

Journey to the West

(35)

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)

This agrees with what the Great White Planet told him, namely that there would be celestial disciples to bless, protect, and help him; namely Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, and Sha Wujing. Thus, it is very clear that he disappeared at Two Boundaries Mountain. Nevertheless, he later amassed great accomplishments; therefore, the Emperor rewarded him by giving him an honorable title. He established diplomatic relationship with India and fetched many sutras that greatly contributed to the country, the society, and Buddhism. As a result, he relieved the job title, “Ten Great Buddhist Yuan”, consequently, we are not supposed to think that Tang Sanzang was assigned to fetch the sutras by Tang Taizong. As a matter of fact, it wasn't true. Actually, during the 13th year of Zhen Guan, after 12 years of Tang Sanzang fetching the sutras, Buddha nature just came to him.

For instance, we are practicing Tao now; as

we sit in the temple, our Buddha nature hasn't come to us yet. If it had, we wouldn't need to remake vows often. Though, what does remaking a vow mean? When we first came here, we didn't know why we were here? We didn't know how or why we came to the temple; we just followed other people. When people came, we also came. People listened to the lecture as we also listened to it, until one day our true self from heaven, the Buddha nature, comes into us. Then we are able to be entirely free, just like Sun Wukong, who could unite with the clouds and fly. Then we are truly cultivating Tao, handling Tao's affairs, and fetching the sutras from the West. At that point, each of us acts without following orders. Let's say that in the first year of Zhen Guan, Tang Sanzang was assigned to fetch the sutras. Since he was just following orders, the Buddha nature had not come to him yet. He just heard that there were sutras to be fetched; maybe it was not even the sutras that attracted him, rather the Buddhism that arose in India where he wished to set off and visit. He traveled until the spirit and the nature became one. If we think of it in this way, things

will make more sense.

Therefore, we should say that during the 13th year of Zhen Guan, his timing became mature, and at that point, he really started handling Tao's affairs. We may say that he remade a vow at that time which makes us understand more. For Westerners, the number 13 is an unlucky number. Why is that? That's because most Westerners practice Christianity and Jesus Christ was betrayed on Friday the 13th. There was also a movie called Friday the 13th; in the movie there always were many murders that happened on Friday the 13th, and that's why 13 is not a lucky number. Now recall that the hexagrams of I-Ching are always 6 lines; and 12, which is $6 + 6$, corresponds to two hexagrams; but 13, which is not a multiple of 6, does not correspond to a hexagram. Now where do the 64 hexagrams come from? We can form hexagrams by combining two trigrams. Since there are 8 trigrams, there are $64(8^2)$ possible hexagrams.

Let's talk about the number in Chinese culture. To ancient Chinese, there were 12 hours in one day, not 13. Once reached 13, the day started over. When it starts over, that is a change. Therefore, in Chinese culture, the number 13 represents change and is not truly unlucky. However, in Western culture, it is ill-fated. Why do we consider that 13 represents change, but Westerners find 13 unlucky? This is easy to explain. We know that the West is the "fruit place" and every-

thing in the "fruit place" is good. See? Fruit has already been born; isn't that great? For example, when an apple is not yet mature, its color is green; when it is mature, it turns red. This is good for viewing and eating, so this is why it is called "fruit place". If it is not mature yet, then there are no fruit. Nowadays, the West is still the "fruit place", and everything is good. Though, when good stuff changes, it can only change into something not so good. Asia is a place of "unaccomplished causes" where nothing is good. Though, what is a place of "unaccomplished causes"? To use a metaphor, it is not the apple but an apple tree: apple leaves and apple branches. Why are those apple leaves and branches? They are not good for looking at or eating. Let's think about it another way: if an apple tree doesn't have branches and leaves, how it can bear apples? Therefore, the branches, leaves, and tree are the causes, to produce the apples. Thus, Asia is the "cause place", and it originally is not good, but when change occurs, then everything will become good.

Let's consider the 13th of Zhen Guan. Why is it 13? That's because 13 indicates a change. Tang Sanzang didn't have any Mahayana sutras before, so he went to fetch the sutras as soon as the change happened. When he came back, he had sutras and then practiced both the Hinayana and Mahayana. The number 13 represents change. For people who live in the "cause place", change is a good thing; but for people in the "fruit place", it is quite the opposite. Thus, do not make any

changes in the “fruit place”.

The West is the “conservative world”; it is aggressive in the scientific field but not in daily life. Its lifestyle is always conservative because the basic necessities of life are assured. Westerners want to maintain this good situation. As a matter of fact, every single number has its meaning; we talk here so much about the number 13 because it represents change.

There is one more key point. Why does the story mention September 3rd? The important thing here is that it’s the best time to obtain Chi. September is a Fall month. Fall represents gold or metal, but it also represents white and the seventh hour of the ancient Chinese day (5 to 7 PM). We frequently talk about the following three periods: “Green Sun”, “Red Sun”, and “White Sun”. They come in this order like a tree. First, there are green twigs and leaves; then red flowers appear. Finally, the tree bears fruit—white or golden fruit. By the time the tree bears fruit, the third season has arrived :Fall, or harvest time. To return to Tang Sanzang, he went to fetch the sutras in the Fall because this is the season of ripe fruit. He had already practiced Tao and passed a test of his sincerity and his righteous heart. Where he gained was the “right fruit”, and he became a Buddha.

All numbers have specific meanings. It is not important that Tang Sanzang left on the third day of the ninth month of the 13th year of Zhen Guan,

but the symbolism of 9,3, and 13. Journey to the West is neither a diary nor recorded history. Instead, it gives us a practical process for practicing Tao.

We’ve talked frequently about things arranged in threes: three periods, three dynasties. We refer to the “Public Achievement of Buddhahood” as “Third Dragon Flower Festival”. Why is it called a third meeting? That’s because “Cherry Banquet” were held during the “Green Sun” period. During the “Red Sun” period, “Immortal Peach Banquet” were held. People generally know the “Immortal Peach Banquet” because they were held in order to announce the names of those given celestial status by Jiang Tai Gong (1210 — 1120 BC). He normally conferred the celestial rank in the “Immortal Peach Banquet”. Furthermore, we often read stories about celestials that indicate that the “Queen Mother” held “Immortal Peach Banquet” and invited all the celestials to participate in her birthday party, and many celestials ate the immortal peaches. What do the immortal peaches represent? Are they fruit? Are you eligible to attend the “Immortal Peach Banquet”, which means you have gained the “right fruit”? Therefore, the “Queen Mother” represents the spiritual mother. If the “Queen Mother” invites her son-in-law to participate in the “Immortal Peach Banquet”, that is because his spirit has gained the “right fruit”, not because of his worldly status. The “right fruit” of mortal is attained by a person who was

an emperor, president, or someone prominent in the world of mortals. When you have accomplished something great or are a great person, you have gained the “right fruit” in the world of mortals. What about the “right fruit” on the spiritual level? This is needed for admission to the “Immortal Peach Banquet”. Yet now it is not called the “Immortal Peach Banquet”, but the “Dragon Flower Festival” instead. It is strange! We used to talk about fruit all the time, but now we gain flowers, not fruit. We have practiced Tao for a long time; while everybody else gains fruit, how come we gain flowers only? Isn’t that strange? Why is the third period, the “Third Meeting”, called “Third Dragon Flower Festival”? This is because the dragon represents the Chi as well as the heaven level, so we may call it “Heaven Dragon”. Our fruit is the flower from the “Heaven Dragon” level. In other words, this flower represents Chi, but the fruit we gained before was on the image level. The flowers we gained are on the Chi level.

After 2000 years of the Age of Pisces, it is now the Age of Aquarius. During the Age of Aquarius, the constellation controlling this world is based on Chi. Mankind will become completely spiritual. Their spirits become apparent. Therefore, there is no need to practice Tao and be vegetarian. We don’t mean that it is not necessary to be vegetarian, but that everybody is vegetarian, and thus we needn’t even talk about it anymore. You don’t need to convince people to be vegetari-

ans because people already are; moreover, you don’t need to talk about Buddha since people already know about him. Because the world will enter to the Chi level at that time, everybody can see something on the Chi level. Due to the fact that everybody can see, they needn’t listen to what you have to say. Nowadays since people can’t see Buddha, they don’t believe in Buddha. Some people can’t see God, so they don’t believe in God. Although, if everybody sees a superior being, will there be any issue of believing or not? Let’s use a chicken as an example; does a chicken believe mankind exists? Because it already saw men, it must believe in it. Nevertheless, we are sorry that we haven’t discovered any species that are higher than human beings on earth. Today, a chicken sees that a cat is higher than it as to a cat that sees an ox that is higher than it, so does ox sees to a monkey, and a monkey to a human being. Human beings are on the highest level, and nobody can be higher than them. If a human being could see that God is higher than him, would he believe? He must believe. We can see on earth — who is controlling it today? If not mankind, probably some other animals. Is that correct? Why would we say no? Let’s look around. Who built the houses? People did. Who built the bridges? People did. The utility poles were put in place by people, right? Was there anything done by monkeys or tigers? No. Everything was done by people. In other words, people are handling affairs on earth, so people are the highest creatures on earth. Celestials are higher than

people, but nobody sees celestials and their operations; therefore, we only believe in people, not celestials. If from today we see that the utility poles are set in place by Buddha, and houses are built by Buddha, would we need to convince people to believe in Buddha or God? Certainly not. People would believe it easily themselves. When we enter this spiritual level, everybody will see everything. We will not need to preach because people will believe. However, if we don't need to preach, we won't improve. Why is that? That's because the Chi level is a very regular level. It's like the military; everything is based on rank. For instance, if A has the rank of one star, and B has the rank of two star; then A has to salute B. One with the rank of two stars must salute another with the rank of three stars. That is absolutely strict. If someone doesn't salute when he should, he will have to deal with consequences. If someone is brighter than you when you arrive on the Chi level, then you will make one bow to him; if he is darker than you, you will ignore him. This is quite realistic, and that's why there is no chance for improving because there are no more tests. You will never misunderstand people. Light is light, and dark is dark. You may treat great people as villains and villains as great people; or see good people as bad ones and see bad people as good ones. But in this case, you can have the chances to be a great or good person. But if you see good people as good people and great people as great people, you will lose the chance to improve yourself. You will be what you are, and

everything is solid. This is the sorrowful part of that time, just like a "fools' paradise". For example, in a family, the grandfather will always be a grandfather; he will definitely not become a grandson one day; his grandson will be his grandson forever, and the grandfather will always belong to an older generation. That is the unchanged relationship. Today in our society, because people are not able to see things clearly, we have chances to change it. The grandson sometimes can reverse the roles and reincarnate to a higher level. Or, someone can descend from a higher level to a lower level. There are chances for change. However, when you enter the Chi level, there is no chance for change. It is the best timing to practice Tao right now because we have not been able to see things clearly yet. The water is still muddy now, so people can get fish in the water. We won't be able to get fish once the water is clear. Everything will be the way it is.

Why do we need to help all living creatures? That is relevant to Maitreya Buddha. According to the sutras, Maitreya Buddha will descend to this world in 5.67 billion years. He will become a Buddha after he descends, so we call him the future Buddha. Then, he will help all living creatures. Since Maitreya Buddha won't be here until 5.67 billion years, then we should not expect to have a Maitreya Buddha later. Yet some people still do not understand the meaning of Maitreya Buddha. (To be continued)