

## Journey to the West (20)

### Chapter 10

With a stupid plan the Dragon King breaks the laws of Heaven;  
Minister Wei sends a letter to an officer of Hell.

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-- Extended Interpretation of  
Chapter 10

### Mercy for All

The problem is that the Sun Wukong wanted Tang Sanzang to save him. This is the key point. In other words, while Tang Sanzang was ready to save Sun Wukong, if Sun Wukong had not been willing to follow Tang Sanzang, he wouldn't have been saved. His being saved depended on both of them. One of the reasons was that Tang Sanzang wanted to have this disciple and the other reason was that Sun Wukong was willing to take Tang Sanzang as his master. Now Tang Sanzang was weaker than Sun Wukong and he didn't have any supernatural powers, so why did Sun Wukong want to follow him? Sun Wukong didn't follow Tang Sanzang's power, which shows that he had elevated his spiritual level.

Sun Wukong had been a violent person before and relied on martial arts and special powers to handle everything, yet he was willing to take as master a person who didn't have any which shows that he had enhanced his spirit from his original level to another. Tang Sanzang was especially compassionate, and because he was merciful he saw everyone equally - he even saw evil spirits as human beings. For him, there is no distinction between evil spirits and human beings.



He said: "because I can't identify who is Buddha and who is the devil, who is an evil spirit and who is merely a stranger, so I treat everyone equally." Therefore, he worshiped Buddha when he perceived Buddha, and worshiped people those whom he perceived as a Buddha.

The reason he went to the West was to fetch the sutras and to worship Buddha. On his way to the West, no matter whether the Buddhas he met were true or fake, he worshiped them sincerely. In case he met a real Buddha but didn't worship it, or met a devil but worshiped it as a Buddha then everything would be messed up, so he treated everybody equally so that he wouldn't miss a real Buddha. This mercy is how he was able to achieve great merit. Mercy in Buddhism refers to great kindness and great compassion - so great a kindness and compassion that it overcomes affinity. Overcoming affinity is the same as not drawing distinctness. No matter whether they are Buddha or devil, Tang Sanzang would worship them as he would worship a real Buddha. Thus he showed his mercy. Sun Wukong respected him for his mercy, not for his magic powers or for his wisdom.

Some people feel that Yuan Shoucheng revealed a heavenly secret by providing a method

of saving the karma dragon. This heavenly secret is a message and a heavenly destiny. As a matter of fact, Yuan Shoucheng merely acted as a channel, and if this channel was permitted by heaven then he did not reveal a heavenly secret.

### Revealing Heavenly Secrets

There was a book that forecast that the year 1999 would be the end of the world. Was this forecast revealing a heavenly secret? The answer is very thought-provoking, especially since many matters forecast in this book have occurred. Events from World War II to John Kennedy's assassination were in the book and all have taken place as predicted. As these matters came to pass, perhaps this book revealed heavenly secrets; however, if Heaven intentionally set up a channel to disclose these secrets, then it is not really a case of revealing heavenly secrets. Revealing heavenly secrets on one's own account is a sin, but if one has a mission to disclose things then no sin is involved. For example, there always are lots of secrets in the Department of Defense, but as soon as the department assigns its spokesman to announce something it becomes news which all may freely discuss.

In contrast, announcing information without authorization is disclosing secrets.

Returning to the case of the Dragon King, revealing a heavenly secret to him by forecasting the rainfall was wrong. But since this wrong resulted in the fetching the sutras, it eventually became the right thing to have done. Apparently, Heaven sometimes intentionally reveals heavenly secrets to cause certain events. If the heavenly secret hadn't been revealed, the Dragon King wouldn't have committed sins and Tang Taizong wouldn't have traveled to Hell. If Tang Taizong hadn't gone to Hell he wouldn't have summoned people to fetch the sutras and there would be no Journey to the West without those causes and

effects.

In order to cause a certain event, Heaven sometimes intentionally reveals heavenly secrets. Just like today as we practice Tao sometimes we see or hear something special. Why would Heaven let you hear, see, or know something out of the ordinary? To draw your attention to something extraordinary.

### Simple logic

For example, suppose that a company wants to invest in USA. But if the shareholders know nothing about USA, they would never approve of this. In like manner, some heavenly secrets are meant to be disclosed, and such disclosure wouldn't be considered a sin but as transmitting a special message instead. But of course revealing heavenly secrets privately is still a crime.

From another perspective, after a meeting of some high ranked administrative staff of the Department of Defense, all the attendees know some secrets of the Department of Defense. Are those still secrets for them? No, because these are the results of their discussion and knowledge of these secrets is necessary for them to do their jobs. Perhaps you ask why they these official may know these secrets but we cannot. Because of their mission they participated in this meeting, however, they are aware that they must not let anyone else know these secrets. Some people must know these secrets. Moreover, absence and late arrival are not allowed, either; the staff must attend the meeting and get to know everything, although outsiders are definitely not allowed to know anything.

Therefore heavenly destiny and heavenly secrets are very subtle. We never comprehend on this level, so we always misunderstand and think that knowing any secret is revealing heavenly

secrets, so learning heavenly secrets always seems like gaining a treasure.

Actually it is not like that at all, and the important thing is to understand whether or not you should know. Therefore, a heavenly secret isn't really a secret for some people but merely a part of their mission; just as some people participates in meetings at the Department of Defense and discuss national affairs because that is the mission, and in this case the discussion is not secret from him. In other words, he has to know some secrets and if he doesn't want to know that would be disobedient.

The theory is very simple; there will be a problem if someone gains some knowledge by intention. This is just like what we have heard about intelligence purchasing, which is what I shouldn't know but I spend money to investigate. This is absolutely not right, you shouldn't buy and he shouldn't disclose this type of information. You are acting with intention and using an improper way by buying the intelligence, and that's called revealing. A person who sells intelligence this way is revealing and the one who gets the intelligence is getting a heavenly secret he shouldn't get.

### Respect for Heavenly Destiny

On the contrary, if a person can easily obtain heavenly secrets then he is meant to do so. As we see Yuan Shoucheng was able to get heavenly secrets merely by counting on his five fingers, which means that the secrets were not confidential for him and he had the particular mission. If he had needed to resort to more elaborate methods, it would have meant that he should not have access to this information. We can check by his method and mentality. Heaven intentionally gave him a message to give to the Dragon King to follow, which led eventually to a momentous change.

In fact, this matter was not important and we can deduce that the Dragon King didn't obey the heavenly secret and destiny in this matter. We often talk about destiny, fame and wealth, and dignity. A Tao practitioner should beware of these three values. Dragons represent Tao practitioners, but dragons frequently fail in these three areas. Would you follow heavenly destiny, or would you give priority to other things? What would a gentleman do? First, respect heavenly destiny; second, respect the great man. If you beware of heavenly destiny, then you can abandon fame, wealth, and dignity. However, the Dragon King valued dignity too much. Because of this, he violated Heaven's law and so earned a death sentence. So, don't turn your back on Heaven just for dignity, fame, and wealth.

Actually the Dragon King only violated heavenly destiny by very slightly changing the timing and amount of rain. Yet we can tell his mentality of valuing dignity from this tiny action. Regarding this from the perspective of heavenly destiny, Heaven is the same as the Universe and the operation of the Universe is orderly. When you don't obey heavenly destiny, you violate the order of the Universe. When you contravene the order of the Universe, many disasters will result. So even tiny actions can cause serious repercussions and cause the time and space to be altered. This tells us how important it is to valuing heavenly destiny.

### Text and Interpretation

"It seems to me that people who struggle for fame kill themselves for it. Those who compete for profit die for it. Those who accept honor sleep with a tiger in their arms. Those who receive imperial favors walk around with snakes in their sleeves. Taken all in all, we are much better off living free among our clear waters and green hills. We delight in our poverty and follow our destinies."

Li Ding said: "You are right, brother Zhang, but your clear waters have nothing on my green hills."

"Your green hills are not a patch on my clear waters," retorted Zhang Shao.

It is difficult to be simultaneously both merciful and wise. Should we emphasize mercy or should we emphasize wisdom? Or should we sometimes emphasize one, sometimes the other? Mercy and wisdom are just like emotion and rational thought. One cannot have both at the same. Thus Li Ding and Zhang Shao argued.

When the two of them had finished reciting verses and matching couplets, they came to the place where their ways parted and they bowed to each other to take their leave. They talked about many things and could not decide who was right. "Brother Li," said Zhang Shao, "look out after yourself on your way home and keep a sharp look-out for tigers up in the hills. If you met with an accident, then 'an old friend would be missing on the road tomorrow'." This made Li Ding angry. "You scoundrel," he said, "I am your friend and I would die for you. How could you put such a curse on me? If I'm killed by a tiger, you'll be capsized by a wave." "I'll never be capsized," retorted Zhang Shao. "In nature, there are unexpected storms and in life unpredictable vicissitudes'," quoted Li Ding, "so how can you be sure that you will never have an accident?" "Brother Zhang," replied the fisherman, "despite what you just said, it is your life that's insecure, whereas my life is certain: I'm sure that I shan't have an accident." This paragraph foreshadows the rest of the story. "Your life on the water is very dangerous and insecure," said Li Ding, "so how can you be so certain?" He is a fisherman, which always depends upon fortune and is insecure. "There is something you don't know," said Zhang Shao. "Every day I give a golden carp to a fortune-teller on West Gate Street in Chang An

and he passes a slip to me." This means that the fortune-teller divines for him where he should fish. The fortune-teller's directions are always correct. "Today, I went to buy a forecast for him, and he told me that if I cast my nets to the East of the bend in the Jing River and lowered my lines on the West bank, I would be bound to catch a full load of fish. Tomorrow, I shall take the fish into town and sell them to buy wine and we can continue our talk than, brother."

As the saying goes, "If you talk on the road, there will be someone listening in the grass." This conversation was reported to the Dragon King of the Jing River. Because the fortune-teller's predictions are so precise, all the fish are in danger. A day will come when all the water animals will have died, and this made the Dragon King very angry. He was ready to rush to Chang An to kill the fortune-teller, but his subjects told him that he should not act in anger. They said: "There is a saying that 'you should not trust everything you hear.' Your majesty is capable of all sorts of transformations, so you should take the form of a scholar and visit Chang An to learn the truth for yourself. That way you will be able to punish the fortune-teller if he is guilty." So the Dragon King followed their advice and went to Chang An disguised as a scholar.

Now this fortune-teller was Yuan Shoucheng, the uncle of Yuan Tiangang - the Imperial Astrologer. Yuan Shoucheng's nephew was well-versed in astronomy and geography, as was Yuan Shoucheng, who had won great fame as a fortune-teller. The Dragon King asked Yuan Shoucheng when and how much it would rain on the following day. The fortune-teller replied that the rain would start at noon and continue until 3 feet and 3.48 inches had fallen. The Dragon King replied that he would pay the fortune-teller 50 tael if he proved correct, but would run him out of business if he turned out to be wrong.

The Dragon King felt that deciding upon the rain was his prerogative, and not the fortune-teller's, and thus counted on winning this wager. Thus he was shocked when he received a decree from the Jade Emperor commanding him to make it rain on the tomorrow morning exactly as described by the fortune-teller. His general suggested that the Dragon King make it rain a little bit less and at a slightly different time just in order to discredit the fortune-teller. [Some versions of Journey to the West have the Dragon King's disobedience causing a drought, as well as defying the law of Heaven.] In either case, his guilt is clear.

The following day, the Dragon King went to the fortune-teller and denounced him as a fraud. Yuan Shoucheng coolly retorted that he recognized the apparent scholar as the Dragon King of the Jing River who had flouted the laws of Heaven and was therefore going to die on the Dragon-decapitating Scaffold. This so frightened the Dragon King that he knelt and begged the fortune-teller to save his life.

Yuan Shoucheng can only recommend one thing for the Dragon King to try to save his life, but could do nothing himself. This is comparable to the cultivation of Tao where the master can only point out the way but cannot do the work for the disciple. You cannot depend on other people. Neither God nor Buddha can save you; you must save yourself.

Acting upon the fortune-teller's advice, the Dragon King went to the Imperial palace and appeared to the Tang emperor in a dream to ask him to save the Dragon King from beheading by the Tang minister Wei Zheng. Tang Taizong agreed.

Taizong felt that he could control Wei Zheng, just as the Dragon King of the Jing River felt that he could control the rain. Now Wei Zheng

received a message from Heaven ordering him to behead the Dragon King in a dream at half past one the following afternoon. Thus he did not attend court the next morning but prepared himself for this divine duty. Now when the Tang emperor noticed Wei Zheng's absence, he sent a messenger to call him to court.

At noon, he asked Wei Zheng to play chess with him. At half past one, Wei Zheng fell asleep in the middle of the chess game. The Tang emperor let him sleep, and shortly Wei Zheng awoke and fell to the ground asking forgiveness for having been so discourteous. Taizong graciously forgave Wei Zheng for having fallen asleep, but just then some guards brought in the dripping head of the Dragon King and reported that it had fallen from a cloud. Wei Zheng admitted that he had beheaded the Dragon King while dreaming. Taizong was proud that he had so capable a minister as Wei Zheng, but sad that he had failed in his promise to save the Dragon King.

Similarly, sometimes we fall asleep when we mean to concentrate. This is not a problem, if we do good things in our dreams, but otherwise it can lead to trouble. In this case, the sleeping Wei Zheng caused the Tang emperor to break his promise to the Dragon King, but this turned out to have the good effect of sending someone to fetch the sutras. So the death of the Dragon King was preordained in order to lead to journey to the West.

(To be continued)

