CHAPTER 9

Tanggum-aegi and the Three Chesok Gods

How did the Three Chesok become gods? Why do many people worship the gods? Where were the Three Chesok's roots? Listen and I will tell you.

Once upon a time, in a peaceful and prosperous country, there was a king by the name of Wang Pusol, who was known as King Chongban. It was through the favour of the gods that he had become king, and there was but one thing that he lacked, an heir.

One evening, the king and his wife were standing outside their gate looking out over the western mountain where the sun had sunk behind the hills, when the moon rose in the east. The king spoke with a heavy heart, 'As we were born into this human world, who will care for our property and perform the ancestral rites for us, if we have no heir to succeed us?'

His wife, being a woman, felt this sadness even more keenly and called to the king, saying, 'Through the favour of the gods you became a king, ruling over India, and we lack nothing. Yet you are distressed because we have no heir?'

'Did you just now realize that? We are not fated to have an heir, so what can we do?' said the king.

'I have not just realized this, but perhaps it is because our devotion is insufficient. Maybe that is why we cannot have an heir. Let us pray at a famous mountain and river and then try to beget a child', said his wife.

'If having an heir depended only on how devoutly one prayed, would there be anyone in the world without descendants or anyone who wasn't rich?' said the king.

'Being devout is not something that everyone can do. Making that kind of effort is more difficult than bearing an heir. If one is utterly devoted in one's efforts, there is nothing in the world that one cannot do. As devotion moves heaven, is there anything that wouldn't go better for you if you were extremely devout?' said his wife.

The king could think of nothing to say in response, so he agreed to his wife's plan.

After obtaining the king's consent and purifying their house, his wife ascended a famous mountain and built a high altar out of yellow soil. After washing her hair and bathing, she burned incense on the altar. And after offering the burning of three pieces of prayer paper1 she knelt down, clasped her hands together, and prayed, 'I pray to you, I pray to you, wise gods, god of the mountain and god of the earth.'
Thus she prayed in the king's name, rubbing her hands together.

'Please answer my prayer. I am none other than Wang Pusöl's wife. Through the favour of the gods my husband became king of India and we lack for almost nothing. But as we do not have even a single heir, I pray to you to bless us with a child.'

She began praying thus with her whole heart.

One day passed, then another, and before she knew it she had prayed for a hundred days. She returned home and lay down in the bedroom.

At midnight she had a dream. In her dream, a child appeared and said, 'Honoured lady, do not be frightened. I was originally a transcendent. But because of my many offences in heaven I was banished to the famous mountain. As I had no other place to go, the mountain god and the earth god sent me to your house. Now we have been fated to become mother and son.'

Suddenly, the baby was in her arms and, startled, she awoke from the dream.

She called the king at once and told him about her dream. Joyfully, he gave her his interpretation, 'Ah! Now there will be prosperity in our house! A flower will bloom – an heir, born to us!'

It was the eighth month of the kyehae\(^2\) year, and from that time on the king's wife started to show signs of pregnancy. With great care she looked after herself, and on the seventh day of the fourth month of the kapcha\(^3\) year her labour pains began. She lay down, and at the hour of the horse\(^4\) on the eighth day she gave birth to a baby boy.

The child's face was like jade and he had a stalwart appearance. They named him Sakyamuni, and treated him with great care. They were afraid to blow on him lest he fly away. They were afraid to touch him too roughly lest he be crushed. 'My darling child! My beautiful and beloved child!' they would say, and time flew by as they raised their cherished son. Sakyamuni grew up in perfect health. Around the time he was one year old, he began to learn how to walk, and his tottering steps were really something to see.

The kapcha and ülch 'uk\(^5\) years passed, and he continued to grow in perfect health through the pyöngin\(^6\) year, when he began to learn how to talk. His baby talk was astonishing to hear. Sakyamuni's parents could not have been more delighted, and they passed many happy hours together.

The pyöngin year passed, and in the chŏngmyo\(^7\) year Sakyamuni turned four and was able to speak about anything. His intelligence was limitless, and when his parents looked at the son they had so tenderly raised, their joy was boundless.

The pyöngin and muchin\(^8\) years passed, and in the kyŏngo\(^9\) year he began to study. He began with the Thousand-Character Text and learned the Four Books and Three Classics\(^10\) as well as books by scholars of the hundred schools, all before he was ten years old. On top of all this, his writing was unmatched in the world.

When Sakyamuni reached the age of ten, however, his father fell ill and spent much time in his sick-bed. Although he was only ten, Sakyamuni's filial