

道教四十九关

The 49 Barriers

Foreword: The original text dates to the Qing Dynasty, written by Master Liu as "The 50 Barriers." The text has been slightly modified. What we call an "abnormal" person here is a person who society views as different from the multitude, often called crazy, mental, idiotic, foolish, moronic, dim-witted, prodigal, unattendant of one's duty, parasitic, a pushover, etc. Because of their perspectives on human life, values, worldview, and differences from other people, they don't compete with others and don't attempt to take things forcefully for themselves. They don't cheat others, lobby for personal gain, seek high office, or seize opportunity for profit. They don't see every bird and fish as a meal, nor commit actions which harm the lives of other living beings. They are wary of good food and drink and the temptation of physical beauty. Others see them as useless and handicapped. Is that not so? People may say "What are these people? Unbelievable!"

The Chinese word "Guan" (关) is defined as an obstruction blocking a path to a fortress, a narrow mountain pass or a request. When a "Guan" or Barrier is obstructed, one is unable to arrive at their destination, or achieve their goal. The reference is made to barriers from studying and understanding the Dao, sublimation of the soul, ascendance to immortality and enlightenment; it also describes the junctures and openings of these barriers. These barriers contain that which is inherent to a person's nature, as well as the qualities which have been influenced or corrupted by the ideas and judgments of society... one's degree of self-cultivation, understanding, comprehension, assurance, choice of direction, intensity of dedication etc. are all closely related to these influences and barriers.

1. Lust

Sexuality is the force behind the procreation of all life. It is also the first great barrier of one who seeks to awaken to the Dao, achieve immortality and enlightenment by following the abnormal methods of the celestial ones. People are born from this path of desire and they die of it. This desire is an inherent nature which moves within us and creates a loss. This movement and the loss causes is a calamity and destitution of this world. Even in an unknowing and unfeeling state it, arises even in a state of thoughtlessness and carelessness it is there. People see desire, passion grows, entering this situation, the spirit moves eagerly and loss occurs. This creates many types of karma. If those who cultivate the Dao rid themselves of the deepest root of this desire, naturally the spiritual seedling will begin to grow. If they encounter this desire and aren't immediately coerced, they may act without lust, Remarkably, they won't create desire, preventing lust from entering inside themselves. Those unable or unwilling to eliminate this desire or those unable or unwilling to go this route have many methods available to them. Their ability is deepened through long practice. Eventually the time of elimination of desire will come, when the deepest root is removed, when the physical body is strong, the spiritual body is easily cultivated, all other barriers are easily overcome, whether one has renounced their family to join the monkhood, or not, their wish to

become enlightened is unhindered. Although human relations continue into future generations, if the desire of lust is tasteless one's energy and essence will be ample and flourish, extending life and preventing disease. One must know that human affection is needed for the beginning of cultivation; however, later it clouds the glory of the Way and those who use those affections will not know the Way. Life after life unending is called the great Dao, the cause of the seed to Immortality.

2. Love

"Even though human life may last 100 years, no one can predict the length of any specific life; yesterday you were riding a horse quickly down the street, today you are a lifeless corpse in a coffin." This is called the "bitter shortness" of life. Seeing the meaninglessness of deep love, one rushes to cultivate the great Way. Only then can one escape from the three realms, and grab hold of their life and death. For human life in this world everything is illusion, only Life is real. Serious illness poses a threat to the body. Even one's closest kin or most beloved aren't able to take on another's adversity, nor may they shoulder another's misery. Nothing can be done, though an entire life of loving kindness has come to this point. Father and son, brother and sister, husband and wife, when they are together and wish to do something for the father, they must follow the appropriate principles. For son, husband, wife, parents, friends, one must know each principle, it is one's individual duty to act thus. But in one's heart they understand these are merely tools for transient pleasure, the partnership of the family, a means of bringing this act in proper order to its conclusion. Acting with one another in this way we can avoid moving against the inherent mandate of our natural bonds and not hide or obstruct our natural instincts. Whether amongst a family or as a renunciant, in this world or out of it, from the ancient past until these modern times, succeeding in finding the Dao, one is free from cares, unrestrained. With a willing heart, boldly and powerfully forging ahead, one vows to reach the far shore.

3. Rank and Influence

Riches and honor are a desire of people. Prosperity has its rank in Heaven and its rank among men. The rank within Heaven is the Way, virtue, benevolence and faith. The rank of humanity is honor, fame and salary. To cultivate rank within Heaven, one must accumulate benevolence and faith and nurture Way and Virtue, restrain ostentatiousness and move towards sincerity, storing energy and supporting health. One ought not teach against riches and luxury, but to move outside of their circumstances. Getting rid of the desire for rank and luxury is a real accomplishment. In a place of wealth and glory one relies on it, by living within it one covets it, by surpassing it one forgets it, meeting with it one fawns over it, seeing it one knows what it is. This makes it impossible for one to overcome the barrier, as glory and rank come and go one is pulled along by them. To make use of the law of the world and the law of the Way, cultivating the Way with virtue, using the Dao for salvation, being with the place of riches and rank but forgetting them, being without them and not envious of them, this method of following the Way brings results.

4. Wealth

Wealth is separated between the wealth of the world and the wealth of the Great Law. Wealth of the world is measured in gold, silver, pearls and jade. The wealth of the Great Law is measured by virtues and sincerity. It is to accumulate wealth heavy in virtue and light in gold. Take sincerity over pearls and jade,

benevolence and faith over precious metals and stones, comfortable breathing and relaxed repose over beneficial commodities. See existence and truth as great riches, peace and quiet as property, although, while cultivating, while your body still resides within this realm one cannot completely abandon riches, but must remember to always make the virtuous decisions in spite of profit, comply with the natural order, avoid calamity and help those in need, build temples and places of worship, engage wholly with the religious teachings, use all wealth appropriately, accumulate wealth of the Great Law, never use the spirit to swindle or make money, use the Buddha to make money, or become rich for private gain.

5. Poverty

Truly cultivating the Way, means moving contrary to the ways of the world. Extravagance prevents indifference to gain. Poverty creates inalienable will and ideals. If one is unable to suffer poverty, endure hunger and cold, and forget about frustration, they meet resolution difficultly, succumb to delusion, are hateful and resentful to heaven and earth, blocking the path which leads to the high mountain, harming the way and becoming demonic, unable to move forward, if they want to understand the Way, which is real difficulty!

6. The Illusory Body

The true Dao is formless, true nature is without body (substance), true law is without comparisons, to not hold onto your physical body is to speak of the Dao, outside of this physical body there is a true body, though normal people take this false body for truth. Greedily covering riches and glory for the sake of this physical body, scheming money and property to support it, eating meat and drinking alcohol to fatten it, decorating it with magnificent clothing, life is still constrained by the extent of its span, the form is spoiled and the soul lost, life is lost outside of one's self, at this point if one seeks the repent there is real difficulty!

7. Arrogance

One of noble character treats people modestly, studying the Dao, using an open demeanor, one is inferior and small, unfulfilled, ashamed to ask of one's subordinates, reveres teachers and respects friends, is never arrogant or impetuous. Only by this can one give direction and advise friends. The way of proper cultivation needs a competent teacher as a guide, good friends benefit from the strengths of the teacher. If one praises oneself, and thinks of themselves as always right, even if they are excellent and clever, outstandingly learned, but too arrogant to bow their head, who would be willing to show them the way? Only the small can become great, only the low can become high, only the bent can become straight, and only the empty can be true.

8. Jealousy

Using the knowledge of good friends, I can offset my own ignorance, using others capabilities I may achieve what cannot do alone. By being friends in life, and moral in associations, we can be as close brothers. Others have their achievements, as I have mine. Others have their losses, as I have mine. This is the direction towards truly learning the Way. If when one sees the strengths of others, and becomes

secretly jealous, unrepentant of one's own weaknesses, opposing those who excel beyond oneself, they will develop a selfish mind. Amongst people act with compassion and virtue, respect the strengths of others, correct your own shortcomings, manage affairs humbly, and progress will come.

9. Irritability

Irritable demeanor is detrimental to the body and mind, it must be eradicated. The one who cultivates the Way, takes the delicate first, takes peace as a basis and follows reason as a beginning to influence the world. Forgiveness and yielding are essential. Abuses and viciousness are harmful to one's position and should be put out of one's mind, if only thinking of what benefits oneself, and never thinking of others, even a small disruption sets one off, hate burns throughout the body and the original spirit leaves. The fluids dry up and the breath is dispersed, the three jewels are internally injured, outside one engages in vile conduct, life becomes messy and shaken, violence causes great harm. This drives a person mad. One must become like a dead person, an imbecile, one's heart like cold ashes, one's nature becoming frozen; only then can one cultivate the Way.

10. Argument

Argument is the root and source of right and wrong. Relating to moral integrity and degeneration, people are unaware of devastation. Distinguishing virtue one becomes proud and complacent, speaking more of oneself than of others, lying or speaking craftily, giving mistaken opinions, breaking promises, raving deliriously into disaster, speaking of lofty issues but containing no truth, cursing and defamation, and defeating others becomes an accomplishment. All of this is harmful to any type of affair. Don't speak presumptuously nor indiscriminately. Words are the heart of sound, the tongue is the heart of the sprout. If the heart isn't pure, the root is already spoiled. When one's nature is darkened and life is shaken, don't imagine that the Way can be understood.

11. Resentment

No matter how much misfortune or loss one has suffered, they must first rid themselves of enmity. Before resentment is eliminated one suffer through this state, and lands themselves in the cycle of life and death, the ocean of cause and effect. The richness of the earth sustains and grow all things, and carry the full weight of Tai Shan, receive the flow of all the Yangzi. Studying the Way is as profound as the earth, as wide as the seas, like the immortals, with their unhindered manner, peaceful temperament, one can make contact with the Way.

12. Selfishness

When one is selfish they won't work for the benefit of others. A Taoist must have a selfless perspective. For desires to not disturb a person, they must achieve selflessness. When the self exists, one becomes self-interested. Without distinguishing others from oneself, one can be in correct correspondence with others. This mind, this way, this method of cultivation, is the embryo of the Sage. Discerning others and oneself, taking others lightly and oneself heavily, meddling in affairs, seeking gain, always being wanting to receive, but never willing to retreat, one won't realize that their three energies are exhausted and all is

wasted. One ought to see all living things as one entity, everything under heaven as one family. The happiness, and sorrow, gain and loss of others should be seen as one's own. One should be forgiving when the time is right. When it is appropriate to step back one should step back, giving one's whole heart and intention to the service of all life. This should be the manner in which one cultivates the Dao.

13. Laziness

To enter the Way and pursue cultivation, one must vigorously advance, one must not shirk responsibility and act lazily. One must move eagerly into hardship, the mind and intention firm and stable. If there is a beginning and an end, only then can there be progress. Seek to correct all misunderstanding, researching the night and the day. Disaster and difficulty multiply the force of the will. If there is one virtue to be done, one evil to be dispelled, one must be constantly striving, always diligent. If one only seeks peace and avoids and fears hardship, keeps hard work at bay, pushes away meritorious deeds, spends the whole day eating, not giving a thought to anything, these actions are a vain attempt at understanding the Way.

14. Talent and Understanding

If there is talent don't use it, if you have understanding don't employ it. Only then will you have complete talent, only then will you have complete understanding. What is talent? It is to consider things flexibly. When there something to be done, one always looks to their talents and understanding first. Observe what the truth of the situation, that people always lose their lives to their talents and understandings. Relying on talent one becomes condescending. Relying on understanding one uses it to seek vanities. He who truly admires the Way, rids himself of talent and burns away his understanding. He conceals his own light and doesn't stick his head into this world. He doesn't compete in affairs. He is honest as a person, flexible in his usefulness, studies the Way. If he were to use his talent and understanding he would scheme and strategize, satiating his desires, eventually coming to an end.

15. Will

When only the open mind seeks the Way, it is broken and at a loss. Not being self-willed causes great harm. One must not only study the Way, but also one's nature. If one isn't willing to study hard, they have little control and cannot become harmonious within the multitude. If one is limited in what they can tolerate, they will not become magnanimous. In this world, when the will is abused, people become outwardly offensive and loathsome, while inwardly they become insidious. If one can quietly meditate and consider one's path, small talk will never take one off course, relations are put in order, travel in all directions is satisfactory, affairs are undertaken modestly, one finds shelter when weak, all of one's blindnesses of the past are known. One is naturally stubborn, gradually undergoing change. To become this natural seeker of the Way, one must be blank, like a stupid man, only then can one achieve the Way.

16. Adversity/Trials and Tribulations

For a person who chooses not to study the Way there are many comforts. Those who cultivate encounter disaster again and again. In truth there are many demons blocking the path to the Dao. With will and determination, through difficult asceticism one may eliminate this adversity. Through meritorious actions

one overcomes these barriers, and over time naturally attains health and peace of mind. Without adversity there is no

cause for aspiration. Gold is smelted in great fires, the lotus grows upwards from the mud. Without fire one would never see the brightness of gold, without mud one would never see the purity of the lotus. Through difficulty, disaster, hardship and danger one commits themselves to heaven. Responding from a place of no mind, if one doesn't withdraw from the will, they are protected and sustained, naturally the ominous becomes auspicious, and calamity becomes fortune. Confronting adversity with fear and losing one's will and ideas in the face of disaster and misfortune the mind becomes messy and the spirit flees, finding the Way becomes difficult.

17. Dishonesty

It is valuable to study the Way with genuine sincerity. Only by abasing oneself and making oneself small can one experience the treatment of a true teacher, win the confidence of others, receive favor from others. When one's heart is pure, teachers and friends will treat them with a pure heart. With one is sincere, their teachers and friends will treat them with sincerity. When one seeks to be treacherous and cunning, the heart is corrupted, and one tries to conceal their actions even from wise men. They make alluring lies, and interpret the scriptures inaccurately. As they have acted thus, though outwardly they may appear to continue the study of the Dao, in their minds they conspire. They deceive others and thereby themselves, mistakenly discarding their future. With honesty one can sense Heaven and Earth, communicate with ghosts and spirits and move people. To have any falsity in one's thoughts not only can a person not seek to gain truth, they will be unable to even see it clearly.

18. Conjecture and Opinion

Within the Way there is true and false. Within the false there is truth, and within the truth there is the false. There is action and there is non-action. The mystery of the Way is indescribable and discussion cannot explain it. Within the three dimensional world there is the form and the formless. There are things with appearances and things with no appearances. What appears real is often not. To discern the truth, one must use their whole life, take responsibility, use all of their talent to eliminate illusion. They must seek great teachers, those enlightened to the deep mysteries, one's own meager cleverness is never enough, for it contains conjecture and opinion and one always sees themselves as correct. They provide nothing to others and entreat only themselves. They don't look to others for help, but rather look artificially inward, if they wish to understand the Way they will find only difficulty.

19. Absent Mindedness

The sages of the three religions, were valued because of their whole heartedness and practicality, they never engaged in affairs with absent mindedness. Cultivating the Way is an extreme, fully developed affair, the study of an entire lifetime. In Daoism there are three sections of study: the most elevated for the wisest people who understand easily, learning a hundred lessons for every teaching, who were born with understanding, and they perform harmoniously. The central course is for those with average wisdom, who can be affected to understand, upon hearing one they understand two, through study they gain understanding, and they perform favorably. The low course is for those of little wisdom, with great effort

and research they can achieve deep skill and achievement, though difficulty they gain understanding, and they perform with effort. Through these three courses people do what they are capable of. Although separated into three classes, everyone begins from the ground up. If one is absent minded and untrue, unable to focus their attention, without enduring will, no one from the middle level will progress in their study, and even those with great wisdom will be wasted. If you learn and question, are careful, discerning and conscientious then what can stop you from understanding the Way?

20. Wishful Thinking and Delusion

To understand the Way one must practice truth, not emptiness and delusion. Human affairs are artificial and confusing, fame and gain is misleading, deep love is consuming. If one takes these false things as truth they are unable to establish their will and ambition, unable to rise their energies, unable to use their strengths. Following these desires one allows their knowledge of the spirit to be destroyed and, though looking forward they move backwards, taking their desire for merit, replacing consideration with evil. In ancient times the Immortals and Buddhas suffered through unknowable uncountable hardships. They employed endless self-discipline. Only through this could they understand the Way. Who knows of how much difficulty they endured to achieve the Way? Wishful thinking and delusion is the sin that prevents one from understanding the Way. If this endures, one cannot expect to achieve anything.

21. Life and Death

When studying and cultivating the Way one cannot have the lust after life nor the fear of death in their heart. Zhuangzi said "Absorbing vitality is to extend life, forgetting vitality is to lose life." The way of long life requires one to forget about living or not living, dying or not dying. Heaven and Earth can use that which has a form, but cannot use the formless, they can use that which has energy, but that which has no energy they cannot use, they can use that with a mind, but cannot use that with no mind. To have no mind is to have no energy; to have no energy is to have no form. Having no thoughts of life and death they cannot wear one down. If one has a mind which asks for life, than the physical body endures while the mind dies before it's time. The sprouts of life are spoiled, and the roots which grow death extend. Demons and devils arrive and there is confusion and turmoil. Make an examination of death and then put the question of these two words, "life and death" outside of your consideration. Bury death by walking its path. To avoid death study death. Although you live you may not know life. There is only this one word the "Way" which will always be in front of you, otherwise you seek life and fear death, and caught like this, the Way is unattainable.

22. Complacency

One person's knowledge is limited; the knowledge of the multitude is boundless. If people don't engage with this they learn nothing, if they don't bend to this they have no knowledge. If one doesn't recognize they are empty, there is nothing to gain. If one doesn't respect what others have they can achieve nothing. Sages achieve the way by emptying the heart and mind. If one relies on one's own cleverness and education, they become complacent and no longer seek to improve. They will likely enter through side doors and engage in small affairs, not realizing this is wrong. By thinking highly of themselves they cannot confirm anything. One must take all people as their teachers, and every place as somewhere to learn.

23. Fear of Difficulty

There are no difficult affairs under Heaven, only fear in men's hearts. Cultivating is the most simple and straightforward affair. It is also the most difficult and most wearisome affair. One must have solid aspiration. The most difficult affair under Heaven must be the greatest affair. The greatest affair requires an "abnormal" person using the greatest force in order to succeed. If cultivating the Way were easy, everyone in this world would become Buddhas and Immortals.

24. Slight

The Way works for itself, Time is limitless, unfathomable, but life is limited, explore the vast universe, experience the great ocean of humanity as if seeing insects crawling on a mountain. Can this be seen lightly? To look disrespectfully at the Way, is one able to cultivate it? Can one move forward?

25. Cowardice

To cultivate the Way one must forge ahead bravely, one cannot be cowardly and weak. If one has aspiration they transform their weakness into an unbendable will. If one has no aspiration even their greatest strengths become weaknesses. What is called aspiration must be decisive and resolute, a bold will, an enduring strength of the heart and mind. Always moving forward, minute by minute, carefully through life. Endlessly trying to understand and learn the principles of the way. What one does not know they must seek to know. What one doesn't understand they must endure bitterness to learn. By enduring the unendurable, only then can one achieve the unachievable, experience bitterness without bitterness, and know what cannot be known.

26. Short Sightedness

Cultivating the Way and Virtue does not happen in the span of one day. It requires a long term aspiration. It is not right to distinguish good from evil, if in the end one is pleased with oneself. If one vainly hopes to quickly achieve the Way and is anxious for results, they don't have the mind for the long term and lack the strength of will. They will go forward and back, going and stopping. How can they reach a profound place this way? If a person is of two minds, changing back and forth, it's inevitable they will give up halfway, never reaching an understanding of the Way.

27. Resignation

Normal people say that a human lifespan has a fixed duration, surpassed only by the inhuman. They say holiness is inborn, special people are gifted with these abilities. They say the way is the deepest and most profound, not understandable by normal people. One must know that all people can become sages. All people may be enlightened. They must be completely honest, completely respectful, bending themselves to ask help from others, starting from near and ending far away, unflinching in their determination. If people couldn't achieve the Way how would they differ from animals? What a person doesn't know they must learn in order to know. What they cannot do they must learn in order to do. For the body to enter the

gate of the Way one must not think of moving quickly, not give up on oneself as hopeless, not waste time day by day. Going on like this a person lives in a dream, wasting life, and disaster repeats itself.

28. Debt

Those who cultivate the way must have a simple and unadorned manner. To store wealth and riches is to spread blood and sweat in many directions, which cannot be endured lightly. This is why one must not seek fame and wealth. One string, one ray, to arrive at this thought is not easy, one drink, one meal, one must know this is hard to achieve.

29. Loftiness

To not think of oneself highly is the highest one can go. When one doesn't think of themselves as great, that is as great as one can be. If one doesn't think highly of oneself they can be humble amongst other. If one doesn't think greatly of oneself, they can be small amidst others. Hiding one's capabilities, one is in agreement with the world bringing joy to people, one studies the way while pleasing one's teachers and friends. If one is outwardly modest and inwardly slight, and relies on their abilities to study the Way, and thinks highly of how they hold to the Way, who is so powerful as to take all of their arrogance, self-satisfaction, and write it off in one stroke, so that person can then achieve the Way?

30. Adornment

People in the world take adornment heavily while taking inner content lightly. They recognize the false and discard truth. People worry others will make fun of them and therefore adorn themselves in beautiful clothing. People make themselves beautiful in order to laugh at others; they pretend to have high morals in order lie to others. When people put much time into only this how can they cultivate with this perspective? It is by fulfilling one's duty, not seeking fame and wealth, maintaining simplicity, being dependable, giving respect to the Way, considering virtue as valuable, that all affairs are completed and progress moves everywhere.

31. False Conviction and Misunderstanding

Understanding the way requires a true view of the profound. It is not acceptable to take what is unknown as known, or mistakes will be made in important affairs. When something appears right but is wrong, one must ask someone who knows for illumination, brightening and opening the mind, uncertainties are explained, meanings are made known. One must set aside their own cleverness and clean their own hearts, eagerly ask for understandings of the unknown, seek deeper than what is already known. If one feigns high understanding, in the end they know nothing, and with such little understanding deep knowledge is hard to obtain.

32. Evil

One who cultivates in the world must have a compassionate demeanor. They may not keep their vices hidden within; this prevents them from coming in contact with the Dao. People distinguish good and evil, virtue and foolishness. One person has a singular nature, many people have many natures. Some people use offensive language, or engage in dishonest affairs. One must listen without hearing, look without seeing, always responding to people without prejudice. If people forget to be kind in their actions and act only out of enmity, they hide their insidiousness within their character. After years of amassing this energy it is hard to do away with. Outwardly they are ingratiating; inwardly they bent over in darkness. This damages one's person and injures their body. If one doesn't repent this state endures, one must raise their head upwards. When in this state if they perceive the smallest details, if their desires aren't dispelled and if evil doesn't change, one sinks into the cycle of life and death, the ocean of cause and effect.

33. Alcohol

"Wine, women, wealth and temper" are called the four walls. Though everyone is kept within these walls, there are those who jump over to the outside, and discover "long life without illness." Alcohol is one of four injuries; to be drunk confuses one's nature. Lust easily rises in drunkenness, wicked ideas are born, and anger comes forth, injuring innocence. Evil supersedes one's actions, one forgets oneself in their speech, and becoming extremely audacious they dare anything, all because of alcohol. In ancient times how many heroes met with this difficulty? One must be wary.

34. Fear of Bitterness

Beginning to cultivate, hunger and thirst, cold and heat, disaster and disease, stopping desire, training oneself and acting properly in affairs, all these are normal parts of the bitterness of cultivation. Having the habit of appeasing the physical body's desires it is difficult to progress. What "abnormal" people should know is that in loss there is gain, and one must engage in difficult endeavors if they seek a profound result. Normal people retreat from difficulty, they see difficulty and stop. They don't understand the idea that one begs for the Way in the center of bitterness. This word, bitterness, to temper one's willpower, is the medicine a cultivating person uses to recuperate, a way to overcome many demons. If one renounces in order to avoid difficulty and spend idle time, as a way to receive clothing and food, what makes them different from anyone else? Fear of bitterness and suspicion bear no fruit and as the years go on the Way is still unattainable.

35. Faithlessness

When higher man hears of the Way he works hard to cultivate it. When an ordinary man hears of the Way, there is some he keeps and some that he forgets. When a lower man hears of the Way he laughs. The faithful don't speak of faith, rather they keep true faith within their hearts. This is the most powerful faith, which can perceive the heavens and move the earth, communicate with gods and spirits, end the cycle of rebirth and reverse life and death. It is holy and worthy, allowing one to become a Buddha or an Immortal. It is the greatest treasure of one who cultivates the Way. To truly believe in faith is to have one mind with the Way, a singular mind. But faith also must distinguish between right and wrong, evil and virtue. When studying the way faith is precious, the value of faith is that it shows us what is correct. This is the true faith of the Way. In the end one achieves this, otherwise, if faith is incomplete one is dominated by uncertainty, and achieving the Way is but wishful thinking.

36. Masterlessness

Normal people have accomplishments, but before they can be considered valuable they are subject to the masters interpretation. Without the upright master, one's ideals can become empty and unreal. Without upright vision one may walk easily into the side doors, wasting many years of their time. When the mind is uncertain it cannot hurt to ask the great teachers for assistance, to clarify uncertainty, otherwise one may not distinguish true and false, and rather than seeking after life one will instead move closer towards death.

37. Quick Results/Impatience

When one cultivates the Way they must follow the proper order, moving gradually and diligently, making progress over the course of time, this can't be rushed into happening all at once. If one hasn't researched the scripture, and their virtue hasn't accumulated, they will enter the side doors and walk winding paths. The desired result is simple, but the work to achieve it is hard, one must endure long lasting difficulty, to come to see the real great Way. One cultivates their innate, original, formless energy. The desired result is difficult, but the work to achieve it is easy. Without long term ambition, without a mind which endures forever, when one is anxious to see the fruits of their labor, is diminutive and sluggish, through this eagerness there can come no success. .

38. Carelessness

To study without consideration is deception, to consider without studying is dangerous. With a singular careful pursuit one can keep on for a long time. Putting in one's time and effort, one can make achievements. Moving through the scripture limitless times, it is through carefulness that one is able to find understanding. One must study carefully, grasping the principles one step, one layer at a time. One's own heart and mind become clear, one understands truth, the tapestry is weaved together, and one gains the ability to reach the highest Way.

39. Waste

One's body is a great gift. Time is constantly passing, waiting for no one, so one should make the best use of this remaining time. It is best to start cultivating while the body is young and strong, before energy and spirit weaken with age. It is a true waste if one spends time on unimportant actions and focuses on cultivating only his material life, and shows one's ignorance of the cycle of life and death. One should find a real teacher and good friends to learn from. One should also always try to be meritorious and avoid sinful action. If one can be concentrated and dedicated, make commitments and do great deeds than deities and gods will protect and help them. This way the great Way can be achieved.

40. Retreat from Will

One's body is a great gift and should be used as a boat to cross the river to enlightenment, as a ladder ascending to heaven. We must be determined to forge ahead perseveringly towards the purification of our

spirit and ascension. We must make this accomplishment in this lifetime, we can't expect this opportunity in future lives. When one has the heart to study the Dao though they be 70 or 80 years old, if they are able to focus entirely on the moment, they can still achieve it. One shouldn't be discouraged on account of age, one shouldn't give up halfway. The more aged the body becomes the more energy and intention one should spend in daily life for cultivation, until the moment of death there is the opportunity for cultivation. The real spirit is not hard to retrieve one only need be wary of lack of ambition and perseverance. .

41. Boasting

Scholars of society are deliberately mystifying, learning fancy words to make their speech more colorful without deepening their meaning. They are conceited in believing they are awakened, call themselves enlightened, they sing their own praises and beat their own drum, like this they seek fame and compliments, when in fact by such actions they bring destruction upon themselves and eventually fall into evil ways. One who is truly interested in cultivating the Dao should make themselves as if stupid and slow, being cautious and discreet, not declaring their achievements and avoiding fame. Whoever hasn't heard about the Dao has an opportunity to learn, whoever has can begin cultivating, step by step unto success.

42. The Furnace

The five metals and eight stones are all artificial and have been misunderstood. The ten thousand herbs and hundred thousand prescriptions are all wrong. The Elixir of the Dao is not the material elixir smelted in a cauldron spoken of in the books of external alchemy. This elixir comes from indestructible chivalrous deeds. This elixir is round without deficiency, is bright and shiny, strong and complete. Stored inside of our body since birth, it is the root of life. Everyone posses it. However, foolish scholars don't know it. They ignore the Way at their door step and seek far away for truth. They don't do what is simple; instead they look for a difficult external method. They misunderstand the teachings. The life of a practitioner is not the same as the life of ordinary person. For all these reasons, I advise those of you who really want to learn about the great Dao to hurry up and open the gate of the furnace, put aside external alchemical seekings, stop boiling and frying, put your energy into the study of real spiritual life, and discover the furnace of heaven and earth. Taking metals for delicacies and poisons as life's treasures won't do any good to your spiritual life.

43. Disgrace

The most precious thing for a Taoist is imperturbable tolerance for the world's bias and near sightedness, people's lack of knowledge and ignorance. The calmness comes from tolerance and strong determination, and one may remain unperterturbed by poverty and disaster. One should be as an ocean, accepting all waters whether pure of dirty, sweet or bitter, none more, none less. One who follows the Way should tolerate disgrace, not fighting in competitive situations, nor feel shamed when improperly treated. One's character should be like an ocean. Those who see themselves as great are not great. Those who think themselves honorable are not honorable. Those who think themselves correct are not be correct. One can only cultivate the Way if he can put disgrace aside.

44. Karma

A family that has accumulated kindness will have fortune, a family that accumulated evil will face disaster. Kindness is returned with kindness. Evil is repaid with evil. One's actions in one moment are be echoed in others. With cause, there is result. If one walks the path of kindness, they will be seen by helpful spirits. The Creator will let those ones with evil doing taste the fruit of evil. One must first learn to be a good and commit no evil; then one can move forward on the way of cultivation, escaping the cycle of life and death. We should also know that if in this life this cycle isn't resolved, we can still create a strong foundation now to begin from a further position our next life.

45. The Demon of the Book;

There are myriad scriptures and books. One should read them diligently; remembering one's understandings reflect only the level of their cultivation and not the wisdom hidden in the ancient texts. One should search for theoretical knowledge within scriptures but an explanation by a master must be given. If one takes what's written in books as the Dao itself, they will fall into the trap of the "Demon of Book". Not seeking an enlightened teacher will hold one back in their cultivation. We must recognize truth and falsehood through careful and diligent studying as well as find a discerning teacher to delineate right and wrong. It is by the confirmation of each step that one moves towards understanding the Dao.

46. Emptiness

The great Dao is not only emptiness and lifelessness. The great Dao has extreme emptiness but contains also extreme abundance. Within this greatest emptiness is contained the greatest reality. "Non-action", brings about completion, just as Heaven and Earth force nothing but give life to all living things. The sun and the moon create seasons in this effortless way. It is within "non-action" that right action can occur. It is not simply nothingness that is described by "non-action." To cultivate the Way, one must first understand the Way and afterwards they may cultivate towards it. By recognizing the movement of the great Way but doing nothing one will experience nothingness, a state which is unsatisfactory for cultivation. Having human bodies, we suffer imbalances of yin and yang and the five elements. We are affected by karmic cycles and obstructions of the physical world. If one wishes to transform negative influences, and using only nothingness, how can Yin become Yang, and remove the bitter seeds of the calamity and evil?

47. Grasping Images

The primordial Way gives form to the formless. It is not all this physical body which does work in the world, so where and when does the formless body begin its work? Leaving the body we can no longer discuss the Way. Grasping onto images we neglect truth. The human body is the combination of five illusions. They are externally expressed as eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and mouth and internally as the heart, liver, stomach, lungs, and kidneys. When death comes, they will be reduced to a pile of bones and rotting flesh. If one is too attached to their body during cultivation how can they achieve unity of nature and life? One must know that the body creates much toil in this life. Therefore, to preserve the Golden Elixir of the Way the Taoists cultivate their nature and life, cultivating the inner spirit as well as taking well care of the

physical body. Our true spirit, also called dharma body or the yang spirit has no imperfection. Once the Yang spirit is cultivated, one can enter water without drowning, enter fire without burning, endure as long as heaven and earth, and is as illuminated as the sun and moon.

48. War of Appearances

Gathering Yin to support Yang, seeking fulfillment from outside is like trying to quench one's thirst thinking of plums; it doesn't benefit one's life and character and is morally harmful. The Taoist method is similar to way the men and women interact with each other in the physical world; the difference is that Taoists use the true body, born from their spiritual father and sacred mother, as opposed to the physical body given by physical father and mother. Yin and Yang described in the alchemy scriptures are these spiritual parents. True Yin and Yang can't be found outside one's own body.

49. Illusion

The Way passes from gradual cultivation to sudden enlightenment. In the midst of stillness one observes countless changing images. If one accepts these illusions as reality and mistakes falsehood as truth they succumb to the Demon of Temptation. In less serious cases one may become sick in more serious cases one risks losing their life. Taoists endure endless years of hardship and the 81 difficulties to overcome this barrier! They embrace precepts and train themselves to overcome this barrier! They work tirelessly throughout their entire lifetime to overcome this barrier! They use every moment as cultivation overcome this barrier! If one cannot maintain this through every moment, one's mind is bound to be disturbed and strange illusions appear. Thereby one loses all his accomplishments, demons come to spoil his cultivation and test his work, controlling him completely; lamentably one loses everything they had achieved. If we cannot be steeled in our environment illusions arise from the heart. Before the five openings illusions may appear as good luck or misfortune, as ghostly spirits, or Buddha's and immortals, or even as sensual beauty or familial love. Every temptation will manifest because our desire has not been discarded. These are all illusions, not the true Way. One should not look, or smell, nor be happy, scared or afraid. One must cultivate daily rather than wait until the last minute. Only by understanding these barriers can one really grasp the difficulties of Taoists cultivation.

Afterword:

These forty-nine points are the most important barriers for students of Taoism. These barriers are demons standing in our path to achieving the Dao. One progresses only by passing through one after another. Like an examination, if one doesn't pass they are barred from further progress. When one cannot overcome these barriers they should keep working hard and believe that one day they will be able to pass their test. The path of cultivation is the way to heaven. It is the most important and most difficult thing in this world. It requires great determination and hard work. Taoist cultivation isn't merely explicable through language and numbers and it isn't within the scope of the understandings of ordinary people. It is like a student's education, there are different classes and different grades; the kindergarten, elementary, middle, high school and university students cannot be taught the same subject matter. Every individual has a unique power of comprehension, some are faster and some slower. When the great teachers of the past were in the world they addressed different situations with different methods. Nowadays, we have material supplies, advanced technology, and fast communication. One can read every book without setting foot

outside their home. Though this has its benefits, we must know that this convenience is a double edged sword. Where there is gain there is inherently loss. This convenience can trap us in satisfaction and comfort, a deadly situation for our determination towards further cultivation. It can lead people towards selfishness and cause people to chase after the material world eventually losing connection with one's inner self. In today's world, money always comes first. This world is hard enough for a normal human being not to mention those who cultivate. People who reject material comfort and their own desires are very rare. Those who intend to cultivate should consider this heavily, before taking action. After reading this insane statement above, some may not agree. Those who share a similar perspective with the author will agree and others will not. The ocean of desire is limitless, and those with affinity are drawn to the Way. The Buddha and the Great Daoist masters of the past were also seen as crazy. The master says: If one doesn't understand they won't become crazy. Not becoming crazy, they won't succeed.

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