

The Classic of Eternal Purity and Stillness

-commentary by the Venerable Abbot

The reason why we study the Buddhadharma is so that we can cultivate the Way, the Tao. The reason we cultivate the Tao is to accomplish Buddhahood. You absolutely have to cultivate the Tao in order to accomplish Buddhahood.

Most people in the world spend their lives raising families and running after worldly pleasures. But those who leave the home-life to cultivate must renounce all worldly pleasures, enjoyments, and luxuries. Your lifestyle should be exactly the opposite of that of householders. Therefore it is said:

If you can't give up death, you can't exchange it for life.
If you can't give up the false, you can't accomplish the real.

If you can't put down the false you can't pick up the true.

Since we are cultivating the Way, the Tao, what shape or form does it have? It has absolutely no shape or form. T'ai Shang Lao Chun (太上老君), the venerable High Master Lao, that is, Lao Tzu, said in the *Classic of Eternal Purity and Stillness* (常清□ □):

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.

This section taken from the beginning of the *Classic of Eternal Purity and Stillness*, spoken by the Venerable Old Master, Lao Chun, who was a transformation body of the First Buddhist Patriarch Mahakashyapa, liked being old. Therefore he dwelt in his mother's womb for eighty-one years before he got born. But by that time his hair had grown completely white and he also had a frosty beard, and so he was called Lao Tzu, the "old one." This is not a case of premature old age which sometimes happens to children so that by the time they are five or six years old they look like eighty-year olds. During this day and age premature old age has become more and more prevalent. But when Lao Tzu was born, although he was old in appearance, he was extremely energetic. Why did he wait so long in his mother's womb? Well, probably he was so engrossed in investigation of the *I Ching*, the "*Book of Changes*," that he was determined to find the exact best time to be born. But when he found a good year, he couldn't find a good month and when he found a good month, he couldn't find a good day, and when he found a good day, he couldn't find a good hour, and so forth. Thus he went back and forth,

looking for the most ideal hour, day, month, and year to be born. It took him eighty-one years before he found the perfect time.

He was well-versed in all branches of the sciences—astrology, geology, and the philosophy of people. Since he was so erudite of course he wrote classics. One of his books is called the *Classic of Eternal Purity and Stillness*, the beginning section of which I've just quoted.

The text starts out saying, "The Great Way has no shape, but it is able to produce heaven and earth." If there were no Way--the Tao--the entire cosmos would just be a big blur, chaotic and unformed. It is only because of the Tao that heaven, earth and the myriad creatures all come into being. The Tao also produces immortals, Buddhas, and sages. But does the Tao have any appearance? No, it does not have a shape or form. It is a primal energy that gives birth to all of creation, replete with boundless transformations. You can call it "the Spirit," or "energy," or "primal breath," or the "nature."

"The Great Way has no feelings but it revolves the sun and moon in their orbits." The Tao has no emotional feeling, unlike people whose every action is run by emotions, to the point that even cultivators talk about "sentimental feelings" towards each other! It's really sticky. But, the Great Tao has no feeling. Well, isn't that very cold and inhuman? No, rather, it transcends everything. The Tao sustains the sun, moon, and all other heavenly bodies so they course in their proper orbits and never go out of bounds. The sun is the essence of yang, and the moon is the essence of yin. Heaven ascends because of pristine yang energy, therefore it is called "heaven." The earth sinks because it is the conglomerate of all heavy turbidities, therefore it is called "earth." And people, because they are neither pristine nor turbid to the extreme, do not rise and do not sink, but stay in the middle. Heaven, earth, and people together form a trinity--the Three Talents (三才). Therefore the Tao is mother of heaven, earth, and people and all other creatures.

The sun and moon course about in their heavenly tracks at exact degrees, sustained by the interplay of yang and yin magnetic forces. So the Tao holds them all in motion.

"The Great Way has no name; yet it grows and nourishes all of creation." The ten thousand things all come about through the Tao. At sixteen years of age I wrote a verse:

The ten thousand things are born from the Tao.
One who attains it naturally penetrates its efficacy.
Upon understanding this principle,
Bodhi neither increases nor decreases.

Everything comes into being from the Tao. One who achieves the Tao naturally becomes very wise. One becomes replete with the Three Bodies (the Dharma Body, Reward Body, and Transformation Body), the Four Wisdoms, the Five Eyes, and the Six Spiritual Penetrations. Why is the Buddha replete with all of the above? Just because he has realized the Tao, the Way. He became enlightened and certified to the fruit. Why are we not this way? Because we are entangled in our habits. We don't want to change, so we get really messed up. Upon enlightening to the subtle wonder of the Tao, then Bodhi-- enlightenment--reaches a state where it neither grows nor diminishes. You arrive at a place where there is no need for further study or cultivation.

Lao Tzu in the next line of the *Classic* says, "I do not know its name, but make an effort and call it the Tao. Actually," he says, "I don't know what it is called, but for lack of a better name I will call it the Tao. As for the Tao, it consists of purity and turbidity, movement and stillness." When it becomes clear to the extreme, it becomes turbid. When it becomes turbid to the extreme it becomes clear. This is the way people are too. When we live to the limit of our lifespan, we die; then we are reborn, and repeat the cycle over and over again. Well, since we are born and then die, die and are reborn, is it really all that much fun? No, it is very dangerous. Right within this life you don't know anything about your past life, nor can you foresee your future. It's a big gamble. You don't know the odds and it's very easy for you to lose your bet--lock, stock, and barrel. It's not fun and games by any means.

The Tao is a very natural force, much like electricity. It embraces both motion and stillness. Moreover, "heaven is pure, earth is turbid." Heaven is clear and therefore rises; earth is turbid and therefore sinks. "Heaven moves; earth is still. Men are pure, women are turbid." Men have a purer substance, women are more turbid. "Men move, women are still." Men by nature are energetic and active; women are by nature more reserved and quiet. Therefore, men do outdoor work, they go out to make a living, while women tend to stay at home more. Within this pattern lies a very natural law, in which both sexes assume roles that are complimentary to each other. But during our present time, people vie for Equal Rights for all clamoring about Women's Lib and the like. But in their actions they often contradict the very fundamentals of the heavenly principle, going against the natural flow of yin and yang. Some of them are even homosexual. This is a source of endless offenses.

"The root descends, the branches flow forth to produce the ten thousand things." This means descending from the source and flowing towards the branch tips. It can be put in another way: "The nature flows down and becomes emotion; emotion flows down and becomes desire." From the fundamental wholeness we fall, flow down, and thus "the myriad things all come into being." Everything is begotten--humans, non-humans, frogs, mice, ants--everything under the sun! Animals come in all sizes, shapes, and colors, and within each species there are further many sub-species. It's the same way for people. Just take a look: some people have big eyes, some have tiny eyes; some have hooked noses, some have straight noses; some have blue eyes, black eyes, brown eyes; some have red hair, black hair, blonde hair. Right within the human species there are innumerable kinds of varieties--mutants too.

Well, think it over. Now that some of us have left the home-life, if we don't really set our minds to it and cultivate, then what have we left the home-life for? If we hadn't left home, we could still play around in the world without any restrictions. But now that we have left home, and still do not cultivate but only think about luxuries and having fun, isn't that too pitiful? We should become painfully aware of this point, put our entire effort into cultivating the Tao, and then we won't have left the home-life in vain.
