



Journey to the West

(43)

Chapter 15

On the Coiling Snake Mountain, deities give secret help;
In the Eagle's Sorrow Gorge, the Thought-Horse is reined in.

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However, before returning to the right way, it is just a snake. We've heard about Guanyin Bodhisattva riding a dragon but not a snake. Why is this? If a snake submits and is willing to be ridden, it is called a dragon. Therefore, the point here is not about the difference between a dragon and a snake. On the physical level, no one has ever seen a dragon. We only see dragons in paintings. We see real snakes but not real dragons. When will a snake become a dragon? When it submits. What changes when a snake submits? Since we cannot see dragons on the physical level, it must be the spirit that changes. What Journey to the West describes is the story of dragons because Chinese people say that they are the descendants of dragons. It is the same in the Tale of the White Serpent, which expresses the same

idea in different words. Up until now, everyone should be able to understand something about the Coiling Snake Mountains. In this chapter, a snake submits and becomes a dragon.

Original Text

It is recorded that Sun the Practicer served the Tang Sanzang on his journey to the west. It was a very cold day in lunar December with high winds blowing from the north. The two traveled through icy and slippery twisty roads, climbed precipitous cliffs, and went ridge after ridge of jagged mountains. Rows of precipitous mountains spread out in all directions.

Interpretation

The above excerpt implies that the roads were very dangerous, the weather was very cold, and the wind was freezing. It describes when we have cultivated Tao to a certain level, we encounter difficult situations. In this sort of situations, we feel the surroundings are cold. In fact, we just entered into difficult situations. In addi-

tion, the rough roads make us feel it is too difficult to go on to cultivate ourselves in such a harsh environment. This kind of predicament can be termed as “coming to the Coiling Snake Mountains.”

Original Text

Riding the horse, Tang Sanzang heard the roaring of a torrent and asked, “Sun Wukong, where does the noise come from?” Sun the Practicer said, “I remember this place is called the Coiling Snake Mountains and the Eagle’s Sorrow Gorge. The sound must come from the stream in the ravine.” While he was talking, the horse went to the side of the ravine. Tang Sanzang reined in his horse and took a look at the surroundings. While the master and apprentice looked around, they heard a loud swirling sound from the ravine. A dragon emerged from the middle of the stream. The dragon stirred up violent waves, quickly flew above the steep cliff, and lunged at Tang Sanzang.

Interpretation

During cultivation, when you encounter a difficulty and feel frightened, you are meeting the dragon that we mentioned, which is not from yourself. Sun Wukong is a dragon but looks like a monkey on the physical level because he practices Tao. We know that Sun Wukong is the king of monkeys, but we don’t know he is also a dragon king. He is from Tang Sanzang’s spirit and heart. Sun Wukong is the dragon of Tang Sanzang. So, who is the dragon that just emerged

from the Eagle’s Sorrow Gorge? It is not Tang Sanzang’s dragon. This dragon is the third son of the Dragon King of Western Sea. Sun Wukong is a dragon king. What is the difference between a dragon king and a dragon’s son? As human beings, we have both true nature and heart. What is our true nature? The true nature is the innate heart which is divine. In the book, Doctrine of the Mean, it is said, “The divine providence is the true nature.” Where does the true nature come from? It is from heaven. Therefore, we know who represents the true nature. Tang Sanzang does because he has the mandate from heaven. All demons and ghosts want to capture Tang Sanzang and eat his flesh. Why? It’s because they want to steal his divine providence. However, divine providence is the true nature. Who doesn’t have a divine providence? Everyone has their own true nature. Because the true nature is the innate heart, everyone has a divine heart. Our own heart is what we call conscience. Everyone has their own conscience. Why would one bother to steal other people’s heart? Each of these demons and ghosts also has their own heart, but the problem is that these demons have lost their hearts. Because the heart is lost, a demon does not even know he had the innate heart. Demons thought they created their hearts. Based on this kind of thinking they thought the hearts belonged to themselves. When they thought the hearts belonged to themselves, they could not find the origin. For example, I know from whom I was born - my parents. Had I not known I was born by my parents, I would

have said that I was born by myself. This statement shows that I lost my origin. Lost people can only recognize themselves but no one else on a higher level. However, we know that above human beings, there is a heaven. When one is lost, he cannot recognize heaven. A person doesn't know his origin is from heaven, so he forgets his innate heart. At the same time, he loses the true nature and the divine providence. Therefore, the lost beings in Journey to the West want to rob others and thought of eating the flesh of Tang Sanzang so that they can live forever without aging and became an immortal or Buddha. In fact, it is unnecessary. Every one who is lost has an innate heart.

Divine providence is the true nature. This tells us that Tang Sanzang has the mandate from heaven. What is the heart? A human being has a heart called conscious. Is there a heart called ambition or greed? Yes, there are many hearts such as greed, hatred, and ignorance. We also have many hearts. Some of them are good, but some are not. So, it is not easy to say whether the heart is good or not. For example, in a big family, does everyone in the family have a good heart? Certainly not. There are some good ones and some bad ones. Taken together, all of them form a family. The heart is similar to a family in which there are many different kinds of people with greed, hatred, ignorance, and so on. When all are put together, they become a family which is called

the heart. Therefore, it is also called a whole thought. Where does conscious come from? Each heart is a thought. There is a saying, "When one thought of hatred arises, one million barriers arise." One thought from the good heart opens the channel to heaven. A thought from the bad heart leads one to hell. All of these are just reflections of thoughts. The whole mind is the combination of all thoughts which are from our hearts.

Why do we mention dragons, dragon's sons, and dragon kings? We often talk about the "Mind Ape and Thought Horse". A dragon can change into a horse. When does a dragon become a horse? This is the same question as when does a snake change into a dragon. When a snake submits, it becomes a dragon. When does a dragon change into a horse? When a dragon submits, it changes into a horse. You might wonder why it becomes smaller after submitting. The answer is that to be small is to be useful. What is the function of a dragon? It can only fly up into the sky to show itself off. However, being a horse is useful. When one goes to the west to get the sutra, he needs a horse not a dragon. A horse can be ridden by Tang Sanzang and carry the sutra back. That's why a dragon needs to become a horse.

As I said, dragons can change into horses. What is a dragon? A dragon is one who has not submitted like the son of the Western Sea Dragon King. This dragon son represents the deluded and

ambitious heart. How does the deluded and ambitious heart become the rectified heart? How does a fake mind become a sincere thought? It is through the dragon becoming a horse and being obedient to the dragon king's words. The dragon son violated the law by not following the dragon king's words and burning the legendary pearl which shines at night. Thus, he was punished. So, he represents the deluded heart. The legendary pearl represents the nature of the dragon king, and the dragon son's stealing the pearl was the same as a robbing or disturbing nature. He committed a crime and should receive a death penalty. However, Guanyin Bodhisattva let him atone for his crime by going to the west to seek the sutras, i.e., let him cultivate in order to obtain the right fruit. The dragon king's son is the deluded heart. When the deluded heart becomes a rectified heart, the fake mind turns into a sincere thought.

Who is the dragon king? It is Sun Wukong who has already returned to the right way, so he is called the rectified heart. When the rectified heart overcomes the deluded heart, the rectified heart needs to accept the deluded heart and then becomes a sincere thought which is also called the Thought Horse. Therefore, a sincere mind accompanies a rectified thought. First, the rectified heart appears, and then the sincere thought ensues. It is mentioned in the book, Great Learning, that sincere thinking must precede a rectified heart, but here a rectified heart must pre-

cede sincere thinking. The reason is that in Tao cultivation, these procedures are reversed. Great Learning speaks of the mundane world and gives the proper sequence for being human. Originally a rectified heart must precede the sincere thinking. So, Tang Sanzang first found the monkey with the rectified heart and then found the horse with sincere thoughts. Before the sincere horse there was a deluded one who had a fake mind, i.e., the white horse. Tang Sanzang had the dragon horse after his a horse was eaten by the dragon horse. Sanzang worried about where to find the horse and asked Wukong about it. Wukong said he would help to get the horse back for Tang Sanzang, but the master still worried. Sanzang said if Sun Wukong left to find the horse, some demons would show up and eat him. Sun Wukong answered, "You want the horse back but don't let me leave to find it. How can I find the horse for you? Do you wish to just sit here and wait until you become an old guy?" Seemingly these words did not make any deference to the master, but in fact it is not the case. The real meaning was that you want the fake mind (the white horse) and also want to find the real dragon. Thus, there is no place to go. If you cannot abandon the fake mind, the white horse, you cannot find the real dragon, let alone the real mind.

(To be continued)