

Journey to the West (26)

Chapter 12

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

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

I want to make another point here. Tang Taizong visited Hell but he did not die, instead he received an extension of his life for twenty more years, and the record of the Register of Birth and Death was changed. We know there is another person in the story who has also changed the Register of Birth and Death, namely Sun Wukong. He went to Hell and took his name out of the Register of Birth and Death, and went forever beyond the authority of the Kings of Hell. His action was even more complete. This is the similarity between these two.

I have just mentioned that the dragon king of the Jing River begged Tang Taizong to save his life, but Taizong failed and saved himself. In reality, is it truly like this? Chen Guangrui succeeded in rescuing the dragon king of the Hongjiang River. In the end, the Hongjiang River dragon king in turn saved him. This seems reasonable. Tang Taizong promised to save the dragon king of



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Jing River and failed. Then he paid a visit to Hell and came back with twenty more years of life. On the surface, this is definitely not fair. There is a saying: “Hell is a place to which you can go, but not one from which you can return.” If we examine it, we will find there is a hint in the story. The King of Hell told Tang Taizong: “The Jing River dragon king came here and complained about you, but I have already sent him for rebirth.” In this sense, the Jing River dragon king did not die. He was reborn and lived on in the body of Tang Taizong. That is also the reason why Zhen Guan governing was extended to thirty-three years.

Let’s take a look at the history books. They record only twenty-three years of Zhen Guan. Tang Taizong was in power for twenty-four years. This means the years in the story also include his father’s years. His father’s name was Li Yuan. According to circumstantial evidence, Li Yuan was dethroned by Tang Taizong, and all his other sons were killed by Tang Taizong too. That’s how Tang Taizong got his position as Emperor. If his-

tory is correct, Tang Taizong was not a good person. But why was the Zhen Guan period a prosperous time in history? We will find it very interesting if we analyze this carefully. The thirty-three years of Zhen Guan in Journey to the West were actually twenty-four years of Tang Taizong plus nine years of Li Yuan. Li Yuan asked to be saved, but Taizong did not save him so his father came back himself. These two in total reigned for thirty-three years. The first nine years, Li Yuan himself ruled. The following twenty-four years, Li Yuan and Tang Taizong ruled together. One returned to life, the other one was given a new lease on life. One was noticeable and one was hidden - and both lived in the body of Tang Taizong. Li Yuan was dethroned by Tang Taizong before his mission was accomplished, so he used the affair of the Jing River dragon king to resolve his problem.

As we saw, the dragon king of the Jing River was beheaded and then reborn. Tang Taizong visited Hell and saw all sorts of cruel tortures; he truly learned that karma and reincarnation exist. The first Emperor, Li Yuan, was beheaded in another form, so his sin and karma were dismissed. After this, both of them acted with good and virtuous hearts. Thus their spirits worked together, and created the prosperous Zhen Guan period in history. Tang Sanzang, Zhu Bajia and Sha Wujing all are representatives of the spirit world, but in the image world, there was only Tang Sanzang. Likewise, only Tang Taizong could be found in the image world, but in his body there also lived the dragon king of the Jing River. This is the very same idea. All the glory for

thirty-three years of Zhen Guan governing went to Li Shimin (Tang Taizong).

There is one part of the story for which the timing cannot be linked up. It is the son of Chen Guangrui - Tang Sanzang. He was born in year thirteen of Zhen Guan. He was chosen as the Master of the Ceremony by Tang Taizong, also in the thirteenth year of Zhen Guan. By that time, he was already eighteen years old. What is happening here? It is obvious that he could not have been born in year thirteen of Zhen Guan. It is true that he was eighteen years old when he was chosen as the Hierarch. Why is there such a big overlap of time? This is because it was in year thirteen of Zhen Guan that the spirit of Current (Jiangliu). Tang Sanzang, or the Golden Cicada, went into the body of River Before that, Jiangliu was just a normal monk. His body did not belong to the Golden Cicada. In other words, his body had a special affinity with the old monk who raised him. The conditions were ripe when he reached eighteen years old. He found his mother, and learned that his parents were Chen Guangrui and Man-tang-qiao. This was a heavenly arrangement for someone to handle an important event for China.

From the perspective of the spirit world, the spirit had just been born; but the body of Jiangliu was already eighteen years old. In other words, during those first eighteen years, his body had no connection with Tang Sanzang. Need I even mention that a spirit body is not constrained by space-time? The thirteenth year of Zhen Guan in the story really means the year Tang Sanzang went to

live in the body of Jiangliu, and in that year the body was already eighteen years old. This explains the matter more clearly.

From the viewpoint of the spirit world, nothing is limited by space-time. All connections, causes, and effects happen in the blink of an eye. To fit into the human concept of time and space on earth, but also not betray the comings and goings of the spirit, the author of *Journey to the West* had no choice but to write down that these events all took place in the thirteenth year of Zhen Guan. We find this contradictory because we are blind to the truth.

Using the principle of idea, energy, and image, Xuanzang is the Golden Cicada on the idea level and the Golden Cicada represents his character, while Sun Wukong represents his heart. When we get into the energy level, they are represented by the dragon king of the Jing River and Tang Taizong. At the image level, it is his father and the dragon king of the Hongjiang River. They are all parts of one body.

There probably wouldn't have been a Xuanzang, if there had been no dragon king of the Hongjiang River. The dragon king of the Hongjiang River helped Chen Guangrui return to life, and in fact he was also in the body of Chen Guangrui. Their relationship also involved sharing a body. At the end, the Golden Cicada, Sun Wukong, the dragon king of the Jing River, and Tang Taizong were all inside Tang Sanzang. How about: Just as idea, energy, and image exist on the idea level, so too do idea, energy, and image

exist on the energy level, the image is Tang Taizong. On the Image level, we can only see Tang Sanzang. On the Idea level, the image is Sun Wukong. As we all know, Sun Wukong belongs to the spirit world. We also agree that there is an image of Sun Wukong. Similarly, we cannot see our mind, but everybody believes there really is an mind. That's why there are three levels of ideas, energies and images.

When the book talked about the unification of idea, energy and image, it was saying that they all met in year thirteen of Zhen Guan. But every event has its own time-space. All of them are different. Sun Wukong was fixed beneath the Five Elements Mountain for 500 years. Xuanzang lived in a Buddhist temple for 18 years. The book did not say much about time used by the dragon king of the Jing River and Tang Taizong. Due to the differences at the different levels, their operations are also different. By surveying all of these, we see the longest time was taken on the idea level. Sun Wukong was fixed beneath the mountain for 500 years. Bodhisattva Guanyin acted as intermediary and skillfully arranged everything regarding fetching the sutras. For anything to succeed, first there must be an idea, then a energy must build, and finally the energy must be transformed into an image. So it has to use the relationships of the dragon king of the Jing River and Tang Taizong to make it happen. At that time, there were a lot of people opposed to Buddhism. Without the sponsorship of Tang Taizong, mounting a journey to fetch the sutras would have been impossible. Complex relations were required to persuade Tang Taizong to believe in the six paths

of reincarnation and to realize the importance of accumulating merits, so he was able to send a decree to his empire and find Xuanzang, and accomplish the great undertaking of fetching the sutras. All the arrangements were for the purpose of fetching the sutras. You can also say Journey to the West secretly points out that cultivating and achieving Tao requires passing thousands of severe tests.

There is another important point here. As we know, Tang Taizong's Zhen Guan governing was a prosperous period. Policy was pure and clean; but the methods of obtaining power were not a model for later generations of emperors. When Li Yuan was the emperor, his governing career was not very smooth. At the end, he was muddle-headed and dictatorial. These things can be looked up in history books.

In other words, did the first emperor of Tang have the mandate of heaven? Of course, he did. There is a saying: A mandate of heaven is not forever. Only the virtuous can possess it. The mandate of heaven does not belong to anyone exclusively. When the person's heart runs counter to heaven's virtue of being fond of life, the mandate of heaven will shift to someone else immediately. Since Li Shiming got his position through murdering his brothers, his ascension does not fit the requirements of heaven. At the same time, Li Yuan no longer possessed the mandate of heaven, so heaven had no choice but to participate in assisting Tang Taizong so that he can meet the conditions of receiving the mandate of heaven.

Li Yuan was muddle-headed and lost the mandate of heaven. He didn't do his job and did not carry out his responsibilities. He wasted the "heavenly eye" through misjudgment. Would heaven give him another chance to correct his mistake? Of course, it would. The same situation occurred with the dragon king of the Jing River. He made a bet with a fortuneteller and lost. To save his own face, he rained less and changed the time of the rain. In making this change, he violated the mandate of heaven, so he had to be beheaded. In the eyes of heaven, it was only an error. Why should he need to suffer forever by not being able to return to life? Naturally, heaven will give him another chance. So the dragon king of the Jing River went to Tang Taizong and begged him to save his life.

The dragon king of the Jing River was certainly a dragon with karma. He violated the mandate of heaven, and he lost his true nature and became confused. Confusion, karma and suffering are all due to cause and effect. The result is a cycle of confusion, karma, and suffering that leads to the six paths of reincarnation? That is why we call him a dragon with karma. He begged Tang Taizong to save him, but Tang Taizong misjudged and did not save him; yet Heaven still gave him another chance. He was given rebirth and tried again. He and Tang Taizong both held the mandate of heaven, practiced virtue and established merit together. You can also say their relationships are the relations of sharing spirits.

The relationship between Sun Wukong and the Golden Cicada was also a relation of sharing

the spirits. We often think of Sun Wukong as a monkey, but he was also a dragon. This dragon does not have the image of dragon, but the image of a monkey. When he was upgraded, he became the Golden Cicada. The Golden Cicada is a higher level dragon; it belongs to the idea level. We can also say he is a dragon when he is at the energy level and becomes human when he is at the image level - a human monk who wanted to fetch the sutras and cultivate Tao.

I have just said to you that when a person with the mandate of heaven becomes muddle-headed, heaven will still give him a second chance. Sometimes, this is by letting him get into the body of a person that has the mandate of heaven so that they may carry out the mandate of heaven together..

The reason the Tang Dynasty did so well politically is that its intention was to fix past mistakes and do good deeds for the future. Both Li Yuan and Tang Taizong had admitted their past wrong doings, and were carrying out their tasks and making up for past deficiencies. That's why I often say we need to give other people chances to make up for their mistakes. Compare a person atoning for past misdeeds and a person who wants to do good deeds, the first will do better. Because the first will set his whole heart to try to make up for the past, and the second will still partially think that he is doing good deeds and that others will thank him. The first one, with the goal of making up for the past, has no complaint and no regret, does all he is capable of, and does not wish for any return. This is the kind of spirit we need

most when it comes to cultivating Tao. The desire to gain merit by doing good deeds and the desire to make up for past deficiency by doing good deeds - these states of mind are very different. This is a very important point. And heaven gives us a lot of those chances.

Xuangzang took his leave of the emperor and hurried to Huasheng Temple to make preparations for the Great Water and Land Mass. He divided the monks into groups, and ordered the holy objects before the Buddhas. When an auspicious day was found for the start of the Mass, all was reported to Tang Taizong; and at the appointed time the emperor and all his family and court went to Huasheng Temple to burn incense and take part in the service.

Now the Bodhisattva Guanyin had been in Chang'an for some time, following Buddha's orders to find a man to fetch the sutras, but she had not yet found anyone truly virtuous. Then she learned that Tang Taizong was propagating the True Achievement and arranging for a Great Mass to save the lost souls in Hell. She was very pleased when she saw that the Master of Ceremonies was the monk Jiangliu, a Buddha's son descended from the realms of supreme bliss, a master monk whom she herself had led into his earthly mother's womb. With the treasures given her by Buddha, the Bodhisattva took to the street to offer them for sale.

(To be continued)