

Records of the High Sanghans

*Great Master Fa Kwang
as told by Tripitaka Master Hua*

continued from issue #182

Dharma Master Fa Kwang was born near Jyang Nan during the Jin dynasty. His lay name was Gau. Unfortunately, shortly after his birth, his mother died. His father had two wives and the remaining wife became the boy's foster mother.

The child instinctively knew about the compassion of parents in raising children, and he set about to return their kindness, particularly that of his foster mother. He was extremely good to his parents: if his foster mother hadn't eaten, he would wait for her. If anyone gave him new clothes, instead of wearing them himself, he would give them to his foster mother. On his part he would just wear old clothes.

The family was extremely poor and as such the only work available was farm laboring. Through this, he earned a bit of money to support his foster mother. His foster mother died when he was eighteen or nineteen, but already by then news of how well he cared for his parents had spread far and wide. True to his reputation, he thought of a way to have his foster mother decently buried. Then, out of his devotion for her, he spent mourning periods beside the grave. That was a very difficult time for him, because he had neither a roof over his head nor any warm clothes. All he had was "the earth as a pillow and the sky as a quilt."

By the time the mourning period was over, Dharma Master Fa Kwang had seen the emptiness of everything in the world and so he left the home-life. He met with a Bright-Eyed Teacher named Tan Yin who was an outstanding Good and Wise Advisor. After he had left the home-life, he studied the three treasures of the Tripitaka: the Sutras, Vinaya, and Shastras, fathoming all the material. He also bowed to the *Lotus Sutra*, and performed the Lotus Flower Repentance Ceremony. He used this to good effect, because one day, when his teacher was gravely ill, he vowed that he would bow this ceremony on behalf of his teacher so as to bring about his speedy recovery. He bowed day and night, when, suddenly, on the seventh day Dharma Master Fa Kwang saw a light composed of five different colors filling the room in which he was bowing. Inside the light he could see the room of his sick teacher. Just then, his teacher felt as if an invisible hand was rubbing his body and head. Immediately after that, his teacher recovered without any need of medicine.

Since Dharma Master Fa Kwang had been so devoted towards his foster mother, he was naturally an extremely good disciple to his teacher; so much so that when his teacher had become sick, Dharma Master Fa Kwang's degree of sincerity in bowing the repentance ceremony was able to evoke such a tremendous response. When his teacher had fully recovered, Dharma Master Fa Kwang took his leave and travelled all over the land, studying the Buddhadharma in different places. This is a traditional practice, in which, having stayed at one temple for the five years immediately after leaving the home-life, one then travels to many different places, so as to investigate diversity within Buddhism. During such a time one visits other Good and Wise Advisors and gains experience by observing how other Monasteries do things. One is attentive to their rules and regulations and their fields of study.

When on his travels, Dharma Master Fa Kwang reached Jyan Jing mountain. He thought it would be a very suitable place at which to cultivate the Way. He stayed there a long time and deeply investigated *The Lotus Sutra*, completely understanding the principle therein of "Assembling the Three (Vehicles of the Sound Hearers, Pratyekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas) and returning them to the One (the Vehicle of the Buddhas)." Besides *The Lotus Sutra*, Dharma Master Fa Kwang also specialized studying the *Sutra of Limitless Life*, which is about the Pure Land. Throughout his life, he lectured both these Sutras, explaining them to even an audience of one person! Should not even one person come, then he would recite them aloud.

One day, a very dangerous plague swept the area. The disease was so fatal that after a sick person was visited by a doctor, the doctor would catch the illness and die along with the patient. It was that fierce! The doctors were like Bodhisattvas made of clay trying to cross the ocean--they could not even protect themselves. However, since Dharma Master Fa Kwang had cultivated to perfection the Dharmas of Great Compassion, the Great Compassion Mantra, and the Forty-two Hands and Eyes, he was able to use his spiritual powers gained through these Dharmas to counteract the epidemic. Nobody would invite him to come; yet he would still go to the houses of the sick and cure them. He would recite the Great Compassion Mantra and the sick would recover. It was through his own compassionate heart that he derived such power from the Mantra.

There are ghosts behind the cause of any incurable disease. If you have opened your Five Eyes, then you can see all such ghosts. Ghosts are everywhere, and as many as ants. Moreover, there are as many Buddhas as there are ghosts. Through his recitation of the Great Compassion Mantra, Dharma Master Fa Kwang subdued all the ghosts behind that particular plague.

The Great Compassion Mantra is not a Secret School Mantra. There is nothing secret about mantras, and at the same time, there is nothing manifest either. However, they are ascribed to the Secret School. In fact, what is secret can never be spoken of, as can be seen in the following dialogue from the *Sixth Patriarch's Platform Sutra*:

Dharma Master Hwei Ming: "Apart from the secret words and meanings given me, is there something else more secret?"

Sixth Patriarch: "The secret is on your side; nobody else knows about it. If I were to tell you, then it wouldn't be secret."

Mantras are just like that. One doesn't want to go around saying: "Oh! this is a secret." If it's so secret, how do you know about it? If you know about it, then it isn't secret; and if I know about it, then it is even less a secret; and if he knows about it, it certainly is not a secret. The name "secret" is forced on mantras. Thus, secret is secret, and yet not secret, not secret and yet secret.

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