

Journey to the West (41)

Chapter 14

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

Interpreter: Henry Chang
Translator: Alice Chou &
Anthony Grecco
Editors: Ken & Luchia Howell,
Sharon Lee

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

Original text:

Sun the Practicer laughed, “That’s because Tang Sanzang did not know human nature. I killed a few mountain bandits for his safety, and then he kept nagging about how evil I was. Can you imagine me staying in the sulks? Of course I ditched him to go back to my mountain. That’s why I dropped by to say hello and have some tea with you.” The Dragon King replied, “I’m grateful for your visit.” Then he asked his son and grandchild to serve the Practicer the best tea in the house.

After drinking his tea, Sun the Practicer turned around and saw a painting called “Presenting a shoe on the Yi Bridge.” Sun the Practicer asked, “What’s the story behind this painting?” The Dragon King said, “You were in

Heaven as the Great Sage Equaling Heaven at that time. That’s why you don’t recognize it now. This is about a man who presented a shoe three times on the Yi Bridge.” Sun the Practicer asked, “Why presenting the shoe three times?” The Dragon King replied, “This Immortal was Elder Yellowstone and the man was Zhang Liang in the Qin Dynasty. The Elder was sitting on the Yi Bridge. All of a sudden, one of his shoes came off and fell under the bridge. So, he asked Zhang Liang, who was nearby, to get it for him. Zhang Liang picked it up right away and, kneeling to show his respect, presented it to The Elder, whereupon the Immortal let his shoe fall again. This happened three times and Zhang Liang did not hesitate at all but picked up the shoe again and again and brought it to The Elder without showing the slightest sign of impatience. The Elder admired Zhang Liang’s diligence and cautiousness. One night, the Immortal gave Zhang Liang the Book of Heaven and asked him to assist the Han Dynasty. Zhang Liang later turned out to be capable of devising national strategies

by working on his own. He also defeated enemies from thousands of miles away. When peace returned to the nation, he resigned his office, went back to his mountain, followed Master Red Pine, and achieved the way of immortality through enlightenment. Great Sage, if you don't protect and serve the Tang monk with all your diligence and accept his teachings, you are still an immortal monster and will never obtain Tao."

After listening, Sun Wukong stayed silent for moments. The Dragon King then said, "Great Sage, you should know what to do next. You should not just strive for the so-called freedom; otherwise you will not carry out your mission in time, and you'll miss your future." Sun Wukong replied "Say no more, I will go protect Tang Sanzang." The Dragon King said to Sun Wukong with joy, "If so, I won't dare to keep you here for long. Great Sage, please be compassionate and don't stay away from your master any longer!" Sun the Practicer saw that the Dragon King was urging him to leave immediately, so he said goodbye to the Dragon King and, mounting his cloud, left the Eastern Sea.

The Practicer ran into Guanyin Bodhisattva when he left the Eastern Sea. "Sun Wukong, why didn't you follow my advice to guard Tang Sanzang? What on earth are you doing here?" said the Bodhisattva.

The Practicer bowed to the Bodhisattva and

nervously replied, "Thank you so much for giving the good advice that the Tang Dynasty monk would come to my rescue by tearing off the spell and accepting me as one of his disciples. Because he accused me of being incorrigibly wicked, I decided to stay away from him for a little while. I will be by his side to protect him now."

"Hurry up while you are still willing to protect him! Don't pass on this good thought," said Guanyin Bodhisattva. Once the conversation was over, both of them headed back to where they came from respectively.

Interpretation:

Did the Bodhisattva scold Sun Wukong for killing the six bandits? No! She only asked him to return to his master to protect him. This proves that Sun Wukong did not do anything wrong. However, Tang Sanzang was the one that could not accept Sun Wukong because Tang Sanzang was not on the same spiritual level as Sun Wukong. Tang Sanzang could only conquer his own dragon and tiger (i.e., getting rid of his own wild thoughts and physical desires while meditating), so he could not see that others were trying to help him to accomplish the same goal. Therefore, when Sun Wukong helped him to get rid of his own thoughts and desires, he could not take it.

A similar example is that some of us are not able to accept the fact that someone in India tried to cut his own tongue to cultivate his mind. We

feel that such a person's mind might not be in the right state, so he cultivates his own mind in such a harsh and dangerous way. This practice is absolutely wrong. However, it was one way of getting rid of thoughts and desires. People who cultivate the Hinayana (lesser vehicle) normally are willing to do whatever it takes to get rid of their own thoughts and desires, but are unhappy to see others using different methods.

Tang Sanzang had not yet obtained the true sutra at the time. Although he was sincere and had a true heart, he was just an ordinary man who was in the early phases of mind cultivation. He wasn't able to accept others' help. In *Journey to the West*, we can see the extent to which the master scolded his disciple is quite different from the way Guanyin Bodhisattva did Sun Wukong. Therefore, it proves that the spiritual levels of the two are different. Guanyin did not castigate Sun Wukong for killing the bandits but only urged him to protect Tang Sanzang.

Original Text:

Sun Wukong returned to his master. Tang Sanzang asked Sun the Practicer to get him some water to go with the dry food stored in a bag. Sun the Practicer discovered a cotton cassock and colorful headband with gold rim which were left by Guanyin Bodhisattva. Sun Wukong saw them in the bag and asked, "Are the cassock and headband from the Eastern Land?" Tang Sanzang

replied "I used to wear them when I was little. Anyone who wears the headband can recite the sutra without learning it. Anyone who wears the cassock can perform ceremonies without rehearsing beforehand. If they are your size, take them."

Interpretation:

Was Tang Sanzang lying when he said that he used to wear the cassock and headband while he was younger? Is a monk allowed to lie? We can see Tang Sanzang made some progress after meeting the Bodhisattva. He scolded Sun Wukong very harshly after seeing him kill the six bandits, but gained some wisdom after meeting Guanyin. Sun Wukong would not have dared to put the cassock and headband on had Tang Sanzang told him that they were given to him by the Bodhisattva as gifts. Tang Sanzang lied to Sun Wukong. Monks cannot lie. However, if Tang Sanzang had told him the truth, it would not have been good for Sun Wukong. Therefore, it's fair to say that Tang Sanzang had made some progress.

There are multiple spiritual levels in practicing Tao. We sometimes say a Tao practitioner is practicing tirelessly, but the more he practices, the further away he is from the middle way. Is it moving forward or backward when someone is not in the middle way? It depends. For some, staying in the middle way can mean moving backward. While for others, it can mean moving forward. Tang Sanzang needed to help Sun

Wukong to practice Tao by cultivating the mind and body, so he lied to him. Some people might think the author should have known that Tang Sanzang could not lie and might ask why insulting Tang Sanzang by portraying him as a liar? No, the author did not insult Tang Sanzang. In fact, the author is telling us that Tang Sanzang has made some progress by leaping over his original spiritual level.

Original Text:

Sun the Practicer donned the cassock and headband, which fit Sun Wukong perfectly. Seeing this, Tang Sanzang stopped eating and started to chant the band-tightening spell, which caused Sun Wukong a devastating headache.

Interpretation:

There is a saying in Zen Buddhism, “The guideline and the ultimate goal of Zen practice is thoughtlessness in your mind.” Therefore, Zen is thoughtlessness. The Zen practice is to stay calm. Thus, Zen is calmness. When will we stay calm? When we are thoughtless. Once a thought arises, our mind can’t be calm. However, Tang Sanzang utilized his will (by chanting the band-tightening spell) to make Sun Wukong stay calm so that Tang Sanzang himself could stay calm. Once a man is calm, there won’t be any thought arising in his mind. However, when one reaches the true state of calmness, no mantra should be chanted. In the Tao practice realm, it is necessary to have a

mantra, but we don’t really need to chant it. We often talk about practicing Wuwei or effortless-mind Dharma. A passage from the Diamond Sutra reads, “All Youwei (promising) methods, strenuous and requiring great effort, are like bubbles floating in a stream; they are nothing but illusions, phantoms, or dreams. So is all conditioned existence to be seen.”

Nonetheless, we still need some Youwei methods to calm our mind first. Once our mind is calm, we must get rid of the Youwei methods to stay calm ourselves. This is just like having the band-tightening spell but not using it. It is best if you can stay calm without using the spell. It serves to balance the monkey when he is not calm; Tang Sanzang recites the spell to make the monkey stay calm. Once the monkey is calm, no band-tightening spell is needed.

We need to have a correct conception about Youwei methods, and we need to learn it. If Tang Sanzang followed the above-mentioned passage and did not recite the mantra, do you really believe Sun the Practicer would have accompanied him all the way to India to get the sutra? The way to make our mind stay clear is to have Youwei methods handy; yet not to use them. Therefore, do not dispense with Youwei methods. If you do, what would you do when your mind is not calm enough?

(To be continued)