

# Journey to the West (24)

## Chapter 12

The Tang Emperor keeps faith and holds a Great Mass;  
Guanyin inspires to the reincarnated Golden Cicada

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For the details of the story, please refer to Chapter 12 in *Journey to the West* as translated by W. J. F. Jenner, published by Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, ISBN 7-119-00653-3

We mentioned earlier that there are also social relations in Hell just as in the human world. For example, the Kings of Hell found out that Liu Quan was fated to become an immortal and his life was not due to end so soon. So they acquiesced and sent him alone with his soul back to the human world. On the surface, it seems that the Kings of Hell did Liu Quan a favor. In reality, it was he who had earned the credits for his return.

According to the Register of Birth and Death, that year was not Liu Quan's time to die. This is similar to what happened to Tang Taizong, who was given an extra 20 years of life. Tang Taizong didn't believe that he would rule for a mere 13 years, so he certainly didn't accept this as a favor. That extra 20 years, was coming from his father's willingness to shield him. And that is why Zhen Guan lasted for 33 years.



The characteristics of the energy world are not the same as those of the idea world; on the idea level, nothing is added and nothing is subtracted. Ideas can be transformed into energy., but energy itself can not be transformed into ideas. That is why the devils that live in Fool's Paradise will eventually perish; they will use up all their limited

energies. The energy in Fool's Paradise will not last forever. Among the three levels - idea, energy and form - only at the idea level is it impossible for matter and energy to change. Certainly, the Kings of Hell do not randomly extend people's lives. Although on the surface, the number of years in Taizong's life seemed to increase by 20 years, it was actually taken from somewhere else and put there. No matter how it was apportioned, it all belonged to Taizong. No one can take more or receive less. On the surface, it seems as if Liu Quan's life span was increased; actually, the years that he had earned were restored to him.

Tang Taizong received his father's shielding,

so he was able to enjoy an extra 20 years of ruling. It means that in some way both he and his father were Emperor at that time. Because they had both repented, the Kings of Hell allowed these two penitent spirits to live in one body and do more good deeds. Since they were both in positions of great power, for them to do good deeds was more efficient than for common people. It is not that Hell is so dark that two melons are worth 20 years of Taizong's life. Rather, Taizong had accumulated enough virtue and done enough good deeds; also, his father was shielding him and became his protecting spirit. As we often say: "Who lives for whom?" Are we living for our descendants? Or are we living for our ancestors? This is to say we share a body with our ancestors. Some times, the unborn baby also shares this physical body as well. A physical body functions like a house. More than one person can live in a house. There should be no problem if you can think of it this way.

Let me give you an example. We all know Zhang Liang (from the last years of Qin dynasty). He used to be the military strategist of Xiang Yu. As the result of a bet, he became the military strategist of Liu Bang. There was a solemn promise that whoever entered the Pass first would become King, and as it turned out Liu Bang managed to do so first. So Liu Bang became the first Han emperor, and Xiang Yu killed himself due to his failure. In other words, victory or defeat really depended upon which side Zhang Liang had taken. The side that Zhang Liang took would have the stronger force. It did not matter what Xiang Yu did.

The same thing happened with Wei Zheng. His position as assistant to Tang Taizong made it possible for Zhen Guan to become the most famous period in Chinese history. Since Wei Zheng was an alchemist, it was inevitable that he would make some mistakes. He used magic to change many causes and effects. That is why many scholars who have studied Journey to the West have said that the name Wei Zheng really means "Fake symptom". This comment suggests that all the things he did involved purposeful methods. There is a sentence in the Diamond Sutra reading: "All purposeful methods are like dreams and bubbles." That is why all the things Wei Zheng did are like dreams and bubbles. On the surface, Zhen Guan was a very good political era. But if it was truly so good, the emperors that followed should have been even better, and they were not. During Zhen Guan, only the image of goodness was created, not a solid Idea. In the end, there was not enough energy to support the dynasty so the image also collapsed. It only sustained the period when Tang Taizong was in power

Another example here is Kong-ming of the Three Kingdoms era. It seems that he was also an alchemist, just as Zhang Liang and Wei Zheng. They actually are different. Kong-ming was a person who understood heavenly destiny. He would not try to change any destiny with force. He did his human duty but followed the heart of heaven. Although he knew he would not succeed, in order to demonstrate the utmost loyalty toward his master, he had no choice but to go into battle. That is what we say "Do the best in human

affairs, but obey the destiny given by heaven.” If he had used his magic arts to fight, he might have won the battle. He could have extinguished the founder of Jin dynasty, and not allowed the Kingdom of Wei to win. Then he would have been a real alchemist.

Although Kong-ming knew magic and tricky strategies, he did not use these purposeful methods to change any causes and effects, and also did not create any false images. He preferred going into battle with human effort and if necessary losing the war, instead of creating a false image. Kong-ming wasn’t able to receive the Mandate of Heaven (Divine Providence) due to Zhang Liang’s error in thought. Zhang Liang was supposed to assist Xiang Yu, but he went to help Liu Bang. In the end, it caused the Mandate of Heaven to go to Liu Bang, and allowed Liu Bang to become the official ruler. If Heaven had reversed the order of the Universe, it would have caused millions to die. Heaven has the virtue of being fond of life, and did not want to cause a great tragedy, so the mandate of Heaven was allowed it to remain with Liu Bang.

Kong-ming knew the Mandate of Heaven and also followed the will of heaven. Zhang Liang did not know heavenly destiny and used purposeful methods. Although his “great undertaking” succeeded, it significantly affected later generations. Both of them were military strategists. One followed the heart of heaven, one went against it. But the second one was admired by people. If the book “Romance of the Three Kingdoms” did not exist, Kong-ming would prob-

ably be cast in a very bad light. Fortunately Romance of the Three Kingdoms has helped explain the conduct of Kong-ming, and let later generations understand him a little better.

Confucius wrote that “The superior man in everything uses his utmost endeavors.” This applies to chapter eleven. This affair of Liu Quan taking pumpkins to the Kings of Hell is a good example of such behavior. An Emperor wanted to send southern melons to Hell, and to reach his goal he even asked a living person to commit suicide. What would have happened if the Kings of Hell had not allowed Liu Quan to come back to life? What would the common people have thought? Of course, it was another matter since Liu Quan was willing to die for this, and the Kings of Hell did send him back to life.

But from the point of cultivating Tao, sometimes it has to be done this way. Only in this way are we able to break through and reach a higher level. Here I have used one of the sayings of Confucianism. Of course, every school of thought has its own sayings. Taoists say they are refining the pills of immortality. Buddhists say they are fetching the sutras. And Confucianists say they are talking about a higher level of knowledge. Actually, all are talking about the same thing.

The main story in this chapter is about the Tang emperor learned that there is truly an underworld and that the six paths of reincarnation do exist. After he returned from Hell, with all his heart he wanted to cultivate Tao. The story has also recorded that he encountered many divine

events that strengthened his beliefs. Let's enjoy the content:

One day, Liu Quan came to Taizong's palace and asked for an audience with the emperor. When he was brought before Taizong, he told how he had delivered the pumpkins to the Kings of Hell and that they were greatly pleased. He also recounted that the Kings of Hell had inquired about his circumstances, so he had told them of his children back home and his wife who had committed suicide. They immediately called for his wife and inspected the Registers of Births and Deaths, where they found that he and his wife were destined to become Immortals.

The Kings of Hell at once sent Liu Quan back up to the human world, but Li Cuilian could not be sent up so quickly. She had been dead for some time, her body was decomposing and another body needed to be found to house her soul. It was decided in Hell to put her soul into the body of Li Yuying. Liu Quan was looking for Li Yuying to find the soul of his wife.

Taizong welcomed this development by explaining to his court that the Kings of Hell had said that all would be well with his family - except for his sister Li Yuying who was due to die soon. In fact, she did die after Tang Taizong had returned home, and when he went over to her she was shouting, "Wait for me, husband." While this had seemed to be simply delirium, her story tallied precisely with that of Liu Quan, thus his wife's soul must have been placed in the body of Li Yuying.

While Li Quan waited, the Emperor had her fetched. She was shouting, "I'm taking none of your medicine. This isn't my home. My home is a simple tiled house, not like this jaundiced, yellow place with its flashy doors. Let me out, let me out."

Taizong had wife and husband reunited. While Liu Quan recognized his wife's speech, because of her different appearance as a princess he was hesitant to claim her as his wife. "Indeed," said the Emperor, "Sometimes mountains collapse and the earth cracks, But few men will shorten their lives to die for another." As he was a good and wise monarch he gave all of the princess' dressing-cases, clothes and jewels to Liu Quan as if they were a dowry, presented him with an edict freeing him from labor for life, and told him to take the princess home with him. Husband and wife thanked him and returned home happily.

(To be continued)

