

The Cosmic Mystery of All Times



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When I was little, I watched a Chinese television drama and heard a Buddhist verse (佛偈) for the first time. It goes like this:

佛在靈山莫遠求，
靈山只在汝心頭，
人人有個靈山塔，
好向靈山塔下修。

The buddhas dwell on Mount Spirit, so don't search far to find them.
This mountain lies deep within your own heart.
On each person's Mount Spirit, there is a sanctuary.
Beneath that sacred roof is the best place for self-cultivation.

As a kid, this verse felt mysterious to me. I caught a few important words—buddhas, mountains, and mind—but I didn't understand what it meant. As fate would have it, someone explained it to me years later. Since then, my life has never been the same.

One key lesson from this verse is that our inner buddha lives in our mind. The Chinese character "頭" (tóu) means "source" or "beginning." This shows that the source of our mind is

where our spirit lives. It is also where the journey of self-improvement begins. All sages and buddhas began their path from this very place.

You may wonder - “What is the beginning of mind? Why is the beginning of the mind the place and starting point of self-cultivation?” This next verse can build on that understanding:

吾有正法眼藏，涅槃妙心，實相無相，微妙法門，
不立文字，教外別傳，付囑摩訶迦葉。

During the Flower Sermon, the Buddha said:

"I hold the true Way, hidden in the eyes. It leads to the wonders of the awakened mind, the ultimate truth beyond all forms, and the deep path of practice. This teaching needs no words—it is passed on in an unconventional way. I have entrusted it to Mahākāśyapa."

Each time I say this verse out loud in Chinese, I feel a deep sense of awe—as if each word is part of me. When I hear others say it, I’m filled with reverence and a sense that we are sharing something sacred together. I feel blessed to know this verse.

There are many ways to reflect on its meaning, but here is my humble take: this true teaching is hidden in plain sight, right before our eyes. It leads us back to our true selves and brings us to the very beginning of our enlightened mind. This is where we find the ultimate truth. In other words, this teaching shows us the right starting point for our journey of self-cultivation—so that every effort we make truly matters.

Now, you may wonder - “Is there more to this hidden place?”

Here is a Daoist verse from chapter 6 in Dao De Jing to deepen and widen the understanding of this secret space.

道德經，第六章
谷神不死，是謂玄牝。
玄牝之門，是謂天地根。
綿綿若存，用之不勤。

*The eternal valley spirit is the Mother of Creation.
Through its gate flows the origin of heaven and earth—endless and unseen.
Its workings are boundless and without effort.*

Of the many ways to understand this, here is a humble reflection:

The term “valley spirit” is a literal translation, but figuratively, it is another name for Tao. The choice to keep the translation literal here is intentional—and its purpose will soon be explained. Those who are somewhat familiar with the Dao De Jing understand that Tao is the source of all phenomena—in other words, the Mother of Creation.

The word “door” in the next line suggests a location, and that place is in a valley—a gateway to the source of creation. This hints at the same hidden place referenced in the Flower Sermon and the verse about Mount Spirit. Here, this secret and veiled place is shown as the origin of all things. It is a single, mysterious point that holds the deep truths of the universe.

Speaking of door, here is a Confucian saying that also hints at the hidden place:

論語，雍也第六。子曰：「誰能出不由戶，何莫由斯道也？」

In the Analects, Confucius said, “Who can go in and out of their home without using the main door? So why do people not walk the moral path?”

As Confucius suggests, the main door is not merely a physical entryway but a profound symbol. It represents the primary gateway through which the spirit enters and exits the body, pointing to the moral path that we, as human beings, are meant to follow.

Another verse from the Analects further expands on this concept of the moral path:

論語，學而第二。有子曰：「君子務本，本立而道生。」

In this verse, one of Confucius’ disciples said, “A noble-minded person is rooted in their moral center, which guides the way they live. Once that center is firmly established, the moral path becomes clear.”

Returning to the door analogy, this door represents our moral center—which is the same as our true self, spirit, or original nature. When we live in harmony with it, our moral center naturally gives rise to our moral path.

Yes, the word moral can be off-putting for many, as it often carries a dogmatic connotation. It was that way for me too, especially in my early years of studying Eastern philosophy. But over time, I’ve come to understand that the kind of morality that flows from our true self is simply the voice of our conscience. Following it brings inner peace and a deeper, lasting joy.