

Journey to the West (21)

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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For the details of the story, please refer to Chapter 10 in *Journey to the West* as translated by W. J. F. Jenner, published by Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, ISBN 7-119-00653-3

The events surrounding the death of the Dragon King of the Jing River were very unusual, but this is all background for a story about Sun Wukong, who was very unusual himself. Sun Wukong was not the result of evolution; he was born from Heaven and raised by Earth. Recall that he jumped out of the stone that gave birth to him. Therefore, this story is unusual in many ways. All this abnormality leads to normality.

The story continues with the Dragon King haunting Taizong and asking for his life back. He lodged a complaint with the King of Hell that Taizong had broken his promise to save his life, and demanded that Taizong attend a hearing before the King of Hell. Luckily for the Tang Emperor, the Dragon King was chased away by the Bodhisattva Guanyin, who had come to Chang An to find someone to fetch the sutras.

Now Tang Taizong gained the throne by murdering his brothers, so he had great guilt to redeem. Sending a monk on a journey to the west would be his redemption.

You may ask why Taizong agreed so readily



to save the Jing River Dragon King. Actually, he had no choice since the Dragon King was his father. There was a great deal of cause and effect at work here. As it turned out, initiating the journey to the West saved Sun Wukong; note that Taizong, the Jing River Dragon King, and Sun Wukong were all dragons.

Sometimes, something on one level is significant, but is not so important on another level. For example, there was only a slight difference in the timing and amount of rain caused by the Dragon King, but on the level of Sun Wukong major disruptions were caused in the heavenly palace. This seems to be a case of only a slight difference on one level, but a major difference on another; but actually the Dragon King incurred equal guilt on both levels.

On the form level, Sun Wukong was a monkey, but on another level he was a dragon. When he was pressed under the Five Elements Mountain, it was just the same as when the Karma dragon (the Dragon King of the Jing River) was killed. When Sun Wukong was pressed under the Five Elements Mountain, Guanyin Bodhisattva saved him. Guanyin pointed out a bright road and let him know a monk would come along it to save him. Looking at this care-

fully, we realize that the Jing River Dragon King, Chen Guangrui, Xuanzang, and Sun Wukong were all the same character. Sun Wukong is the main character in Journey to the West, so why in these few chapters was he never mentioned? Very few people link Sun Wukong to the dragons, therefore they cannot find the main actor. But if we understand this dragon theme, we will know that Sun Wukong is involved in this part of the story as well.

The story continues by recounting how on a subsequent night Tang Taizong was disturbed by a dream in which he saw the Dragon King of the Jing River reproaching him for failing to save him. The emperor was very frightened, and awoke covered in sweat. The Dragon King continued to haunt Taizong, who fell into ill health. The court doctors predicted that he would die within one week.

Taizong called Qin Shubao and Yuchi Jingde to stand guard, and thus in later times the images of these two people were pasted upon the door, in fact they were referred to as door gods. Many books in China record the existence of these two door gods. Similarly, Liu Qian contributed the melon. All these things really happened in the Tang Dynasty, by which I mean that they are recorded in history. Although we look on Journey to the West as a novel and its events as legendary, some of its events are historical fact.

Tang Taizong was not bothered by the ghost while Qin Shubao and Yuchi Jingde stood guard, so he had their images painted by the door. The next two or three nights were peaceful, but then the emperor passed another bad night. This time, he asked Wei Zheng to guard the back gate, and everything was quiet. But it was too late, and Tang Taizong's condition deteriorated further until he neared death. Just before the end, Wei Zheng rushed to the emperor and gave him a let-

ter that he said would bring him back to life. This was a letter to Cui Jue, who was in life an official of Taizong's father and after his death became a judge in the afterworld. Cui Jue was good friends with Wei Zheng, and so Wei Zheng was sure that he would restore Taizong to life.

As we know, according to history Zhen Guan only lasted for 23 years, not 33 years. Tang Sanzang spent a total of 14 years fetching the sutras. If he left in year 13 of Zhen Guan, as we discussed before, then he should have returned in year 27 of Zhen Guan. But actually Zhen Guan only lasted 23 years. In other words, when the Tang Monk returned to Tang, Zhen Guan was over and Tang Taizong was already dead. But, in Journey to the West, Taizong was still alive and Zhen Guan had not ended; obviously in this respect the book does not fit with history.

The first two emperors of the Tang Dynasty seemed to be different people, but on the spirit level they were all the same dragon. From this angle, Zhen Guan lasted 33 years.

There is one book which says that the words Zhen Guan are meaningful. Because zhen sounds like the word for "real" and guan is "observation", the name seems to us to mean a "real look", but these events were fake. A prime minister is called Wei Zheng and wei sounds like "fake", whereas zheng is "symptom." So this name means a fake symptom, or a false image. All 33 of the Zhen Guan years are actually fake, not real; more precisely, everything is taking place on the spiritual level.

Although the Zhen Guan period is a very famous one - the country was very prosperous and the political situation very good - on the image level everything was fake, and this fakeness led to the truth later on, because this fakeness enabled Tang Sanzang to get the sutras.

Fetching the sutras is real. Therefore, the Zhen Guan period's fakeness led to a true result later.

Lee Shiming killed his two brothers, and usurped the throne. This was quite immoral. On the spiritual level, things were chaotic. In the spiritual world, just as on the image level, letters of recommendation and bribes are effective. All this chaos on the spiritual and form levels led to the main fact, which was getting the sutras.

Of course, all this happened on two different levels. Simply said, there is a difference between the afterworld and the human world. In the afterworld, Wei Zheng is a judge and he has the power to kill dragons. In the human world, Tang Taizong is an emperor so Wei Zheng must obey his orders. But in the afterworld, even the dragon must obey Wei Zheng. Actually, the dragon is a symbol of Taizong's father, and the first two emperors of the Tang dynasty belong to a series of dragons.

Equivalently, in the afterworld Tang Taizong must obey Wei Zheng, but in the human world Tang Taizong governs Wei Zheng. They supplement each other, and each controls the other, in some way. If we say that Taizong controls Wei Zheng, then Wei Zheng cannot kill the dragon. Is Wei Zheng guilty of disobeying his master? It is hard to decide clearly. This has to do with the relationship between the afterworld and the human world.

If he stayed in the human world, Wei Zheng could not kill the dragon. So Yuan Shoucheng suggested that Tang Taizong get around the law by detaining his minister in a game of chess.

Unfortunately, Taizong did not understand about the spiritual world, and did not realize that Wei Zheng would complete his mission while napping. If he knew that Wei Zheng could execute the dragon in his dream, he would have

woken Wei Zheng up when he fell asleep. Therefore from this angle, even though Taizong didn't save the dragon, he did not actually do something wrong. Even though this course of action was unethical because it contravened the decree of Heaven to have the Dragon King executed, Yuan Shoucheng's method should have worked.

This tells us that the relation between the afterworld and the human world is like that between those cultivating Tao and those in the everyday world who hold high positions. Some people in society - professors in schools, bosses at work, or officials in government - have influence over you. Perhaps in the afterworld, you may control them, but in human world they control you. This is like the relationship between Tang Taizong, Wei Zheng, and the dragon king.

Actually, nowadays, there are many relationships like the yin realm and yang realm. The yin realm and yang realm here refer respectively to the afterworld and the human world.

We may be controlled by many people in the human world, but in another world we may control them. That depends on whether it is better for you to control them or for them to control you. If we understand this, we will be able to cooperate with each other, and we will not be controlled by people who should not control us.

(To be continued.)

