

梁武帝問誌公禪師因果經 (續)

The Sutra of Emperor Wu of Liang Dynasty Inquiring of Chan Master Zhi Gong about Cause and Effect (continued)

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English Translated by the Early Bird Translation Group



武帝見說心生歡喜。即發誠心。合宮齋戒。依師之言。命請五百聖僧。修建道場。投佛懺悔。聖僧檢尋藏典。宣出大藏靈文十卷。號曰梁皇寶懺。

帝乃誠心懇切。仗承三寶威光。接引郗氏靈魂。現出蟒蛇之跡。直至道場。壇下盤纏幾匝。醜惡驚人。

僧眾登壇禮佛誦經。行道繞旋。果然郗氏受恩薦拔。即脫蟒蛇之體。獲得天人一身。影現雲端。禮謝而去。良因已竟。因果昭然。自後武帝。又加信心。精進修行。時時不昧良因。刻刻搜尋義理。

帝又復曰。已蒙指示。超拔夫人。如是觀之善惡業緣。受報好醜。如影隨形。

Delighted to hear this, Emperor Wu immediately gave rise to sincerity and ordered everyone in the palace to observe the pure precepts and vegetarianism. Following the Master's instructions, he invited five hundred eminent monastics and built a ceremonial ground for the repentance ceremony. For this purpose, those monastics were tasked with searching for and extracting the relevant texts from the Tripitaka; the monastics compiled an efficacious repentance text of ten rolls, which is called Emperor Liang's Jeweled Repentance.

Emperor Wu then sincerely bowed in repentance; by the merit and virtue of the Three Jewels, Empress Chi's soul was rescued [from falling into the hells] but still manifested in the form of a python. The python went directly to the Dharma platform and coiled up in a few circles below the platform. Its grotesqueness astonished the people.

The monastics ascended the platform to conduct the repentance on her behalf: they bowed to the Buddha, recited the sutras, and circumambulated the platform. Consequently, Empress Chi 郗 was liberated — right then she shed the form of a python and became a celestial being. She appeared amid the clouds, bowed to express her gratitude, and took her leave. The entire Dharma event, with its planting of good causes, concluded successfully, which clearly revealed the working of the Law of Cause and Effect. Subsequently, Emperor Wu's faith further increased, and he cultivated vigorously. He was constantly mindful of planting seeds of goodness and was always diligent in seeking out

果然不昧。吾今復問。寡人今作一朝人主。未知前世。作何功德而來。請師究竟。

誌公答曰。我王欲問前世。修因之事。吾今不便言說。

武帝聞言。心中慚愧。又復問曰。朕今拜你為師。云何不說。弟子願欲聞知。

誌公答曰。我皇前世。是個樵夫。只因上山砍柴。遇見山間。靈壇古廟。庵宇朽爛。惟有古佛一尊。雨淋日曬。無人侍奉。汝自發起善心。將己頭上箬笠一個。遮蓋佛身。佛以天眼觀見。有此善心。讚言善哉善哉。貧苦布施。甚為希有。汝如來世。當作上人。是故今生。得此福報也。

武帝見說。心中喜悅。自思念之。若捨這些。就得為帝。我今更作大福不難。厥後武帝。又敕聖旨。遍行天下。五里一庵。十里一寺。建立不絕。日久歲深。武帝惹得大病。仍去問師。寡人今發大善。遍造庵宇。今且大興善因。如何反加大病耶。誌公答曰。汝說興善因。我言作惡業。

帝曰。我師何故說話顛倒了。以前說我捨笠蓋佛。今得帝位。是故我今發大善心。敕旨建庵。興崇佛事。更是大福。云何說我造惡也。

☞待續

and studying Dharma principles.

The emperor then said, "I am much obliged to you for your guidance; my wife's soul was liberated. Now I see that each good or evil deed brings about its respective karmic retributions just like a shadow following a form. The Law of Cause and Effect never errs. Now I would like to ask, 'I am now the lord of a country. I wonder what virtuous deeds I did in past lives that led to this result? My Master, please thoroughly explain to me the underlying causes.'"

Master Zhi Gong answered, "My lord has asked about the causes you created in past lives. It might be embarrassing if I talk about it."

Hearing this, Emperor Wu felt ashamed, but asked again, "Now that I venerate you as my teacher, why don't you tell me? I want to know."

Master Zhi Gong then answered, "In a past life, my lord was a woodcutter. Once you went to a mountain to cut wood and saw an ancient, dilapidated temple; its structures were rotten and decayed. Only a statue of an ancient Buddha remained. It was exposed to the sun and the rain and nobody was taking care of it. A kind thought arose in your mind, and you took off the bamboo hat from your head and put it on the statue's head to cover its body. The Buddha saw your kind thought with his Heavenly Eye and exclaimed in praise: 'Excellent, excellent indeed! It is very rare for a poor person to practice giving. Thus, in a future life, you will become a person of superior status.' It was for this reason that you have such blessings in the present life."

Emperor Wu was joyful in his heart when he heard the explanation. He thought, "Just making an offering of a bamboo hat caused me to become an emperor. Now [as an emperor] it will not be difficult for me to create greater blessings." He later issued a royal edict to build nunneries and monasteries every few miles. However, as time passed, Emperor Wu fell greatly ill. Again he went to consult Master Zhi Gong and asked, "I have resolved to do great good by building many monasteries and nunneries all over my kingdom. How come the causes of great goodness I have created have brought me severe illness instead?"

Master Zhi Gong answered, "You say you have planted good causes, but I would say you have committed evil karma."

Emperor Wu said, "Why does my teacher talk in such an inverted way? You once told me that I offered a bamboo hat to shelter a Buddha statue [in a past life], causing me to become an emperor in this life. Therefore, I have made a great resolve to do good deeds and have issued a royal edict to build monasteries and advocated Buddhism. This should bring even greater blessings. Why do you say that I have created evil karma?"

☞To be continued