

Between Heaven and Earth: Book Three - Destiny and Fate - Chapter Five - The Money Master

Michael P. Downey
October 9, 2020



Sunflower was a master of money. He had been born in Hong Kong to a Chinese father and a Korean mother. He had spent his whole life in between those two worlds that his parents represented.

He learned his first language at the knee of his mother. On the mean streets of the British Crown Colony his Koreaness was not much of an advantage. As a perpetual outsider in the Chinese dominated culture, the martial arts became a leg up for him. Rather than mastering the subjects taught at school, he immersed himself in several Wushu styles that were the bread and butter of the street toughs that he rubbed shoulders and threw hands with. He won plenty of encounters but came out on the short end of the stick on many others. Along the way he fell into a school run by a teacher of a different ilk. His master practiced and taught a much more internal method that emphasized the cultivation and movement of the vital life force known as Chi. The practice of the breathing and movements greatly enhance both his physical and psychological profile. He quit fighting in street brawls and began fighting in

other arenas. He continued to practice Chi Gong daily as consistently as he breathed in and out.

His Chinese father was a refugee from the troubles on the mainland initiated by Mao and ruthlessly carried out by the Chinese Communist Party known as the Cultural Revolution. His dad's orientation in life had little to do with politics, parties, or ideologies but everything to do with clan and blood ties. From the area of China south of Canton, he was considered Hakka Chinese, that is, not in the lineage of the ruling Han Chinese. For hundreds of years the Hakka were outside of the ruling and privileged classes. In order to survive, they formed clan and blood fraternal organizations that stood against whatever dynasty ruled from Beijing. These eventually became the Triad secret societies. His own father, that is Sunflower's grandfather, and his brothers had been Boxers who had used mystical martial arts to create a rebellion against the foreigners and the Manchu masters in Beijing.

Sunflower grew up with that as the legacy passed down to him by his father. He did hate the Chinese Communist Party but it never prevented him from working with the powers that be while always maintaining his primary loyalty to self, family, and clan.

Just as Chi was the energy of inner life, he had learned that there was a corresponding force, money, that ruled the outer realm. He decided that he ought to become adept at the cultivation and movement of money. Through trial and error he had become a master of money.

One thing that he had learned along the way was that money, like Chi, took many forms. For example if somebody told him that he doesn't have enough money, it's a sure thing that the guy doesn't really know what money is. Everyone has money; in their pocket, in a bank, or under a mattress. Furthermore, you could borrow money, find money, or steal money. If you think you don't have enough money then what you really mean is that you don't want something bad enough. Another thing that you hear all the time is that time is money. But also the reverse is true; money is time. When you run out of time then you are surely out of money.

He had at one time, in the early eighties, sojourned in that big beautiful country known as America or, as he liked to say after witnessing the prominence of the automobile culture, A Merry Car. He absorbed English and the back roads of several American subcultures. He met and lived with an aging hippie chick for a while. She taught him about the country from a decidedly anti-establishment point of view, how to smoke pot, and take a trip. He taught her to gracefully control her breathing and movements. He preferred to be in control of himself through his breathing.

While there, he became fascinated by the emerging high tech dot com revolution. He was highly

impressed by the seeming ability to make huge piles of money out of electronic digits. Time equals money and money equals electronic digits; could the future be one of making money out of long chains of digits. Entirely possible he had concluded but the time was not yet ripe.

He had also become friends with a guy that had the moniker, Stormin Norman. Norman was a pilot and had done time with the CIA in Southeast Asia in an outfit called Air America. His only real passion was to fly. Not being high on Delta or United's must hire list, he branched out on his own. He purchased three old DC-6 work horses and started his own air transport company. He flew auto parts in South America, fish in Alaska, and tourists in the Caribbean. The parts work was good when he could get it. Carburetors seldom complained or demanded their money back. The fish gigs paid well but what a slimy smelly mess they made out of his precious airframes.

In those days, the recreational use of cocaine was rampant and the importing of it from some of the same cities where Norman dropped off parts, was considered by many as little more than a white collar crime. Stormin, of course, saw the logic and began making seriously profitable back hauls.

Sure, the DEA folks could not be considered among those who thought that importing the white powder into the U.S. a minor offense. In fact the war on drugs had heated up to the point where actual assets designed for war were being deployed to stop the white avalanche into the home land. One day, an aircraft piloted by none other than Stormin Norman, was detected by air defense radar flying off the coast of Washington with no flight plan. A flight of F-15s was scrambled and when the DC-6 failed to respond to calls on various frequencies, was forced down onto the rolling Pacific Ocean. When a Coast Guard cutter arrived on the scene a couple hours later they found Norman and his crew lounging in an emergency life raft awaiting rescue. Whatever was onboard was at the bottom of the sea with the DC-6 and without a confession there was no evidence so the boys had to be released. All's well that ends well; but hold on, the DEA obtained a warrant to search both his other aircraft and all associated premises. They seized all the planes, equipment, computers, and arrested Norman along with several of his guys; charging them with conspiracy to import and sell a controlled substance. As often happens in these matters, under not a little pressure, one of his crew rolled over and provided enough details to earn Stormin a conviction along with a substantial sentence at hard time in a federal penitentiary.

The Sunflower learned several important lessons from this episode. First, although time equals money and vice versa, sometimes you just have to do the time. The other lesson was; when dealing in commodities of relatively equal value, some were more desirable than others. Fish and other messy stuff was at the bottom of the list. Other things like hardware also had its disadvantages. Dealing in people was usually better but the best was cold hard cash.

Having learned this at considerable expense and effort, he returned to the East and became a money broker. He began, slowly at first, to move money for various principles and for assorted purposes. Of course, whatever money passed through his hands, a certain amount always stuck to his fingers.

Over time he perfected his craft, built his reputation as the 'go to guy' when discretion and finesse were required, and prospered. Originally, his base of operations was Hong Kong but he followed the money throughout Southeast Asia and into the mainland of China. Eventually it became clear, with the political reality of the return of Hong Kong to the motherland, that moving the whole shooting match to the People's Republic was the future.

All the while, the Sunflower continued to pursue his inner calling of Chi cultivation and blood brotherhood. His secret society associations and Chi Gong network intersected and in many ways benefited him as he in turn benefited them. It was only natural and to be expected. Although there were plenty of challenges, the works of the Chinese Communist Party chief among them, life was unfolding in an honorable and profitable way.

In Beijing and later on in the Northeast provinces, during the course of his professional activities, he began to encounter more and more ethnic Koreans, many of them on the run from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Money was a pure commodity. It was neither right, wrong, good, or evil, and had no moral characteristics. But in meeting with and talking to folks who had escaped the brutal reality of life in North Korea and then found themselves in even more dire circumstances as non persons in China, he couldn't help but be sympathetic. He supposed that it was his mother's blood calling out to him. In any case, he realized that his client list was becoming increasingly top heavy with his maternal brethren. He told himself that he was just following the money and it was true mostly but he was too aware to not know better.

Take the case of the Reverend Kim; he kind of liked the guy despite his allegiance to the foreign religion. Sunflower had nothing at all against Christianity, in fact thought it suited Americans quite well. He had come to understand that its relatively shallow view of reality made up much of the underpinning of western culture and was what made them so childish compared to those raised in the traditional Chinese view of life. What's more, he considered Marxist-Leninism a particularly malignant twist of western

Judeo-Christian ideology and that Asia would have been better off if it had never appeared on its shores.

In the end he didn't care what Kim, or anyone else for that matter, believed. What someone did or practiced was a much better view of a man's character and a more accurate predictor of future actions than the beliefs they spouted. If nothing else, Kim was a man of his word. He consistently acted to make any nasty situation better. He was also known in the shadow realms to be capable of an un-tested violence. And he seemed to do it all without anything to gain. To Sunflower's way of thinking it was the very definition of naive. A guy could understand because, didn't their god voluntarily give himself over to be hung on a cross? Go figure?

The Sunflower had been working with Kim for more than three years. He was mostly sheltering refugees and getting them out of China and on to asylum in South Korea. It was usually a matter of paying brokers to guide them out. Sunflower maintained a stable of reasonably trustworthy brokers and he handled the payments. Nothing was without peril but his arrangements had a track record of success. There was always the broker gone greedy or the intervention of the Chinese police but the horrors of women and children being resold to human traffickers was minimized.

The latest request to move money into North Korea was only a natural extension of the work Kim was already doing. Borders were mostly artificial barriers but on all sides there were people living that needed a more or less free flow of the things of life. Consider the fish of the sea; they had neither visa or passport but they traveled anywhere their fishy nature took them. Penetrating barriers was a vocation for Sunflower. Whatever Kim was planning, he was more than willing to help out. Right now he would just sit back and see what developed. In the end the key would be money; how much money was there to spend? It would be the measure of how much will there was to accomplish the thing. Another jewel that, besides his nickname, he had picked up in the States was the working man's wisdom; talk's cheap, takes money to buy whiskey.