



# Journey to the West

## (30)

### Chapter 13

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

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(For the details of the story, please refer to Chapter 13 in *Journey to the West* as translated by W. J. F. Jenner, published by Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, ISBN 7-119-00653-3)

From an unselfish perspective, human beings are not just individuals, but also part of a whole. What is meant by a whole? When we talk about the whole, we mean not an individual but the entire extended family. Of course, the interest of the group supersedes the interest of any individual in that group. In other words, your family doesn't want to lose you; neither do you want to lose any member of your family. Therefore even when your physical body and your soul want to leave this world, because your family doesn't want to lose you and is concerned about you, can you disappear? No, you cannot. Therefore when one person is already enlightened, and wants to return to Heaven and find peace, it is difficult. So, it is common to hear that someone has been a

monk for 8 or 10 generations. It is strange that to be a monk is to be empty, isn't it? Why is a monk, already empty, still subject to reincarnation? Partially this is because he wants to be a monk, but his family doesn't want to lose him and always has a claim on him. So in each generation he reincarnates to be with his family, then again he leaves home to be a monk, and his family complains that he is heartless. This familial concern seems weak, but because of it he is subject to endless reincarnation. To be born then to be a monk in this way only leads to reincarnation. Therefore, even being a monk for 10 or 12 or 100 generations like this does not help to elevate the spirit.

Though a man may want to be empty, if his family doesn't agree with this goal then he cannot be empty. Emptiness is not a matter solely of the individual, but also of the whole. The whole universe is a union of complex, connected, and con-

tinuing life, which is not solely amenable to the individual will. Therefore, returning to the origin requires that the mind be empty but this does not solely depend on the will of the individual. How does one make the mind empty? The answer is a very essential point: you must find all of your affinities on three levels (idea, energy, and image). The spirit (idea), soul (energy), body (image), original nature, and heart all need to be elevated and become truly empty to lead to true Buddhahood. If you are empty only in one aspect, you won't reach Buddhahood.

Why do we mention here that it is necessary to have an empty mind to return to the origin? When your mind starts to work, it means an idea is being put into action (going from the idea level to the energy level). The energy then forms an image. Returning from the image level to the emptiness of the idea level seems to require only going backwards. However, in fact, it is not so easy to go back.

Where do images come from? Now the image results from the spirit (idea), soul (energy), and body (image), plus original nature and the heart. Since the image is being formed, it is composed of the four aspects - wind, fire, water, and earth. Wind, fire, water, and earth are described in physics, but there are also some things that are invisible. From the viewpoint of the body, what matters is the four aspects. And what is there in addition to the physical aspects? The remainder is original nature plus mind, spirit, and soul. You have to let all of these be empty, in order to empty

the mind and return to the origin. Though it seems easy to empty the mind, the mind includes many components.

The Heart Sutra goes: "no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind." They are analogous to mind, original nature, spirit, soul, and body. How does a mind lead the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind astray? In the I-Ching it is written that: "When Wu-Chi moves, then Tai-Chi is created, and then, the two poles are formed, and then, the four Phenomena, and the eight Trigrams..." Similarly, when the mind moves in ignorance, eyes are formed, and then a nose, tongue, body...etc. So if one is without mind, then is one without anything? The problem is that not only the mind but also the products of a moving mind must be erased. So if the mind ever moved in the past, eyesight, hearing, smell, taste, sensation, and consciousness must be also erased. This is why the sutra says "no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind; no sight (color and form), sound, smell, taste, touch, and idea."

Why does the sutra mention this? Because if you want to extinguish your mind, first you have to erase what your mind creates. The human being who is caught in never-ending reincarnation has a mind full of entanglement, full of stubbornness, right and wrong, and anxiety. It is far from empty; the spirit has descended from the idea to the energy, and then to the form level. Therefore, you cannot just say that without idea (or thinking), everything would be fine. If it were so easy, everyone would be still, and then would become

Buddha. The error comes from the suggestion that meditation aimed at thinking nothing erases thought. Zen Master said: “no thought is the aim” and therefore people have deduced wrongly that as long as they can meditate without any thought, they can become Buddha.

In fact, this is wrong. Although you may get rid of thought, how do you deal with that which was created by the mind in the past, namely eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind as well as the sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and idea? Will you just attend to the present heart, but not care about what happened before? Do we not all have three hearts in one - the past, present, and future hearts? For example, my last name is Chang, and I have Chang ancestors. Can I just erase my ancestry and have my family disappear? Is this reasonable? Even if I erase my ancestry, generation after generation of descendants in my family will still exist. You cannot just say that the ancestry is gone, and then all family members are gone. The head of the household can represent the whole family but that doesn't mean that when he passes away, the whole family ceases to exist. That would be nonsense.

If you say that no thought is the goal, it is similar to saying that simply by eliminating one's ancestry, subsequent generations will disappear. This way is more like magic, not a valid idea. If the principle of no thought were correct, why would the sutra talk about “no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind ,” as well as no “sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and idea”? You have to

erase all of them: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind , as well as sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and idea ; even aging, death, and ignorance. Then your empty mind can return to the origin. So to empty one's mind and to return to the origin, superficially it seems enough to empty the heart; but considered more deeply, it can be seen that the mind has created a great many dharmas; hundreds of thousands of dharmas. Now suppose you want to erase your mind because it has created all these dharmas. In order to do this, you first must erase the hundreds of thousands of dharmas. That is why we must be willing to learn endless dharma gates.

How does one eliminate hundreds of thousands of dharmas? If the dharma is for use on the spiritual level, then extinguish it by spiritual means; if it is for the soul, extinguish it with the soul; if it is for use on the image level, extinguish it on the image level; if it is for the mind, eliminate by the mind...etc. when all of them are eliminated, then you can say that your mind is empty. Otherwise, even though you say your mind is empty, on some level it is not. This is similar to when the ancestors are nearing the level of Tao, but the descendants say “No, I am still a human being”. In this case, the goal has not been accomplished yet. Even when you reach Buddhahood, you still must come down to carry up those that have not yet reached Tao. You will have to come down over and over again. If one time you become lost again, then you must start to practice from the beginning: no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind, sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and

idea. It seems to be endless.

If you don't understand the basic principles, chanting some Buddhist words or phrases not only cheats you but also others. In the end, it becomes just a platitude. It sounds natural and unrestrained, but these words may send someone to Hell. To empty only the mind is easy. The problem is that those dharmas which have been created by the mind are still there. If these are still there, they will be charged to your account. Then who shall help you to take care of all these things? For instance, Sun Wukong's hairs create a great many things, such as Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing and many other things. Tang Sanzang says my heart is empty "every devil comes from the heart, and without heart there are no devils" In this case, is every devil really gone? Sun Wukong says that I haven't emptied yet. I still can see many devils. Who is responsible for those? If it is only necessary for Sun Wukong to fight these devils, what purpose does Tang Sanzang serve? Tang Sanzang must still accompany the fighting and even be kidnapped so that Sun Wukong and Sha Wujing can save him. In this manner, each of them will get to understand and work together to defeat the devils.

Above we mentioned that chi (or energy) should be still. To be still means to hold firm in your belief. When you have a firm belief, you can produce an form. Now no matter whether you now have firm belief, in fact you must previously have believed firmly. For if not, there would be no form. So if there are forms, it means that you

have had firm belief. Therefore, if today you want to get rid of the form, you have only two alternatives: down and up.

What does "up" mean in this context? It means that I want to be rid of my current form; I want to move up to an form on a higher and more beautiful level. For example, I don't want to be human being and I want to become a deity; I don't want to be a human being, and I want to be celestial; I don't want to be a human being, and I want to be Buddha. All of these are signified by "moving up". By getting rid of the present form to complete a future form, one moves up.

The other alternative is down. In this context, it means: I don't want to be a human being. I deny the right of being a human being. I had firm belief but I was wrong. I should not have become a human being. Then the question arises - what do you want to be? An animal? If you say that you don't want to be an animal, then what can you do? When a person doesn't want to be a human being or an animal, then one cannot be a deity or a Buddha either. What can such a person do? He can only return to the chi world, to be a spirit there. But then there is no way to promote the self; one day the spirit will have the sense to wake up, and say "No, I shall be firm in my belief." Then the level on which he has firm belief determines what he will become. After being a spirit for some time, he will be discontent. No matter how one looks at it, it is best to be a human being. Since he cannot be a deity, or a celestial, the only choice is to be human again, so he comes to the

earth. Perhaps he thinks that it is dangerous to be human, that he should be an animal, so he will become an animal. But even in this case, he will drop down from the chi level.

If we want to elevate, then we must do so from the form level. There is a saying that “Human existence is hard to come by.” If we are on the chi level, eventually we will come down. We have to understand this concept. Someone might say, “How wonderful to be on the chi level; isn’t it freer?” However, being on the chi level, there is no connection with Buddha. Is it not strange that the chi level is closer to the idea level? Why is there no connection? It is because starting from the chi level, you cannot reach the idea level. Reaching the idea level is only possible from the form level; starting from the form level, there is a chance to transform to the chi level and then immediately transform to the idea level. Our energies are chi. Energy is derived from mercy and wisdom. With mercy, you build up your merit and virtue. From merit and virtue, your forms are created. On the other hand, wisdom is accumulated through devilish tests and experiences. Therefore, today if you have enough mercy and wisdom, you have energy. If you do not have enough mercy and wisdom, you don’t have energy.

The most important consideration is that because you are on the form level, you have the chance to cultivate your merit and virtue. By cultivating, you may increase your wisdom and merit, and thus elevate to the idea level. You may

go from being human to a deity or a Buddha. That is why Buddhists say “Human existence is hard to come by”; only humans have the chance to cultivate their merit and virtue and through mercy and wisdom in order to become Buddha. But if now you are on the chi level, no matter how merciful you are, it is useless. On the chi level, the amount of energy you have is constant. For example, if you have 500 grams of energy today, then you will forever have 500 grams. No matter how merciful you are, or how hard you think, it is still 500 grams forever. If you want more, the only way is to get it from other sources. To take it from other is stealing. If you resort to robbery, then there is no chance to be Buddha. Therefore, on the chi level, your energy is constant; there is no chance to increase it. The opportunity for change is only on the form level. That is why “Human existence is hard to come by.”

( To be continued )

