

# 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 through 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.

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## 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.

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