

Journey to the West

(40)

Chapter 14

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

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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

Interpretation

Sun Wukong was trying to conquer another powerful dragon and subdue another fierce tiger, but Tang Sanzang was not able to accept such behavior. This shows us the difference between Hinayana, the small vehicle, and Mahayana, the great vehicle. Normally, people only know how to tame their own dragons and tigers. They believe that they ought to tame their own dragons and tigers by themselves. That is why there are so many ascetic Sanghas in India. An ascetic practitioner does not mind cutting his tongue, burying himself underground, or going out in the hot sun just to experience harsh desquamation. This is also called taming the dragons and tigers. No matter how cruelly he treats himself, he is always willing to bear the pain. However, he is unable to accept the idea that other people can actually help

him to tame his own dragons and tigers. Let's recall the biography of JiGong(濟公). In movies or TV shows, JiGong often punishes people and gives people a hard time. In fact, he is actually helping people to tame their dragons and tigers. Practitioners of other dharma gates might wonder how come he is so cruel and tortures people so brutally. Nowadays, some Tao practitioners are only willing to tame their own dragons and tigers but do not want to help other people to tame their dragons and tigers. What Sun Wukong did was to help others to tame their dragons and tigers. Tang Sanzang was unable to accept this behavior because he did not understand the purpose behind it. He only knew that he should tame his own dragon and tiger by himself. He did not know that others can also help him achieve this goal. Thus, he could not accept this behavior. This tells us the difference between Hinayana and Mahayana. We all know that JiGong was a Buddhist monk. Why does it seem like JiGong is acknowledged by only few branches of Buddhism? The only branch of Buddhism that accepted JiGong was Zen

Buddhism. Zen Buddhism practices Mahayana Buddhism and has comprehended this method. Zen recognizes that scolding your teachers or your ancestors is a way of cultivating Tao. Walking the correct path is not about using only good words and friendly gestures. Sometimes you scold someone to help them cultivate because you are really scolding their dragon and tiger. If you just talk with the dragon and tiger, would it work? If you invite the dragon and tiger to dinner, would you be able to tame the dragon and tiger? Of course not. That is why we emphasize the importance of “the Dharma gate”.

Original Text

Tang Sanzang said, “If you were arrested, you wouldn’t be able to talk your way out of this even if your father were the magistrate.” Wukong replied, “Actually, master, five hundred years ago while I was still the monster king of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, I killed countless people. Had I followed your precepts I’d never have become the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.” Sanzang said, “It was actually because you acted with such tyrannical cruelty among mortals and committed the most terrible crimes against Heaven that you were punished for five hundred years. Now you are admitted to the priesthood. If you still act as violent as you used to, you’ll never get to the West, let alone be a real monk. Terrible! Terrible!”

The Monkey could not stand being scolded

like this. Sanzang kept going on about Wukong’s ruthless behavior. Wukong couldn’t stand it anymore and shouted with anger, “Alright, since you think I am not a monk material and won’t be able to reach the West, why don’t you just stop going on at me like that. I’m going back.” Before Sanzang could reply, Monkey leapt up furiously, shouting, “I’m leaving!” Sanzang looked up right away, but Sun Wukong was already out of sight.

Interpretation

As mentioned before, a person who wants to cultivate Tao should be sincere and bear a rectified heart. Who has the rectified heart? Sun Wukong. A rectified heart means a heart for Tao. When the Tao heart disappeared, would Tang Sanzang still be able to obtain the sutras? Since Tang Sanzang lost his Tao heart, of course he wouldn’t be able to. The same thing might happen to us. Usually we have a Tao heart to keep us going on the path of Tao cultivation. When something unpleasant happens, we might get so angry that we drive our Tao heart away. Then, we are no longer able to keep cultivating Tao. No matter how much your body wants to cultivate, as long as the Tao heart is gone, you are no longer able to keep going. Without our heart, we cannot act. Recall that Sun Wukong was given the name Sun the Practicer (walker), which means “one who walks”, in Chinese. That is why without Sun Wukong, Tang Sanzang just sat there and could not go any further.

Original Text

All Sanzang could hear was a whistling sound flying to the East. Being left on his own, Tang Sanzang sighed to himself sadly and indignantly and said, “What an unteachable monkey. I only said a few words and he decided to go back and left on me!! Very well then, it must be my fate to have no disciples or followers. I can’t find him now even if I want to. He wouldn’t answer if I called him. I must be heading off on my own.” Thus, Sanzang had no choice but to do his best to head toward the West without being looked after by anyone else.

Sanzang had no choice but to gather up the luggage and hoist it on to the horse’s back. He could not ride the horse. Instead, holding his monastic staff in one hand and leading the horse with the other, he started off again to the West. Not long after he set off again, Sanzang saw an old woman on a goat. She was holding a cotton cassock and an embroidered hat. As she came toward Sanzang, he drew the horse aside to let her pass. The old woman asked, “Where are you from, venerable monk, traveling all alone?” Sanzang replied, “I was sent by the Great King of the East to go to the West to visit the Buddha and ask him for the sutras.” The old woman said, “The Buddha of the West lives in the Temple of the Great Thunder Sound in the land of India, which is 108,000 miles away from here. How would you expect yourself to get there without any companion or disciple waiting upon you?”

Sanzang said, “I did have a disciple, but he was very mischievous. I scolded him a bit and he disappeared into the blue.” The old woman said, “I have a cotton cassock and an embroidered hat. They belonged to my son, who died three days after becoming a monk. I just got back from his monastery. I went there to mourn his death and say farewell to his master. I took the cassock and hat to keep in memory of him. Venerable monk, since you have a disciple, I’ll give them to you.” Sanzang replied, “I really appreciate your generosity. It’s just that my disciple is now gone, I should not accept them.” Old woman asked, “Where has he gone to?” Sanzang said, “All I heard was a whistling sound as he went back to the East.” Old woman said, “The East is not that far. My home is in the East. I guess your disciple must have gone to my home. I’ve also got a spell called Mind-Calming True Words, or the Band-Tightening Spell. You must memorize and chant it in your heart and never reveal it. Never let anyone else know. I’ll go look for him and send him back to you. You make him wear the cassock and hat. If he is disobedient again, just recite the spell silently. He will not dare to misbehave or run away again.”

Sanzang bowed to thank the old woman. Suddenly she changed into a shaft of golden light and vanished into the East. Sanzang realized that it was Guanyin Bodhisattva who gave him the spell, so he took a pinch of earth as if he were burning incense and bowed reverently to the East

to show his gratitude. Then he put the cassock and hat in his baggage, sat at the roadside, and recited the mind-calming true words over and over again until he knew it by heart.

Interpretation

This section shows us that when a person’s Tao heart leaves, it is very difficult to walk on the path to Tao. But since Tang Sanzang had a sincere heart, the Bodhisattva came to help him. She gave him a hat and a cassock and asked him to put them on his disciple. And she also taught him a mantra. What are all these for? They are used to calm his heart. Mencius said, “The path of learning is about nothing but finding your lost heart.” Sun Wukong represents the heart. The heart went to the east, meaning it ran away and got lost. Gaining knowledge means learning Tao. There are no other methods of learning Tao but to keep finding the heart you have let go.

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The following article was translated by
Alice Chou and Anthony Grecco

Interpretation:

Now Tang Sanzang wanted to find his lost heart (the true self). How should he begin? The answer lies with Guanyin Bodhisattva’s assistance and Guanyin Bodhisattva’s giving Tang Sanzang the cassock and the headband. What are the functions of the cassock and the headband?

They are to help Sun Wukong to cultivate his physical body and behavior. The disciplinal cassock is for him to watch his manner, while the tightening band is to calm his mind. Therefore, Guanyin Bodhisattva is teaching Tang Sanzang how to handle his mind. For example, while practicing Tao, we sometime lose our focus on cultivation, simply because of the anguish of facing issues that arise in the dharma gate or at home. The contradiction lies between the choices of whether we ought to continue practicing Tao or not. The thing is that even though we want to continue practicing Tao, it becomes very difficult to start. What should we do then? This is when Guanyin Bodhisattva shows up to help us to regain our lost focus and teach us how to keep it.

I interpret it this way because when I read this chapter earlier, I realized that the reason we receive Tao is like the reason the restraining headband is put on Sun Wukong’s head. When he does not behave well, the master will recite the band-tightening spell so that he’ll get such a headache that he won’t dare to stop practicing Tao. No wonder whenever we try to connect people to Tao, we get a headache. Guanyin is very merciful; why would she give us something as terrible as the band-tightening spell? In fact, many people who are facing a hard time when passing tests set by demons are not harmed at all. The truth is that these people leave the dharma gate without any signs of getting a headache. On the contrary, it’s the people who stay right here who get

headaches. Therefore, it proves that the mantra works for those who stay in the dharma gate and continue to practice Tao, not for people who leave the dharma gate.

I once asked a Tao teacher about this concept and got the answer: “Do not get it wrong that we Tao practitioners use the mantra to control other people. If we did, there would be more Tao practitioners staying in the dharma gate and no one would dare to leave.” That is when I realized the band-tightening spell is not any regular mantra but a special mind-calming tool, so I brought it up here to share with all of you my former misunderstanding. There is really no restraining mantra on us, and we possess freewill with which we can decide whether we want to stay in or go out of the dharma gate. The true purpose of the restraining mantra is to help people to have and keep focus on practicing Tao because we sometimes lose our focus. Our rescue then depends on the Buddha or Immortal with whom we have affinity.

Original Text:

SunWukong said goodbye to his master and took his cloud to the Eastern Sea in one somersault. Putting his cloud away, he parted the waters and went straight to the front door of the undersea palace of crystal. In shock, the Dragon King came out to greet him and escort him to the palace. After bowing and seating Sun Wukong, the Dragon King said, “I recently heard that the Great Sage Equaling Heaven (the Monkey) has over-

come all obstacles, and I would like to congratulate you on this accomplishment. You must want to reorganize your holy mountain and reside in the ancient cave.” Sun Wukong replied, “I have thought about this, but it’s just that I have become a monk.” The Dragon King asked, “Why a monk?” Sun Wukong replied, “I owe it to Guanyin Bodhisattva for guiding me how to cultivate the right fruit and showing me the true way of becoming enlightened by accompanying Tang Sanzang to the West to visit and worship to Buddha. That’s why I became a monk. You may also call me the practitioner.” The Dragon King said, “This is great news. I want to congratulate you for reforming your wrong doings and turning to the good. But if all this is so, why are you here? You should be on your way to the West.”

Interpretation:

Sun Wukong and the Dragon King kept mentioning the East and the West. If Sun Wukong goes East it means that he is returning to his hometown because the East is the land of cause. If he goes back to the East, Sun Wukong is creating a cause; he can only get the harvest fruit (result) in the West. (To be continued)

