



The Scripture of the
Founding Master

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Chapter Five Cause and Effect

1. The Founding Master said, “The truth of the universe originally involves continuous circulation over and over again without either arising or ceasing, so that whatever goes, comes again, and whatever comes, goes again; and a giver becomes a receiver, and a receiver, a giver. This is the constant Way that never changes throughout all eternity.”

2. The Founding Master said, “In accordance with the principle of circulation of the four seasons in heaven and earth, there is for the myriad things a transition between birth, old age, sickness, and death; and in accordance with the law of the alternating predominance of yin and yang in the universe, there manifest among human beings the wholesome and unwholesome retributions and responses of cause and effect. Thus, winter is the time when yin flourishes, but because yang is contained within yin, yang gradually grows stronger until finally spring and summer appear. Summer is the time when yang flourishes, but because yin is contained within yang, yin gradually grows stronger until finally autumn and winter appear. In the same way, in human affairs, strength and weakness are interrelated, and as one produces what is wholesome or unwholesome, there occur the karmic retributions of progression and regression and mutual lifegiving and mutual harm. This is the fundamental principle of the retribution and response of cause and effect.”

3. The Founding Master said, “Since plants grow by setting roots in the earth, once a seed or a root is planted in the soil, a new shoot will sprout in accordance with the causes and conditions of the season. Since animals live by setting roots in heaven, thinking one thought, committing one action, or saying one word plants a karmic cause in the dharma realm of empty space and its karmic retribution appears in accordance with each and every one of its wholesome or unwholesome conditions. How can one then possibly deceive other human beings or deceive heaven?”

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4. The Founding Master said, “The rewards and punishments granted by human beings are delivered with thought, so that no matter how lucid, the judgment could be faulty. But the rewards and punishments bestowed by heaven and earth are delivered with no-thought, so that they completely accord with truth and expressly correspond to one’s wholesome and unwholesome actions. Since, at the same time, that truth is capable of both great and small and pervades the ten directions, how can anyone possibly deceive it or be unafraid of its retribution and response? Therefore, a sensible person considers the reward and punishments bestowed by truth to be greater and more important than those given by human beings.”

5. The Founding Master said, “Even though a person may not see or hear you, do not hate or disparage that person. Since energy is being mutually transmitted through heaven and earth, though you may hate a person without his knowledge and may have disparaged him just once, that energy is already transmitted and a seed of mutual harm planted; and even though you regard someone highly without his knowledge and may have complimented that person only once, that energy is already transmitted and a seed of mutual life-giving planted. Then, once the right conditions are finally in place, the seed of mutual lifegiving will bear good fruit but the seed of mutual harm will bear rotten fruit. Earthworms and centipedes possess mutually harmful energies, so that if their casings are burned together, you can observe that their two energies are mutually repelling until one fades first. One can understand from this example the principle that mutually harmful and mutually lifegiving energies each find their due response.”

6. The Founding Master said, “Just as the weather is sometimes fine and sometimes gloomy, so too is a human being’s spiritual energy sometimes refreshed and sometimes melancholy and the surrounding sensory conditions also sometimes favorable and sometimes unfavorable. These are also natural changes in accordance with the principle of cause and effect. When a person who understands this principle experiences these changes, his mind of culti-

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vation will simply be just as it is and as unconcerned as heaven and earth. But for a person who does not understand this principle, these changes will disturb even his mind and he will never be able to grasp the Middle Way amid joy and sorrow, suffering and happiness. Thus, there is no limit to the sea of suffering.”

7. The Founding Master said, “What you bestowed on others out of kindness and righteousness will be reciprocated with kindness and righteousness; what you took away with malice will be taken away with malice. According to the scale of the other person’s progression or regression, the retribution could multiply several tens of thousands of times or decrease several tens of thousands of times, but will never go away completely. Also, even if the other person does not seek revenge himself, there will be naturally returning transgressions and merits. Thus, the transgressions and merits others have made cannot be received instead by oneself and the transgressions and merits oneself has made cannot be received instead by others.”

8. Cho Chŏn’gwon asked the Founding Master, “Since during their many repeated lives the buddhas would have done nothing to cause themselves to receive lowly retributions, there should be no occasion for them to experience suffering in any of their numerous lifetimes. However, in the past the Buddha endured various hardships in his day, and you too, Great Master, after establishing this order, have not been spared the suffering due to government surveillance and troubles in dealing with the congregation. We do not understand the reason for this.” The Founding Master replied, “Although it has already been quite some time that I have labored so as not to commit any transgression knowingly, I think it may be because, while I was delivering many people throughout several lifetimes, I unknowingly repressed the perverted energy and evil energy of obstinate sentient beings.” He continued, “Even with a buddha’s ability, which effects compassionate deliverance with the right dharma, he cannot eliminate his destined karma; and no matter how insignificant a sentient being may be, his merits may not be offset by his transgressions. Buddhas and bodhisattvas of great ability can, indeed, condense into a single lifetime the retributions they were to receive over many lifetimes, but they can never elimi-

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nate them completely.”

9. A person asked, “If a person cultivates the Way with a mind of utmost sincerity, can he avoid even destined karma?” The Founding Master said, “Karma that is already fixed is difficult to avoid all at once, but there is a way to be rid of it gradually. If a practitioner fully understands the principle of change within the six destinies of rebirth and the four types of birth and thus does not perform unwholesome deeds but instead performs wholesome deeds daily, then unwholesome paths will recede of their own accord and wholesome paths will come gradually closer. Even were an unwholesome cause and condition to repay its old debt to me, I must respond with the mind of the Way and not think of extracting revenge in return; then, that karma will naturally come to rest. Also, even when receiving an unwholesome result, if, by reflecting on the self-nature in which transgressive karma is utterly void, you keep resolving all karmic affinities with the thought of getting rid of your old debts, then, in that state of mind, thousands of transgressions and sufferings will melt away like snow on a hot stove. All of these are ways to eliminate destined karma with one’s mind. Again, when I have cultivated the Way well, I will always be walking on the path of progression through the six destinies, so that even if I meet with some unwholesome cause and condition, I will receive less because I will be superior and the other inferior; and since I have accumulated merit with the public, no matter what circumstances I might encounter, I shall always receive support from the public, so that the unwholesome cause and condition will not be able to find a gap to invade easily. These are ways to mitigate destined karma by means of awesome power.”

10. A disciple was humiliated by someone and could not overcome his anger. The Founding Master said, “When it is your turn to retaliate, just let it go. If you do so, then that karma will come to rest. But if you retaliate now, then the other person will once again retaliate, and if you each go on retaliating in this manner, there will never be a day when this karma of mutual harm will cease.”

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11. A laywoman who was unhappy in her marriage detested her husband, vowing that they would have no further affinities with each other in their next lives. The Founding Master said, “If you want to avoid creating any further affinities with your husband, don’t entertain either a detesting or a loving mind, but treat him only with no-mind.”

12. While the Founding Master was abiding at Pongnae hermitage, the wretched shriek of a wild boar a hunter was slaughtering nearby was so pitiful that it prompted the Founding Master to say, “One’s gain is another’s loss.” He also said, “Witnessing the death of this wild boar, I can surmise its past deeds; and witnessing this hunter slaughtering the wild boar today, I can also surmise what the hunter will face in the future.”

13. The Founding Master said, “People accumulate various kinds of transgressive karma via body, speech, and mind; the types of retribution they receive are really endless. Even so, I will give you a sense of how this works with a few familiar examples. A person who upsets someone deeply by making false insinuations will suffer from heartburn in his next life. A person who enjoys furtively probing into or eavesdropping on others’ secrets will suffer humiliation and embarrassment in his next life by being born as a bastard, and so forth. A person who readily exposes others’ secrets and readily embarrasses them in front of other people so that they blush with shame will, in his next life, have some ugly marks or scars on his face that will hamper him all his life.”

14. A disciple asked, “What kind of transgressive karma causes a person to be struck dead by lightning?” The Founding Master said, “To be unwittingly struck dead by lightning is caused by the transgressive karma of having unwittingly struck down others as would a thunderbolt. For example, there are many cases of such transgressive karma as committing mass murder through abuse of one’s political or military power, etc., or causing much harm to many people through unjust enforcement of an evil law.”

15. While the Founding Master was overseeing the construction of the

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Seoul Temple, several of the workers said to each other that no matter how hard a person tries one cannot prosper by one's own effort alone but must absolutely have some sort of unexpected hidden help. Hearing this, the Founding Master later said to his disciples, "Generally speaking, as we human beings live our lives in this world, there is bound to be unexpected hidden help and harm that come inadvertently. Those without understanding presume that these are managed by gods, buddhas, ancestors, or ghosts and bestowed on us, but those with understanding know that everything is the result of the workings of each person's mind and body: what one has created in the past, one receives in the present; what one creates in the present, one will also receive in the future; and there is nothing one receives that one has not made previously. Therefore, foolish people willfully seek wealth and glory in inappropriate places, and willfully try to avoid poverty and hardship. Wise people, however, while tranquilly accepting their previously created transgressions and merits, continue to make steadfast effort toward future merits and happiness. Also, while creating these same merits, they plant infinite beneficent merit among the public, thereby ensuring that the source of blessings and fortune never becomes dry regardless of time or place."

16. The Founding Master said, "The urgent matter is not to teach everyone all the thousands of scriptures or to encourage them in all the thousands of good deeds; rather, the most urgent matter is first of all to help them believe in and awaken to the truths of neither arising nor ceasing and the retribution and response of cause and effect."

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17. The Founding Master said, “When a foolish person sees others receive blessings, he becomes greedy and envious, but given the chance to create merit, he is lazy and naps. This is like a farmer who hopes to harvest without sowing first: if he does not sow in the spring, there will be nothing to harvest in the autumn. This is the principle of cause and effect. How would it be limited just to farming?”

18. The Founding Master said, “If a person has created no merit, then no matter how well he wishes to do in his next life, it will not turn out that way. This may be compared to the case in the present life where, no matter how much someone wishes to reside in a nice home, he wouldn’t be able to live in it unless it’s his own. Look at Kongch’il! When he gets off at Iri Railway Station there is a row of fancy Western-style homes, but he does not dare even to think of going inside them and goes into his own humble dwelling. This is indeed a concrete example of how things turn out as one has created and a model of how one receives in accordance with what one has created.”

19. The Founding Master said, “The greater the blessing, the more it must be enjoyed by a deserving person for it to last long. If such a blessing were to go to an undeserving person, then he would either lose it all or even bring misfortune on himself because of it. Therefore, a wise person knows how to create, safeguard, and use one’s blessings, so that no matter how great they are, one keeps them forever.”

20. The Founding Master said, “Ignorant people value reputation alone, so they try hard to get recognition even if that reputation is unwarranted. This is because they do not realize that unwarranted reputation will ultimately become the source of misfortune that harms oneself. It is a principle of the world that reputation that is warranted in fact will be revealed naturally even if one tries to conceal it, whereas an unwarranted reputation will eventually vanish no matter how hard one tries to make it hold up. Therefore, a reputation obtained through words but without any actual basis will ultimately be damaged by words, and a reputation obtained through trickery will be damaged by trickery.

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Furthermore, even one's well-deserved reputation from the past will be stained as well; and in extreme cases one could even be deprived of one's life and assets. Shouldn't we take precautions regarding this?"

21. A beggar told Kim Kich'ŏn to make merit by being charitable to him, so Kim Kich'ŏn asked, "If I make merit, do you have the ability to bestow it on me?" The beggar could not answer. Kich'ŏn continued, "Ignorant people often tell others to make merit when it is for their own sakes. These instead are words that will create transgressions." Upon hearing this, the Founding Master said, "Kich'ŏn's words are a dharma teaching. People in the world like to receive merit, but those who make merit are few; they dislike receiving punishment, but those who make transgressions are many. Therefore, in this world there are many people who receive suffering, but few who receive happiness."

22. The Founding Master said, "If a person is reckless in pursuing all kinds of unwholesome conduct and does not discipline himself, then others will definitely discipline him; and if others do not discipline him, then Truth definitely will. Therefore, a sensible person abstains from committing unwholesome conduct before others stop him and willingly submits to their advice before Truth stops him. Thus, one need never be nervous that one's unwholesomeness will be exposed, and one's mind will always be at peace."

23. The Founding Master said, "You who abuse your petty privileges with your petty talent! Do not deceive or harm the public, presuming they are ignorant. If the minds of the people come together, they become heaven's mind; if the eyes of the people come together, they become heaven's eye; if the ears of people come together, they become heaven's ear; if the mouths of people come together, they become heaven's mouth. So, how would one deceive or harm the public, presuming they are ignorant?"

24. A ferocious dog in the vicinity of the Headquarters of the order was attacked by another dog and was about to die. Seeing this, the Founding Master said, "When that dog was young, it possessed a ferocious disposition and acted

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like a king among the other dogs in the village, committing all kinds of vicious acts as it pleased. It is being killed so horribly now as an effect of that retribution. This incident should serve as a warning to people who abuse their unwarranted authority. How can we dismiss this incident as just something that happened to a dog?” He continued, “Even when you watch people using their minds, you are able to judge those who are progressing and those who are regressing. Those in the period of progression have a good and gentle nature, do not harm others, and harmonize well with whomever they encounter; always advocating humility, they extol others and love to learn; in particular, they have faith in the truth, strive in their spiritual practice, wish others to do well, and by any means possible encourage the weak. Those in the period of regression, by contrast, are vicious by nature, cannot benefit many people, and conflict with whomever they encounter; being arrogant, they like to look down on others and do not like to learn; in particular, they have no faith in the truth of cause and effect and do not engage in spiritual practice; and they cannot bear to see others do well, trying by any means possible to cut down others who are better than themselves.”

25. The Founding Master said, “By committing unwholesome actions and becoming the frequent subject of others’ criticism, one’s road ahead becomes dark. There was a man who was appointed a magistrate of a county and severely abused his power. He took many people’s lives and confiscated their property so that when the villagers gathered, they all cursed that man. Finally, the words of the villagers became the seed that eventually made his life miserable and before their very eyes, he became the epitome of someone whose transgressions met their retribution. The lips of many people are indeed terrifying!”

26. The Founding Master said, “Among the many types of transgressive karma that sentient beings foolishly create, these five are the most terrifying of all. First is to stand before the crowd without knowing the right principles and mislead them. Second is to induce many people to doubt cause and effect, thereby hindering them from creating good karma. Third is to criticize and be jealous of an upright and virtuous person. Fourth is to associate with wicked

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factions and to lend them strength. Fifth is to interfere with faith in the great Way and the right dharma, thus hindering the development of the right-dharma assembly. Those who do not stop making these five types of transgressive karma will never know a day free from the three evil destinies (hell denizens, hungry ghosts, animals).”

27. The Founding Master said, “There are three terrifying types of transgressive karma in this world. First is the transgression of falsely accusing others of having committed wicked acts, judging just from external appearances. Second is the transgression of being jealous of others’ friendship and sowing discord between them. Third is the transgression of using perverted wisdom to mislead innocent people. Those who have frequently committed these three transgressions will receive such retribution as being unable to see, being unable to speak, or losing their minds.”

28. The Founding Master said, “There was once a Sōn master who had many disciples and lay supporters, so that his life was quite comfortable. Even so, he planted several fruit trees and grew them himself, supporting one of his disciples separately with the profit he made from them. All his disciples asked him why, and the Sōn master replied, ‘This fellow did not make any merit in his past life, nor is he likely to offer benefits to others in the present life. Supporting him with the grain and money that people donate to make merit would cause him to accumulate even more debts. What he would get is free support in this one lifetime, but when the time comes for him to repay, he will have to go through much suffering as an ox or a horse over many lifetimes. Out of affection for a disciple, in this way, I support him separately in my leisure time so as to lessen his debt.’” The Sōn master’s handling of this matter is a great dharma instruction for those who live a communal life. You should not dismiss this anecdote lightly. If, with your spirit, body, or material goods, you devote yourself in equal measure for others’ sakes, then there would be no harm in accepting people’s offerings. However, if you take offerings from people while handling just your own affairs, then you are a person who is incurring great debts and must expect to go through much hard work over many lifetimes.

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Generally, however, those who care for other people do not like to receive others' offerings, but those who are concerned only with their own affairs do like to receive others' offerings. You must examine yourselves every day and every moment, and be ever cautious not to become a person who incurs great debts from the people."

29. One day, Ch'oe Naesŏn offered a meal to the congregation. After the meal, the Founding Master said, "Even when people make the same amount of merit, there cannot but be certain discrepancies in the fruition each person receives. Merit involves not only material quantity, but also the depth or shallowness of one's mind, as well as the ability of the receivers. A farmer in Yŏnggwang assisted three officials in crossing a river one monsoon season, and therefore became acquainted with them. Even though the farmer, on the same day and time, worked equally to help those three men cross the river, later on, when they came back to reward him, there were considerable discrepancies according to each man's power and ability. Even though this may be only a simple story about what happened in real life, the principle generally reveals how one makes and receives merit throughout the past, present, and future."

30. When the Founding Master was residing at Yŏngsan, a debauched young man in a neighboring village on his own had a spiritual inspiration, repented his past faults, and became the Founding Master's disciple, vowing to do deeds worthy of a human being. Later on, when the Founding Master returned to Yŏngsan after several months of making the rounds, the young man had gone back to a life of debauchery and had squandered his assets on liquor, women, and gambling. He felt ashamed for not keeping the vow he had made, so he kept avoiding him. One day, however, they met each other on the road, where he couldn't avoid him, and the Founding Master said, "Why is it that you haven't come to see me even once?" The young man said, "It's only because I feel guilty." The Founding Master said, "What do you feel guilty about?" The young man said, "My previous vow has now ended up deceiving a sage, so how could I not feel guilty before you? Please grant me your forgiveness." The Founding Master said, "All this time it was you who have been dissipated,

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squandering all your assets and placing yourself in many compromising situations. There is nothing for which you need to seek forgiveness from me. If I were to receive on your behalf the transgressions you have committed, then you would be right to apologize to me or to avoid me. Whether misfortunes or merits, what you have made will necessarily be received by you alone. Right now, you may think you deceived me, but in reality you have just deceived yourself. From this point on, do not needlessly try to avoid me, but instead once again work hard to regulate your own mind.”

31. While the Founding Master was residing in Yōngsan, he went out to the vegetable gardens one day. Near the gardens was a manure pit filled with night soil that attracted swarms of maggots. Just then a rat came by, ate the maggots, and went away. The disciples who were cultivating the fields said, “That rat comes by often, eats them, and goes away.” The Founding Master said, “Right now the rat is eating these maggots to its heart’s content, but in a few days, the rat will end up being eaten by the maggots.” The disciples did not fully understand his meaning, and thought, ‘How could cause and effect over the three time periods work that fast?’ A few days later, finally that same rat fell into the manure pit and started to rot, and then the maggots were feeding on the rat. The Founding Master said, “You seemed to think it strange what I said the other day, but I was merely describing the situation. At the time, the manure pit was filled with night soil, so the rat was running all around the top, feeding on the maggots. But once the vegetable fields were being cultivated, you would naturally be dipping up and using the night soil, the pit would become deeper, and the careless rat that kept coming around was bound to fall into the pit and die. I conjectured ahead of time that the rat then would inevitably become maggot food.” He continued and said, “The karmic retributions people have made, whether transgressions or merits, also occur in accord with the nature of the situation. It is no different than with the rat: what is to be received in a future lifetime will be received in a future lifetime, and what is to be received in the present life will be received in the present life.”

32. Kim Sammaehwa was cutting meat in the kitchen. Seeing this, the

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Founding Master asked, “Have you ever looked at Sword Mountain Hell?” Sammaehwa said, “No, I haven’t.” The Founding Master said, “The meat on the cutting board is in Sword Mountain Hell. When it was being killed, it was hacked by meat axes and sliced by knives into thousands pieces. Then, several people buy these cuts of meat and again cut them in their homes with thousands knives. How could this not be terrifying?”

33. The Founding Master said, “In the past there were many people whose minds were deceitful or unwholesome but who in their lifetimes still lived well. But from this point on it will be tough for people whose minds are deceitful and unwholesome to live well in their lifetimes. The transgressions and merits people make during their lifetimes will mostly be received right away, leaving little to carry forward into future lives. Therefore, as the world becomes more enlightened, people who are sincere and wholesome in their minds will be sincere and wholesome in everything and their future will open radiantly. But people who are deceitful and unwholesome in their minds will be deceitful and unwholesome in everything and their road ahead will be dark and obstructed.”