



Journey to the West

(28)

Chapter 12

The Tang Emperor keeps faith and holds a Great Mass;
Guanyin appears 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

Then you realize how you can transcend death. Is it loyalty, piety, chastity and justice that will allow you to do this? No. Can loyalty, piety, chastity, and justice help sufferers to detach themselves from their misery? Not at all. Can one cultivate to get boundless longevity? Can one reach the higher idea this way? Impossible.

Does reading the Diamond Sutra enable one to reach the idea level? Yes and no, because the Diamond Sutra is dharma and not religion, and religion is teaching. Sutras are only theoretical. For example, we have a saying, “One should act according to the sutra, rather than just talk about it.” Chanting the sutra is not as important as teaching the meaning of the sutra. Teaching the sutra is not as important as acting according to the sutra. So the ultimate goodness is to act according to the sutra.

There is a phrase in the Diamond Sutra that reads, “All appearance is illusion.” If you see a stone in the street, you may ask if this stone is an illusion. Yet, if you kick it, it hurts your foot. Then you think the sutra is fooling you. Did it fool you? No. It is because you do not understand its true meaning. You have only heard what other people say, and you think everything is an illusion - including the stone. But when you kick it, you realize that this is not true. This stone does not act according to the law.

The Diamond Sutra also states, “All dharmas of intentional action are like dreams, illusions, bubbles and shadows.” When we cultivate Tao, teach a sutra, or act according to a sutra, do you also think all these are illusions? Are these all dharmas of intentional action? Is my teaching and your listening a dharma of intentional action? Even achieving success and cultivating morality can be intentional action. If that is so, does it mean that we do not have to do anything? Let us all go home and sleep! Would we then be acting according to the dharma? No! If you do not

understand the true meaning of the sutra which Buddha intends to transmit, you can be wrong by acting upon its superficial meaning.

When we address the Lesser Vehicle and the Greater Vehicle, if you do not realize the true meaning, even the Greater Vehicle becomes the Lesser Vehicle. If you understand truly, even the Lesser Vehicle can be used as the Greater Vehicle. Even a simple chant such as “Namoamitufo” can be the Greater Vehicle. Without this awareness, the best sutra cannot be taught. In sum, if we do not understand the sutra truly, we cannot address the sutra clearly, not to mention act according to the sutra.

There is a book called Post Journey to the West. It is recorded in there that, “In Journey to the West, the sutras were retrieved but not deciphered. Therefore, another journey to the west is needed to get the manuscript to decipher the text.” But until now, do we really get the key to deciphering the sutras? Not yet! Why is there such a book? It is a question worth thinking about. In fact, one does not even need to have a journey to the west to get the sutras. It is enough to travel to India.

If you really understand Journey to the West, you have already the means to decipher the sutras. In appearance, the book is like a novel, but it really has a more profound meaning with high vision and great teaching. If one does not catch the true meaning, one can read it in a short time. Instead, one should really explore the true meaning and start to consider why Guanyin Bodhisattva addressed the issue of the teaching method, but not the Lesser Vehicle and Greater Vehicle sutras themselves: Even though Buddha

had chosen Tang Sanzang as the right person to teach, Buddha had never emphasized the sutra itself. Instead, he stressed more on the teaching. Essentially, the sutras acquired on the Journey to the West are formless. Therefore, at the end of Journey to the West, it says, “The true sutra is the wordless sutra. Sutras with words are fake sutras.

Journey to the West (29)

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He falls into the tiger’s den and is saved by the Great White Planet;On Double-Forked Peak, Boqin entertains the Priest.

The original text reads

Wise monks conferred over the possibility of going to the West to seek the sutras. Objections were heard such as that the mountains were too steep, the rivers too fast, and the wild animals too dangerous. Some even pointed out that there would be poisonous creatures to block the way. Tang Sanzang said nothing but pointed at his heart and nodded. Perplexed, the monks asked why. Tang Sanzang replied”When hearts are tempted, demons wait; when thoughts vanish, so do demons. I have sworn to Buddha at Huasheng Temple to achieve this great task. Thus, I will do my utmost to carry out this vow. I must reach the Western Heaven, see Buddha and obtain the sutras, in order to turn the wheel of our fate, and thus guarantee eternal security for our sage lord.” The monks applauded Tang Sanzang’s resolution.

This portion underlines Tang Sanzang’s

absolute confidence in fetching the sutras from the west. He proclaims that every uncertainty, fear, and hesitation arise out of one's own thoughts, and feed impractical dreams constructed out of pure delirium. For example, Tang Sanzang faces many creatures and monsters; he takes them not as physical obstacles but as artifacts of his mind manifested in the tangible realm. As for the monsters that Sun Wukong faces, they exist on the energy level, residing in the same space-time as Sun Wukong, therefore they all seem real to him. He can only defeat them as they come to him.

Because Tang Sanzang is at a higher level, all his demons arise from his heart. Suppose Tang Sanzang's heart was Sun Wukong (the mind ape); since they have fallen under the influence of delirium, Tang Sanzang and Sun Wukong need to lecture about the sutras to others to rise out of it again. On the level where the demons reside, they must be destroyed personally and physically.

Deep inside one's heart is not unlike a mirror. Once it reflects a demon, the only way to defeat it is to do so at the root of its growth: the heart itself.

For Tang Sanzang, all demons rise out of the heart, in other words, he sees everything as equal, monsters have no tangible existence but in the heart. But to whom does the heart belong? To Tang Sanzang, and Sun Wukong is Tang Sanzang's heart. Therefore, can you say Tang Sanzang faces no demons? His ideas have no demons, but his heart does.

Thus we must understand the greater meaning behind the words people say. According to

Tang Sanzang, the heart creates all demons, and sheds all demons. Hearing this, our first thought is that he has become all-knowing, and that no demons can trouble him. Yet in the eyes of Sun Wukong demons are everywhere, he is constantly battling and defeating demons. Whose demons you ask? Sun Wukong's? No. Sun Wukong embodies the heart; once tempted, demons thrive. Sun Wukong's duty in Journey to the West was to combat demons. So who was the creator of these demons? Tang Sanzang's heart. And whose demons are combated and defeated? Again, Tang Sanzang's. But under Tang Sanzang's reasoning are there demons? No. Only the heart has demons. Yet without heart, he could not fetch the sutras, return to heaven, and become a Buddha.

We who hear many lessons from sutras can easily develop a misunderstanding; and overemphasize "emptiness." There is a saying, "An empty heart returns to innocence." It means that once your heart empties, you reach a pure state. But what is emptiness? Does it require a complete removal? No. The essence of your heart should remain, but without the layers that cover up the heart, such as greed, anger, ignorance etc. Without these stains, your heart is truly empty. But without heart itself, one is just mindless, and mindlessness is not any sutra's intention. Too many are unable to understand this real meaning and thus undervalue the heart. Because the heart is represented by Sun Wukong, without him, Tang Sanzang could never have fetched the sutras.

Unable to go alone, Tang Sanzang had to take many disciples with him for this voyage out west. In actuality, Sun Wukong didn't need this particular master, his cloud could have quickly traversed the entire route to fetch the sutras alone,

but fetching the sutras in that fashion would have meant nothing. And neither would Tang Sanzang's trip, had he gone alone. It is only by Tang Sanzang, Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing, and the dragon horse going together that the real sutras can be fetched. You ask why that is? A few chapters ago I spoke about these five characters as one, each representing a part of Tang Sanzang.

Looking at a person as a whole, does he have a heart? A body? A mind? A spirit? Thought? In this sense, fetching the sutras with one fifth of one self would only yield one fifth of the sutras.

What we also don't realize is that although the story of Tang Sanzang fetching the sutras is played repeatedly in Asian films, television series, cartoons, and puppet plays, intellectually, we never get anything out of them! This is because many who cultivate Tao only use the Lesser Vehicle. If Tang Sanzang or Sun Wukong had only cultivated the Lesser Vehicle, he would have left the other, which as I said, would have meant nothing. Therefore, today we cultivate Tao together. Whether you are Zhu Bajie, Sun Wukong, or Tang Sanzang fetching the sutra alone does not count; without finding four others with whom you have a strong affinity, what you fetch has no meaning. Suppose Tang Sanzang was to become a Buddha, what level would he achieve? As a man of reason, he is on the idea level, and Sun Wukong would be at the energy level. Without both levels, one could not reach heaven.

So how do we cultivate to become Buddha? By cultivating together, with a heart, a body, a mind, and a spirit - which of course makes it

harder. But only by overcoming this level of difficulty can one prepare for the needs of world. Therefore, obeying 84,000 laws one becomes Buddha. This is called "promote together".

<Extension>

Previously we've talked about the three levels: idea, energy, and form. The sutra explains the origin of the universe by saying "from emptiness (wu chi) comes substance (tai chi)." Tai chi gives birth to the two poles. The two poles give birth to the four phenomena, which then give birth to the eight trigrams, and the eight trigrams give birth to the ten thousand things. In other words the meaning of "Idea" is nothingness. You may ask, "Why?" Take a person for example; he begins with an empty heart, thoughtless; when he thinks, an idea arises; the idea then generates energy or chi.

We often say that ideologies and movements are a kind of thought. A thought is an idea or concept, and thoughts generate a type of belief. A belief generates power, and power can also be termed chi or energy. But when chi is manifested as power, you can see its external form. Therefore, this is a change from the chi level to the form level. Therefore, the current stage of cultivating Tao emphasizes belief and energy. Energy and chi are used to cultivate stillness. In Buddhism, there are six transcendent practices in order to obtain enlightenment. The fifth is "Zen stillness."

What is 'Zen stillness'? It is classical Chinese term, a Buddhist term. To speak plainly, 'cultivating stillness' means cultivating in order to strengthen one's faith. With firm faith, energy is created and thus power. Therefore in summary,

ideologies and movements are a kind of thought; the thought creates faith and the faith creates power. But where does the power come from? It comes from stillness. That is why a firm faith generates power. So the necessary elements are idea, energy, and form.

Our bodies are an amalgamation of wind, fire, water, and earth. This is a fake union because it is just form. Where does the form come from? It comes from a lack of thought-or more specifically from an absence of thought based on false distinctions. When a thought is stirred up accidentally, it generates a faith and an ideal; through the practice of Zen stillness, this ideal reaffirms the faith.

Why do we have firm faith? Let us look at some examples: If you think that the highest achievement is to run fast, your wisdom is only sufficient to be a horse. Then you will have faith that allows you to become a horse. That is, faith in being a horse generates the power to become a horse, and thus the form of a horse. But you and I have faith in the desirability of being human, and thus we are human.

Hence all forms, no matter the particular nature, are a union of the provisional elements wind, fire, water, and earth. [In Buddhism, the real elements are imperceptible.] This union can be explained by using the three levels - ideas, energy, and form.

An empty mind leads back to the origin. When your heart is empty, it returns from form to energy to idea, back to the status before thoughts based on false distinctions arose. The condition before these thoughts arose is called original true

nature. It sounds easy to return to the original true nature.

Suppose that mixing wind, fire, water, and earth yields a human. Then, how do we make this human empty? It is simple! When a human dies, the body rots; the soul and the energy are separated. At the end, the heart ceases to think, and then it is returned to emptiness, back to its original true nature. This is absolutely a return to a state of no thought. But is this actually the case? No, it is not like that. For 99.9% of human beings, their hearts are not empty at all after they die. Their hearts still think many things: “My money hasn’t been taken care of.” ; “Will my wife remarry”? “Will my children be successful”? “How pitiful my children are, following my death!” They persist in that or this and cannot put daily worries from their heart. This kind of heart accumulates many thoughts and becomes a chi or thought energy. It will become a so-called spirit. The spirit will become a so-called ghost which wanders the energy level. This type of heart is never empty. The heart never rests and never returns to the idea level. It is always just a soul in the spirit world.

Anyone promoted from the form level to the chi level, and then promoted from the chi to the idea level becomes a Buddha. But in fact, things are not so simple. Human beings persist very stubbornly on the form level, because they have a firm belief in the form. To be human in the first place requires a firm faith in the desirability of being human, as we have seen above. So how can a person lose all of a sudden lose this firm belief? In other words, it is never simple to promote to a higher level.

(To be continued)