

Journey to the West

(39)

Chapter 14

The mind ape returns to truth;
the six bandits disappear without a trace.

Interpreter: Henry Chang
Translator: Zhi Zhu
Editors: Ken & Luchia Howell

[For details of the story, please refer to Chapter 14 in Journey to the West, translated by W.J.F. Jenner. Publisher: Foreign Languages Press. ISBN 7-119-00653-3]

Original text:

Then the old man knelt and bowed to invite Tang Sanzang in and gathered his wife and children to meet him. All of them seemed very happy when they heard what had happened. After having some tea, the old man asked Sun Wukong, "How old are you, Great Sage?" Sun Wukong replied, "How old are you?" Old man said, "I am a senile 130-year-old." Sun Wukong said, "I've got lots of descendents. I can't recall when I was born. I've spent over 500 years under that mountain." The old man said, "Right, I remember my grandfather once told me that this mountain was dropped from Heaven to restrain a magical monkey. You were not able to get out until now. When I was a kid, you had grass on your head and mud on your face, and I was not afraid of you. Now you don't have grass on your head nor mud on

your face. But you are a bit skinner and wearing tiger skin around your waist. You don't look much different from a demon."

This conversation made everyone burst into laughter. The old man arranged a vegetarian meal. After the meal, Sun Wukong asked, "What's your family name?" The old man said, "Chen." Hearing this, Tang Sanzang made a courteous gesture by raising his hands and said, "Venerable Benefactor, you belong to the same clan as me." "Master," protested Wukong, "Your last name is Tang. How come you belong to the same clan as him?" Sanzang said, "My secular last name is Chen. I am from Juxian Village, Hongnong Prefecture, Haizhou of the Tang Empire. My dharma name is Xuanzang. I was honored by the Great Tang Emperor Taizong as his royal brother and bestowed the surname, Tang. This is why I am known as the Tang priest." The old man was very happy about having the same secular last name as Sanzang." The Monkey said, "Old Chen, I don't mean to bother

you, but I haven't had a bath for over 500 years. Could you please have some hot water ready for us to have a bath before we take off?" The old man then had hot water and a lamp ready right away.

Interpretation:

This is the first step of cultivating oneself.

Original text:

After Sanzang and Wukong took a bath, they sat by a lamp. The Monkey said, "Old Chen, I have one more thing to ask you. Could I borrow a needle and some thread?" Old man said, "Of course." He then asked his wife to give the Monkey a needle and some thread. With his sharp eyes, Monkey saw his master take off a white short cotton tunic before taking a bath and did not put it back on. Hence, Monkey took the tunic and put it on. Then, Monkey took off the tiger skin he was wearing, pleated it, tied it with rattan, and wrapped it around his waist again. Monkey then asked Sanzang, "What do you think about this outfit compared to what I was wearing yesterday?" Sanzang said, "Good, good, good. Now you look like a real monk. If you don't mind wearing a hand-me-down, you can keep the tunic."

Interpretation:

Sewing clothes implies making some repair.

Journey to the West is a novel. You can also call it a fairy tale with lots of metaphorical fables in it. The characters didn't actually take a bath, sew clothes, kill a tiger, etc. These events imply a stage of mind in Tao cultivation.

Original text:

Early next morning, Wukong woke up and asked his master to take off. Sanzang got dressed and told Wukong to pack their luggage. Just when they were ready to say goodbye, the old man prepared water for them to groom themselves and a vegetarian meal. They took off after breakfast. Sanzang hopped on the horse and let Wukong lead it. They ate when they were hungry, drank water when they were thirsty, lodged at night and took off again at dawn. They kept going until it was early winter.

One day, master and disciple heard a whistle from the side of the road. Then six guys rushed out with spears, swords, cutlasses, and bows in their hands. They shouted, "Where do you think you are going, monks? If you leave your horse and luggage here, we won't take your life." Sanzang was so scared that he fell off the horse and was speechless. Monkey pulled Sanzang up and said, "Don't worry about a thing. These guys are here to give us clothes and money for the trip."

Interpretation:

Sun Wukong is not intimidated by any demons, devils, ghosts, and bandits, so he told his master not to worry about a thing.

Original text:

Sanzang said to Wukong, “Were you deaf? They said they wanted us to leave the horse and luggage here, and you think they are here to give us clothes and money?” Wukong said, “How about this? You guard the clothes, luggage, and horse. I’ll fight with them and let’s see how things turn out.” Sanzang said, “No a strong hand ever defeats two fists. Two fists can’t beat four hands. There are six big guys in front of us. How dare you such a little man to fight against them?”

The monkey was very brave and stepped forward with his arms crossed in front of his chest. He bowed and said to the six men, “I would like to know why you guys want to block our way?” The guys said, “We are the robber kings and the lords of mountain. We bet you don’t know how notorious we are. Leave your stuff here before it is too late, and we’ll let you go your way. If you say ‘no’, we’ll crush your bones into powder and grind your flesh into mincemeat.” Wukong said, “I am also a king of great ancestry, and the host of a mountain for many years. Yet I’ve never heard of you guys.” The guys said, “Sure you don’t know us. Let us tell you who we are. We are Eye-looking Happiness, Ear-hearing Anger, Nose-smelling Love, Tongue-tasting Thought, Mind-born Desire, and Body-based

Sorrow. Wukong laughed and said, “You guys are just sly bandits. You did not recognize that I, the monk, am your master. Instead you are trying to block my way? Surrender the valuables you stole and I’ll share them with you guys equally. I’ll let you off with that.” This made the bandits happy, angry, loving, thoughtful, desirous, and sorrowful, respectively. They all came up to Wukong and shouted, “What an outrageous monk!! You’ve got nothing to contribute and you want to share what we have?” They waved their spears and swords, crowded toward Wukong, and riotously hacked Wukong’s head for 70 to 80 times. Standing among the six bandits, Wukong just stayed motionless and acted as if he didn’t know what’s going on. The bandits said, “What a monk! He is a really tough guy!” Wukong laughed and said, “Why don’t you guys just let it go. I bet your arms are sore after all that bullying. Now it’s my turn to show you some tricks with my needle.” The bandits said, “This monk must be an acupuncturist. There is nothing wrong with us. Why is he talking about his needle?”

Wukong then pulled out an embroidering needle from his ear. Flashing in the wind, the needle became an iron cudgel, whose diameter is the same as that of a bowl. With the cudgel in his hand, Wukong said, “Don’t go yet. Let me try out my cudgel on you guys!” The bandits were terrified and fled in all directions, but Wukong raced after each of them, caught them one by one, and beat all of them to death. Wukong then stripped

off their clothes and took their money. He came up to his master with a smiling face and said, "Let's go, Master. I've taken care of these bandits." Sanzang said, "You are in trouble! No matter how bad these highwaymen were, they would never be sentenced to death by any judges if they were arrested. No matter how good a fighter you are, you should just try to get rid of them. Why on earth would you kill them all? You killed them for no apparent reason. How would you recognize yourself as a monk? People say that monks 'watch out for ants when they sweep the floor and cover up lamps so that moths won't fly into the lamp fire.' How come you beat all of them to death without distinguishing the innocent ones from the guilty ones? You absolutely have no compassion and mercy at all! This time it happened in the wilderness where nobody can trace the crime. But what if someone offended you in a city and you went berserk and beat them with your cudgel. I would not be able to get out of this mess no matter how innocent I am." Wukong said, "Master, they would definitely kill you if I had not beaten them to death." Sanzang said, "I am a religious man who would rather be killed than kill others. It would only cost one life if I were murdered. Now you took six people's life. This is ridiculous."

Interpretation:

Let's stop here and analyze a few things. When Sun Wukong crushed the tiger, Tang

Sanzang did not criticize him at all. Instead he said, "He is really a tough guy." However, this time, Sanzang scolded Wukong for killing the six mountain bandits. Let's take a look at the six bandits' names: Eye-looking Happiness, Ear-hearing Anger, Nose-smelling Love, Tongue-tasting Thought, Mind-born Desire, and Body-based Sorrow. These names refer to eyes, ears, nose, tongue, mind, and body. Who are these bandits exactly? It is mentioned in the Heart Sutra that "There are no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind." What does "no" mean here? Normally our heart evolves from our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, mind, and body. However, when you find your true heart, your heart is not bound by your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, mind, and body anymore. If you are still led by your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, mind, and body, it means you still have a fake heart. When the six bandits met Sun Wukong, the fake hearts met the true heart. The fake hearts told the true heart that they were the real kings and masters of the mountain. Sun Wukong replied that he was the real master. And he fought against the six bandits to prove to them that he is the real master.

Who is the real master? By studying the Heart Sutra, we know that the real master is the heart, and the fake ones are eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Before our true heart emerges, our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind believe that they are the real hearts. When a person's eyes look at things, the person believes

that it is his/her heart that is looking. Of course he/she would think that him/herself has a true heart. However, you cannot see the ultimate truth if you don't use your true heart. By nature, what's seen by your eyes must be transmitted to your heart. What your ears hear must also be communicated to your heart. Otherwise your heart would not know what is going on. In this sense, the six bandits are actually the servants of your heart. Since they have been doing their jobs smoothly for so long, they forgot that they are actually working for the heart. They started to believe that they are the real masters. When they met the true master, they claimed that they were the true kings and masters of the mountain. Sun Wukong argued that he was the true king and master of the mountain. Thus, they got into a fight to prove their authenticity. Sun Wukong would of course take out his cudgel. What does the cudgel represent? The cudgel is from the Palace of the Ocean Dragon, and it is called the Magical Needle which Stills the Ocean. As mentioned earlier, the ocean refers to both the Ocean of Nature and the Ocean of Dharma. The needle from the Ocean of Nature represents one's original true self. When the original true self and true heart unite as one, the six little bandits are no longer a big deal. Of course they would all die in the first blow of the wind. When the true heart emerges, the six bandits disappear without a trace. Now, the true master is the heart, not the six bandits anymore. This is another stage in Tao cultivation. However, at this point in the Journey to the West, Tang Sanzang hasn't

reached this level yet. He is still at the level of a human being. He hasn't separated his true self from his body yet. When he saw the tiger being killed, he did not think it was a big deal because, to him, the tiger was just an animal. Tang Sanzang was still a human being. There is a Chinese saying: "A fox mourns the death of a hare," which means like grieves for like. Though hares and foxes are different species, they belong to the same biological class of Mammalian. They both have fur, run on the ground, and are preys of hunters. By the same token, Tang Sanzang felt for the six bandits because himself and the six bandits are all human beings. Tang Sanzang thought that these dead bandits are human beings, not monkeys like Sun Wukong. When he saw an animal kill humans, his human judgment came out. He scolded Sun Wukong for murdering and accused him of lacking compassion. Sanzang did not know that when the true heart meets the fake hearts, by nature, the fake ones must vanish. This is why the six bandits were eradicated by the true heart right away.

(To be continued)

