

Journey to the West

(34)

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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)

He jumped out of a stone. The stone was immobile and fixed. It is like the original true self of a person. Personal nature is immobile. It does not move. Only the heart moves. Therefore, when the original true self moved, the heart moved. When the heart moved, it jumped out from the stone. The stone jumping out to the form level is just like when in reincarnation a person comes from a fetus. We call that a birth because it involves a fetus. Breaking a stone or giving birth is earthshaking, and we know that Sun Wukong came out from the stone. It is just like that for each of us. We all come this way because we were all fetus once. When we are born, it is also as if a stone is broken in an earthshaking manner, only we don't know it. So we cannot treasure our life. We think that birth is easy but it is not; it is earthshaking. Of course after birth, you may or

may not disturb the heavenly palace. But you must be born this way. After birth you must choose one path or the other. If you have no chance to read Journey to the West and do not cultivate a “you wei” (or intentional dharma), you might be easy and happy as a king. But if you cultivate a “you wei”, you are capable of disturbing the heavenly palace. Then you will be defeated and submit to cultivate morality and your original true self and then be reunited with your original true self to find out someone with whom you have affinity.

We can think this over again. Tang Sanzang was from heaven and then moved his original true nature, which led Sun Wukong to break out of a stone. But why was this also related to Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing, and the Dragon Horse? In fact, what was Zhu Bajie? He just represented a pig. What was Sha Wujing? He represented a fish. Was thus Tang Sanzang affiliated with pig and fish? We know that he was just from a normal fetus, a flesh and blood body. You might well ask if a body has two kinds of animals - pig and

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fish? The pork portion means his soul and fish portion means his body.

(The following article was translated by Emily Chang)

You will probably ask why I divided Tang Sanzang in this way last time. Let's use the computer as an example. There is a piece of computer software called the operating system which is installed when the computer is manufactured. As long as you leave the operating system inside, the computer can be turned on and function. Every single computer has an operating system, and this is what all computers have in common. In addition, computers also have application programs, such as spread sheets and databases that can help you calculate and store data. Documents are another type of software. What are documents? Documents consist of text — characters and numerals — they are useful in calculations only when acted upon by application programs. Similarly, application programs can't function without system formulas.

In sum, there are three categories here: application programs, operating systems, and documents. Sha Wujing is analogous to documents, Zhu Bajie is analogous to application programs, and Sun Wukong's heart is analogous to operating systems. Why do we say this? Everybody knows that fish swim in the water and are simple. The song we often sing “fish, fish swim in the water” means that they are very easy and free, in other words, their hearts are free. We also know that

they don't think so much, just as documents are merely acted upon by application programs. An example of a document is a list of names or a list of phone numbers. Do these documents actually do anything on their own? No, they can only be used. Who's using them? The application programs use them. The application programs are just like pigs. Do pigs think? Do they have any thoughts? Yes, they do. Do pigs feel free? No. Cattle are not content either, right? Chickens? Ducks? None of them are content. These discontented animals are being used as application documents, application formula, just like Zhu Bajie. As for Sun Wukong, wow! That's awesome! He is the operating system. This is a basic human being. There is an operating system in every single person's brain. You use the operating system to apply application programs to the data. This is how a computer works, and it operates with these documents.

The same is true of a human body; a body needs the items we mentioned above. Fish form the documents and poultry form the application programs; yet what role does the heart play? Does the heart eat the poultry and the fish? Maybe and maybe not. Can it only eat vegetables? Yes, it can. The operating system is important but not complicated, and it is just a set of basic instructions for the computer. Generally speaking, the operating system is set up inside the basic device, so-called ROM (Read Only Memory). In other words, it operates only when it is called for. It is turned off

once the computer is shut down. There are two advantages to this arrangement:

1. Working memory (RAM) is not used to store the operating system.
2. Greater flexibility is obtained.

If the operating system occupies the same memory that is needed for documents, when the operating system is loaded into memory this will slow the use of documents. This would not be a good arrangement. A better situation would be to have the operating system loaded into memory when the computer is turned on and then deleted once it is no longer needed.

The heart reminds us of another phrase that we often mention: "React when matters present themselves, and remain quiet after matters have passed by." This is the proper function of heart. Therefore, when Sun Wukong felt the existence of demons and devils, he rushed out looking for them, then beat them. If not, he would behave and follow the master, and nothing would happen. Thus, his role was most important when they encountered devils. This accords with the expression "React when matters present themselves, and remain quiet when matters have passed by." However, Zhu Bajie and Sha Wujing were different. They were troubled all the time. Zhu Bajie ate, drank, and slept all day long. He was subject to "greed, lust, the desire for fame, hunger, and the need to sleep." These incessant desires are just like a set of application programs which run all the time. For example, although you may

ignore a database, the document still remain inside the computer and doesn't come out. Let's give an example so that we will have an idea where documents come from.

In order to practice Tao, one must have a body; if a person has a body and wants to practice Tao, there will be someone to come visit him. What the Dragon Horse was? He was the third son of the Western Sea Dragon King. A dragon's son is a little dragon, who is our spiritual guard and able to protect us and help us. He can guard us but he is not our guiding spirit. Who was Tang Sanzang's guiding spirit? In Journey to the West, we see that Guanyin Bodhisattva oversaw him. When Sun Wukong was not capable of defeating the ghosts and eliminating the demons, Guanyin Bodhisattva showed up just in time and instructed him as to who could solve the problem, or handled the devil herself. This is a so-called guiding spirit, yet a spiritual guard can only protect us. Therefore, when nothing happened, the Dragon Horse was just a well-behaved horse; only in emergencies that his elder brothers - in - Tao were not able to handle. Did he suddenly speak human language? Usually he was silent and functioned stolidly as a spiritual guard. Our spiritual guards also act like this. We usually do not know we have spiritual guards, yet in fact they are quietly protecting us and enduring many things for us. At some key moments, they speak out and all of a sudden we realize that they are protecting us. In some sense, we feel they are guiding us, but actu-

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ally they are just giving us advice; there is someone else that guides us. Nevertheless, we feel they are pretty similar, so it's hard for us to distinguish the spiritual guard from the guiding spirit.

We often say that Journey to the West discusses five people: Tang Sanzang, Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing, and the Dragon Horse. Some people say that these five people are actually only one person, but people don't generally include the Dragon Horse; only those who practice Tao include the Dragon Horse. As for his being your spiritual guard, you will have nothing with which to pay him and he will starve if you don't practice Tao. you will be able to support him, and he will be able to follow you everywhere only when you practice Tao and have virtue. Otherwise he will fall half-way if he follows you.

Tang Sanzang departed on the twelfth day of the ninth month in the 13th year of Zhen Guan and for two days didn't stop riding the horse until he arrived at Famen Temple, which marked Tang Sanzang's start on his trek to the West to fetch the sutras. Next let's examine the content of the chapter all the monks at Famen started discussing the tenets of Buddhism. Tang Sanzang had set out to fetch the sutras, but many other monks told him that the way to his destination would cross seas and high mountains and that he would face many wild animals such as tigers and leopards, etc. — all to discourage him. These people were all test-

ing him. Would he still go in the face of so many difficulties? If he did, that would prove that he was truly sincere in both heart and thought. Why was it important to inquire into his sincerity of thought? Because it revealed the nature of his character. Of course, Confucius discussed sincere thoughts and integrity of mind in his book Great Learning. Tang Sanzang was tested to see if he had both sincere thoughts and integrity of mind, which mean to see if he had the sincere intention to fetch the sutras from the West. After he passed this test, he went West to fetch the sutras. What happened afterwards? He really met many tigers and bears. What could he do? His two attendants were eaten by the wild animals. Only he was left and nearly was eaten as well; luckily, the Great White Golden Star (Venus) came to save him. Why was that? Because Tang Sanzang said that he was fully sincere, and merely saying so was not enough. So he got tested. Three monsters - a real tiger, bear, and ox - came together to test him. As a result he was scared to death, but still wanted to go on. When he saw the tiger eating his followers, he was so scared. He thought he would die. Didn't he say he was fully sincere? How come he acted like this? So we can tell that talk is one thing, yet action is another matter. However, even though he was scared to death, he never gave up on his mission to go to the West. Thus, the Great White Planet came to save him. White, metal and justice are all in the West, and these are all attributes of the Great White Planet, so it is appropriate that he should be the one to save Tang

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Sanzang. As soon as the Great White Planet saw that the one who wanted to fetch the sutras had been tied up by the devil, he acted heroically to help loosen the rope that bound Tang Sanzang to let him continue on his mission. This paragraph describes his sincerity. Since he was sincere, he was really willing to make the pilgrimage, and he got tested from the very beginning. We can tell that the Journey to the West is really an “examination”.

Practicing Tao is a process of testing, and to symbolize this Tang Sanzang met two tigers next. He thought this time he would surely die. He didn't expect that Boqin — who is both a warden of the mountain and a hunter — would arrive on the scene. Boqin was so good at hunting that when the tiger saw him, it immediately felt dizzy and was eventually killed. Boqin wanted to treat Tang Sanzang to tiger meat, but Tang Sanzang didn't dare to say anything. He just followed him home. Tang Sanzang finally said, “I'm a vegetarian.” Boqin said, “You are a vegetarian! I only have tiger and roe deer. Everything is meat; do you want it or not?” Sanzang answered, “I can't eat meat, let me just have vegetables.” “But the oil for frying dishes is also animal oil, there is no vegetable oil.” What could he do? Then he answered, “I don't want to eat then.” The hunter replied, “You don't eat? What if you starve to death?” Tang Sanzang said, “Starving to death and remaining vegetarian is still better than being eaten by the tiger.” Good! He was very sincere.

As a result, the hunter's mother came out and said, “Don't worry, I'll cook for you. I have vegetables and vegetable oil.” Tang Sanzang had just faced a test concerning vegetarianism. Once he passed the test, someone would cook something he could eat. He didn't have this chance originally until he said, “Starving to death is better than being eaten by the tiger.” Because of this sentence, the hunter's mother would cook for him. If he hadn't said that, he probably wouldn't have had the meal. Then, he would have put up with the situation and perhaps would have suspended his vegetarianism and disregarded Buddhist doctrine. As a Tao practitioner, you will be tested for sincerity; and if you pass you will be tested with tigers. If you do not withdraw, then you will be tested on retaining Buddhist discipline and tolerating disgrace. If you pass, then you can proceed.

Now Boqin took him the next stage in his journey. The way led right to Two Boundaries Mountain, which was originally called Five Elements Mountain. The name was changed to Two Boundaries Mountain to refer to Yin and Yang. For instance, one side is China while the other side is India. Also, there would be no more human followers from here, since they had both died as Tang Sanzang was left alone. Any more helpers down the road would be on the spiritual level.

(To be continued)