

仁慈貞靜——

李太后

Humane, Kind, Chaste, and Serene
— Empress Dowager Li

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明神宗（萬曆）之母。其父夢空中有五色彩輦，旌旗飄揚，鼓瑟天樂，而下導之，太后生。賢淑聰慧，端莊大方。教子甚嚴，帝不讀書，則召長跪悔過，若不上朝，則至寢所呼之。如有小過，亦不寬恕。身為太后，約束兄弟家人，不可驕恣。用張居正為相，政大治，使萬曆初年，有富強之象。

太后信佛，多建梵剎。為天下人民增長善緣，消除惡業。信崇憨山大師，施資建寺，頒大藏經。後大師被誣，充軍於嶺南，後復興曹溪南華寺。太后生時慈悲，歿後諸多感應，懿德傳世不朽。

Empress Dowager Li was the mother of Emperor Shen (Wanli) of the Ming Dynasty. One night (before she was born) her father dreamed of a five-colored chariot in the sky with waving flags and heavenly music of harps and drums that came to guide him. After that, the Empress Dowager Li was born. She was virtuous and intelligent, dignified and magnanimous. She took the teaching of her son very seriously. When he didn't study hard, she would order him to kneel down to repent. If he wasn't present for the royal court meeting in the morning, she would go to his bedchamber to call him. She was a strict teacher and didn't easily forgive even a small mistake. As the empress dowager, she restrained and disciplined the actions and conduct of her family and siblings, cautioning them against any arrogance, overindulgence, and willfulness. [As a regent,] she appointed Zhang Juzheng as Prime Minister, whose efforts brought great order to the whole empire during the beginning reign of Wanli. The Empire was healthy, prosperous, and strong.

She believed in Buddhism and built many monasteries. Through her actions many citizens were able to increase their wholesome affinities and lessen or eradicate their offense karma. She had great faith in Venerable Master Hanshan, and donated money to build or construct temples and monasteries, and to publish and circulate the Tripitaka. But later on, the Master was wrongly accused and was banished to Lingnan, south of the Five Ridges in southern China. Afterwards, he restored the Nanhua Monastery at Cao Creek, to its former glory. Throughout her life, the Empress Dowager was always compassionate, and even after her passing, there were stories of spiritual responses, and her legacy of virtue has continued throughout the generations.

今天講的是明朝萬曆皇帝的母親——李太后，她是一位很賢良的國母。在她出生前，她父親夢見空中有五色彩輦，旌旗飄揚，鼓瑟天樂，慢慢從天而降，於是就生了她。

她就像周朝的太姒，有幽嫻貞靜四德，賢淑聰慧，性情慈悲，莊嚴大方。她教子甚嚴，皇帝若不讀書，則召長跪悔過；若不上朝，則到皇帝的寢室呼喚他；如有小過，亦不輕易寬恕。

她做太后的時候，用張居正為宰相，令朝政超過一般時代，可以說是國泰民安，民豐物阜，天下大治。因為信佛，於是廣建梵剎，度很多人出家做和尚，培植善事，修福修慧。她非常崇敬憨山大師，施資建寺，頒大藏經。

後來憨山大師遭人妒忌，被誣告私建廟宇，於是被罰充軍於嶺南。在嶺南期間，對佛教事業甚有貢獻，復興了曲江馬壩鎮曹溪南華寺等多座寺院。

太后生時慈悲，對佛教有所建樹，引導宮廷的人信佛，大有成就；死後諸多靈蹟，懿德傳世，萬古不朽。

贊曰：

虛空而來，離相逝去
廣建梵剎，多增福慧
仁慈貞靜，教子不墮
崇拜憨山，佛教歲萬

「虛空而來，離相逝去」：太后生時由虛空而來。本來她不著相，因為想令佛法振興，於是托夢給神宗萬曆皇帝，召集所有的和尚超度她。

Commentary:

Today we will discuss Empress Dowager Li, the mother of Emperor Shenzong Wanli of the Ming Dynasty, who was the benevolent, virtuous mother of the nation. Soon before she was born, her father dreamt of a five-colored chariot in the sky with fluttering banners and celestial music of harps and drums, all slowly descending from the sky.

She was like Empress Taisi of the Zhou Dynasty, who possessed the four wholesome qualities of a woman: gentleness, composure, chastity, and serenity. She was virtuous, intelligent, compassionate, and was dignified and magnanimous. She took the teaching of her son seriously, strictly rearing her son. Whenever he skipped his daily studies, she would order him to kneel down to repent. Whenever he did not attend the royal court in the morning, she would go to his bedchamber to call him. Even for a small mistake, she did not let him off easily—she would not easily pardon him.

As the Empress Dowager, as a regent, she appointed Zhang Juzheng as Prime Minister, whose efforts brought order to the empire for a period of time. The country prospered and the people enjoyed peace and abundance; the empire was at its prime. She believed in Buddhism and sponsored the construction of many monasteries. Many people became monastics, developed their roots of goodness, practiced wholesome deeds, and cultivated blessings and wisdom. She had great faith in Venerable Master Hanshan, donating money to construct temples and monasteries, and to publish and circulate the Tripitaka.

Later on, due to the jealousy of others, Master Hanshan was wrongly accused and banished to Lingnan, south of the Five Ridges in southern China. During that period, Master Hanshan continued devoting himself to Buddhism and rebuilt many monasteries, such as Nanhua Monastery, by Cao Creek near the town of Maba, Qujiang County in Guangdong Province.

When alive, the Empress Dowager was compassionate and made distinguished contributions to Buddhism. Through her guidance and efforts, she successfully guided and influenced the royal court to believe in Buddhism. After her passing, there were many spiritual stories told about her, and her legacy of virtue has and will continue to spread throughout the generations.

A verse in praise says:

She came from empty space. She departed free of characteristics.
She built many temples, increasing blessings and wisdom.
Humane, kind, chaste, and serene. Educating her son against degenerating.
She venerated Hanshan, and hoped Buddhism will last forever.

Commentary:

She came from empty space. When the Empress Dowager was born, she was someone who came from empty space. **She departed free of characteristics.** Originally she was not attached to marks, but because she wanted to make Buddhism flourish, she manifested in the dream of Emperor Shenzong, also known as Wanli, requesting him to assemble monastics to perform rituals on her behalf so that she could be liberated.

待續

To be continued