dao was here before humankind and has been practiced and passed on through many generations of saints and sages. Dao is the meeting point of all cultures and civilizations. It is the essence in which the spirituality of all people and the universe come together.

Until quite recently, Dao was transmitted only on a one-to-one basis. Because it was passed on in this way, and always with the utmost discretion, there was no general awareness or understanding of Dao. For the same reason Dao has no written history and any allusions to Dao occur only as hints, traces, and oblique references in historical texts. Now Dao is propagated universally. This is due to heavenly intention, which makes it possible for us to receive Dao in order to fulfill the needs of heaven and humankind at this critical time.

Why is Dao universally available now? Because the time is right and the people are ready. These two conditions—the time factor and the human factor—are very important.

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1. The Time Factor

The time we live in now is the period for all of us to return to our origin. Time, in this context, is not the time of human lives and generations, but heavenly time, the chronological cycle of the universe which has its own changing seasons, conditions, and opportunities. It is most important that we

work in accordance with these heavenly stages and their specific conditions. It is useless to rush into something if the time is not yet right. It is similarly futile to do something when it is already too late and the right opportunities have been missed. Time is a crucial factor in all our undertakings, and the universal propagation of Dao is no exception. It must take place at the right time and in the appropriate circumstances.

We live in an era of advanced science and technology. Human knowledge has expanded at a dramatic rate and there has also been a rapid growth in our population. With current transportation, communication, and media technologies, we are now operating within a smaller time/space frame than ever before. We have much greater mobility than our ancestors. Although our technology has brought us many welcome innovations, it has also had negative effects. We are easily distracted by material pleasures and indulge in selfish and greedy pursuits. Consequently, our moral and ethical values have deteriorated. This has left us spiritually empty, living our lives in the absence of reliable guidelines and support. Furthermore, the negative nature of human spirituality has been responsible for imbalance and disharmony, which manifests itself in the world as “natural” and human-made disasters.

Now the world is on the brink of destruction. We are approaching the time referred to in religious texts as the time of judgment, in which we reap the fruit of our past actions. It is at this critical time that we need to propagate Dao, to restore harmony in our spiritual nature and in the world around us.

Another reason why Dao can be propagated worldwide now is that advanced communications technology and the availability of fast, reliable transport make it possible to reach a large number of people in a relatively short period of time. During Confucius’s time, around 400 BC, Confucius spent his whole life teaching and propagating the essence of truth. He traveled widely, from one province to another, preaching his wisdom in order to create a world of unity. Although he worked tirelessly, his achievement did not extend beyond a small part of China. Similarly, Gautama Buddha’s efforts in preaching the dharma and teaching sentient beings throughout his life were limited to certain areas of India. The same limitations apply in the case of Lao Zi, Jesus Christ, the Prophet Mohammed, and many other saints. If Dao had been globally available in those days, the efforts of Dao propagators would have been seriously hampered by limited mobility and the lack of effective communication systems, whereas now we have no such restrictions.

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2. The Human Factor

In terms of human relationships, science and technology have brought people closer together by overcoming problems of distance and time, and have also made it possible for relations between countries to improve. They facilitate trade and business and encourage cultural exchange. This in turn promotes the study of other languages and a greater understanding of different cultural traditions. In the past, this was not possible to the same degree, and this is one of the reasons why it was not suitable for Dao to be widely propagated.

In terms of human spirituality, our ancestors were purer in nature than we are now. Moral and ethical values were more rigorously preserved. Life was simpler and, on the whole, more peaceful. As a result, people did not feel such a strong yearning for truth as we do now. This is another reason why the universal propagation of Dao would not have been effective in the past.

So far, the factors we have discussed have all been related to external circumstances. The most important point, however, concerns the spirit within us. Now is the time for all souls to come together as one and return to our origin. It is now 60,000 years since we parted from our Heavenly Mother. Before we left her at the Hill of the Three Mountains, we were constantly reminded to return to Heaven, our place of origin. But we lost our way like stray sheep and our bright original nature has been obscured with corruption and depravity.

Now time is critical. We live in constant danger of terrible destruction. That is why the universe extends this precious essence of Dao to the worldly realm so that everyone can receive Dao and return to the source.

Two to three thousand years ago, the saints and sages of the five great religions descended to this world to preach the essence of truth, to teach the essence of morality, and to spread the gospel. They also left us their wisdom recorded in various texts and embodied in doctrines. All this was done in order to prepare the path for the universal propagation of Dao. Now, as we study the teachings of these past saints, we can see that they were all making the same prophesies, spreading the same essence of truth in different places and different cultural contexts.

All the divine spirits in the universe are now coming to the world to assist in the work of Dao. That is why we see so many spiritual manifestations. The spiritual beings also come to give teachings and pass on messages (through sand-writing and other means) in Higher Teaching classes. They do this to help and to guide us. Sometimes in the Higher Teaching class, the teachings are presented in the form of lyrics.

When Will We Be Re-united? (Song by the Divine Patriarch)

> 60,000 years ago
>
> We were separated at the Hill of the Three Mountains. The Heavenly Mother is very anxious.
>
> She ordered all spiritual beings to descend to the world,
>
> To pass on messages and teachings, both directly and in subtle ways.
>
> Hopefully all my disciples will cultivate rigorously,
>
> Willingly bear the responsibility for truth,

> To clear our karmic debt and accomplish our mission
>
> in this final period of the white stage.

Great Motherly Love (Song by the Divine Dean of Heavenly School)

> “In the sad and desolate wilderness,
>
> We must uphold the essence of Truth.
>
> Our compassionate Mother misses her beloved children,
>
> She sends messages to us constantly,
>
> With endless tears and a broken heart.

The Heart of the Heavenly Mother

> “The bright moon hangs like a hook in the sky,
>
> The heart is full of sadness.
>
> The wind of disaster sweeps the dusty world,
>
> While the lost children idly wander,
>
> The White Period is the third period of autumn.
>
> Save our brothers and sisters quickly,
>
> Bear the responsibility of truth with great courage
>
> And establish an eternal essence.

From these few songs we can understand the heart of our Heavenly Mother and all the other saints and immortals. These songs express a sense of great urgency. We can understand how critical it is

to spread the essence of Truth in order to return to where we have all come from, our place of origin. As human beings, we play a vital role in saving the human heart and manifesting the world of great unity.

We all know that the world is on the verge of destruction, but what can we do to reverse the negativity that has brought us to this crisis? Mencius once said:

> When the world is sinking, the way to save it is through Dao.

The world is in chaos and people are drowning in oceans of greed and desire. The world is sinking and only Dao can raise it up again. How can Dao bring about such a change?

The present state of the world is the consequence of human actions. We are responsible for the mess, the chaos, and the proliferation of disasters. As mentioned earlier, the main reasons why we have had such a negative effect are our loss of conscience and our insatiable greed. In the constant battle for material gain and worldly reputation, people resort to unethical behaviors like killing, cheating, and theft. This results in a vicious cycle of cause and effect which inevitably leads to disaster. There is a Chinese proverb that says:

> The person who tied up the bell must be the one to untie it.

Since we are the ones who caused the problem, we must take responsibility for solving it. How can we do it? Only through Dao.

When Dao descended to the world, the saints and sages came to the world too. Zheng Zi once said:

> When the world moves in accordance with Dao, saints will ascend to heaven.
>
> When the world has no Dao, the saints and sages will appear on earth.

This means that when the world has Dao, everybody will act in accordance with Truth so the world will be peaceful. When the world is peaceful, there is no need for saints to stay on. Their mission would be accomplished and they would simply depart from the worldly realm. When the world has no Dao—when people forget their conscience and the world is a mad, chaotic place—saints will incarnate into the world to teach with love and compassion. They will work to save the world with their unconditional love.

If we are involved in the work of Dao, we will come across many predecessors who dedicate themselves unconditionally to the work of Dao. They pioneer Dao from place to place without sufficient rest. Their main concerns are to ensure that Dao relatives can fully understand the

essence of Dao and to make it possible for the rest of the world to receive Dao. Are they not saints and bodhisattvas?

With the propagation of Dao, through the pointing out of the Heavenly Gate by the Dien Chuan Shr, our true nature and conscience will start to shine brightly. Then, with the love and compassion of the Buddhas and the work of the predecessors in the Dao environment organizing seminars and classes to guide us along the path of cultivation, we will begin to manifest the qualities of a cultured person. We will begin to curb our selfish desires and gradually shed our shortcomings and vices to become righteous people. The positive energy that we manifest can, in time, resolve the negative energy of the world. Only then can peace be restored to societies, nations, and all over the world. This is how a world of great unity can be established.

Conclusion

This is the reason why Dao has descended to the world and is now universally propagated. By receiving Dao we can begin to brighten ourselves and let our true nature shine as we carry on the saintly mission of life.

We have discussed the reason why Dao has descended to the world at this time. We can appreciate just how honored we are to have received Dao and realize the importance of the saintly responsibility we bear. Hopefully, we will make every effort to understand Dao and make full use of this precious opportunity to cultivate ourselves.

Chapter 6: The Preciousness of Dao

The world is constantly changing. As time goes by, all people and societies seem to negate themselves and their values. In the present we negate the past. In the future, our present concerns will be negated. In the course of human history, many heroic figures have emerged, and one by one they have been devalued or forgotten and replaced with new heroes.

The history of governments follows the same pattern, with new rulers and political parties overturning the policies of the old. In the field of scientific research, scientists must accept the fact that they can have no absolute academic authority as their findings will be modified, disproved or disregarded by future researchers.

There is, however, one achievement which will never be denied. That is the achievement of sainthood or Buddhahood. Realizing this, we can understand more fully the preciousness of Dao. This chapter will focus on the keys to the preciousness of Dao.

In the words of Lao Zi:

> “ It is better to move into the essence of Dao than to be an emperor, one of the three dukes, to hold precious jade or to ride in a carriage drawn by fine horses.

In ancient times, the emperor, as the son of heaven, is a person of the highest character. This symbolizes a position of respect. The three dukes hold official positions second only to the emperor. They stand below one person and above thousands. They represent high status or position.

If a man has servants who hold jade in their hands he must have great wealth. The mode of travel, with four horses pulling a carriage, represents power and status. Respect, status, wealth, and power are great treasures in the world. They are the four things most desired by worldly beings. And yet Lao Zi actually states that they are incomparable to the achievement of Dao.

Knowing this, people of great wisdom in the past and in our own time like Buddha, Confucius, or Buddha Gwan-Yin abandoned all their worldly possessions in order to set out on the path of cultivation.

Why is Dao so precious? Let us consider the following points.

1. The Preciousness of the Heavenly Decree

The Heavenly Decree literally means authority that is in accordance with the will of heaven—that is, the decree from God.

Let us make the distinction now between things that are human-made and things that go according to the will of heaven. Any behavior that has its source in human desire can be called human-made, while behaviors that coincide with heavenly intention are in accordance with the will of heaven. This will of heaven is also known as the Heavenly Decree, or the will of God. It represents the truth of all dimensions, the principles that all things follow.

We can live as human beings because a soul has been bestowed upon us. We are the head of all living creatures. Together with heaven and earth, we form the trinity. Heaven, or God, is the governor of the universe and exists everywhere in the world as Truth. This is the truth of the Universe and it constitutes the guiding principle of all things.

To act according to the direction of the soul is to follow the principle of heaven and to respond to the common wish of human beings. As we follow this guiding principle, our actions will certainly give rise to great vitality and harmony. On the other hand, to act against the principle of the soul is essentially destructive because everything will be in a state of chaos and will finally perish. That is what the saints and sages meant when they said:

> “To follow heaven one will have life, but to act against heaven only brings destruction.

The widespread propagation of Dao is in accordance with the decree of heaven. It does not arise from human desires. The Heavenly Decree passed to our Dien Chuan Shrs is exactly the same as the Heavenly Decree that was bestowed upon the Divine Patriarch and Divine Matriarch.

The propagation of Dao has met with many difficulties and setbacks in its time, but not only has it survived these setbacks, it has actually prospered. Dao has spread from Taiwan to many other countries and is recognized and protected by the governments of various nations. Clearly such prosperity would not be possible if Dao propagation was not in line with the decree of heaven.

Dao cultivators must have been very selfless in their work and followed the wish of heaven in order to benefit all people. That is the consequence of responding to the heart of heaven, cultivating and spreading Dao according to heavenly will.

Our Divine Patriarch said:

>

> The decree of heaven far exceeds the emperor's decree.

This is the first preciousness of Dao.

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2. Transcending the Cycle of Life and Death

Nothing in the physical world is more important than the question of life and death. Life and death are like a one-way street. Once we enter the flow of traffic, there is no way we can turn around and go back. We cannot suddenly decide that we were born into the wrong family and go back to try again, nor do we have the chance to make a second attempt at dying if our death does not go according to plan.

Life is like a flowing river—the water moves constantly in one direction and does not return. Once our last breath leaves us, our life ends, regardless of whether it was good or bad. Then comes the next life, which has its own form and structure, its own journey. In the course of a lifetime, any deviation from the path of truth results in negative behavior, which in turn produces the seed of reincarnation.

The reason why Buddhas descend into this world is to resolve the cycle of life and death. Before Buddha Sakyamuni became a Buddha, he was a prince called Siddhartha. When he first left the palace to tour the city, he discovered the four kinds of suffering that occur in life: birth, old age, sickness, and death. When he realized that all living beings suffer, he decided to leave his home and family in order to search for the way to end all suffering.

After a period of cultivation, he attained enlightenment. From that time on, through his great compassion and concern for the welfare of sentient beings, he turned the wheel of dharma to free them from suffering and the endless cycle of life and death.

The Dien Chuan Shrs have the Heavenly Decree from our Divine Patriarchs. They can pinpoint our true nature, awaken or initiate our spiritual essence. One of the holy teachings indicated:

> “You can read the Diamond Sutra until the pages are torn and recite the mantra of Great Compassion till your mouth is sore, but unless you have received the initiation of the Divine Patriarchs, you will remain within the reincarnation cycle.

We are yet to find the path that leads to our release from the cycle of life and death. It has also been said that:

> Even if you are smarter than Yen Hui and Min Zi Qian, don't try to guess the nature of Dao before you receive the pointer of a Divine Patriarch.

Yen Hui and Min Zi Qian were the two most virtuous and wise disciples who learned under Confucius. This proverb says that even if we are smarter than them, we still would not be able to understand the path that can free us from the cycle of birth and death without the pointer of a Divine Patriarch or Divine Matriarch.

From this, we can see the crucial role of the Divine Patriarch and Divine Matriarch in passing Dao onto us. The ultimate way to transcend the cycle of life and death is known only to saints and Buddhas and is passed on to us in the physical realm by the Divine Patriarch and Divine Matriarch.

In the previous chapter we saw how the Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan had seventy-two masters, all very virtuous, but all ultimately ignorant of the way out of the reincarnation cycle. Even if people know the way, they do not have the authority to pass it on to others, unless they are themselves enlightened. Followers of religions and many other great cultivators have acquired an understanding of truth, but they have not been able to transcend the cycle of death and rebirth.

Our Divine Patriarch and Divine Matriarch received the heavenly decree to descend into this world and pass on the Way. This is prophesied in Ancient texts. The predictions refer to Patriarch Gong Chang and Matriarch Zi Xi. In the *Scriptures of Long Hua*, a poet writes:

> “How many know the birth of Gong Chang?
>
> All religions turn to one.
>
> Time is mature for Dao to be spread,
>
> Saving all the children of heaven.

This poet shows the authenticity of the decree of heaven that was bestowed upon our Divine Patriarch and Divine Matriarch, and their mission in the propagation of Dao. Their purpose is to ensure that all religions are united; all people can receive and cultivate Dao in order to transcend the cycle of life and death, and to be at one with the universe.

The Dien Chuan Shrs carry out heavenly duties and also work to fulfill the unaccomplished tasks of their predecessors in spreading Dao to every corner of the world. Their aim is to facilitate a world of great unity.

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3. The Preciousness of the True Teachings

Dao is now spread to all people no matter whether they are rich or poor, talented or unskilled, wise or foolish, virtuous or mean. No matter where we come from in this life or what our worldly circumstances may be, the three treasures offer a simple and accessible form of cultivation that can free us from the cycle of rebirth. We do not need to practice meditation or chant the sutras.

The reason why the three treasures are so effective is that the teaching they embody encompasses the heart teachings that were passed on from generation to generation by the Patriarchs in the past. Most importantly, our Heavenly Mother bestows the three treasures on us.

The heart teaching of the three treasures is not limited by language. Regardless of ethnic background, levels of literacy or the strength of our spiritual foundation, we can use the essence of the three treasures as a daily practice in our lives. This is the third preciousness of Dao—the preciousness of the true teaching.

Conclusion

The preciousness of the Heavenly Decree, the Divine Patriarch and Divine Matriarch's help to us in transcending the life and death cycle, and the teachings of the truth are unique to Dao.

If it were not for the pressure of impending disasters, the mercy of God, the protection of heavenly grace, the great vow of Buddha Me-Ler, and the virtues of our predecessors, we would not be able to benefit from the preciousness of Dao.

We are honored and extraordinarily fortunate to be able to receive these gifts. We should maintain a heart of gratitude and truly cherish the treasures we have gained.

Chapter 7: The Meaning of Life, Birth, Aging, Sickness, and Death

There was once a wise Chinese man named Zhang Liang, who said:

> Being human is difficult.
>
> A human is difficult to be.
>
> It is difficult to be human.

Undoubtedly, playing our role as a human being is not easy. The journey of life is complex, unpredictable and subject to change at any moment. The experiences that we have in life—bitterness, sweetness, achievement, and loss—are often beyond our ability to predict or control.

In the days when Buddha was still Prince Siddhartha, he led a very sheltered existence. He stayed in the palace surrounded by people who looked beautiful, young, healthy, and happy. One day, however, he went through the palace gates into the city and there he saw sights which he had never seen before. He witnessed the pain of birth, the suffering of age and of the sick, and the agony of death.

It was the sight of these four forms of suffering that prompted him to leave the idle, pleasure-filled life of the palace and to set out alone to search for truth. When he became enlightened, he found the path that can free us from these four basic experiences of pain and suffering.

What is that path? Why is it that the knowledge of such suffering should lead the prince to seek truth?

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1. What Are the Four Major Sufferings?

i. The Suffering of Birth

The suffering of birth can be considered from two points of view: the pain of our mothers who give birth to us, and the pain we ourselves feel in the process of being born.

All mothers experience pregnancy and most mothers experience labor. Bringing a child into the world is a painful process. From the time of conception, there are all kinds of discomforts: morning sickness, fatigue, loss of appetite, and odd cravings. Towards the end of the pregnancy, there is the awkwardness of a very large belly to contend with. The period of labor begins, bringing the indescribable pain of pushing a baby into the world. It has been called a struggle between life and death. In the past, it was common for women to die in childbirth, and even now there is a saying that "*the birth of a child endangers the mother.*"

Birth is also painful for the one who is being born, so this is a pain we have all experienced. Most of us, however, have forgotten this pain and the important lesson that it holds for us.

In order to be born, we all go through the processes of conception, the growth of the embryo into a fetus, and, in most cases, turning and positioning ourselves within the womb to be born upside down. A baby preparing to come into the world goes through a little cycle of life and death. If anything goes wrong, then the new life will fail to be embodied. Labor is a painful process for the baby, as well as the mother. It is no wonder that so many of us cry as we enter the world.

Buddhist texts describe the pain that is experienced by a fetus, as its pure spirit is embodied in the weighty impurity of matter and imprisoned in the harsh environment of the physical, conditional world.

From these few points, we can see that the process of birth is painful, and indeed, the whole journey of life is marked by troubles and cares.

A poem describes the pain of birth and the delusion that so often characterize the lives of sentient beings:

> When we are born into the world, we cannot avoid the eight major sufferings.
>
> When we are born into the world we become restless, with ceaseless, anxious thoughts.
>
> Rushing all day for fame and gain,
>
> Who are we working and saving for?

---

ii. The Suffering of Old Age

Old age also involves suffering. We may not have experienced it ourselves, but from talking to our older friends and relatives, we can understand a little of how it must feel. Unless we depart from

the world while we are young, we will all go through the process of aging.

Like all physical things, we have a limited life and at some point our bodies will begin to fail us. Once we are old, we tend to lose mobility. It becomes more difficult to do the things we used to take for granted. We want to watch television, but our eyes are too weak. We see delicious food but are unable to eat, because our false teeth can't manage it, or it is too rich for our delicate digestion.

So often when we are young and busy, we postpone our schedule until we have more time. We look forward to retirement and all the leisure activities we will enjoy. But by then, who knows if the body will still have the energy or the strength? When we are young we try to save money for our old age, but once we are old we find that we can't do much with the money anymore.

If we could look forward to old age as a time when our children and family members grow to respect us and care for us it would not seem so bleak, but the truth is that people tend to ignore, ridicule, and even abuse the aged. For the many lonely, homeless old people in the world, old age is truly a time of suffering.

> When people grow old they become weak and their memory begins to fade.
>
> Guarding the door, they look after the house in loneliness.
>
> The hairs on their temples grow snowy white,
>
> Their bodies are thin and gaunt and they no longer have a say in the running of the household.

---

iii. The Suffering of Illness

We all have bodies of flesh and blood. It is impossible not to become ill at some time. We don't all suffer major health problems, but all of us at some time have had colds, flus, infectious childhood diseases, and other minor illnesses. The experience of illness is unpleasant. When our friends are ill, we do what we can to comfort them, but no matter what we say or do, we cannot share their pain or suffer the illness for them.

To be seriously ill can involve long periods of pain, frustration, and distress. Thinking of the often long, drawn-out suffering that comes with illness, a Chinese army general named Zhang Fei once said:

> I have no fear of death but I'm afraid of being ill.

Whether the hospitals are large or small clinics, they always seem to be filled with patients. Anyone who has ever visited a hospital will understand that people suffer in operating theaters, or even in routine procedures that can make a hospital seem like a living hell.

So far, we have mentioned only physical illness. We also suffer spiritual disease when our heart is filled with troubles and anxieties. This kind of illness is even more painful than the sicknesses of the flesh.

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iv. The Suffering of Death

Of the four major sufferings, death is the most frightening. Many people claim not to fear death, but in most cases their attitude changes dramatically when death actually approaches. Although we have no experience of death (or rather, we have forgotten our past experiences of dying), death comes to us all as an unavoidable fact of life.

When we sit with someone who is dying and observe their pain, when we realize that all our cherished memories, hopes, plans, and ambitions will die with us, we naturally feel the fear and grief of loss. Death separates us from the people and places we love. Some people pass away before they are able to fulfill lifelong vows or wishes, and that gives even greater pain at the time of death.

People are considered clinically dead when their breathing stops and their hearts no longer beat. However, clinical death is not the same as the real moment of death, which occurs when the soul has completely departed from the body. Different people's souls take different amounts of time to leave: the faster ones take about two hours, four to ten hours is average, and the slow ones take up to two days.

This is the way death was described by Buddha, and it is consistent with the observations of medical science. During the period of the soul's transition from the body to the disembodied state, the body undergoes great pain. Some people have likened it to the pain that a turtle or a snake might feel if it were to be stripped of its shell or skinned alive. It is indescribably painful, and no one, neither king nor beggar, can escape it.

What is even more distressing is that the soul will have to bear its karma and face the endless cycle of pain through births, illness, ageing, and deaths. In short, death hurts when it happens, and hurts even more when it is over.

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2. Only Through Receiving and Cultivating Dao Can We Transcend Suffering and Dwell in Happiness

When Prince Siddhartha went around his city, he witnessed the four kinds of suffering and understood that no one could avoid them. These four are not the only kinds of suffering; there are many ways for us to experience pain. Since pain is unavoidable, the only way to have a pain-free existence is to overcome it.

When he realized this, the prince left his palace and his family, went to seek truth and to find the way for the world to be free of suffering. His perseverance never failed him and at last, in his enlightenment, he found Dao, or truth, the remedy for all suffering. This essence that he acquired is exactly the same as the essence that is passed on to us when we receive Dao.

Can receiving and cultivating Dao help us to overcome the four major sufferings? The answer is undeniably **yes**.

The suffering of birth and death comes from our confusion about what it really means to be born and to die. It is because we do not understand the purpose of birth that we are fearful and willing to be born. And because we do not know where we will be after death, we are afraid to leave the place that is familiar. We come to the world confused and we leave it the same way. Between our arrival and our departure, we endure all kinds of sorrow, pain, and frustration.

Now that we have received Dao, we can understand the purpose of life and live in a meaningful way. We can understand the purpose of death and die gracefully. With this approach to life and death, the pain and suffering is resolved. That is why many virtuous Dao relatives, even though they are busy with their personal lives and the work of Dao, still wear smiles on their faces and live happily. At the end of their lives, they leave the world still smiling because they have fulfilled their mission in life.

We can see then that the way to overcome the suffering of birth and death lies in receiving Dao and learning the real source of our troubles, then cultivating our virtues in order to fulfill our heavenly mission. This is the only way for us to break out the cycle of reincarnation and completely resolve the suffering of birth and death.

The pain of illness can also be resolved or eased through our cultivation of Dao. The most serious illnesses are those caused by our karmic creditors. Many serious illnesses manifest for this reason. The only way to overcome them is by learning more about Dao, so that we can understand our illness with our growing wisdom.

We need to realize that the only way to cure karmic-induced illness is to establish our virtue and accumulate merits. On one hand, we use these virtues and merits to cleanse ourselves of our karmic contamination. On the other hand, we are embraced by the spiritual grace of the universe. Only then can our karmic sickness be resolved.

The same applies to emotional problems. When we cultivate Dao and understand its essential truth, we will have a more peaceful mind. We learn to stop craving and to feel contentment in our lives, and we can find the best remedy for emotional stress.

Cultivation can also alleviate the suffering that comes with ageing. When we cultivate, we work on our virtue and we become wiser. We find that our cultivation has a very positive effect on other

members of our family, so that we can support each other in mutual respect and care.

As well as our personal family, we have a large family of Dao relatives. With such supportive and loving family networks, we can cultivate and propagate Dao until our old age, and never fear loneliness or rejection.

Conclusion

As we have seen, by participating in Dao we can realize the true source of our suffering. By cultivating and propagating Dao, we can resolve the four major sufferings and transform them into happiness. This shows us once again how truly precious Dao is, and how fortunate we are to have the opportunity to cultivate.

In this chapter we have touched on another aspect of the preciousness of Dao cultivation. At times this cultivation may be a rough journey filled with challenges, tests, and trials. This pain, however, will be short-lived, and afterwards our hearts will be filled with boundless happiness and joy.

If we understand the suffering of life, we want to be away from it. With the joy of cultivation, we want to make rapid progress. So on one hand we remove ourselves from suffering, and on the other hand, we approach the source of happiness. As we come closer to this source, our suffering diminishes and we begin to feel true happiness and joy.

Chapter 8: The True Self and the False Self

In the previous chapters so far we have come to understand that the soul is the owner and governing essence of the body. When body and soul combine, there is birth. When body and soul go their separate ways, death occurs. The body goes through the processes of birth and death, creation and destruction. This, however, does not happen in the case of the soul, which merely comes and goes.

There is a very close relationship between body and soul. Each affects the other. This relationship is the topic of this chapter. An ancient sage named Kong Ming posed this riddle in the *Passage of the Heavenly Secret*:

> Two people share the same pair of shoes,
>
> The one who is alive carries the one who is dead,
>
> Yet, the one who is dead buries the live one.

This, like all riddles, makes no sense if we interpret it literally. How can two people share one pair of shoes? That in itself would be strange enough, especially when we read the second line. It seems more like a joke. In addition, how can a dead person bury someone who is alive?

The answer is **a person**. The two people are in fact one person. The one who is alive is the soul, and the dead one is our physical body. The soul gives life to the physical body and, in fact, carries it—the body cannot function by itself unless it is ensouled. The soul animates and activates the body.

However, when we were born into this world we failed to recognize our true nature. We mistake our physical body for our true self and spend our whole lives finding ways to keep it comfortable and entertained. As a result, the soul bears all the karma that accumulates in the course of a lifetime, unable to escape the ceaseless cycle of suffering. If we follow the desires of the physical body, the soul will have to take the consequences.

This is what it meant in the riddle when “the one who is dead buries the one who is alive.” The physical body can cause the downfall of the spiritual self. As it is said:

>

> How we feel after death depends on what we do while we are alive.

The Two Corpses: A Story

A story from a Chinese legend illustrates this principle. About three thousand years ago, at the end of the Zhou dynasty, Zheng Zi, a disciple of Lao Zi, was strolling in the wilderness when he saw a heavenly deity holding a bouquet of flowers and paying respects to a corpse. Zheng Zi asked the deity what his relationship to the corpse was and why it deserved such honor.

The deity answered:

> “This body is my previous incarnation. It helped me to do many meritorious deeds, so I was able to ascend to heaven, where I can live in freedom and joy. Without my old body, none of this would have been possible. That is why I am now paying my respect to it.

When asked what good deeds he had done, the deity replied:

> “I paid respect to heaven and earth; I respected the saints and sages and honored my ancestors. I was a pious son to my parents, lived harmoniously with my neighbors, and helped the poor and needy. I was compassionate and generous, giving and sharing.

Zheng Zi thanked the deity and went on his way. Soon, he came upon a hungry ghost whipping a corpse in rage. Curious, Zheng Zi asked the ghost why.

The ghost replied:

> “This body is my previous incarnation. This terrible body made me do terrible deeds.

When Zheng Zi asked what these were, the ghost explained:

>

> I insulted heaven and earth, disrespected the saints and sages, dishonored my ancestors, and mistreated my parents. I constantly argued and fought with others, showed no respect to anyone, vandalized and killed many animals, and denied the teachings of the saints and sages. Because of my deeds, I now suffer constant torment in the underworld. That is why I am venting my anger by whipping this traitorous body.

The ghost recited:

> “Because of this stinking covering of flesh
>
> I have spent my whole life pursuing temporary pleasures.
>
> I did not stop to reflect on my actions.
>
> Even though life is transient,
>
> The pain after death seems endless.
>
> Now I whip this body that has led me astray,
>
> So that I can release my anger and frustration.

Zheng Zi, deeply moved, recited:

> “Today I saw two corpses.
>
> The wise one ascended to heaven
>
> While the evil one descended to hell.
>
> The virtuous soul paid respects to its body,
>
> While the body of the tormented soul was whipped in anger and frustration.

---

1. Birth and Death Are Continuous

Birth is not the beginning and death is not the end. Birth comes as a result of death, and death has its origin in birth. As the saying goes:

> One extra person born into the world means one less ghost in the ghost realm.

This shows that life is a continuous process. The soul is eternal; it has no birth or death. Birth and death are unavoidable processes for the physical body. Life in the physical world is transient, just a dot on an infinite line of existence.

When we realize that life is a process and that there is no permanence in our physical existence, we can begin to see all things of this life—bodies, reputations, property, wealth—merely as tools, useful but without real substance. Nevertheless, these impermanent things can greatly influence the soul's state after death.

The deity in the story lived in joy because he used those tools wisely to fulfill his spiritual needs. The ghost suffered because he used them for actions that obscured his true nature. To die in peace and live on in brightness, we must consider our actions while alive.

---

2. Positive Existence After Death Requires Virtue and Merit

Death is not the end—it begins life in another form. Our present life follows our death in the past, and our past death led to this life. If we want a positive life after death, we must cultivate virtues and merits now. Everything we experience is the result of our past actions; blaming others is pointless.

The constant pain of humankind stems from ignorance of this principle. If we do not plant good seeds in this life, we cannot expect to harvest good fruits in the future. Ignorance of cause and effect only deepens our suffering.

The way to change our circumstances is to change our heart. As we cultivate goodness, unnecessary pain and worry will be resolved.

---

3. Better to Transcend the Cycle of Birth and Death

Whether rebirth is into good or bad circumstances, it is still within the cycle of karmic returns. As long as karma exists, birth and death will continue, and reincarnation becomes a vicious cycle.

Acting well to secure a better next life is still limited. Even in fortunate rebirths, old negative seeds from earlier lives can still sprout. The best course is to transcend the cycle entirely.

This is possible only when positive actions are unconditional. When we receive Dao and our Heavenly Gate is opened, we gain inner wisdom, enabling unconditional benevolence. Cultivating Dao and dedicating ourselves to saving all beings allows us to transcend birth—and thus death.

Whether we can transcend the cycle depends entirely on how we live now.

Conclusion

Life is precious when used to cultivate Dao and radiate inner virtues. Death is frightening when one lacks virtue. We must cherish each moment, using life to establish and realize our divine goal.

Chapter 9: The Story of the Kew Chow Master and Bai

We now live in a time when Dao can be part of our family life. It is no longer necessary for us to seclude ourselves in order to cultivate. After receiving Dao we can cultivate at home, together with all the other members of the family.

As part of a family, we show love and respect towards our parents. As part of society and a nation—whether we work as farmers, laborers, business people, or professionals—we each have responsibilities to fulfill. Within society we also develop networks of affinity with friends and relatives, and we share the knowledge of Dao with them when we meet. This is a very agreeable and convenient way to spread the Dao message and elevate ourselves as well as others.

In the past, the situation for cultivators was much more difficult. They had to leave their homes and families behind and travel deep into the mountains. As you can imagine, very few people cultivated in this way. This chapter is about earlier methods of cultivation.

Two Immortals in the World

Seeing how souls in the world created bad seeds and had no intention of returning to their heavenly home, the Buddha in the West told two immortals to reincarnate into the world to awaken the lost. These two immortals came separately:

- **Bai Lee Tian**, born into the Bai family, became a royal officer.
- **Ma Tian Zhang**, born into the Ma family, was a great scholar in the National Academy. Through reading scriptures, he came to understand the law of cause and effect, resigned his position, and became a monk in the Ta Shuan Ling monastery.

When Ma Tian Zhang completed his cultivation, he returned to heaven. Buddha asked:

> While you were in the world, how many people were you able to deliver from the cycle of reincarnation?

Ma Tian Zhang replied that delivering lost souls was difficult. The Buddha then asked where his fellow cultivator was. Ma explained that Bai Lee Tian was content in his royal position and had been captivated by the mundane world. The Buddha admonished him for not saving Bai and instructed

him to return immediately to do so.

The Bird’s Nest Zen Master

Knowing Bai was already nearly eighty years old, Ma Tian Zhang worried that reincarnating again would take too long. Then he saw a bird’s nest at the top of an old pine tree and chose to reincarnate as a bird with a human face. Thus was born the **Bird’s Nest Zen Master**, who preached truth from his perch.

One day, Officer Bai rode past and heard the Zen Master. Curious, he asked:

> “What is cultivating?

The Zen Master replied:

> “Stop all negative doings, do all positive actions and good deeds. That is cultivating.

Bai scoffed, saying even a child could say that. The Zen Master replied:

> “Yes, a three-year-old can say it, but an eighty-year-old still cannot do it.

When Bai asked if living fifty feet up a tree was dangerous, the Zen Master answered:

> “Your position is much more dangerous than mine.
>
> Being an officer, you ride beside the emperor.
>
> Attending the emperor is like riding with a tiger.
>
> The flowers that bloom in the dawn are enchanting,
>
> But in the dust they fade, leaving nothing behind.

Bai was moved and promised to return, but worldly routines made him forget.

Awakening Officer Bai

The Zen Master later visited Bai's home and wrote this on his wall:

> In forty years of being an officer, whether general or scholar,
>
> There are thousands of rights and wrongs.
>
> In the comfort of one family lie the complaints of a thousand families.
>
> In the achievements and fame of half a lifetime,
>
> The grievances of a hundred lifetimes arise.

Reading this, Bai was awakened. He told his wife he wished to retreat into the mountains to lighten his karmic burden. She objected, saying the whole family could share his burden. Bai then tested them by blowing out a lamp and asking who would take the blame. No one did. He concluded:

> If you cannot take responsibility for a small act, how can you bear my karma?
>
> When we have sickness and pain, we must endure the suffering alone.
>
> No one can suffer on our behalf.

The next day, Bai went to the Green Water Bridge, paid respects to the Zen Master, and began cultivating.

The Family Follows

Bai's wife tried to change his mind, but he wrote to her:

> Husband and wife begin as birds from the same forest,
>
> But when danger comes, each flies in a different direction.

> What is the use of achievement and high status,
>
> When they can vanish in an instant, leaving a heavy karmic burden?

His family, inspired, later joined him in cultivation.

Lessons from the Story

1. With Willingness to Learn, a Common Person Can Become a Buddha

Even worldly people who sincerely cultivate can transcend confusion and attain awakening, especially if they perform deeds to save others. Without pursuit of truth, even Buddhas and bodhisattvas can become lost in the illusions of the world, as happened to Officer Bai.

By receiving Dao, we rediscover our true nature. Learning, cultivating, and spreading Dao allows our virtues to shine and helps us fulfill our life mission.

---

2. Focus on Cultivation and Help Others Do the Same

Many of us have strong spiritual foundations and affinities, possibly from past lives as disciples or even Buddhas and bodhisattvas. But the world’s temptations can bind us. Bai was trapped by attachments to status, wealth, and family, but freed himself through wisdom. His choice led his whole family to cultivate.

We must not sacrifice our spiritual purpose for career, reputation, or material gain. Instead, we should focus on cultivation and help our families cultivate together for a truly happy, meaningful life.

---

3. Each Person Must Bear Their Own Results

Our circumstances are the results of our own actions. No one can bear our karma for us. As the saying goes:

> A person has to deal with the circumstances of his own death just as the one who eats will have the full stomach.

Now that we have received Dao, it is time to learn more, understand the truth, and cultivate ourselves.

Chapter 10: Why a Kind Person Still Needs to Receive Dao

As human beings living between heaven and earth, we are blessed with all kinds of grace. Heaven unconditionally gives us air, sunshine, and water for our use. The earth unconditionally nurtures grains, vegetables, and fruit that provide us with food. Many other forms of grace are constantly bestowed upon us. Without such grace, we could not survive.

And yet, what have we done to repay the kindness of heaven and earth? Why has God given us this physical body? What purpose should it serve?

---

1. A Person’s Most Basic Requirement Is a Good Heart

It is common to hear people say, *“Why should we cultivate? It is enough to have a good heart.”* Or, *“Life is fine the way it is—why go through so much trouble?”* At first glance, such thoughts seem reasonable, but on deeper reflection, they are not necessarily correct.

How can we define the *“kind heart”* so many claim to have? It is a heart that does not engage in violence, theft, or any unrighteous act; a heart that takes care of oneself and is kind to others. But do all who claim to have a good heart truly manifest it?

Having a good heart is the natural condition and obligation of each person. If we fail to manifest it and fulfill our basic obligation, we act against truth and fail in our role as human beings. This alone is cause for shame. How could we then even think of causing harm to heaven and earth by holding a negative heart?

Human beings live in peace only because heaven, earth, and all beings bestow their grace upon us. Every second, heaven provides solar energy equivalent to millions of tons of burning coal—free and unconditional. The earth gives grains, fruits, and vegetables, nurturing all life. Even if humans plant and harvest, the real nurturing comes from the earth’s virtues.

We also receive support from our nations, love from our families, and guidance from our teachers. Clearly, we live with the blessings of boundless grace. Can we repay such immense kindness simply by having a “good heart”?

As Buddha taught:

> “A person ploughs and cultivates the fields to make a living. Why does heaven give life to humans? Even wood and stone have their purpose in the world.

Human beings live for a purpose greater than eating and sleeping. To have a good heart is only the most basic human responsibility—not a special achievement.

---

2. It Is a Great Pity if a Good Person Does Not Receive Dao

Today’s society, steeped in materialism and selfishness, often breeds ruthlessness. Many forsake the law of heaven and ignore their conscience, living in sorrow.

A truly good-hearted person refrains from stealing, deceiving, or committing evil deeds. They act in line with conscience and the law of heaven. Such people are rare. But if we stop at this basic level, our achievement remains insignificant.

A good heart reflects good spiritual foundation and affinity. But if we do not elevate ourselves by seeking truth and life’s meaning, we waste that precious affinity. Without receiving Dao, we cannot fully understand the root source of our existence or our life’s mission.

Our physical body is a tool for the soul, given through our parents, to fulfill life’s needs. Heaven, earth, and all things exist to nurture the body so the soul can use it. The soul is the essence, and without Dao, we cannot fully understand it.

Why does Heavenly Mother prepare such an ingenious body for us? Why arrange vast resources to meet its needs? If we do not receive Dao, we remain content as “good people” but fail to fulfill our true purpose.

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3. A Truly Good Heart Comes When We Receive and Cultivate Dao

The basic human heart is not the same as a truly good heart. A bodhisattva naturally emanates compassion to save suffering souls; a devil, by contrast, brings harm. Those who say they already have a good heart and do not need Dao misunderstand what true goodness is.

A true good heart manifests in deeds aligned with conscience—the essence of our true nature. Such a heart:

- Sympathizes and has compassion.
- Feels shame and avoids negative behavior.
- Is humble and courteous.
- Distinguishes right from wrong.

As Mencius said:

> A person whose heart cannot commiserate is inhuman.
>
> A person whose heart cannot feel shame is inhuman.
>
> A person whose heart is immodest and disagreeable is inhuman.
>
> A person whose heart cannot distinguish right from wrong is inhuman.

From conscience arise the Four Beginnings:

- **Benevolence** — sympathy and a desire to save others from suffering.
- **Righteousness** — shame over wrongdoing and a drive to help others replace negativity with good.
- **Propriety** — humility, shining warmth and brightness upon others.
- **Wisdom** — discerning good from evil, guiding others to clarity.

A person who embodies all this has a working conscience and a truly good heart. Before receiving Dao, these virtues are often abstract ideals. When we receive Dao, the *Dien Chuan Shr* points out our true nature, making it possible to fully manifest these virtues.

Cultivating Dao is the process of removing negativity so our true nature's virtues can shine.

Conclusion

Being complacent with having a "good heart" and not seeing the need to receive and cultivate Dao is a misunderstanding. Especially in these turbulent times, we cannot care only for our own well-being. Dao is now available to all—this is our great chance for spiritual elevation.

If we truly act from a good heart and possess wisdom, we will cherish the opportunity to receive and cultivate Dao.

Chapter 11: Human Nature

In the *San Zi Jing* it is written:

> In its original state, human nature is kind and pure.
>
> In the beginning everyone has a similar nature, but because we all live under different conditions, our characters soon become widely divergent.

Everyone's original nature is like the purity and innocence of a child. Surrounded by positive influences, we become positive; surrounded by negative influences, we become negative. Over time, these patterns become so pronounced it is hard to believe we were once alike.

Some argue that while most children seem innocent, some are mean, selfish, or greedy even before they know what these traits are. If so, how can we claim that original human nature is pure and kind?

This chapter examines our original nature, beginning with three ancient Chinese scholars.

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1. The Viewpoints of Three Ancient Scholars

Xun Zi believed a person's original nature is evil. He pointed to children who refuse to share, are jealous of siblings, and self-centered. In his view, careful teaching and guidance are needed so people can learn courtesy, respect, generosity, sincerity, and other virtues.

Gao Zi argued that a person's nature is neither good nor bad. If taught to be good, people become good; if taught to be bad, they become bad. He cited the proverb:

> If you get too close to red ink, you'll be stained red; if too close to black ink, you'll be stained black.

Hence, he emphasized role models and keeping good company.

Mencius believed human nature is pure and kind. He observed that babies naturally love their parents, respect elders, feel shame for wrongdoing, and show compassion even before moral instruction. With proper guidance, inherent wisdom can manifest fully, enabling achievements like those of past saints.

Three Types of Nature

These views correspond to three aspects of human nature: **physical nature**, **dualistic nature**, and **true nature**.

Physical Nature

Also called conditional or habitual nature, it exists only with the body. Interaction with the material world creates desires—basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter can grow into greed and attachment. Without restraint, greed and indulgence overshadow the true nature, enslaving us to materialism.

Dualistic Nature

Also known as inherited nature, it derives from *chi* and karmic seeds from countless incarnations. Lao Zi said:

> Act positively, and positive stars will follow; act negatively, and negative stars will follow.

Thus, some are born kind, others stubborn, based on past actions. Gao Zi's neutral view refers to this dualistic nature, which can be good, bad, or mixed. We carry it from birth to death. Realizing this, we can work to avoid creating negative karma and to accumulate merit.

True Nature

Also called heavenly nature, it is God-given, existing before heaven and earth. It embodies benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness—pure, truthful, kind, perfect, and virtuous. This is the nature Mencius described. It is the aspect we use to emulate saints and sages. When obscured by duality and physical desire, it loses its purity.

Buddha taught us to "see the inner nature"; Confucius to "nurture the inner nature"; Lao Zi to "purify the inner nature." All recognized our innate purity.

---

2. Our Original Nature Is Complete

Gao Zi compared human nature to flowing water—directionless, shaped by its channel. Mencius replied:

> Water cannot distinguish east from west, but it knows up from down. Flowing downhill is intrinsic to water, just as purity is intrinsic to human nature.

External forces—like splashing or pumping—can make water flow upward, but this is unnatural. Similarly, negativity in people is caused by external forces.

Within all of us lies a pure, wise conscience. Yet through countless lifetimes, karmic seeds are planted, causing repeated rebirth. The six senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought—entangle us, and karmic seeds sprout when conditions arise, influencing our behavior.

Under peaceful conditions, we are naturally kind. But in conflict over personal gain, greed can overwhelm kindness, and worldly desires can eclipse our true, selfless nature. Integrity is often sacrificed for material benefit.

Buddhism urges “seeing the inner nature” to keep karmic nature from leading us astray. Confucianism teaches “nurturing the inner nature” to strengthen it against physical and karmic pressures. Taoism stresses “purifying the inner nature” to filter out impurities.

Transforming Nature

To “transform physical nature, relinquish inherited nature, and return to complete heavenly nature” is to restore the Buddha nature given by God. Few attain this level, for conscience often disappears in life’s struggles. Without unlocking the Heavenly Gate, our true master—our pure nature—remains imprisoned by karma.

Now that we have received Dao, our true nature is free. Let it govern our lives, giving us integrity and guiding the transformation of our physical and inherited natures into heavenly nature.

Conclusion

Our original nature is pure and complete. If it were inherently negative, cultivation would be pointless—like trying to turn rock into gold. If it were neither good nor bad, we would be at the mercy of environment alone.

Buddha taught that we are all Buddhas, but we must find our root source to manifest our Buddha nature. Though karma and physical conditions make each person’s character different, understanding our original nature enables us to return to the realm of truth, the embrace of our Heavenly Mother—the great homecoming sought by saints, sages, and cultivators throughout history.

Chapter 12: We See What We Have Within

Whenever we think of Buddha, our thoughts also turn to the opposite of a Buddha—the sentient beings who suffer in the world. Most people imagine Buddhas as bright, pure, holy beings with devotion. Sentient beings, by contrast, are considered less developed. People pray to Buddhas or Jesus, kneeling before icons for blessings, but ordinary people are rarely revered in this way.

Enlightened beings, however, see ordinary beings differently.

The Story of Su Dong Po and Fo Yin

In the Song dynasty, scholar Su Dong Po was both a literary figure and a student of Buddhism. He learned much from his friend Fo Yin, a Zen master. One day, they sat meditating together in dark brown robes.

Su Dong Po asked, “How do I look when I meditate?”

Fo Yin replied, “You look like a Buddha.”

Pleased, Su asked in return, “What about me? How do I look?”

Su, ever playful, laughed and said, “You look like a pile of cow dung!”

Fo Yin smiled without reply. Later, Su boasted to his sister, Su Xiao Mei, that he had finally “won” in their exchanges. But she shook her head:

> “A Buddha came out of Fo Yin’s mouth, and dung came out of yours. Fo Yin has a Buddha in his heart, so he sees Buddhas. Your heart holds crude thoughts, so you see crudely.

The story holds a core Zen lesson: we see according to what is in our hearts.

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1. Everybody Can Be a Buddha

Buddhahood is a level of cultivation anyone can achieve. All beings have Buddha nature within. As one sutra says:

> The heart, Buddha, and sentient beings are a single entity.

A Buddha is a sentient being fully enlightened, manifesting inner brightness. A sentient being is a Buddha whose nature is obscured.

When free from cravings and desires, the heart finds tranquility, and virtue shines forth to brighten others. When lost in desire, the false self governs, and the original brightness fades.

Saints and Buddhas come to guide beings back to their inner Buddha nature. True cultivation is not about seeking Buddha outside, but discovering and manifesting the Buddha within.

A Buddhist verse says:

> Buddha is at the spiritual mountain—do not seek from afar.
>
> The spiritual mountain lies within one's heart.
>
> Everybody has a pagoda within the spiritual mountain;
>
> Go and cultivate yourself there.

Receiving Dao gives us the "key" to unlock the Buddha within. With the door open, cultivation and truth bring tranquility, and we extend help so others may also awaken to their Buddha nature.

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2. With a Buddha in Our Heart, We See Buddhas Everywhere

Fo Yin had Buddha in his heart, so he saw Buddha in Su Dong Po. The *Amitabha Sutra* says:

> The water, the birds, and the forest all chant and cultivate.
>
> The mountains, rivers, and great earth are all transformations of the Tathagata.

Buddha exists everywhere; every land can be pure land—if we have Buddha in our hearts. With this essence, compassion naturally arises, for all beings have Buddha nature waiting to be uncovered.

Predecessors guide people to receive Dao, organize learning, and create opportunities for awakening. As compassion grows, we naturally want to help free others from suffering.

Buddha said:

> As the heart is pure and tranquil, the land of Buddha will be tranquil.

We first establish pure land in our hearts by removing illusions, deviant thoughts, and desires, and cultivating Dao. An enlightened saying puts it:

> With no deviant thoughts, every place is like the South Seas.
>
> Aspire to cultivate Dao, then your home will be a paradise.

With Buddha in our hearts, our homes, communities, and travels become places where darkness turns to light.

> With Buddha in our hearts, we see Buddhas everywhere.
>
> With a pure land in our hearts, every place is a pure land.

---

3. Beauty Exists Everywhere

Nothing in the physical realm is absolutely perfect or flawed; perspective determines beauty or ugliness. The peacock is beautiful yet imperfect; the seemingly ugly may hold beauty.

An old woman with two sons—one in the noodle business, the other selling umbrellas—worried constantly: sunny weather hurt umbrella sales, rainy weather hurt noodle drying. A friend advised her to rejoice for one son’s gain in sun, and the other’s in rain. Her worries vanished.

Attitude shapes experience. As with Su Dong Po and Fo Yin: see through the heart’s beauty, and you see a Buddha; see through ugliness, and you see dung.

Bodhisattvas strive to save beings because they see the precious brightness in everyone. By seeking beauty in all things, each day becomes a good day—especially in Dao cultivation.

Conclusion

All have Buddha nature; all can be Buddhas. Our Heavenly Mother has given us this chance—do not waste it. Receiving Dao, cultivating, discovering the Buddha within, maintaining the Buddha heart, and adopting the concerns of a Buddha all serve one purpose: to let our true nature shine.

When we do this, we create pure lands wherever we go, and everything becomes beautiful. In this beauty, life gains true meaning and joy.