

# For Modern Chinese: A Guide to the Blessed Path

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## 1 Disclaimer

This material is for personal contemplation and spiritual enrichment, tailored for the modern thinker. It draws from traditional Daoist, Confucian and Buddhist philosophies as sources of inspiration, not dogma.

Each reader is encouraged to engage with the content critically and with an open heart, applying the wisdom within these pages in a way that is most meaningful to their own life and context. As the ancient sages advised, we should "Hold fast to the Dao of the ancient to manage the existence of today" (adapted from "Dao De Jing", 14). In other words, grasp firmly onto what is good and true from the teachings, allowing them to guide you in the present.

The views expressed are broad and may differ from various scholarly or orthodox opinions, serving merely as an initial guide for your own exploration.

## 2 Introduction: A Call to Harmonious Living

The ancient Chinese philosophers exhorted a message not dissimilar in its urgency to the spiritual calls found in other traditions: "To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right," as Confucius stated ("Great Learning", 1). This invitation to transformation is an enduring commitment to the Daoist harmony and the Confucian social order. Emulating ren (仁), humaneness, we strive for a genuine connection with others, as Mencius taught, "Benevolence brings under its sway whatever hinders its power, just as water subdues fire" ("Mencius", 1A:3). Inclusivity and universal love are akin to the Daoist view where Laozi reminds us, "The Dao nurtures by not forcing. By not dominating, the Master leads" ("Dao De Jing", 10).

## 3 Active Virtue and Trust in the Dao

Drawing from the profound depths of Daoist philosophy, we are guided by the axiom "Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing

lacking, the whole world belongs to you,” as expressed by Laozi in the “Dao De Jing” (44). This sentiment fosters a trust in the Dao’s natural abundance, reminiscent of birds that soar without worry for the next day. This trust, however, should not be mistaken for encouragement to withdraw from the world’s affairs. On the contrary, it introduces us to the principle of wuwei ( 無為 ), which signifies ‘action without force’ or ‘effortless doing.’ “The sage does nothing, yet nothing is left undone,” another excerpt from the “Dao De Jing” (48) illuminates this concept. It is not about inaction but rather about actions that are in spontaneous and harmonious alignment with the Dao. This principle of wuwei encourages us to engage actively and effectively in improving the world while maintaining an inner serenity and a stance of non-contention, embodying an active virtue that is in seamless concert with the natural order. Through such alignment, our actions are not only effortless but also profoundly effective, ensuring a unity with the Dao in both spirit and deed.

## 4 Recognizing and Reflecting the Dao Within

Our inner life is not only a mirror of the cosmos but also a canvas for painting the virtues of the Dao, reflecting the interplay between the individual essence and the collective harmony. Confucius instructs us, “He who rules by moral force is like the pole star, which remains in place while all the lesser stars do homage to it” (“Analects”, 2:1). This analogy does not merely exalt the individual’s inner moral compass but also illustrates one’s role in the celestial dance of service and leadership.

The Dao is not just within us; it is us, as Zhuangzi profoundly identifies, “Heaven and earth were born at the same time I was, and the ten thousand things are one with me” (“Zhuangzi”, Inner Chapters). We are each a note in the symphony of the universe, individual yet indispensable. Our true nature is to resonate with the cosmos, to contribute to its melody by fulfilling our potential and serving the whole.

Laozi’s concept of being an “empty vessel” (Dao De Jing”, 4) invites us to embrace humility and openness, allowing us to be filled with purpose and to pour forth in service to others. This vessel is not passive; it is a dynamic force of giving and receiving. As Mencius teaches, “Act with a pure heart and without expectation of reward” (“Mencius”, 7A:16), we find the quintessence of service—acting not for accolades but for the collective good.

By allowing the Dao to work through us, we become instruments of a greater purpose. The Confucian ideal of ‘Ren’—benevolence or humaneness—becomes our guiding principle, harmonizing personal conduct with the welfare of others. In this way, our actions become a testament to the Daoist and Confucian vision, where the individual flourishes through self-cultivation and the collective thrives through each person’s commitment to the common good. Thus, we become vessels of peace, agents of harmony, and bearers of the universal virtue that sustains and propels all life.

## 5 Service, Humility, and Harmony: Emulating the Virtues of the Sage

In the spirit of the sage’s teachings, the importance of selfless service and the cultivation of benevolence are held in high regard. As the ancient proverbs suggest, “The highest excellence is like that of water,” embodying the virtue of serving all things without contention (Laozi, “Dao De Jing”, 8). This call to service is akin to a journey on the higher path—one of humility, compassion, and self-effacement.

The recognition of the Dao in each individual underlines the principle of respecting their inherent worth and autonomy. The teachings reflect, “What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others,” an ancient maxim that underpins justice, balance, and mutual reverence in our engagements with one another (Confucius, “Analects”, 15:23).

In the fabric of traditional values, the union of marriage is esteemed as a harmonious partnership, much like the interplay of Yin and Yang, symbolizing the balance and unity that life partners strive for in their shared existence. This concept is encapsulated in the I Ching or Book of Changes, which states, “When a husband and wife unite in harmony, they will create and transform all under heaven” (I Ching, Hexagram 11: Peace). This ancient text highlights the importance of mutual respect and balance in marriage, reflecting the

timeless wisdom of Chinese philosophy on the sacred union.

Family ties are foundational in the fabric of society, reflecting the principle of filial piety and the respect for one's ancestors and elders. This familial virtue is captured in the saying, "In the family, be filial and fraternal," a testament to the significance of honoring and upholding the family structure ("Classic of Filial Piety", Chapter 1).

Yet, this respect and compassion extend beyond the confines of the family, reaching out to the entire community and beyond. The Confucian ideal of universal love, as embodied in the exhortation "To love all men is the greatest benevolence," calls us to extend kindness to every individual, even those beyond our direct influence (Confucius, "Analects", 12:22). Embracing this principle means considering the far-reaching impact of our actions on the whole world, not merely the benefit to our group. This broader perspective fosters long-term fruits, contributing to a more peaceful and harmonious global community.

Our empathy reaches all living beings, resonating with the Daoist view that every creature and element of nature is an expression of the Dao. Acknowledging the sacredness of life, the ancients observed, "Heaven and Earth and I are of the same root, the ten-thousand things and I are of one substance" (Sengzhao, "Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra"). In this unity, we find our role as stewards of the Earth, entrusted with the care and preservation of the intricate tapestry of existence.

Through these lenses, we are reminded of our interconnectedness and the enduring values that guide us towards a life of virtue, harmony, and universal compassion, mirroring the wisdom of the sages of old.

## 6 Cultivating Benevolence, Compassion, and Forgiveness in Accordance with Ancient Wisdom:

**The Essence of Universal Love:** The sages of old spoke of the profound nature of the Dao's love and our duty to reflect it in our lives. "With virtue comparable to the Dao, the Dao is followed willingly by all under heaven," (Laozi, "Dao De Jing", Chapter 51). This ancient wisdom aligns with the notion of selfless love—a love that is unwavering, sacrificial, and unconditional. It is the type of love that values harmony and the welfare of the community above the self. Universal love is not merely an emotion; it is a deliberate choice. It calls for placing the needs of others before our own and loving without anticipation of reward. This is the love of the Dao, embracing all beings within its gentle flow, inviting us to partake in its boundless virtue and to make it the cornerstone of our every interaction.

**The Practice of Forgiveness:** Punitive justice, which seeks to punish wrongdoing, often inadvertently exacerbates issues by fostering resentment and a cycle of retaliation. This approach tends to focus on the deed and not the person, leading to alienation rather than rehabilitation. On the other hand, restorative or compassionate justice aligns more closely with the philosophy of "To pardon those who have sinned against us is to be in accord with the Dao" (Zhuangzi, Chapter 23). It seeks to heal the individual and the community, creating an environment where living a virtuous life becomes the path of least resistance. By addressing the needs of all affected parties and focusing on reconciliation, this form of justice encourages a transformation that can fulfill both personal and communal needs, paving the way for a more cohesive and nurturing society.

**The Imperative of Kindness:** Kindness and compassion are paramount in the teachings of Confucius. "Kindness in words creates confidence. Kindness in thinking creates profundity. Kindness in giving creates love," (Confucius, "Analects", Chapter 17, Verse 6). These sentiments inspire us to extend kindness indiscriminately, even amidst challenges.

**Love as a Moral Imperative:** The principle of love is fundamental in our philosophical journey. "To love all beings is the truest benevolence," (Confucius, "Analects", Book 12, Chapter 22). This underscores the essential role of love and compassion in our spiritual and moral development.

**The Virtue of Forgiveness:** Forgiveness is a central theme in the path of wisdom. "A man who has committed a mistake and doesn't correct it is committing another mistake," (Confucius, "Analects", Book 15, Verse 30). Through forgiveness, we manifest the Dao's

mercy and draw closer to the natural harmony of the cosmos.

As we navigate our path, we reflect on the parables that teach us to see the Dao in all beings and to serve them as we would the noblest sages. Those who live in accordance with the Dao, the "noble ones," will find their place in the harmonious order of existence. For as it is said, "Repay injury with kindness," (Laozi, "Dao De Jing", Chapter 63). This highlights the importance of recognizing the Dao in every individual and reaffirms our dedication to the principles of love, acceptance, and forgiveness. By living these teachings, we align ourselves with the Dao and the heart of our spiritual heritage.

## 7 Harmonizing with the Dao through the Sage's Wisdom: A Path of Benevolence and Understanding

**The Sage's Teachings as Supreme:** The sage's wisdom illuminates our path, akin to the way Laozi describes the natural and unbiased flow of the Dao: "The Dao is like a well: used but never used up. It is like the eternal void: filled with infinite possibilities." (Dao De Jing, Ch. 4). This passage suggests that the sage, by embodying the Dao, becomes a source of endless wisdom and possibility, serving all without preference or prejudice. In this light, all of our interpretations and actions should strive to mirror the sage's teachings, which are in perfect accord with the unerring and all-providing nature of the Dao.

**Endless Pursuit of Dao:** The sage, akin to Confucius, emphasizes the importance of personal connection with teachings, as stated in the Analects, "Reviewing what you have learned and learning anew, you are fit to be a teacher." (Analects, 2:11). It is encouraged to immerse oneself continually in the wisdom of the sage.

**Masters and Disciples:** The sage underscores the spreading of wisdom, akin to the Analects' direction, "Is it not a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals? Is it not a joy to have friends come from afar?" (Analects, 1:1). Furthermore, wisdom on respecting individual free will echoes the teachings of Zhuangzi, who emphasized the relativity of perspectives and the importance of naturalness.

**Shunning Blind Conformity:** The sage warns against insincere practice, as Confucius noted, "To worship the ghosts and spirits while ignoring their true nature can be described as fawning." (Analects, 3:12). Alongside this, the sage also teaches the importance of inner reflection in guiding our actions, as emphasized in another passage: "When you cultivate yourself, your virtue will be pure. When you know yourself, your self will be true." (Yijing, Hexagram 14: Great Possession). True understanding and moral conduct thus require not only outward observance but also inward contemplation and alignment with the deeper principles of virtue (De) and the natural order (Dao).

**Ensuring Harmony with the Dao:** Spiritual discernment is pivotal in Daoism and Confucianism, aligning actions with the natural order, the Dao. The Dao De Jing advocates for a subtle leadership that is felt but unnoticed (Ch. 17), paralleling the natural way. Zhuangzi's concept of "fasting of the heart" ( ) calls for a mind free from desires to see the world's true essence. Echoing these principles, Buddhism, particularly in the Kalama Sutta, encourages personal verification of truth—advising against blind faith and urging individuals to trust in what leads to benefit and happiness. Thus, in seeking spiritual guidance, it is crucial to test the teachings against the virtues of wisdom, compassion, and harmony, ensuring they are in accord with the Dao's profound and benevolent nature.

**Role of Wise Leaders:** In Daoism, the paradigm of leadership is one of subtle influence and humility. Laozi encapsulates this in the Dao De Jing: "The highest rulers, people do not know they have them; The next level, people love them and praise them; The next, people fear them; The next, people despise them. If the rulers' trust is insufficient, Have no trust in them. Proceeding calmly, valuing their words, Task is completed, matter is settled. The people all say, 'We did it naturally.'" (Dao De Jing, Ch. 17). This passage illuminates the Daoist view that the most profound leadership is imperceptible yet effective, leading people to feel as though they are acting of their own accord.

**Harmony in the Dao:** The sage aspires for the harmony of his followers, akin to Confucius's ideal of societal harmony through each individual performing their role dutifully,

When the Great Dao prevailed, the world was a public possession. Selection was based on merit... Men loved their relatives, respected their elders." (Book of Rites, Li Yun).

In conclusion, the wisdom of the sage, rich in benevolence and understanding, guides adherents along a path lit by the eternal Dao. Grounding oneself in the teachings of the sage and aligning with the principles of Dao allows adherents to fully embrace the essence of spiritual faith.

**Embracing Universal Compassion:** The essence of love and compassion for all beings is a thread that runs deeply through Chinese spiritual traditions. In Daoism, the concept of "Ziran," or naturalness, emphasizes living in harmony with the cosmos, expressing inherent love for creation. The Dao De Jing states, "Nature says only a few words: high wind does not last long, nor does heavy rain. If nature's words do not last, why should those of man?" (Dao De Jing, Ch. 23), urging us to emulate the natural world's silent yet profound love. Similarly, Confucianism teaches the practice of "Ren," often translated as benevolence or humaneness, suggesting a deep, empathetic love for humanity that should be carried in the heart until the end of one's days. Meanwhile, Buddhism speaks of "Metta," or loving-kindness, as a way to cultivate compassion towards all sentient beings, which in turn shapes our destiny, aligning with the karmic law of cause and effect.

Through the lens of these traditions, maintaining love in our hearts for all creation is seen as vital to our spiritual evolution, ultimately leading us to a peaceful end and a harmonious meeting with the Dao, the ultimate creator and sustainer of life.