

Journey to the West (13)

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Chapter Seven

The Great Sage escapes from the Eight Trigrams Furnace;

The Mind Ape is fixed beneath Five Elements Mountain.

(For the details of the story, please refer to Chapter 7 in *Journey to the West* as translated by W. J. F. Jenner, published by Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, ISBN 7-119-00653-3)

In Chapter Seven, Sun Wukong was taken to the Demon Execution Podium, but he was not harmed by the sword, ax and spear. Finally, he was put in the Eight Trigrams Furnace.

In order to put Sun Wukong into the Eight Trigrams Furnace, the ropes binding him were untied and the hook in his collar bone removed. Then Lao Tse pushed Sun Wukong into the Eight Trigrams Furnace. Lao Tse thought that once Sun Wukong was put in the Eight Trigrams Furnace, he would not be able to come out. Therefore, he ordered the person in charge of the Furnace and the fire-boy to start the fire and reduce Sun Wukong to ashes. The Eight Trigrams Furnace contains the eight Trigram positions - Chien, Duei, Li, Jen, Kwen, Gen, Kan, and Shun. Since Sun Wukong had learned the purposeful [you wei in Chinese] teaching, he knew how to hide himself in the Shun, or wind, position to keep safe.

Because Sun Wukong hid in the Shun posi-



tion and escaped from real burning and fire, and was only tested by wind, he gained fire eyes with golden pupils. What use are fire eyes with golden pupils? They can be used to identify demons and evil spirits. When facing the eighty one calamities, Sun Wukong instantly identified demons and evil spirits. But he did not have the full experience of undergoing testing by water, fire, and other threats. It is because he was practicing a minor Tao (i.e. the Lesser

Vehicle) that he was eventually forced to go with Tang Sanzang to get the sutras. Getting through the eighty one calamities can be counted as true experience of real situations. Real fighting encounters are real tests by water, fire, and other threats that allow one to achieve Tao.

Now, burning in the Eight Trigrams Furnace should produce the Right Fruit. Then why didn't it? Because Sun Wukong was hiding in the Shun position. It is also because he was practicing a minor Tao that he was able to hide in the Eight Trigrams Furnace without harm. That is to say that he did not really go through the trial of the Eight Trigrams Furnace testing. He only passed the test of one of the Trigrams.

Lao Tse thought that after burning for forty nine days in the Eight Trigrams Furnace, Sun

Wukong should be completely done with. When he opened the Furnace, Sun Wukong, saw the light and jumped out right away. Bang, he knocked down the Eight Trigrams Furnace. Some say that the fire from the Furnace he knocked down dropped down to ignite the Fiery Mountains where the Bull Demon King resides. This is the origin of the Fiery Mountains, Bull Demon King, and the Plantain Fan. The Eight Trigrams are Tao on the image level. Because Tao is Wu-Chi giving birth to Tai-Chi, Tai-Chi giving birth to the Two Poles, the Two Poles giving birth to the Four Phenomena, and the Four Phenomena giving birth to the Eight Trigrams, therefore the Eight Trigrams form Tao's image. By knocking down the Eight Trigrams Furnace, he was knocking down the image of Tao. By knocking down the image of Tao, he was denying the image of Tao and starting something new. Because knocking down the image of Tao is very serious, the Fiery Mountains were created.

Have ordinary Tao practitioners knocked down the image of Tao? Will the knocked down image of Tao produce the Fiery Mountains and thus a Bull Demon King in our lives? Yes, absolutely. Will the Bull Demon King become your apprentice and part of your original true self to follow you to the West to get the sutras? Impossible! Toward the end, we will know who will follow us to get the sutras and who will cause us trouble. We need to be on our guard against the latter. The next thing to understand is the meaning of knocking down the Eight Trigrams Furnace and creating the Fiery Mountains. The Eight Trigrams concern the Tai-Chi, the Two Poles, and the Four Phenomena. The Eight Trigrams form the image of Tao which is already produced. But, are the Eight Trigrams useful? They are very useful to people who practice the purposeful dharma [or you wei dharma]. Sun Wukong was practicing the purposeful dharma. But, can those hiding in the Eight Trigrams Furnace who practice the pur-

poseful dharma [or you wei dharma] achieve the golden pills of immortality? No! Hiding there gives Sun Wukong only fire eyes with golden pupils. It is fair to say that without the testing of Water and Fire, the Harmony of Water and Fire can not be achieved. In other words, because he did not endure the full test, he only achieved fire eyes with golden pupils. And then the Eight Trigram Furnace was knocked down and the Fiery Mountains were created. Is this the proper way for us to practice Tao? More or less. For example, suppose someone is practicing Tao and I am observing. It does not look right from any perspective. Since it does not look right, it is just knocked down. Once knocked down, the Bull Demon King is born. In this regard, what do you need to do to practice to become Buddha? Should you become a monk, or a person who practices the rules of Buddha and even faces the eighty one calamities? The answer is that you need to follow the master to get the sutras.

Now, the function of a fan is to move the air and create wind. And we know that this Eight Trigrams Furnace represents water, fire, weapons, and other threats. These various threats are ones that you must experience in person. We know that the four edges represent the four edges of the Cross. The combination of the four edges and the central position is the Five Elements. The Five Elements are also the five cardinal virtues. On the one side, it is mercy. On the opposite side is justice. The other two sides are righteousness and wisdom. At the center is faith. To follow the five disciplines - no killing, no theft, no improper sexual desire, no lying and rant, and no consumption of alcohol - is to practice the five virtues of mercy, justice, righteousness, wisdom, and faith. It is also the image of cultivating Tao. The Eight Trigrams form the image of Tao. Sun Wukong was cultivating inside the Furnace. But he was not willing to be tested, and he could not be tested because he hid inside the Shun (or wind) Trigram

position. He only watched and avoided direct tests, and thus did not face water, fire, and weapons. Therefore, he did not achieve Tao in these Eight Trigrams.

The reason he did not achieve Tao is his level was too high. He thought, "What nonsense is this"? Therefore, as soon as he jumped out of the Eight Trigrams Furnace, he knocked it down right away. When it was knocked down, the people there were very angry and the angry fire of grievance resulted, namely the fire at the Fiery Mountains. Water and fire interacted to produce earth. The result is of the nature of soil because fire produces soil. After being testing by the Bull Demon King, Sun Wukong finally gained confidence.

In this respect, we need to thank the Bull Demon King after all because, without the Bull Demon King, confidence could not be produced. After all, only real fire can produce soil. What is real fire? Real fire is bumping into the real Bull Demon King. We will not gain confidence if we only hear about the calamities caused by the Bull Demon King. Confidence can only be produced by face to face confrontation. The way to build up confidence is to ignore fake fire and face the real exam. Now fake fire looks real, but it was extinguished immediately by the Plantain Fan. There are two sets of Plantain Fans. One exacerbates the flame. The other one extinguishes the fire. Therefore, it is necessary to understand that the fire can be extinguished by the real Shun Trigram position. Then what is real and what is fake? It is necessary to talk about real heart.

What is real heart? It is confidence. Having confidence is the same as having real heart. Fake fire can be extinguished. Without confidence, one will use fake heart to fan the fake fire. The more one fans, the stronger the fire becomes. But if one fans the fake fire with real heart, it will be gone

instantly. The Shun Trigram position contains Yin and Yang, or real and fake wind. Real wind can be used to extinguish fake fire. And some demons are of strong origin. Evil spirits also come from the heart. All dharmas are generated by the heart, and all are destroyed by the heart. Therefore, all demons are created by the heart.

We often ask, "For whom do we organize Tao's affairs"? Is it for those lost souls who fell from heaven? If they are crawling on the ground, do they need this Tao? No! Why not? They do not need Tao because first they must elevate from the level of amoeba to become human. They also cannot fly on clouds and are not capable of the seventy two transformations, nor disturb the Heavenly Palace. The lost souls belong to heaven since they came from heaven. Upon arrival, they are capable of creating chaos in heaven. We must understand that God comes from heaven. The other demons and evil spirits cannot go up to heaven.

There is a famous Buddhist story about Mu Lian going to Hell to rescue his mother. Is it true? Yes. Now, the gate of Hell cannot normally open. But, he opened the gate with magical powers and saved his mother. Therefore, the evil spirits and devils were not able to go up to heaven. But, those evil spirits and devils with magical powers were able to go up to the heaven. But, we should not mistakenly think that there are no evil spirits and devils in heaven. People said that Sun Wukong guards the southern gate of heaven. In fact, that is the Sun Wukong who has been subdued. It is not known how many Sun Wukongs who have not yet been subdued and are out there roaming through and vandalizing the heaven palace. If all the Sun Wukongs are still guarding the Southern Gate of Heaven, then would it be not too far behind the contemporary time to talk about Journey to the West today?

Today, the very reason that we still talk about Journey to the West is that there are still many Sun Wukongs out there roaming through and vandalizing Heaven. We need to understand not all those descending from heaven have gotten up there one step at a time. It is simply because a you wei dharma is being used. The Jade Emperor appointed Sun Wukong to a job as Protector of the Horses. If he had been contented, everything would have been all right. But instead, he meddled with the affairs of Heaven. By meddling with them, troubles were induced. Let us now talk about Sun Wukong. It is correct that he came down from Heaven. There would have been no trouble if he had just occupied the Flower and Fruit Mountain and appointed himself king. But, he wanted eternal life and eternal youth. He wanted to cultivate, become a god, and achieve Tao; he thereby got himself into trouble.

He possessed magical power and thought about himself as more than just the king of monkeys, and so he decided to attain heavenly status. And this quest for higher stature led to trouble. He went up to Heaven to make trouble and forgot that he also came from Heaven. Therefore, he could not even recognize Buddha at all, although Buddha is his original spirit. He has been separated from his own original spirit. What is the relationship between original true self and the heart? Original true self is the root. The heart is the end result. There is some confusion about which is the original root and which is the end result. It is said that materials have their origin and destiny, and things have their beginning and end. Sun Wukong cannot recognize his master because he does not know his own origin. Without a master, he failed because of the lack of a central spirit. If he could recognize his own spirit upon seeing Buddha, he would not have made all the trouble.

His trouble-making is actually a struggle between the individual and the whole. What is the

trouble making all about? For example, it is not possible for a finger to fight with its own whole hand. If the finger wants to overturn the hand, it will not be successful. When the finger sees the hand and realizes not only that it is just a part of the hand but also that the hand is the main part and the finger is a small portion, there will be no trouble. It is only because the finger [Sun Wukong] does not recognize this that there is overturning and trouble-making. Sun Wukong represents people who are from heaven and lost. The purpose of our practicing Tao today is to wake up people who are lost. Make them recognize and return to their master. Make them see Buddha and realize their own original true self.

His magical power is stronger than the heart. Without the magical power, he can still reach heaven by walking one step at a time. Therefore, when reading Chapter Seven about the Jade Emperor, it can be understood why he has that position. He has practiced for a very long time. To be the emperor requires genuine effort. Hoping to reach heaven with one single step will cause trouble. Heaven has the virtue of loving all living creatures and giving all ordinary people a chance to promote themselves. Hoping to reach heaven with one single step is like hoping to pass the qualifying exam to become an official without studying. But, it cannot be attained by cheating. It requires true effort to pass the exam. Therefore, evil spirits and devils - including the Bull Demon King, the Spider Spirit, and the Black Bear Spirit - exist to give people exams. They will all test Sun Wukong. But these tests are what Sun Wukong lacks because these are things that he didn't really encounter in the Eight Trigram Furnace. Therefore, he must encounter them later. After encountering them, it can be said that he has made up for the credits he lacked. Once he passes, he can achieve the Right Fruit.

(To be continued)