

THE TEN GREAT VOWS

During the ceremony of Receiving Tao, before the Master actually transmits Tao, the receiver first takes the Ten Great Vows. After sincerely taking the Vows, the receiver (or initiate) is then ready to receive Tao from the Master, who then initiates them on the Path which leads to Illumination.

The Ten Vows are taken in sincerity with Heaven as one's witness when one receives Tao. To sincerely take a vow means that one is ready and willing to fulfill it. Only by holding true to one's good intentions and vows can the practice of true spiritual cultivation commence. Only by fulfilling one's vows can one reach the Goal.

However, in light of the fact that each of us is endowed with different spiritual faculties, our individual abilities and range of apprehension may vary. Hence, what we do (in terms of our vows) and what we realize as individuals (in terms of our spiritual cultivation) also varies.

The Ten Great Vows are listed and described below. It should be noted, however, that the meaning of each Vow is both vast and deep; they go beyond mere words. Thus the Vows must be put into practice, not just studied.

The Ten Great Vows:

1. I vow to be sincere and to persevere in The Way (Tao).
2. I vow to wholeheartedly repent.
3. I vow to harbor neither insincerity nor deceit.
4. I vow to strive to make progress (along the spiritual path), never stalling or regressing.
5. I vow to neither deceive myself or others, nor to slander the Patriarchs.
6. I vow to never feel contempt for those who have preceded me in receiving Tao.
7. I vow to never fail to follow the Rules of Faith. (Please see Appendix A)
8. I vow to never divulge the secrets of Heaven.
9. I vow to act always according to Tao.
10. I vow to do my best according to my abilities.

1. I Vow To Be Sincere And To Persevere In The Way (Tao). 誠心抱守

The key to self-cultivation is sincerity. When a wise person hears about Tao, he cultivates himself diligently, without straying from Tao for even one moment. This is the concise meaning of sincerity and perseverance.

People of high spiritual awareness who come across the True Tao cultivate themselves with an unattached, unbiased mind, and follow the Pure Tao which is untainted by selfish desire and individual will. They diligently press forward without laxity, with one purpose in mind. They neither lose themselves in success nor have a change of heart when faced with trials and tribulations.

People of moderate spiritual awareness are humble and sincere, perform all kinds of good deeds, and abstain from all manner of evil. They are down to earth and stable in their cultivation.

People of average spiritual awareness do not pretend to be something they are not,

and do not take the Receiving of Tao or spiritual cultivation lightly. They are neither careless nor deceitful, but are honest and truthful. Their only fear is that they may deceive themselves and deceive others. This attitude is precisely in accord with "the vow of sincerity and perseverance".

2. I Vow To Wholeheartedly Repent. 實心懺悔 / 實心修煉

To sincerely acknowledge and regret our past transgressions and to refrain from repeating any of them, to be constantly aware of whether or not one's thoughts and actions are right or wrong, to illuminate one's own mind and dispel one's own ignorance, to at all times eliminate perverse thoughts so that they do not cover and obscure our Original Nature, to admit our mistakes and have the courage to change ourselves, to know what is wrong and to have the courage to abstain from it, this is the concise meaning of wholehearted repentance.

Persons who have high spiritual awareness are impartial and without greed. They are unbiased, neither heretical nor perverse, and harbor no evil. This is wholehearted repentance.

Persons of moderate spiritual awareness do not cover up their mistakes, and at times are self-critical. They correct their mistakes and renew themselves. This is wholehearted repentance.

Persons of average spiritual awareness are always cognizant of their own shortcomings, and sincerely change when people point out the error of their ways. They do not pride themselves on maintaining false pretenses, and have the courage to recognize and rectify their mistakes. This is wholehearted repentance.

3. I Vow To Harbor Neither Insincerity Nor Deceit. 不虛心假意, 真心是道場; 心光透明磊落, 不沾蘊染

All delusion and infatuation, inability to perceive one's own Original Divine Nature, inability to recognize one's Pure Mind, inability to have constant wisdom, all of these are what is meant by insincerity and deceit.

Therefore, persons of high spiritual awareness overcome evil thoughts by constant mindfulness of Divine Perfect Wisdom.

Persons of moderate spiritual awareness eliminate contradictions between what they think and what they do. They don't say one thing and think another.

Persons of average spiritual awareness refuse to use Tao as an excuse to while away the time, to put on airs, or maintain false appearances. Thus, they are able to keep their vow.

4. I Vow To Strive To Make Progress (Along The Spiritual Path), Never Stalling Or Regressing. 不退縮不前, 得不退轉

Persons of high spiritual awareness define the inability to diligently progress on the Path, inability to bear humiliation, inability to follow the rules of discipline governing spiritual cultivation, failure to perform charitable deeds, and failure to develop one's inner wisdom, as stalling or regressing on the spiritual Path.

Persons of moderate spiritual awareness define the inability to endure various trials, tribulations, and hardships, and the inability to actually carry out or live up to one's vows, as stalling or regressing on the spiritual Path.

Persons of average spiritual awareness define diligence at the beginning followed by laxity at the end, and inconsistency or wavering in one's commitment to Tao, as stalling or regressing on the spiritual Path.

5. I Vow To Neither Deceive Myself Or Others, Nor Slander The Patriarchs. 不欺師滅祖

Persons of high spiritual awareness define the inability to live in accord with the ideals of the patriarchs, the inability to realize the true meaning of The Great Tao, and the inability to transmit the Truth on Heaven's behalf, as "deceiving oneself and others, and slandering the Patriarchs".

Persons of moderate spiritual awareness define leaving behind the Truth of the lineage of the enlightened Masters, and relying on other doctrines, as "deceiving oneself and others, and slandering the Patriarchs".

Persons of average spiritual awareness define disrespect for one's spiritual teachers, or violation of the commandments of Heaven, as "deceiving oneself and others, and slandering the Patriarchs".

6. I Vow To Never Feel Contempt For Those Who Have Preceded Me In Receiving Tao. 不藐視前人

Persons of high spiritual awareness define the inability to continue the tradition of the past and carry it on into the future, failure to perpetuate the flame of Truth, and inability to follow in the footsteps of past Sages and Saints and shoulder the responsibility of promulgating Tao, as "contempt for those who have preceded oneself in receiving Tao".

Persons of moderate spiritual awareness define the inability to develop the ambitions and ideals of one's predecessors in Tao, and inability to carry out the instructions given by virtue, as "contempt for those who have preceded oneself in receiving Tao".

Persons of average spiritual awareness define arrogance and self-conceit, disregard for one's superiors, disrespect for one's predecessors, and disobedience towards one's predecessors, as "contempt for those who have preceded oneself in receiving Tao".

7. I Vow To Never Fail To Follow The Rules of Faith. 佛規十五條, 遵循佛規

Persons of high spiritual awareness define domination of the True Self by the mind and its thoughts, and failure to be in accord with the harmony of the Middle Path while moving, resting, sitting upright, or lying down, as "failure to follow the Rules of Faith".

Persons of moderate spiritual awareness define failure to abide by the five standards of conduct, failure to abide by the five rules of spiritual cultivation, and failure to carry out the ten good deeds and implement the eight virtues, as "failure to follow the Rules of Faith". (Please see Appendix B).

Persons of average spiritual awareness define noisy or disruptive behavior in the sanctuary, disorderly or disheveled attire, and ignorance of correct ritual or propriety, as "failure to follow the Rules of Faith".

真心受習於真
欲心受習於真
妄心受習於真
妄心受習於真

8. I Vow To Never Divulge The Secrets Of Heaven. 不洩露天機. always tell what's best for all, despite the foreseen consequence.

Persons of high spiritual awareness define speaking about things which should not be spoken of, talking about things which are not of this human realm, and openly revealing that which is Marvelous and Mysterious without the right conditions or before the appropriate time, as "divulging the secrets of Heaven".

Persons of moderate spiritual awareness define casually revealing the Three Treasures of Tao as "divulging the secrets of Heaven".

Persons of average spiritual awareness define oral or written disclosure of the names or characteristics of the Three Treasures, without first lighting the alter lamps, as "divulging the secrets of Heaven".

9. I Vow To Act Always According To Tao. 不器道不現.
(bring people and sentient beings the Tao)

Persons of high spiritual awareness define the inability to remain constant (in one's faith, practice, etc.) in the face of changing circumstances, failure to remain immutable in one's faith when confronted with changing karmic conditions, inability to feel compassionately at one with others, and inability to show kindness towards others without cause or expectation of reciprocity, as "the failure to act according to Tao".

Persons of moderate spiritual awareness define keeping the "Good News" or the message of Tao to oneself, finding excuses when others need help, the inability to serve others, and the inability to present oneself as an example to others, as "the failure to act according to Tao".

Persons of average spiritual awareness define the inability to lead others to Tao or advise others to turn toward Tao, as "the failure to act according to Tao".

10. I Vow To Do My Best According To My Abilities. 量力而為

Persons of high spiritual awareness define the inability to do away with wrong actions that one performs out of habit, the inability to eliminate one's own defilement and ignorance, the inability to sever attachment to self (or ego) and attachment to things, and the inability to realize one's True Self, as "the failure to act according to one's abilities".

Persons of moderate spiritual awareness define the inability to break the yoke of passions and desires, the coveting of fame and fortune as rare and precious commodities on a par with the gift of life, the wasting of precious moments and opportune time, and the loss of spiritual opportunity in one's lifetime due to careless negligence, as "the failure to act according to one's abilities".

Persons of average spiritual awareness define various kinds of excuses, such as saying that one is too inconvenienced or too busy, saying that one has no time to listen to the teachings of Tao, to cultivate oneself, or to carry out the Will of Heaven, in addition to infrequent attendance at congregations of Tao, infrequent contact with one's brothers and sisters in Tao, and avoidance of the worship ceremony of Tao, as "the failure to act according to one's abilities".

Conclusion:

These are the Ten Great Vows which you have taken. Try your best to incorporate them into your daily life and to live up to them. You may also use them as a source of guidance and inspiration.

During the Ceremony of Receiving Tao there were two other vows which were taken, not by you, but by others for your sake. These were the Vow of the Introducer and the Vow of the Sponsor (or Guaranteer).

Before you received Tao from the Master, two people took an oath before the alter - one is your Introducer and the other is your Sponsor. Without these two persons, you could not have received Tao. Your Introducer vouches for your character and good conduct. Your Sponsor guarantees that Tao is the True Path and that the teachings are genuine. Additionally, both the Introducer and the Sponsor pledge that any donation (or "merit fee") which you give to the sanctuary will be used only for the printing of Tao books and other such noble purposes.

APPENDIX A

The Rules Of Faith

- all
and Buddhas.*
1. Respect God, respect all Heavenly beings, and respect everyone as a Saint.
 2. Respect those who have preceded us on the Way of cultivation, and help those who come after us.
 3. Have a pure mind, solemn appearance, and righteous conduct.
 4. Do things in their proper order according to Truth.
 5. Have a sense of responsibility and also carry out that responsibility.
 6. Emphasize the spiritual life and de-emphasize the material life.
 7. Be modest and respectful, easy going, and have a mild appearance.
 8. Don't disregard the words of the Saints, but always remember them in your mind.
 9. Don't be attached to superficial or phenomenal appearances, see things in their true light, and be objective not subjectively biased.
 10. Be open, clean and honest in all of life's procedures
 11. Have the respect and courtesy to inform significant others when you leave, what you do, and report back when you return.
 12. Recognize the Truth clearly. Truth is one; after you have found it don't become confused and look for another Truth that you think may be better.
 13. Cherish public things, don't abuse public property.
 14. Be flexible in dealing with things according to their unique condition.
 15. Be careful in what you say and what you do.

APPENDIX B

1. The Five Standards Of Conduct:

Benevolence, Righteousness, Propriety, Wisdom, and Faith.

2. The Five Rules Of Spiritual Cultivation:

Broad Learning, Detailed Inquiry, Careful and Thorough Thinking, Clear Recognition, Putting into Practice What One Has learned.

3. The Ten Good Deeds (also known as "The Ten Don'ts"):

Don't Kill, Don't Steal, Don't Be Lewd, Don't Tell Lies, Don't Use Abusive Language, Don't Gossip, Don't Use Profanity, Don't Be Greedy, Don't Be Angry or in a Rage, Don't Have Evil Thoughts.

4. The Eight Virtues:

Filial Piety, Respect For Elders, Loyalty, Faith and Honesty, Propriety, Righteousness, Incorruptibility, To Understand What Shame Is.