

The Venerable High Master Lao Speaks:

The Classic of Eternal Purity and Stillness

-translated from the Chinese by Bhikshus Heng Sure and Heng Ch'au

The Great Way has no shape, but it is able to produce heaven and earth. The Great Way has no feelings, but it revolves the sun and moon in their orbits. The Great Way has no name, but it grows and nourishes all of creation. I do not know its name, but make an effort and call it the Tao.

As for the Tao, it consists of purity and turbidity, movement and stillness. Heaven is pure, earth is turbid. Heaven moves, earth is still. Men are pure, women are turbid. Men move, women are still.

The root descends, the branches flow forth to produce the ten thousand things. Purity is the source of turbidity; movement is the foundation of stillness. If people can be constantly pure and still, then Heaven and Earth completely return.

Now, the human spirit loves purity, but the mind disturbs it. The human mind loves stillness, but desires entice it away. If one can always expel desires, then the mind will naturally become still. Let the mind be cleansed, and the spirit will of itself become pure. As a matter of course the six desires will no longer arise, and the three poisons will disappear.

The reason why people cannot attain this is because they have not cleansed their minds, and have not expelled desires.

If one can expel desires, then inside when one contemplates one's mind, there is no mind. Outside when one contemplates one's body, there is no body. And when one contemplates objects afar, there are no objects.

Enlightened to these three, there then appears to be only emptiness. He contemplates emptiness as empty, too: emptiness has nothing to empty. Since this nothingness itself is gone, then the absence of nothingness is also gone. When the absence of even nothingness is gone, then a deep and constant stillness ensues.

Since stillness itself has nothing to be stilled, then how can desires arise? And when desires no longer arise, just this is true stillness.

True permanence interacts with things. True permanence brings the nature to accomplishment. Constantly responding, constantly still: this is eternal purity and stillness.

In such purity and stillness one gradually enters the true Way. And having entered the true Way, one is called he who has obtained the Tao. Although one is called "possessor of the Tao," there is actually nothing obtained. It is in the transforming of living beings that one gets the name "possessor of the Tao." And only one who can enlighten to this is entitled to transmit the true Way.

The Venerable High Master Lao said: The superior person does not contend. The petty person is fond of striving. People with the highest virtue do not make a display of their virtue. People with lesser virtue cling to and advertise their virtue. One who clings to and parades one's virtue cannot be said to have Way-Virtue.

Why do living beings fail to obtain the true Way? Because they have false thoughts. With false thinking the spirit is disturbed. Once the spirit is disturbed, it attaches to external things. Attaching to external things produces greed and seeking. This greedy seeking leads to hassels and afflictions. And these in turn worry and trouble both body and mind and one meets with foul disgrace.

Flowing and turning on the waves of birth and death, one sinks into the sea of suffering and forever loses the true Way.

The true and eternal Tao! Those who enlighten to it naturally obtain it. And those who can enlighten to the Way are eternally pure and still.