Chapter 4: The Story of How Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan Received Dao

In the past, people who wanted to receive Dao had to forsake their families and their worldly pursuits in order to seek a master who could pass Dao on to them. For us today, receiving Dao is a much less difficult process. Rather than having to search for the essence of Dao, we are fortunate enough to have introducers who come to us and invite us to a Dao Ceremony. The majority of Dao relatives receive Dao in this way. It is rare to find someone who actively seeks this spiritual essence. Why is it so much easier for us to receive Dao than for cultivators in the past? It is because of the blessings of heaven, the great vow of Maitreya Buddha and the hard work of our predecessors to support and sustain our spiritual growth. The story of the Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan, and how he came to receive Dao, shows us the difficulties and struggles faced by cultivators in the past and helps us to appreciate our present blessings more fully.

Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan, is regarded as the ancestor of the entire Chinese race. He had a pure heart and a very kind nature, and, most importantly, a strong affinity for truth. Throughout his life he searched for masters to guide him in his cultivation. At one stage he had as many as seventy-two masters. They all taught him ways to cultivate so that his good deeds and the purity of his heart would have a positive influence in his future incarnations. However, none of them could teach him how to transcend the cycle of life and death, to liberate himself from the endless wheel of suffering. So Emperor Xuan Yuan kept searching for an even wiser master who could help him to achieve this ultimate goal of cultivation.

One day he set up a notice outside the palace gates, which said "*Whoever introduces me to a true enlightened master who can guide me to enlightenment, shall receive a great reward.*"

A few days later a man by the name of Yang Ma Jun came by and read the notice. He looked very pleased with himself as he took it down from the wall, and asked one of the guards to show him the way to the emperor's palace. When Emperor Xuan Yuan saw Yang Ma Jun, he asked,

"Do you really know an enlightened teacher?"

Yang Ma Jun answered very confidently, "Yes, I have a nephew whose name is Guang Cheng Zi. He is the master. He is very virtuous, and I have heard people say that he is enlightened."

"How old is this nephew of yours?"

"He will be thirteen this year." Yang Ma Jun replied. The Emperor thought to himself, "How much can a thirteen year old boy know? This man is probably trying to fool me so that he can get the reward."

He then said, "I have already had seventy-two masters. They are all between fifty and sixty years old, and not one of them can tell me how to transcend the cycle of birth and death. Your nephew is only thirteen. How much virtue can he have acquired? How much can he know? I will visit him tomorrow and ask for his guidance. If he can enlighten me in three days, I will give you a position at court and reward you with great wealth. But be warned! If he fails to enlighten me within that time, you will be publicly executed."

On the following day Xuan Yuan set out for the monastery with an escort of five hundred royal guards. Somehow Guang Cheng Zi knew about the Emperor's intentions, and he had instructed his disciples to chop down all the trees along the way so that they blocked the road. When the royal guards saw the trees piled up in their path, they realized that they could go no further and hurried to inform the emperor of the obstruction. Xuan Yuan thought to himself,

"*My purpose in traveling today is to seek teaching and guidance from an enlightened master. Why do I need to bring five hundred guards with me? Such a pompous approach shows that I am not very sincere.*"

So the emperor ordered his troops to return to the palace.

The next day he instructed his personal guard General Juan Lian to accompany him to the monastery. This time the emperor decided to take a different route, and the two men set out along a track that took them through bush land. But once again, Guang Cheng Zi had anticipated the emperor's actions. He told his disciples to tie the tall grasses together in knots, all along the path. Before long, the Emperor and his General found that this was a serious obstacle to their progress.

General Juan Lian was terribly upset. He could see that this and the incident with the trees on the previous day were deliberate attempts to prevent the emperor from reaching his destination. Being very loyal and dedicated to the wellbeing of the emperor, the general was furious at the thought of Guang Cheng Zi's rudeness and disrespect. He drew his sword and prepared to cut the knotted grass that blocked their way, but the emperor stopped him.

"Wait! Don't do that. Remember, I am here to learn. I must be considerate and sincere in my actions. Why don't you untie the knots by hand, one at a time, and each time you untie a knot, I will kneel down and pray. That will show my master that I am truly willing to learn."

Reluctantly and with barely restrained impatience General Juan Lian untied each knot by hand. There were seventy-two knots, and the emperor knelt down to pray seventy-two times. When they finally reached the monastery, the emperor approached a young monk near the door and asked him,

"Revered one, is this the Xiao Lin monastery?”

The monk replied with a poem:

> Xiao Lin is isolated and not many people know about it.
>
> There is a hidden teaching behind the doorway of the bush.
>
> For truth is impartial, it recognizes no personal rank.
>
> One who wishes to be arrogant should never enter this door.

When Xuan Yuan heard this he realized at once that a person must be humble in order to learn. He entered the monastery and walked across the front yard to a second doorway. In the yard he saw another young monk hitting a tree with a stick. He thought this was rather strange behavior, so he asked the monk "Why are you hitting that tree?"

The boy replied, "I'm hitting it because it won't bear any fruit."

"It doesn't look old enough to bear fruit." The emperor said, "When was it planted?"

"Just three days ago," answered the boy.

"Just as I thought," said the emperor, "how on earth can you expect a three day old peach tree to have any peaches on it?"

The young monk then replied, "If it is impossible for a three day old peach tree to bear any fruit, how could a person expect to be enlightened after cultivating for only three days? Open up your heart, nurture it peacefully and wait till the time is right. When the roots are deep and the branches are strong, fruit will naturally appear. "

The emperor was quite embarrassed when he heard this, and realized that he had been much too impatient with his demand for quick enlightenment. With these thoughts in his mind, he moved on until he came to a third doorway. An old monk was there sweeping the floor. The emperor approached him and asked, “Revered one, can you please tell me where I can find the master?"

"He is in the room in the east wing of the building," the old monk answered, pointing the direction for Xuan Yuan to take. Xuan Yuan bowed and thanked the man, then he made his way to the room in the east wing.

When he entered, he saw a young boy serenely meditating. With deep respect, Xuan Yuan bowed down before him.

"Who is kneeling here?” Guang Cheng Zi asked.

"It is your disciple, Xuan Yuan," the emperor replied. Guang Cheng Zi then asked, "I have heard that you have had seventy-two masters. Can you tell me which of them understood the essence of Dao?"

To which the emperor replied, "All of them understood the essence of Dao, but unfortunately, I was not wise enough to learn it from them. May I ask you, my master, to teach me how to transcend the cycle of birth and death?”

Calmly and quietly, Guang Cheng Zi replied: "If we can detach ourselves from illusion, we will never grow old. Wood will never burn if we keep it away from the fire. If you study the essence of Dao with care and dedication, and cultivate with great discipline, then you will surely become enlightened."

At that point in time, Guang Cheng Zi transmitted the essence of Dao to the emperor. He went on to explain to him that our true nature is beyond birth and death and is neither young nor old. Our problem is that we are too attached to the physical body and physical desires, and cling to the illusions of the material world. When we realize that our true Buddha nature transcends all physical illusion, we see that our true self is not born, does not age, and never dies. Like the analogy of the wood and the flames, if a tree is kept away from the fire, it remains green. Knowing this, what we need to do is to learn and cultivate, following the method with discipline and care, and then surely we can attain enlightenment.

After receiving Dao, Emperor Xuan Yuan experienced a great realization. He thanked Guang Cheng Zi and left for his palace. When he had gone, all Guang Cheng Zi's disciples gathered around him, congratulating him for having an emperor as his disciple. But Guang Cheng Zi wasn't smiling. He said. "I'm afraid this means more trouble than good. Didn't you see how furious that general was? I think he plans to come back tomorrow to kill us all. "

The disciples, shocked and terrified, exclaimed: "We'd better run! We'll have to escape!"

“That won't solve the problem," Guang Cheng Zi replied.

"Why don't we ask the emperor for help," some of the students suggested.

Guang Cheng Zi calmly replied, "Don't worry. Tomorrow, all you need to do is to follow me. Each of you carries a joss stick, and I will take care of the rest."

The next morning, as they expected, General Juan Lian rode his horse at a furious gallop all the way to the monastery. He was still seething with anger at the humiliations his emperor had endured. As he approached, Guang Cheng Zi and all his disciples knelt down on the ground. The general dismounted and stormed over to the prostrated figures.

"What are you doing kneeling down there?" he yelled at them. "Who are you?"

"I am the young monk, Guang Cheng Zi. I have come here to honor your arrival, general."

"When the emperor came here yesterday you were rude and disrespectful to him. My rank is lower than his and yet you all kneel down here before me. Why this sudden change of attitude?" asked the general.

“The life of the emperor is in my hands,” said Guang Cheng Zi.

"Then whose hand is your life in?" the general asked.

"My life is in your hands, general," replied Guang Cheng Zi.

"Now tell me, whose hand is my life in?" asked the general.

"Your life is in the hands of the angel of death!" said Guang Cheng Zi, and he read out the following poem:

> "The emperor seeks the teaching of the Dao because he is afraid of birth and death. He came for one word to escape the angel of death. Now, general, you would come here intending to kill. Since my life is in your hands, I kneel here before you and beg.' "

After listening to the words of Guang Cheng Zi, the general achieved a certain level of realization. He said, "Now I wish to become your disciple. What do you think of that?"

"Are you sure you want to cultivate Dao?" asked Guang Cheng Zi.

"I too would like to find a way to transcend birth and death, a way to end the cycle of reincarnation," said General Juan Lian.

"Since that is your intention," Guang Cheng Zi said, "you can follow me back to the monastery. "

Guang Cheng Zi entered his room and sat on the bed. The general followed a little way behind. When he came to the door he stopped and asked, "Master, can you guess if I will step in or remain outside? "

"Step in and you're in heaven. Stay out and you're in hell." Guang Cheng Zi answered.

When he heard this General Juan Lian had a sudden deep inner realization. He said, "I understand that I have done wrong in despising my master. I now repent and beg for my master's compassion. Then I shall kill myself with this sword so that I may transcend all suffering forever.

He drew his sword and said, " "I thank you, my master, for your compassionate teaching. Please initiate me. "

Guang Cheng Zi was touched by the general's sincerity in admitting his fault. He initiated him and led him to the path of enlightenment. Sometime later, Emperor Xuan Yuan also came to the monastery to cultivate, and he eventually gained enlightenment as well.

We can learn a great deal from this story.

1. The essence of Dao cannot be transmitted without an enlightened master who holds the heavenly decree. Although the Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan was very pious in his cultivation and had seventy-two masters, none of these masters held the key to enlightenment and so could not lead him beyond the cycle of reincarnation. Fortunately, his efforts and his sincerity were rewarded when he eventually found a virtuous master, Guang Cheng Zi. Through receiving Dao and the guidelines for cultivation given to him by Guang Cheng Zi, he was finally able to achieve enlightenment. This shows very clearly how difficult it was for people to receive Dao in the past. It was necessary not only to have a good foundation in cultivation, and great integrity, but also to search tirelessly for an enlightened master. In Chinese this is described as:

   > “Traveling for a thousand miles in search of a master,
   >
   > Wandering for ten thousand miles to acquire a word of wisdom.

This is no exaggeration. When we compare this with the way we come to a Dao temple and receive Dao today we can see that, for us, it is a much easier and more comfortable process.

2. The essence of the truth is impartial. Although, in our physical being, we manifest all kinds of differences such as status, wealth, abilities, rank, health and so on, these differences do not exist in our true nature. Unless they receive the essence of the truth, even a person as highly regarded as an emperor is no more than a worldly sentient being. This story also shows us that an emperor and an army general have to go through the same process as anyone else when it comes to receiving Dao. They receive no special treatment, because in the eyes of truth, the essence of our inner nature is the same for us all.
3. Although Guang Cheng Zi was only a child of thirteen, very young indeed when compared to the other masters who were all older than fifty, the emperor still had to learn from him and accept his guidance. This is because Guang Cheng Zi held the heavenly decree and had cultivated his virtue to a very high level. From this we can see how precious the heavenly decree is.
4. General Juan Lian started out as a rather rough and impetuous character, but he eventually came to his inner realization through the subtle teaching of Guang Cheng Zi. His courage in recognizing and admitting his own mistakes is a quality we should respect and emulate. It was this courage which led him to enlightenment.

Conclusion

It may seem that receiving Dao was very easy for us, but we must remember that the essence we received is exactly the same as the essence that the Emperor Hwang Xuan Yuan and the ancient Saints and Buddhas received such a long time ago. The only difference is that we live in a different historical period, so the conditions in which we receive Dao are different. Today we have boundless heavenly blessings, countless virtuous predecessors and Dien Chuan Shr's who have paved the way for us. The ease with which we are able to receive Dao is something we should never take for

granted. We need to cherish this opportunity to cultivate ourselves. If we are conscientious and persistent in our efforts, we will surely succeed in our path towards enlightenment.

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