

An Introduction to Understanding Dao



Happy Buddha Precious Temple

www.happybuddhatemple.org

March 14, 2014

It is the opening of our third eye that allows us to gain wisdom, to become self-aware, to become enlightened, and to transcend the cycle of life and death. So it is the key to eternal life. The third eye is also the doorway to our True Nature. So receiving Dao also points out our true self so that we may realize our True Nature through the cultivation of our humanity (human virtues). This allows us to attain ultimate awareness and enlightenment in our current lifetime.

Final Words

Dao is the source and origin of everything in Nature including our spiritual being and True Nature, and it is also the root and essence of all true faiths and dharmas. All faiths and dharmas will return back to the root (Dao). By receiving Dao and practicing (cultivating) Dao, we realize and manifest the Dao within us (our humanity) and will be able to return back to the oneness of our spiritual origin.

Perhaps some of the things you've read here are new and different from what you have learned and know. But any seeker of the truth must have an open mind to find the ultimate Truth. We must not fall prey to the dogma and religious doctrine that tells us we must faithfully and blindly accept what we are told because they are God's words. Because we have a True Nature (again, this is our God-given nature), it is incumbent upon us to question what anyone tells us is the truth and to erase any doubts that we may have. The ultimate Truth is not transmitted by way of scriptures and sutras, but rather, it can only be obtained through the wordless transmission of Dao.

Introduction

Our temple belongs to an association of temples in the 先天大道 **Xian Tian Da Dao** (aka 天道 **Tian Dao**) tradition. The followers of Dao practice the moral ethics and philosophies of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. But Yi-Guan Dao should not to be confused with any of these religious practices. The cultivation (or practice) of Dao is similar in so much as it incorporates the morals and philosophies of these religions. However, Dao is actually the source, origin, and root of all the major world religions (including Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam). Therefore, the true essence of the teachings of these religions stems from Dao. From this perspective, one can understand why the practice of Dao appears to follow aspects of the various religions.

Dao is the origin of everything, including the universe. The prevailing scientific theory holds that there was a Big Bang that created the universe. So what was there before the Big Bang? Clearly, for there to be such an explosion, there must have been an infinite energy source. This source is Dao. Besides this infinite energy source, there also existed the absolute principle from which the principles of nature (laws of nature) were derived. Science has come a long way in discovering and understanding these principles of nature, yet these are just derivations of the one true principle of Dao. The derived principles define not only the physical world, but also all living things. Therefore, plants have the growth principle (or nature) which allows a seemingly lifeless seed to sprout and grow given the right conditions. Animals have not only the growth

nature but also the sense nature which allows them to sense and feel (thus they are also sentient beings). Humans have not only the growth and sense natures but also the human nature. The human nature and mind allows us to think, create, imagine, etc. Humans also have a conscience. From this conscience arises our virtues (filial piety, brotherhood/brotherly love, loyalty, trust/trustworthiness, propriety, righteousness, integrity, sense of shame, modesty, compassion, wisdom, faith, sincerity, tolerance, forgiveness, etc.). So practically speaking, when we follow our conscience, we are acting in accordance with Dao and our True Nature.

All religions teach people to be good human beings, to follow their conscience. But it is important to understand the difference between religions and Dao. What really distinguishes Dao from religions is something we call **Heaven's Mandate** (or decree). The Heaven's Mandate is what makes Dao so special—it is the authority given by Heaven that enables the continuing practice and propagation of Dao throughout the world today. Anyone interested in practicing Dao must go through an initiation ceremony (the "transmission" of Dao) in which one is made aware of (or awakened to) one's True Nature and this is made possible only by authority of the Heaven's Mandate. Once having "received" this transmission of Dao, a person must cultivate his/her True Nature and can attain enlightenment and transcend the cycle of birth and death in a single lifetime (attaining nirvana or liberation from suffering just as Buddha had attained).

The true Dao is difficult to put into words, because it is formless and void, yet all forms are contained within it. But we can talk about Dao in practice and the purpose

Receiving Dao and cultivating Dao is a way of salvation from all this uncertainty and suffering. By cultivating our virtues and performing merits we can change our karmic fate. In doing so, we can escape calamities and avoid misfortunes. Our virtues and merits can also benefit our deceased parents and ancestors and our future descendants so that they also will have the opportunity to receive Dao and to ultimately transcend life and death.

There is a famous sermon given by Buddha to his disciples—it is known as the "Flower Sermon." It is recorded that Buddha sat on the mount and held a flower before his eyes. Thousands of disciples and followers were perplexed as they watched, only Mahakasyapa realized the meaning of this action and broke into a broad smile. Then Buddha spoke: "I possess the true Dharma eye, the marvelous mind of nirvana, the true form of the formless, the subtle dharma gate not found in words, but transmitted outside of the scriptures. This I entrust to Mahakasyapa."

To receive Dao is to receive the most precious gift in life. We obtain this gift by the grace of God and enlightening master Ji-Gong Living Buddha. The enlightening master "transmits" the three treasures to us by way of the transmitting master. Just as Buddha transmitted the wordless true Dharma to his disciple Mahakasyapa, one also receives the transmission of Dao from the enlightening master. During the transmission of Dao, the enlightening master opens our third eye or wisdom eye. This is also referred to as the narrow gate spoken of by Jesus and symbolized by the cross.

2. We must have affinity with the Buddhas and saints
3. We must be willing and sincere in seeking the Truth
4. We must be willing to make a token contribution for our own merit and to show our sincerity
5. We must be willing to kneel before the altar of God and take an oath to uphold the principles of Dao and cultivation

Those who do not have faith in the spirit existence or in God will not find the Truth. The ultimate Truth cannot be found in science, technology, literature, or in any other form. The Truth is formless and is not outside—it is within each of us. If only we can discover it and then to realize it. By receiving the transmission of Dao, we are made aware of the Truth. After initiation, it is up to each of us to realize and to put into practice the Truth—this is what we call cultivation.

We must realize that everything in this world is constantly changing and impermanent. The only thing that is constant and permanent is our True Nature. One day the world as we know it (civilization, etc.) will come to an end. Despite the continuing and rapid developments in science and technology, the continuing decline in ethics and morality is quite evident. This decline in ethics and morality is reflected in the increasing incidence and severity of conflicts (wars, terrorist attacks, crimes, etc.), afflictions (diseases, famine, etc.), and natural calamities (earthquakes, tsunamis/floods, drought, etc.) that are occurring around the world today.

of Dao in this world. To understand the practice of Dao, one must understand the basic concepts of Dao. Once these concepts are understood then one can put into practice the philosophy of Dao. Whether or not one has been practicing Dao, as long as one is ready and willing, one can receive the transmission of Dao (discovering one's True Nature). Once you have discovered your True Nature, the path of enlightenment still depends on a lifetime of cultivation. There is no easy path to transcendence from the world of suffering. We must make an effort to achieve this goal. So learning about Dao and understanding Dao are just the beginning even though they are a lifelong process. The practice or cultivation of Dao is also a lifelong process of constant refinements to our character to perfect our virtues and to eliminate our shortcomings and temper. With this goal in mind, we must have an aspiration to achieve what all Buddhas have achieved, to let go of the egotistical self, to embrace all living beings and the whole of Nature as a part of our own being. Only in this way can we hope to realize the true meaning of Dao.

To gain a better understanding of what it means to practice (or cultivate) Dao, please continue to read the following topics: purpose of Dao, basic concepts of Dao, philosophy and practice of Dao, and discovering and realizing your true nature.

1. Purpose of Dao

These are the guiding principles of Dao for humans to follow in creating a peaceful and harmonious world.

The Principles of Dao

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| To respect Heaven and Earth |
| To follow the ways of the saintly |
| To love nations and to act with loyalty |
| To have a sincere character and to esteem the proper behavior |
| To be filial toward parents |
| To uphold teachers |
| To trust friends |
| To be harmonious with neighbors |
| To transform evil into good |
| To understand and to elucidate the Five Cardinal Relationships and the Eight Cardinal Virtues |
| To promulgate the profound truth of the Saints of the Five Religions |
| To scrupulously abide by the Four Ethical Principles and the Five Constant Virtues |
| To purify the heart/mind and wash away anxieties |
| To utilize the transient (false forms) to cultivate the eternal (Truth) |
| To uncover one's Original Buddha Nature |
| To manifest the inherent perfection of one's conscience and virtues |
| To establish oneself and help others establish themselves |
| To achieve and help others to achieve |
| To bring peacefulness and harmony into the world |
| To enlighten people to manifest their humanity |
| To bring about a world of unity and harmony |

to treat others as we would want to be treated by others, etc. The practice can be achieved by constant self-reflection and introspection. Our awareness can eventually expand throughout the entire cosmos and across all time. This is the ultimate awareness that a Buddha has, knowing the past, present and future, and "being" everywhere at once. This is possible because the True Nature is limitless. We are limited only by attachments to forms and non-forms. Therefore, we must also let go of all attachments to forms and non-forms before we can become truly free and completely aware.

But to become a Buddha does not mean leaving this world. Ji-Gong Living Buddha (a Song Dynasty monk) was called a living Buddha because he did what a Buddha should do. Likewise, if we think, say, and do as a Buddha should, then we are also like a living Buddha for that instant. The trick is in maintaining that state for longer than just an instant. Ultimately, when we leave this world, we can attain nirvana or "oneness" with Nature.

Initiation into Dao ("Receiving Dao")

The purpose of this initiation is to point out our True Nature so that we can know it, realize it, and become truly self-aware as the Buddha has become. As the discussion on karma and affinity suggests, everything happens for a reason. In order to receive Dao, certain requirements must be met:

1. We must believe in the spiritual existence and in the source of this existence (Supreme Being, God, Dao, etc.)

“I think, therefore I am,” wrote Rene Descartes, a seventeenth century French mathematician and philosopher. What Descartes realized was that because he can think and reason, that he existed or was self-aware. However, according to the Buddha, who lived about two thousand years earlier, this self-awareness is just an illusion. True self-awareness goes beyond the mind—beyond what we can think and reason. True self-awareness comes not from the mind, but from what is variously known as our True Self, True Nature, Original Nature, Buddha Nature, Christ Nature, etc.

A disciple of Buddha asked, “Are you a messiah?”
“No,” answered Buddha.
“Are you a healer?”
“No.”
“Are you a teacher?”
“No.”
“Then what are you?”
“I am awake.”

What does this mean? It means that Buddha has awakened to his True Nature and is therefore truly self-aware. It is this True Nature that gives us true spiritual or universal awareness. The mind is but a construct of this awareness, and it is the interface with *what we perceive to be reality*. Therefore, all forms and non-forms arise from the True Nature.

Self-awareness is an important practice that leads to enlightenment. The first step is to be aware or mindful of our every action, word and thought. Then we must expand this awareness to our surroundings, including people, animals, etc. In other words, we must show consideration for others, to put ourselves in their shoes,

Confucius also had a vision of an ideal world, a utopian society, based upon his philosophy of ethics and morality.

The Confucian Ideal for World Harmony

When the perfect order prevails, the world is like a home shared by all. Virtuous and worthy men are elected to public office, and capable men hold posts of gainful employment in society; peace and trust among all men are the maxims of living. All men love and respect their parents and children, as well as the parents and children of others. There is caring for the old; there are jobs for adults; there are nourishment and education for the widowers, for all who find themselves alone in the world, and for the disabled. Every man and woman has an appropriate role to play within the family and within society. A sense of sharing displaces the effects of selfishness and materialism. A devotion to public duty leaves no room for idleness. Intrigues and conniving for ill gain are unknown. Villains such as thieves and robbers do not exist. The door to every home need never be locked and bolted by day or night. These are the characteristics of an ideal world, the commonwealth state.

It is not a mere coincidence that the principles of Dao are closely related to the Confucian ideal for World Harmony. The way to bring about this World Harmony is by manifesting and achieving the principles of Dao. Confucian philosophy and ethics relates to the practical relationships that people have with one another, and, in fact, is an application of the principles of Dao. In a

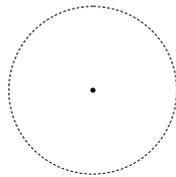
world where science and technology is so advanced and is so prevalent in our daily lives, people are losing faith in religions, and family values, morality and ethics are deteriorating. Confucian philosophy and ethics is nondenominational, and therefore, transcends all faiths. So it is only appropriate that there is now a revival and renaissance of Confucian philosophy and ethics in these modern times. The long term viability of society and the world depends on people practicing the principles of Dao and Confucian ethics.

2. Basic Concepts of Dao

The Origin of Everything

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”—John 1:1

Dao can be said to be the origin of the cosmos and everything within. The origin or 無極理天 Absolute Heaven (Realm) is void of forms, yet it can manifest all forms. The Big Bang theory is considered to be the prevailing scientific theory as to how the universe came into being. The entire universe came into being from a singularity of infinite energy. Of course, there had to be a force that caused the explosion, and we can say that this force is the will of God. Absolute Realm is the superset that encompasses all else (i.e., nothing exists outside of it). It is both infinitesimal and infinite and can therefore be represented by a dot or circle:



Another related question comes up about the statues or other forms that may be prominently displayed in the temple. The truth that we seek is not in these physical forms—they just serve to remind us that in fact other historical figures have become enlightened and found a way to transcend the suffering of living in this world. Therefore, we can learn from them as we seek the same truth and transcendence. *We **do not** worship idols or forms.* There is no requirement that a temple must display these forms. But only because people tend to reinforce their belief or faith with tangible forms, that these forms serve some useful purpose. Buddha, saints and sages never told us to worship them, but rather to learn from and to follow their example.

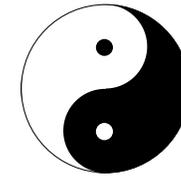
To reiterate, it is important to understand the meaning and purpose behind the forms (statues, rituals, etc.) that we see and practice. Only when such meaning or purpose is forgotten does it become a meaningless or dangerous thing. In other words, as the purpose of cultivation is to return to, or regain our true essence, we should also focus on the true purpose and meaning behind the rituals, rules and regulations of our practice (understand and focus on the truth or principles rather than the outward appearance or forms). The physical forms are reminders to aspire us to achieve that the Buddhas and Saints have also achieved, and the forms of practice embody the spirit and discipline of Dao cultivation.

4. Discovering and Realizing Your True Nature

serve some useful purpose. In our personal daily lives we may perform our own idiosyncratic rituals. Perhaps it is because of the sense of order that these rituals provide that we perform them. Or we might perform them as a way to instill discipline in our lives. It is no different when we practice rituals in the temple. The purpose of such rituals is to practice discipline of the mind, body and spirit, to show reverence to others, to show our own humbleness, and to calm and focus the heart and mind.

So if you feel that there is too much kowtowing (bowing) in the temple, then you do not understand the purpose of such rituals. Because once you truly understand, then practicing such rituals becomes natural. The same applies to the rules and regulations in the temple. They serve a useful purpose in guiding us to the proper way of conduct and instilling discipline in our practice. The kowtowing that we do can also be thought of as a meditation in motion. Normally one associates stillness and calm with meditation, and that would be traditionally correct. But *true* meditation does not require that the body be at rest. The truly meditative heart/mind should be in such a state of calm and awareness that you are not affected by what is going on around you. That no matter what is happening, you have the presence of mind and wisdom to deal with the situation appropriately. The kowtowing (or meditation in motion) that we do helps us to attain that state of mind by letting us focus on our true essence and reflect on our thoughts and actions. It is through such self-reflection that we can attain a greater awareness of our True Nature.

Before the creation of the physical universe that we can observe, the intangible and unseen energy or spiritual realm that we call 太極氣天 Relative Heaven (Realm) was created. Current superstring theory suggests that there may be higher dimensional universes. Indeed, it may be possible to describe the Relative Realm as existing in higher dimensions. This realm is a subset of the Absolute Realm and a superset of the physical universe. It is represented by the yin-yang symbol:



This symbolizes the relative, cyclical, and transient nature of everything within. The undetectable dark matter and dark energy that have been theorized are part of this realm.

Finally, the physical universe, although seemingly vast, is just a subset of the Relative Realm. The scientific principles that we know describe the physical universe, but they are in fact derived from the principles of the Relative Realm. Because experimental science depends on quantifiable measurements, it is limited to the physical realm. But theoretical science can go beyond and give us some understanding of the Relative Realm. We have the ability to theorize about and to comprehend not just the physical universe but also the Relative and Absolute Realms, because we are in fact a part of all three realms having a physical self, a spiritual self (Relative Realm) and a True Self (Absolute Realm).

Law of Cause and Effect (Consequence)

There are universal laws, or laws of Nature, that govern all objects and actions in the universe. Such laws are the foundation of the various scientific disciplines. For any given action, the laws determine the effect or consequence of such action. For example, when a force is applied to an object, the object will either move or be subject to increased pressure. The application of the force is the cause and the movement of, or increased pressure on, the object is the effect. The same is true of non-action, such as a state of existence. For example, an object at rest tends to stay at rest, and for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. The fundamental concept underlying all the laws of Nature is that of Cause and Effect. In the Islamic Koran it is referred to as "an eye for an eye" and in the Christian Bible it is "as ye sow, so shall ye reap." In the vernacular it is "what goes around comes around." If this law did not exist then the universe would be a very different, chaotic and seemingly random place with no accountability for what happens. But our universe is far from random or else science would not be able to explain how it works.

So is it any wonder that all living beings are also subject to this universal law? Of course, only when we know or can discover the cause of a consequence can we more readily accept what is happening. But what if we cannot readily find the cause? Does this mean that the consequence is without cause? Is this even possible? If so, it would imply that some consequences are in fact the result of a universe playing a cruel joke on us. But what if we consider that there is in fact a cause or reason that we cannot see or understand? Time is a

arise directly from our True Nature. To be a Buddha means that everything we say and do is 無為.

We have a long ways to go to get to the point where we can do everything according to our True Nature without a conscious thought or bias. By naturally and genuinely practicing the virtues of humanity mentioned earlier, we are conducting ourselves in accordance with the principle of 無為. Even Buddhas make vows (arguably, a vow implies motivation). The purpose is to use selfless motivation to lead us toward the goal of ultimate 無為.

Purpose of Rituals, Rules and Regulations

Order prevails throughout the universe, and we as human beings are subject to natural and manmade order as well. The principles (virtues) that are characteristic of our True Nature give us a natural sense of order. But after reading the above discussions you may wonder whether rituals are necessary. Shouldn't everything just be done *naturally*? Certainly, rituals without purpose or meaning are not very useful. Confucius also questioned many of the rituals of his time, because no one seemed to know or understand the purpose or meaning behind the rituals. In other words, the rituals had become simple traditions and customs passed down through the ages without anyone knowing why they were still being performed. We should always try to understand what and why we do what we do—the same is true for rituals.

Rituals exist everywhere—from the home to the workplace to social gatherings, etc. Many rituals do

everyday actions is in fact without motivation. We call these unconscious or just instinctive actions. For example, we breathe without consciously thinking about it. However, when it comes to conscious actions, clearly, it would appear that our consciousness is synonymous with one's identity—the self or ego.

As mentioned above, Buddha said that this self and the mind of the self is just an illusion. We think that this self or conscious mind is who we are. And from the mind come desires and other attachments from which selfishness derives. If in fact we live according to this "false self" and suppress our True Nature, then it is like the tail wagging the dog. The slave has become the master and vice versa. This is clearly contrary to the way it should be.

Therefore, true intentions and actions are those that arise and are manifested from our True Nature. The act of sacrificing one's life to save another is a prime example. Or feeling empathy and compassion and helping a stranger in need. These are certainly unselfish and selfless actions. But selfless action is only part of what it means by 無為 (wú wéi). There is no conscious thought involved in 無為. In other words, we can say that the action or "non-action" just comes about naturally (according to our True Nature) without bias and is therefore in accordance with Nature.

We talk about something being second-nature (e.g., walking, riding a bicycle, driving, etc.). These can be considered to be unconscious efforts, but they are the result of learning, conditioning and habit. However, 無為 action really can be called first-nature, because they

continuum, and it is important also to think of life in the same way. Consider that at any given instant, life can be in any one of at least two states: tangible (physical) or intangible (spiritual). We see this phenomenon in Nature: a photon can be in either a particle state or a wave state. So for all sentient beings, there is existence before this physical life began and there will continue to be existence after this physical life is over. Causes accumulate in the physical life and their consequences are also most likely felt during the physical life, although it may be in a different and subsequent physical life.

It is because one does not necessarily reap the consequences during the same lifetime as the original cause, that we sometimes encounter consequences for which we do not see the cause. Here's a simple example: You have a tree in your yard and one day you discover that it is in fact an apple tree when it starts producing apples. You did not plant this tree, and you don't even know who planted it or when it was planted. But you are certainly reaping the benefits. In this case, the seed was planted (this is the cause) by someone else, but you were able to harvest the fruit (this is the consequence). Although in this example the person who sowed the cause was not the same as the person who reaped the consequence. But still, one can understand that there must have been a cause (the planting of the tree) even though one did not see it happen.

Karma and Karmic Affinity

This brings us to discuss what we call **karma**. Karma is in essence the accumulation of causes (actions) in

this lifetime and prior lifetimes which then determine the consequences to be reaped now and in the future. When dealing with everyday objects, it is very easy to see and understand the effects of cause and consequence as we have learned from the basic laws of physics in school. However, when dealing with other sentient beings (living organisms that are responsive to or conscious of sense impressions), things get complicated. Our interactions do not merely involve the laws of physics, because sentient beings can make choices and behave unexpectedly. For example, if humans behaved according to the laws of physics, then it is reasonable to assume that if you hit someone, that person will hit you back in the same way (physical law: an action produces an equal and opposite reaction). But people do not always behave that way. Jesus even taught people not only to not fight back but to “turn the other cheek.” Because we are not merely physical beings, our emotions, desires and virtues have a much greater effect on our behavior.

Now let us talk about a more extreme case: Say in a fit of anger you “accidentally” killed someone. Well, obviously, the dead person can't kill you now. But remember that life continues in a different state of existence even when physical life ends. The person you killed will likely harbor hatred or at least anger that you took his life. If this is the case then you better watch out, because he will avenge his own death. So you have created what we call **bad karma**. This is karma that will result in bad consequences. But humans can reason and they have a choice. That is why Jesus said to turn the other cheek and to forgive. By forgiving you, the person you killed will not come after you wanting to take your life. So does that mean

important the state of the family is to the overall state of society. If the family is dysfunctional, problems also will arise within the greater society. But if everyone can do as they should in each relationship then the family and society as a whole can live in peaceful harmony.

"Non-action" or True (Motiveless) Action

The philosophy and practice of Dao would not be complete without a discussion of Lao Zi's principle of "non-action" or "true (motiveless) action" (Chinese 無為 "wú wéi"). This is one of the guiding principles of all of Nature. As human beings, we tend to have a strong sense of "self." It is this "self" that tends to be in control of our thoughts and conduct. However, this sense of self (or ego) is an illusion according to Buddha. This sense of self is also contrary to our own True Nature, which is really without "self." We can say that true intentions are not motivated by the self or ego.

We can see that there is no concept of self involved in the workings of nature at large. The concept of self exists only in human beings and perhaps in some animals. The universe follows the laws of nature. Human beings should also follow the laws of nature. In addition, humans have other natural laws—what we call laws or principles of humanity (virtues)—to guide and govern our conduct. When we conduct ourselves according to these natural laws, we are in harmony with Dao and Nature.

For most people, acting without motivation may be a contradiction in terms. Yet, a large portion of our

3. Among siblings, there are always the older and the younger (except when they are twins). The younger siblings should respect the older ones and follow their examples. The older siblings should help care for the younger ones and set a proper example for them. Siblings should maintain harmony and look out for each other (shouldn't be selfish, etc).

4. The relationship among friends revolves around trust. To one's friends, one should be trustworthy and dependable. The reciprocal relationship is one of having trust in friends. Only when there is mutual trust among friends can the relationship last. Friends should also love and respect one another.

5. According to Confucius, the ruler must love and care for his subjects. When there is war, the ruler must protect the people. When there are calamities, the ruler must help and provide for the people. By serving the people with virtue, the ruler is also serving in the interests of the state. A population that is content and has what it needs is a population that is loyal to and will support the ruler.

The relationships cannot be maintained in balance and harmony unless each side upholds their duties to the other. Each relationship also depends on mutual respect. Therefore, *all of the relationships are mutual (two-way) and reciprocity must be maintained.* Whenever, one side of a relationship fails to uphold its responsibilities, the relationship suffers. Most people are also part of several, if not all, of these relationships. This makes it even more difficult to perform one's duties. Also note that three of the five relationships are within the family. This just demonstrates how

your bad karma is forgiven? Well, although your victim may not come after you, you may still have to suffer for your actions (otherwise, we can ask where is justice in the universe?). The problem with bad karma is that it can lead to a vicious cycle: I kill you; you kill me, ad nauseum. As long as no one is willing to forgive, the cycle will continue. That is why all sages, buddhas, and saints taught people to forgive and to love. Only in this way can the cycle be broken.

So humans can forgive, but what about animals? We know that animals are hard to reason with, and they often have a temper. So if you kill an animal, what do you think will happen? Of course, you've created bad karma. The problem is the animal spirit will want revenge—it knows no other way to reach closure over its death. Therefore, you will definitely suffer the same fate in another life. However, your fate may be mitigated through cultivation and the accumulation of **merit** (this will be discussed later). So the point of all this is to realize that there is a way to break the vicious cycle of killing, if only we can control ourselves and to forgive and to be compassionate.

So far we've talked about bad karma, but one can also create **good karma**. This is when you do good deeds (helping people, helping animals, helping the environment, etc.). We already know that there are consequences to be suffered for bad karma, and the same principle applies: we reap the benefits of good karma.

There is an important concept that one must be able to accept and to understand—that of karma and karmic affinity. In the simplest of terms, this can be said to be

predestiny or fate. What determines predestiny or fate? The only logical explanation is that there must have been prior cause. So how does one have prior cause? The only way is if one lived or existed prior to one's current life. This is where past lives come in. If the notion of predestiny is to be taken as true then it follows that the notion of reincarnation must also be true.

3. Philosophy and Practice of Dao

What does it mean to practice Dao? It is the same as following our conscience. We all know that we have a conscience. The conscience is the voice inside that comes from our God-given Nature—what we call our True Nature, Original Nature, or Buddha Nature. So in essence, our conscience is the voice of God that tells us what is right and wrong, proper and improper, etc. It also makes us feel guilty or ashamed when we've done something wrong or improper. We must listen to this voice, because this is God warning us to rectify our conduct and behavior. Unfortunately, some people have either chosen to ignore their conscience or are so lost in their emotions and ego that this voice is not heard.

Therefore, the purpose of cultivating our True Nature is to learn to listen to our conscience and to conduct ourselves accordingly. Our conscience must not be relegated to the background, but instead ***we must bring our conscience to the forefront of our consciousness.*** For example, feeling guilty and ashamed is the consequence of wrong or improper behavior, but we must elevate ourselves to the point where we never have to experience such a consequence. In other words,

1. Husband and wife
2. Parents and children
3. Siblings
4. Friends
5. Ruler and subject, leader and follower, employer and employee, etc.

These five relationships are universal and exist regardless of one's cultural heritage. Therefore, it is important that we understand the rules of conduct in each of these relationships. Confucius applied the aforementioned virtues in these relationships. This is a brief overview of the relationships:

1. Traditionally, the husband is the head of the household, and the wife has a supportive role. The husband worked and made a living, so the wife took care of him and the family at home. The husband made the decisions while the wife supported his decisions. But at the same time, the husband must also treat the wife with respect and provide for her well-being. In return, the wife did what she could to serve and provide for the husband at home. But today this relationship is one in which husband and wife are treated more as equals and they may share the same duties towards each other.

2. The responsibility of parents is to provide for and to teach their children. In return, the children must respect and obey their parents. This is where filial piety must be practiced by the children. Although the children must obey the parents, the parents must also treat the children with love and understanding.

us, but we also must have true faith in dealing with ourselves or in what we do.

The other previously mentioned virtues should be manifested in the five cardinal relationships. All these virtues are manifested from our True Nature. Although they are innate and do not have to be learned, there is an external aspect (knowledge) to each virtue. The knowledge allows us to more fully conduct ourselves with virtue and without regrets.

“Mankind differs from the animals only by a little, and most people throw that away.”—Confucius

Humans can manifest all of the virtues, whereas animals can only manifest one or two. For example, dogs manifest loyalty and crows manifest filial piety.

“Humanity (Chinese character 仁 "rén") is the distinguishing characteristic of man. As embodied in man’s conduct, it is called the path of truth.”—Mencius

As Mencius so succinctly states, humanity is what distinguishes man from animals. Simply put, it is the sum of all the virtues. If we can respect and be considerate of others and put it into practice then we can be considered to be humane. So if we do not manifest our humanity in everyday life then how can we be considered human?

The Five Cardinal Relationships

Confucius also expounded upon the five cardinal bonds or relationships that we have within family and society, namely, the relationships between:

we must prevent the wrong or improper behavior (recall the discussion on karma and cause and effect). And in order to do this we must understand the underlying principles of our conscience and True Nature so that we can naturally and automatically behave and conduct ourselves correctly and properly in every situation. Many philosophers and sages have espoused on some of the moral and ethical principles that we can read about today, but only one has truly captured the essence of humanity.

The Five Constant Virtues

Over 2500 years ago Confucius was a leader in moral and social thinking. His insights into human and social conduct are profound indeed, for today Eastern and Western cultures alike are embracing his philosophy more and more. With moral decay not only in society but also within the family, Confucius's teachings are ever more important and relevant today.

Confucius determined that the True Nature or conscience can be characterized by five constant virtues. These are:

1. 仁 Benevolence (compassion, mercy)
2. 義 Righteousness (justice)
3. 禮 Propriety
4. 智 Wisdom
5. 信 Faith (true sincerity)

These are not the only virtues, of course, as there also are other virtues such as filial piety, brotherly love or brotherhood, loyalty, integrity or honesty, sense of shame and regret, modesty or humbleness, tolerance,

forgiveness, etc. According to Confucius, these are the five basic qualities or virtues of the True Nature from which the other virtues are derived.

1. Benevolence is compassion, mercy and kindness. It is the ability to be unselfish and to be considerate of others. It is really the manifestation of unselfishness, tolerance, forgiveness, and sympathy. It is to consider oneself and all things as part of a greater whole. When we see suffering, our True Nature and conscience reacts with sympathy and benevolence. This is because we are connected with all living beings and with Nature as a whole. So it is natural for us to be kind to others and to help others in need.

2. Righteousness or sense of justice is innate knowing or intuiting what is right and wrong in the moral/ethical sense. True morality does not have to be learned. Our conscience (which is the voice of our True Nature) tells us what is right and wrong (usually after the fact by way of the virtue of shame/regret). Although a young child does not know that killing is wrong, the child may feel sadness or that something is not right when an animal or insect is killed. This is because the child instinctively knows that a sentient being should be alive. The knowledge aspect of morality is to know that the act of harming or killing a sentient being is wrong, because it affirms what our conscience tells us. Also, when we see or hear about wrongs being done, we get a sense that something must be done to correct the wrongs—this is the sense of justice.

3. Propriety is doing what is proper and appropriate for any given situation, because there is an inherent natural

order to everything. Where there are moral, social, or legal rules, regulations, or laws, we must abide by them. In the ideal world there are no explicitly stated laws, because ideal people would behave properly and appropriately. But since people are far from perfect, we have rules, regulations and laws to restrain inappropriate or improper behavior. Even without such man-made rules, however, we already should have a sense of propriety due to the natural order of things (e.g., age difference, etc.) and our own sense of humanity.

4. True wisdom is definitely not learned. We can learn from others' wisdom, but true wisdom comes from within (our True Nature). What we typically call common (or common sense) wisdom comes from our experiences and knowledge. What we typically call a sixth sense, gut feel or intuition are a part of our true wisdom. We can say that true wisdom comes from the awareness of our True Nature. The more we practice each of the other virtues, the greater our true wisdom. On the other hand, pursuing all the things that are contrary to our virtues will only suppress our own wisdom.

5. True faith means true sincerity and genuineness, coming from the bottom of our heart. This is the central virtue or characteristic of our True Nature. Without this true sincerity, all of our words and deeds are said and done with false pretenses. True faith is about being sincere and trusting others and being trustworthy. Even when we do things by ourselves and not involving others, we must do them with sincere effort. So not only do we have faith in our dealings with others and others have faith in their dealings with